Up Front

SU Board of Trustees Budget Committee Approves Funding to Enhance Faculty, Learning Initiatives

The Budget Committee of Syracuse University's Board of Trustees has approved a one-time allocation of $1.4 million for a series of new initiatives aimed at strengthening Syracuse as a student-centered research university.

The initiatives are part of "A 2020 Vision for Syracuse University" that was unveiled by Vice Chancellor and Provost Deborah A. Freund during a speech to the faculty March 1. The allocation is possible, she says, because of a surplus in last year's budget. "All of these initiatives are aimed in one way or another toward solidifying our place as both a research and a student-centered institution, so that we are distinguished not only in one of those two ways, but in both," Freund says.

The initiatives support efforts for:

• recruitment, retention, and prevention, by providing necessary resources to improve competitive offers/counter offers made to faculty and to prevent world-class scholars from leaving SU;

• faculty development and improvement of the scholarly and intellectual climate, by supporting mentoring initiatives, seminars, and small multidisciplinary ventures likely to bring about greater excellence and innovation;

• review and strategic investment in graduate and doctoral education, including funds to enhance and expedite program review as well as "kick start" special distance education initiatives in areas that already are excellent and can bring greater recognition;

• initiating "mega" University clusters focusing on multi- and interdisciplinary research and programming;

• recruiting excellent deans; the University will recruit two new deans in the coming months for the College of Arts and Sciences and University College/SUCE, and will need new funds for the development of their schools and colleges;

• improving the learning climate for students through such initiatives as themed residence halls and learning communities, or expansion of voluntary service and service learning; and

• increasing the University's ability to recruit and retain faculty, staff, and students of color to create greater diversity.

"We want to maintain our position as a research and a student-centered university," Freund says of the first initiative, aimed at retaining faculty. "To improve our reputation nationally, we need to hang onto the best and brightest faculty, whatever rank they are, and create an environment that allows them to do their work, and an environment in which students can flourish by working with them, either in the classroom or outside."

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"The quality of the faculty determines the quality of the University," adds John Palmer, dean of the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs. "It is essential that we attract and retain top-notch faculty by providing a supportive environment for their teaching and scholarship."

The second initiative, to create clusters focusing on multi- and interdisciplinary research, also is seen as a way to strengthen SU's position as a student-centered research university.

"The emerging, multidisciplinary approach is to consider multiple effects simultaneously," says Edward Bogucz, dean of the L.C. Smith College of Engineering and Computer Science. "The multidisciplinary approach has already opened the doors for revolutionary change in many fields, such as aircraft design and biomedical applications. Because of the breadth of programs at Syracuse University, we are in a position to be a world leader in developing new multidisciplinary academic and research programs."

Raymond von Dran, dean of the School of Information Studies, sees dynamic programs as interdisciplinary by nature. "The best and most effective way to be number one is through partnerships," he says.

James Wiggins, professor and chair of the Department of Religion in the College of Arts and Sciences and chair of the University Senate Committee on Budget and Fiscal Affairs—which approved the initiatives—says they will benefit the morale of the faculty and the student body. "I hope students appreciate that this move will strengthen the whole University," he says.

Wiggins expects enthusiasm about the initiatives to be "infectious" as the University community becomes more aware of them. "It's the kind of thing you read about happening in other places," he says. "It's a real boost."

Freund says her staff will draft guidelines by which the campus community can apply for funds. She expects implementation of the initiatives to take place this fall.

In a separate action, the board's Executive Committee approved a three-pronged plan to improve faculty salaries and recruit and retain faculty known nationally and internationally for their scholarship and research. The plan includes:

• a 4 percent increase in faculty salaries for the 2000-01 fiscal year;

• an allocation of $250,000 in the first of four to five installments to establish a Strategic Faculty Development Fund. The fund will be used to make salary adjustments for faculty in situations where market disparities, salary compression, or other factors justify increases; and

• income from a gift to establish the Trustees Professorships Program that will provide $1 million a year for the next 10 years.

—KELLY HOMAN

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