Provost Dutta
Purdue University
West Lafayette, IN 47906

Provost Dutta:

The Academic Organization Committee (AOC) of the University Senate reports to the Educational Policy Committee. Information contained on the University Senate website indicates the charge of the committee is as follows:

The committee shall be concerned with changes in academic organization having a significant impact on the intellectual atmosphere and functioning of the university on all of its campuses, e.g., elimination or consolidation of existing departments and schools; and the establishment of interdepartmental institutes and centers. In performance of this task the committee shall, where appropriate, work with officers of the administration, ad hoc committees and faculty involved in contemplated changes.

The Committee views this charge as an important aspect of the University’s shared governance process. While AOC only serves an advisory role, it can none-the-less provide a useful perspective on the intellectual atmosphere and functioning of the university. My experience with the AOC over the last four years indicates the AOC faces three obstacles in carrying out its responsibilities. The AOC met with Associate Provost Vibbert and Vice-Provost Dooley to explore ideas for improving operations.

1. Many of the administrative officers are unaware of AOC and the charge it has been given. This has resulted in AOC being left out of the decision-making process of many academic organization changes. What steps will improve the awareness and purpose of AOC?

Faculty and staff receive various routine reminders. One is the annual message from President Daniels regarding our purpose as a university and broad plans for moving forward. There are many others. We are requesting Provost Dutta to remind Deans, Department Heads, and others overseeing units in which changes to “academic organization having a significant impact on the intellectual atmosphere and functioning of the university” at least annually of AOC and its charge.
2. Purdue is a large complex organization with no way of tracking ideas for organizational change impacting the intellectual atmosphere and functioning of the university. This results in AOC, and frequently administrators, learning about a proposed change at a stage where interjecting new thoughts or discussions is very difficult. In most cases, AOC’s role has been to review a completed proposal for approval. All changes reviewed by AOC involve months or years of discussion. Based on our discussions, AOC is requesting that Deans, Department Heads, and others overseeing academic units report at regular Provost Meetings any academic organization change initiated. The AOC chairperson is notified of these items.

3. AOC’s charge is to “where appropriate, work with officers of the administration, ad hoc committees and faculty involved in contemplated changes.” The way the process has been working; AOC finds itself in the role of reviewing a proposed change and making a recommendation regarding approval. AOC views its charge as providing input into proposed changes and ensuring other parties effected by a change are aware of proposed changes and have an opportunity to provide input into the decision process. In order to achieve this, AOC needs to be involved early in the change discussion not the end. Items 1 and 2 address steps to move AOC in this direction.

In addition, issues decided by one unit often have implications for other units, but these other units many times are not included in discussing a change. Changes to Centers, Institutes, interdisciplinary programs, academic advising, and academic unit reorganization are only a few examples where changes can have a broad reach. Working to improve communication during the change process is a duty the committee takes seriously.

The AOC appreciates the opportunity to meet with Associate Provost Vibbert and Vice-Provost Dooley to discuss these issues. We look forward to implementing changes that we think will make it easier for the committee to carry out its duties. If there are questions, please contact me.

Sincerely;

Craig L. Dobbins, Professor
Academic Organization Chairperson

cc: Ralph Kaufmann
    David Sanders