

THE UNIVERSITY of TENNESSEE CHATTANOOGA

Provost's Page

September 16, 2008

In an attempt to improve our overall communication, I will begin sending each month via email a brief note to all faculty and staff in Academic Affairs. I will try to keep my notes brief and focused on the major issues of current concern. I hope that these notes will be informative and useful to you and encourage further discussions on particularly important issues. I solicit your ideas, opinions, and comments on any of these or other issues of import to UTC's mission.

First, I am delighted to welcome our new faculty colleagues who we hope by now are settled in for the fall semester. UTC's greatest asset is its talented and dedicated faculty. We have an impressive group of new faculty joining us to continue that tradition. I ask all of us "old-timers" to make the extra effort to help them with their transition.

You may surmise from the lengthy list of current initiatives below that this year promises to be an exciting, challenging experience for all of us. Although some of us thought that we might break the 10,000 mark this fall, we came pretty close with a final official enrollment of 9,807. Along with this all-time record enrollment, we have welcomed the largest (2,083) and most academically prepared (Ave. ACT = 22.42) freshman class in UTC history. This year also marks the largest graduate enrollment in UTC history with over 1,400. In fact, UTC's enrollment growth has exceeded 13% since 2005.

Although this growth creates some challenges for us, it also provides us additional tuition revenue to continue our forward momentum with the priorities outlined in the strategic plan. Unfortunately, the counter balance to the increased tuition revenue and the positive energy of a growing campus is the cutbacks in state funding. For FY09, we absorbed a 4.5% cut in state support and have already been alerted to plan for a 3% cut for FY10. However, the top two priorities within academic affairs remain the same: faculty and staff compensation and operating budgets. We will continue to press these strategic priorities at every opportunity.

To ensure the overall health of UTC and its academic programs, we must continually review all of our efforts with a view toward our institutional mission. This is particularly true during lean fiscal times such as these. This review process should be open and as inclusive as possible. I will shortly convene a committee with broad representation to define the review process and the criteria to be used. Although this exercise is never pleasant, it is necessary. Once the process has been defined, I will share it with you.

Below is a briefly annotated list of current initiatives and announcements. As always, please feel free to contact me directly at phil-oldham@utc.edu with any suggestions, questions, and/or concerns you may have regarding any university-related issues. Best wishes to all of you for another great year at UTC.

CURRENT INITIATIVES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

- New Roles and Responsibilities in Academic Affairs.
 - Dr. Jocelyn Sanders, Associate Provost
 - Dr. Fran Bender, Assistant Provost for Student Retention and Success
 - Dr. Andy Novobilski, Assistant Provost for Research and Engagement
 - Dr. Stephanie Bellar, Interim Dean of the Graduate School
- New Dean for CECS- I am pleased to welcome Dr. Will Sutton to UTC as the new Dean of Engineering and Computer Science. Will has a very distinguished record as a faculty member and department head at both the University of Oklahoma and more recently at the University of Alabama.
- Freshman Academic Success Tracking (FAST) Initiative- Professor Fran Bender is now leading our efforts to improve our retention rate for first-time freshman. This fall, the absences of freshmen enrolled in the English Department's composition and Western Humanities courses are being tracked. If these students miss two classes, their instructors report these absences to a website which automatically sends their names to the Advisement and Retention Office and to Residence Life. For those students living on campus an RA tries to make a brief contact with the students to remind them of the importance of class attendance to their academic success. Those students living off-campus are contacted by the Advisement Office. These contacts are meant to serve as a mild wake-up call to students to get them back on track.
- Administrative Realignment- In an attempt to better align ourselves to support our students, we have made the following changes.
 - Office of Financial Aid now reports to the Vice Chancellor for Student Development.
 - The Student Success Center now reports to the Provost.
- SACS Reaffirmation- We are scheduled for our 10-year SACS accreditation site visit in just over two years from now (Spring 2011). Dr. Karen Adsit is chairing our SACS self-study. The leadership and steering committees are now being formed. A web site will be created later this fall to communicate the overall process and keep everyone informed as to the progress.
- International Programs- I invite any faculty member with interest and/or experience with international programs to participate in a task force to focus strategically our efforts in this area at UTC. This group will convene within the next few weeks, so let me know via email if you are interested in participating in this group.
- Faculty/Staff Survey- As part of the strategic plan implementation, a number of strategic plan action committees requested survey data to guide their future recommendations. Dr. Barbara Medley has led an effort to create a faculty/staff work life and diversity survey. All of you should be receiving more information regarding the survey in the near future. Your participation in the survey is crucial for success of the strategic plan.
- SimCenter: National Center for Computational Engineering- With significant financial support from several foundations, considerable effort continues to enhance UTC's opportunities in computational science and engineering. This effort should ultimately provide opportunities for many academic disciplines at UTC. This may prove particularly valuable and timely with Volkswagen's recent decision to build their North American factory here in Chattanooga.

- THEC Peer Group- A proposal to the Tennessee Higher Education Commission is now nearly complete to upgrade our existing set of peer institutions. The proposal calls for three of our current peers that we consider to be significantly dissimilar institutions to UTC to be replaced by aspirational peers.