

Building Excellence during Acute Budget Challenge through Focused Faculty Cluster Hires

Issue: Beginning July 1, 2011 the state of New Hampshire reduced its biennial allocation to the university system by 48%. NH provides the nation's smallest level of state support to higher education per capita. The College of Life Sciences and Agriculture (COLSA) has a very senior faculty, with mean age greater than 60 years. During AY2012 we experienced 10 faculty retirements via the UNH Separation Incentive Program, and we fully expect many more in the next few years. Compounding this we were prevented from hiring new faculty for about 7 years as a result of prior budgetary constraints following implementation of the RCM financial model. We therefore find ourselves in a position of having very few junior faculty, who represent the life blood of academia and are particularly critical to a willingness to explore new academic paradigms. It is fundamental to the future of the college that we identify a means to search for and hire excellent new junior faculty members, in spite of severe budget challenges, to rebuild and to counteract the coming wave of retirements. During 2009-10 we completed a 7-person faculty cluster hire that was widely viewed as extremely successful; many within the college and university now consider this as an important means of building or maintaining excellent research and teaching programs. We therefore initiated a process to develop a consensus and mechanisms toward prioritizing new faculty positions and the freeing of necessary resources in spite of our financial straits.

What has been done: Working with the dean's office staff, COLSA Executive Committee and selected faculty and staff members over the past 16 months, we

- Implemented cuts in multiple longstanding but low-priority areas including support to selected individual faculty or special programs;
- Increased efficiency of instructional efforts - discourage small-enrollment courses, multiple introductory courses, developed more attractive new majors, closed majors with few students, etc.
- Contracted the dean's office from three to one associate deans, through combination of my move to the dean position and another associate dean taking a new position with UNH Advancement
- Invested in cost-share with VPR to fund a new Bioinformatics staff member to strengthen NSF MRI competitive grant proposal for high speed DNA sequencer. The proposal was funded at \$815,000, and will serve as strong attractant plus partial start-up for new hires, a net savings for the college as well as gain via the research capacity and allied bioinformatics support
- Designed and convened a 2-day College Finances Workshop involving the executive committee, two faculty leaders per department, and selected key staff members, with goal to build understanding of constraints and advocacy for necessary hard choices among the faculty and staff
- Worked with the COLSA Executive Committee to consider several 'sacred cows' within the budget - TA support, departmental admin staff, research space, and others. The proposed alternative to these was no new faculty hires. Consolidating research space via prioritizing its most productive use in order to reduce our footprint (and ~\$1.8 million costs via the RCM budget model) was the consensus approach
- Selected and convened an ad-hoc faculty workgroup to develop criteria and priorities for the dean's allocation of research space. In addition to its fundamental appropriateness, this shared governance represents a means of addressing the bargaining unit mandate to provide faculty with adequate space to accomplish position expectations
- Given longer-term financial realities, we are evaluating potential future mixes of tenured, clinical, research faculty and lecturers toward a viable future for the college. We will use tenured faculty in selected areas where we desire strong research programs, and greater number of contingent faculty in other areas (lower costs/course, little or no start-up costs, greater ability to be responsive to changing needs and enrollment, etc.)

Impacts/New Partnerships: The collected activities to date have allowed us to identify sufficient funds within our projected FY14-16 budgets to accommodate selected new faculty hires. During Winter 2012, we worked with colleagues in two other colleges to propose to the central administration a cluster of six new tenurable faculty members; four in disciplines characterized as Genome-Enabled Biology within COLSA, one related position in Neurosciences in the College of Liberal Arts, and one related position in Bioinformatics within the College of Engineering and Physical Sciences. We were granted permission to hire, though CEPS subsequently decided to focus on other proposed clusters within their college.

Outcome of Project (societal impact/ measure of increased quality of life): We recently convened a college-wide search committee and are working to advertise the suite of positions nationally. The college is moving ahead in a strategic manner. Faculty and staff are largely united in our focus on prioritizing resources toward new hires, though tolerance for the required sacrifices is varied.

How has your project been aided by your FSLI experience? The direction we have pursued represents a departure from the financial and hiring paradigm that the college faculty, and I, have been accustomed to during our academic careers. The skills and experiences I gained from FSLI as related to leading change, objectively evaluating problems and potential solutions, and building trust and cohesion have been among the most important to this effort. Additionally, several of my Cohort 6 colleagues have been supportive and have offered useful suggestions.

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