

Report: Forum with Dick Fotsch, November 22, 2010

Purpose of meeting: A step towards establishing a more robust structure to allow for communication and dialogue between faculty and trustees. Fotsch's role: to guide and support, not manage.

Question 1: What is our vision of Academic Excellence? What encourages? What hinders? What resources best used?

John Jentz: summary of faculty e-mail responses:

- Academic excellence requires having clear standards for excellence that are actually pursued
- Academic excellence is seen in students who can analyze and apply learning
- Academic excellence requires diversity and support
- Synergy between teaching and research at both undergraduate and graduate levels
- High quality faculty---at both tenure and contingent level
- All faculty are key

Comments and concerns from open discussion:

- Effects of A&S dean search last spring:
 - Retarded the path of academic excellence of MU. Need renewed, vigorous commitment to academic excellence for all in academy.
 - The effects of last spring damaged our external reputation inserted roadblocks on MU's ability to recruit quality faculty and students. MU is now less able to exploit full pool of people who might have considered coming here.
- Silos/comfort zones: inhibit the needed multi-disciplinary approach needed to solve present day problems in society. To get out of comfort zone, we can't be afraid to fail, but faculty tend protect status quo
- Integrated, innovative, multidisciplinary approach to modern society issues:
 - Academic Excellence related to integrative problem-solving question
 - Rewards lacking for good multidisciplinary research and teaching, sometimes penalized
- Changing demands/expectations on leadership mean more leadership development needed:
 - Need a more empowered workforce, from chairs on up, to address needed innovation.
 - MU indifferent to leadership training and development. Hoping Fr. Fitzgibbon's faculty career, development report will motivate this.
 - Need structurally embedded program of identifying and training
- Budget/Resource questions:
 - Insufficient budget for departments
 - Lack of transparency in university budgeting issues
 - To be competitive: costs of program development, faculty recruitment: Requires more interaction between faculty and business office.
- Academic excellence: implicates both teaching and research, but innovative teaching requires time and must be applied to the P&T process.
- More discussion on what "transformative learning" means.

Dick Fotsch Response: Impression that several issues surfaced: academic freedom, the problem of silo effect, etc. Many seem to be about process, but wondering if all are exacerbated by lack of agreement on what we are trying to do. For example, silos tend to be broken down when we agree we are going to do XXX. MU is a marvelous university but there is no clear, shared understanding of what we will excel at. Consequently, questions about recruiting, resources, etc. get muddled.

Question 2: How is academic excellent different at a Jesuit University? What destination programs do we (or should we) have at MU?

John Pustejovsky summary of faculty e-mail responses:

- Academic excellence is a learning challenge expressed through experience, reflection, action, and evaluation, a process applicable to all disciplines.
- Destination Programs? Two responses: Arts and Sciences needs renewed attention and faculty research needs attention.
- Summary: Teaching and Knowledge in larger context for greater good.

Comments and concerns from open discussion:

- Integration of faith and reason, foreground role of religion in contemporary society.
- Specific Jesuit mission: Promotion of justice in the service of faith. Justice implies diversity, but don't neglect the service of faith.
- Serving society, solving problems, seeing God in all.
- Catholic Identity:
 - Being transformative: inherent conflicts with secular values. Conversations needed about the consonance between Jesuit and Catholic perspectives on controversial issues (economy, war & peace, science & life issues, sexuality) to discern.
 - Catholic identity not a settled thing. Needs to be worked on among ourselves
 - Not only a certain kind of Catholic but a coalition across faiths.
 - Jesuit responsibility: "loving and being loved on basis of enduring worth of a person"—Enduring worth not open to debate.
 - Catholic identity: deliberately unfinished. None of us are truly, fully Catholic. Requires hard grappling with challenging conversations.
- Fr. Nicholas' description of Jesuit University
 - If St. Ignatius defining it? Great improviser, flexible discernment: Important to pay attention to local world and big questions around us, to address key issues of humanity (war, poverty, access, what it means to be human).
 - Jesuit University: safe place to hold tensions. Intellectual conversation needed to know how to create transformation in society.
- Conversations needed:
 - Sustained, supported by university-wide
 - Like Manresa, Gender equity work, interdisciplinary core initiatives, up-coming meeting with Fr. James Heft, January 14.
 - Meaningful conversations to remind us why we do this work.

Question 4: What encourages Academic Excellence now? (What are destination programs?)

John Jentz summary of faculty e-mail responses:

- Honors programs/Capstone courses
- Interdisciplinary initiatives
- Mentoring/service learning for students
- Academic integrity
- Good advising/faculty-student interaction/research opportunities

Comments and Concerns from Open Discussion:

- How can we best serve needs of increasingly diverse student population? Aligned with early Jesuit mission to serve first generation immigrants. This is part of academic excellence, not opposed to it. So, change question from “which destination programs” to who is being served and served well.
- Biggest silo: between academic and non-academic side. Non-academic side needs to trust academics regarding decisions on resources/budgeting. Need more budget autonomy housed with provost. Without that, all our conversations will be meaningless.
- Need to stop competing (to be #4, #3) and set our own standards of excellence/priorities.

Question 5: What interferes with academic excellence? How might resources best be used to strategically promote excellence?

John Pustejovsky summary of faculty e-mail responses:

- Culture of conservatism
- Silo-effect---between faculty and between faculty and administration
- Having to do more with less (resources)
- Lack of incentive for innovation
- Academic administration over-extended
- Flawed obsession with assessment
- Obsession with on-line classes

Summary: Wrong priorities and balkanized culture.

Comments and Concerns from Open Discussion:

- Impediments to conversation
 - All want conversation but faculty tremendously overworked.
 - Conversations require trust and collegiality, not always present.
 - Same conversations (silo-effect, lack of cross-disciplinary work) for 25 years, nothing changes.
- What would change look like?
 - Change requires reallocation of resources to meet growing needs
 - Measurable: Quality of faculty, level of diversity in both faculty and student population. Increasing attention to diversity is crucial. Faculty preparation needed, both tenure track and contingent.
 - Involve faculty in fund-raising: faculty can bring passion, creative imagination.
- Wounds from last spring A&S dean search:
 - Someone needs to acknowledge the damage done to MU academic excellence at national level
 - MU self-perception also damaged: Struggling to keep our own faculty
 - Not enough response from administration
- Representative voice at all levels
 - Too many layers of committees before faculty voice is heard—i.e. representation on ULC, president search committee.
 - Also listen to voice of students

Question 6: other concerns:

Marilyn Frenn summarizing faculty e-mail responses:

- Lack of transparency in oversight of curriculum, faculty, deans?
- Board of trustees background not representative of diversity of MU programs
- Open support of GLBT community
- Renewed commitment to excellence

Dick Fotsch's closing comments:

- Gratitude for honest, passionate responses
- Core issues that emerged
 - The budget is broken and fixing it needs to be a priority
 - More transparency in decision-making needed (comment from faculty: more share in decision-making, not just transparency).
 - Greater clarity in goals—we aren't making the tough decisions.
 - Problem with workload, though this may be related to unclear priorities.
- Level of candor, trust needs to be improved. If this were a business, we need to close our doors and have some hard conversations.