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Date: September 10, 2012

To: Lynn Williams, Chair, Academic Senate  
Academic Senators

From: Chris Henson, Academic Senator  
Department of English

Subject: Provost Covino's Response to Academic Senate Resolution on Cohort Hiring  
Through the Office of the Provost

At the April 23, 2012 meeting of the Academic Senate, the Senate passed by a vote of 35-10 a Resolution on Cohort Hiring Through the Office of the Provost. In a May 21, 2012 memo to Academic Senate Chair Lynn Williams, Provost Covino provided his response to that resolution. That response was forwarded to Academic Senators in an August 31, 2012 email. In his response, Provost Covino claims that the Resolution is "based at some points on inaccurate information, assumptions, or implications." As the primary author of the Resolution, I want to respond to the specific "inaccuracies" listed by the Provost. I urge the members of the Senate to read the Resolution, the minutes of the April 9, 2012 Senate meeting at which a lengthy discussion of the Resolution took place, Provost Covino's response to the Resolution, and my own response. I then urge Senators to consider what additional action the Senate should take.

Provost Covino's memo begins by calling into question the Whereas clauses of the Resolution, the premises on which the Resolution is based. Rather than address each of these clauses individually, I will address the arguments that he makes regarding these premises:

--The Provost first calls into question the budget information and projection in the Resolution. The Resolution takes as a starting point the information provided by the Academic Affairs Budget Advisory Task Force. In its revised recommendations (January 27, 2012) the AABATF identified a base budget gap of \$900,000-1.2 million for the academic year 2011-12. Provost Covino states that this gap is not a base budget gap but is "the estimated amount to be met through the use of reserves for 2011-12." It should be pointed out that the AABATF based its estimate of a "base budget gap" on information provided to them by the CSUF administration. In fact, the CSUF administration provided to the task force the information that the University faced a base budget gap of \$1.7-2 million dollars. By the time of the revised recommendations, that projection had been decreased to \$900,000-1.2 million. In writing the Resolution I relied on this information. The information that the University had \$65 million in carry-forward reserves had not been provided to the task force, the Academic Senate, or the faculty at

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large. There had been no indication to any of those groups that the “base budget gap” the task force was charged with meeting could be met through reserves. Although the use of these reserves did make the budget situation for 2011-12 less dire, that does not alter the very grave financial situation the University faces. As has repeatedly been pointed out by Provost Covino and President Welty, the use of reserves is a one-time solution which does not provide an ongoing solution to the cuts already made to University funding and additional cuts that may be made. Because of the budget cuts already experienced, those the University could face in the future, and the continued uncertainty about funding for higher education, any hiring that does take place should be very carefully considered.

--The Provost argues that the Academic Affairs budget cuts recommended by the AABATF were not restricted to the College/School level. As he correctly points out, the recommendations do include one brief mention of cuts to be made within Academic Affairs above the College/School level. However, that one recommendation is very vague, calling for the Provost to “generate greater efficiencies in centrally funded programs and offices that report to you.” The remainder of the recommendations for cuts are all at the College/School level. It would be helpful to the Senate to know what “greater efficiencies in centrally funded programs” have, in fact, been generated.

--The Provost repeatedly argues that the practice of cohort hiring through his office has involved consultation with Departments and that cohort positions have been determined as essential by Deans and Department Chairs. The Provost has said that the themes for cohort hires were determined through consultation with the Deans. However, the Provost never consulted with the Academic Senate regarding the policy of cohort hiring in the first place, and the practice of cohort hiring was imposed on the faculty without the normal procedures of Academic Senate consultation and approval. In addition, from the debate in the Senate, it is clear that consultation about the themes for cohort hires did not always occur between Deans and Departments or even Deans and Department Chairs. In fact, in the April 9, 2012 Academic Senate meeting, in reply to a question about such consultation, Provost Covino stated, “I can’t tell you what kind of consultation went on at the School and College level.”

