Meeting notes: Dr. Sandy Shullman/UMKC Academic Chairs & Directors
3:00 – 5:00 p.m.
Wednesday, October 28, 2009

Attended: Sandy Shullman, Gail Hackett, Juno Friedman, Michael Smith, Joy Swallow, Anil Kumar, Michael Kruger, Barbara Glesner-Fines, Tamera Murdock, Cindy Amyot, Brenda Dingley, Clovis Semmes, Steven Stoner, Ken Novak, Dave Renz, Nancy Murdock, Kathleen Kilway, Kathy Krause, Bill Lafferty, Bonnie Postlethwaite, Peggy Mullaly-Quijas, Gary Ebersole, Cindy Pemberton, Jake Kupiec, Laura Gayle Green, Jeff Thomas, Lindy Breytspraak, Jerry Woolsey.

Provost Hackett opened the meeting with an introduction of Jake Kupiec, Special Assistant to the Provost for Strategic Initiatives, who will be building a resource website for Chairs and Directors. Cindy Pemberton, Vice Provost for Academic Affairs reminded the chairs of the retreat with Walter Gmelch scheduled for November 30, 2009 in Room 101 at the Bloch School. Provost Hackett then introduced Dr. Shullman.

Dr. Shullman asked the Chairs & Directors to tell her what it means to be a Chair or Director at UMKC:

You are the person in the middle
Role model, politician, mentor
Baby sitter or parent
The person who is held responsible
You are a person who can’t win – are you faculty or administrator?
My role has been to figure out my role
No orientation process
Lots of flux, lack of clarity

What would be in a cultural orientation for UMKC Chairs & Directors, what do you need to know?

Budgetary issues are incomprehensible
Having a budget that I can’t decipher that I have to sign off on is impossible.
How to negotiate PeopleSoft
We need information about the budget model implementation plans and how this will affect us.
Faculty expect Chairs to be a voice for the faculty – this is harder because of budget problems
How much power do you have when everyone knows you will step down soon on the rotation schedule?

How similar are your roles to those of your colleagues?
Roles are very diverse – for example dentistry does not resemble conservatory much at all.
Even within the College of Arts & Sciences, the different departments are diverse and different sizes

The incentive to being a Chair or Director is that sometimes you get to make something good happen for your department or your students.
At its best, it is the kind of shared stewardship/shared governance that makes the university unique.

What is the hardest part about the differing expectations from the Dean and the department faculty?
When a new dean comes on board, the transition period is very difficult.
When the dean has to look at the bigger picture and that involves disappointing the faculty.
The different directions of advocacy – one chair sees her role as an advocate for the faculty only. The hardest things are decisions on P&T because you have to put aside how you feel and look only at facts. Chances in the process have made this even harder. There can be long term grudges that follow you through your entire career.
The Chair needs to be the flak-catcher so that the Dean does not have to handle every conflict. It’s also hard to know what to do about confidentiality – how much do you tell the dean?
Personnel Management and allocation of resources are both difficult.
Personnel issues are the most difficult.
Turnover in administration has caused a lack of policy/inconsistent policy – trying to get a clear answer about something is very hard.
Forms need to be re-done. Forms for grants are frustrating. SOM has re-done them with great success. Need someone who can mentor the filling-out of forms.
Part of development would be to clarify where policies can be found.

How do we enable you to get things done?
Need a handbook for chairs & directors that compiles policies and forms.
Need development around responsibility centered budgeting.
Communication is a huge problem, for example, faculty don’t realize how much money and effort goes into providing development opportunities for them and there is no perception of value.
There is high anxiety and the experience of great uncertainty among the faculty.
The balance of getting people to work for the department AND for themselves is harder now that the university is more dependent upon grants.
The hiring freeze is not letting units get stimulus money. Externally funded positions do not go through the hiring committee, so this is not the cause of the slow-down.

What can your dean or the university do to support you?
Consistency in policy – waiving policies, changing policies, exceptions here and there are frustrating.
There are too many hoops to jump through about diversity. Administrative persons come up with nonsensical policies without knowing how a process is supposed to work or how the policy applies to problem solving.
But it seems like there is more faculty input into policy formation than there was before.
Procedures need to make sense to those who have to use them.
There is a lot that chairs can do to change things if you decide to take it on
There were numerous complaints about HR imposing new policies and procedures without getting any input from faculty members.
If you are a chair you get no time off and you have no back-up. No structure for providing back-up.
Need to give thought to formalizing some kind of relief and backup for chairs. It seems like a terminal responsibility.
In the CRRs the chair is called a position of great strategic importance, the chief executive academic officer – this is not a maintenance job.
How do you know whether you were elected or appointed? Some think they were both.
The authority comes from the university – it is a campus role between delegated and elected authority.

If you are feeling the tension, then you understand the job.
Chairs must keep the abiding principles of academic policy in mind – you are working for the university.
There is a lack of a comprehensible system overview of how things fit together.
Perhaps a blog for chairs is a way we could help each other.