

April 20, 2004

Dr. Ed Cunliff
Assistant Vice President
Academic Affairs
Campus Box 138

Dear Dr. Cunliff:

Please express my gratitude to facilitators Chuck Hughes and Pat LaGrow and to members of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) Action Team for their tremendous efforts to help us identify root causes of the NSSE results and to formulate recommendations to move UCO forward in engaging our students. I appreciate the opportunity to respond to the NSSE recommendations to the Continuous Improvement Team. A synopsis of my responses for the recommendations follows.

- 1a. The university should emphasize its expectation that faculty require an appropriate workload for the course level as mandated in OSRHE policy. Faculty will inform students of this expectation by including a statement on each syllabus that clearly states the amount of time students are expected to spend outside of class, as well as the types of work that are expected (e.g. reading, answering review questions, problem solving, writing).
Response: I concur that faculty should make course syllabi crystal clear regarding expectations. I would ask the NSSE Action Team to devise a statement which could be put into faculty's course syllabi to reflect the intent of this recommendation.
- 1b. The university should provide resources for academic departments to develop and offer out-of-class systems to support student success in more rigorous courses.
Response: I agree we need support mechanisms for our students. UCO is not good at retention. Although some efforts are already underway, I would like suggestions from the NSSE Action Team regarding a systematic approach we can take.
- 1c. The university should provide an avenue for faculty to develop teaching strategies to address issues arising from the increase in classroom rigor recommended, in addition to recurring issues of class size and limited preparation and grading time.
Response: I concur with the recommendation. Dr. Brent Wendling and Sandra Burkey have established a Technology Resource Center for faculty which will assist in this effort. Faculty should continue to request specific assistance from Dr. Wendling who is charged with meeting their needs.
- 1d. The university should make a greater effort in identifying and intervening with "at risk" students.
Response: I heartily concur with this recommendation. Communication could be enhanced by faculty e-mailing their students who are not doing well in their courses. The recommendation will be forwarded to Mr. Jarrod Noftsgger for action as he continues to develop the First Year Program. I would ask the NSSE Action Team to contact the Dean's Council to determine their reaction to the recommendation as well.

- 2a. The university should establish a three-track tenure/promotion/review system for faculty. Track One would focus on teaching and scholarly/ creative activities, Track Two would focus on teaching and service, and Track Three would have the traditional focus on teaching, service, and scholarly/creative activities. The latter track would be useful for some departments and colleges due to external program requirements and for junior faculty. Tracks One or Two might be selected by senior faculty after tenure and promotions are achieved.

Response: I am open to the suggestion of different tracks for faculty. I request that the NSSE Action Team acquire some best practice information from our peer institutions.

- 2b. The university should investigate the possibility of matching enrollment with the resources available at UCO.

Response: While I intimately understand the situation, we must continue to strive to offer quality education with the resources available. A study is currently underway to determine classroom capacities so we can most effectively and efficiently utilize our current resources. I will continue to reiterate this need to the UCO Budget Task Force and strive to increase our full-time, tenure-track faculty numbers as an on-going strategy.

- 2c. The university should have clearly stated goals concerning faculty and staff salaries with clearly stated priorities for attaining those goals.

Response: I concur with this recommendation and will continue to support this recommendation. Energy is being expended on this issue and we will continue to support this recommendation with the UCO Budget Task Force.

- 2d. The university should develop a salary structure for staff and adjuncts that recognizes and rewards experience, developed skills, and long-term commitment to the university.

Response: A task force is completing its preview of staff salaries. Adjunct compensation is also under review.

- 2e. University-sponsored initiatives should emerge from the strategic plan which balances resources and priorities.

Response: I concur and would note that a retreat will be held in August to consider draft revisions of the mission and core values.

While many of these recommendations have budget implications, they address relevant interests of the university community. I will pass these recommendations to Dr. Brent Wendling, Faculty Enhancement Director, and Mr. Jarrod Noftsgger, Director of the First Year program. I suggest that items 1a, 1b, 1d, and 2a be returned to the NSSE Action Team for further work.

I appreciate the resolve and motivation of your work.

Sincerely,

Don Betz, Ph.D.
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

cc: Dr. Brent Wendling
Mr. Jarrod Noftsger