During the debate of the resolution at that same meeting, Senators gave examples of ways in which cohort hiring bypassed consultation with faculty and resulted in positions which did not meet crucial needs of Departments. More specifically, Senators spoke to the following problems:

--Deans, Department Chairs, and faculty in some cases felt that the only way to get a position approved in a time of budget cutbacks was to propose positions that fit into cohorts.

--In at least one case, faculty within a Department were not consulted at all about the cohort position. Instead, they were simply informed that there was to be a cohort hire.

--After identifying a crucial area of need, Departments were told that a position would only be approved if it were part of a cohort, so that job descriptions were rewritten in order to somehow fit the position into a cohort.

In one case, that resulted in a search that failed to fill a position because of a reduced pool of applicants.

Examples of the lack of consultation and questions about whether cohort positions are meeting essential needs continue to emerge. For example, in the current round of searches, an interim dean negotiated with the Provost to transform a position request into a cohort position. This was done without any consultation with the Department, the members of which had made clear that they need a specific specialization that is not met by the cohort job description. The Department was not informed of the re-defined position by the interim dean and only learned of the change from the Office of Faculty Affairs, and the job description for the position was rewritten over the objections of the Department. In another instance, the Chair of a Department which had made a cohort hire for this year contacted the Chair of a Department in another school to inquire about the possibility of the new hire teaching a class in that Department since the Department which had hired him could not be certain of providing him a full teaching load.

Provost Covino also responds directly to the two Resolved statements in the Resolution. The first "Resolved" is "That the Provost's Office should suspend all future cohort hiring." As is indicated in his response, the Provost proceeded with the practice of cohort hiring. He states that of the 48 faculty searches authorized for 2012-13, 20 are "positions requested as cohort hires." To some extent, this is understandable, since the decisions about requests for positions were being made as the Senate considered the Resolution. Those searches will shortly be underway if they haven't already started, so that it would be difficult to stop the process at this point. That does not mean, however, that the Senate approves the continued practice of cohort hiring out of the Provost's Office.

The second "Resolved" states "That all funds available for faculty hires, including funds returned to Academic Affairs from the centrally monitored funds, be distributed to Colleges/Schools according to the Level B budget distribution formula." The Provost argues that "formulaic distribution does not effectively take particular Department/College hiring needs into account." However, such distribution would, in fact, bring the decision making to the College level and make transparent the process by which Colleges/Schools and Departments received funds for hiring. It would also maintain faculty responsibility and control of curriculum and instruction.

There are four additional points I would like Academic Senators to consider as they continue to think about these issues:

First, although the Provost is correct in pointing out that the "effects of further cuts have not been determined," I don't think it is at all a stretch to anticipate that, as the Resolution states, any "further cuts that will be imposed will undoubtedly restrict the hiring of new faculty." Thus, it becomes even more crucial that all hiring be "directed at the crucial needs of Colleges/Schools and Departments as identified by faculty" and funding be distributed transparently to Schools and Colleges.

Second, the Resolution does not call for elimination of cohort hiring through the Provost's Office. It simply states that cohort hiring (after the 2011-12 round) should be suspended. In better budget times, that practice could be resumed as long as the budget distribution is transparent and Departments and Schools/Colleges are supportive of funding a position for a cohort. However, hiring of faculty should always begin with the identification by faculty of the crucial needs of Schools/Colleges and Departments, and that means true consultation of faculty.

Third, the Resolution also does not preclude Departments from creating and proposing positions that would involve interdisciplinary cooperation and collaboration.

Finally, neither the Resolution nor this response is intended to criticize or devalue the faculty members who have been hired as members of cohorts. They bring impressive qualifications and experience and talent to the University. When Senators voted on the Resolution, they were not voting on individuals. They were voting on a policy and practice.

The Senate vote (35 yes; 10 no) is a clear statement that a substantial majority of Senators, after listening carefully to the debate and consulting with their Departments, agreed with the Resolution. The Senate should now consider what additional action should be taken given the Provost's intent to continue the practice of cohort hiring.

cc: John Welty, President  
William Covino, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs