Some Thoughts on Why We Need Deans at WPI

Bruce Bursten, Provost
Faculty Meeting, October 16, 2015

W W M D: Wordplay! Humor! Movies! Explicit language!

The Dane Thing
In 2007, three new deans of A & S, Business, and Engineering ("Unit Deans") were introduced. Led to a number of concerns:

- **Top-down rollout** with little building of consensus among Department Heads and faculty.
- **Lack of clarity** with respect to roles and responsibilities of the deans.
- **Challenges in determining the desired characteristics of decanal candidates.**

  Concerns about purpose, process, and price-tag…

To paraphrase Cool Hand Luke: “What we had here was failure to communicate…”

- 2014: President Leshin addresses the faculty on the issue of deans. Commitment to doing it right with a good process.
- 2015: Here we are today…

  No more looking back! We must look forward and get it right.
Full-time faculty count, Fall 2014: 248 T/TT + 111 NTT = 359 faculty colleagues

Two possible endpoints for the reporting structure for faculty:

Model 1: Each faculty member reports directly to President Leshin.

Model 2: Each faculty member has her or his own supervisor.

Obviously, neither of these structures can work. What is the correct sweet-spot between these two extrema?
Academic Departments: Our First Structuring of Faculty

Like most all universities, our first “bucketing” of the faculty is into Departments, which are centered on specific areas of scholarship.

14 academic departments

- BBT
- CBC
- CS
- HUA
- MA
- PHY
- SSPS
- BME
- CEE
- CHE
- ECE
- FPE
- ME
- MG

Why have Departments? Both strategic leadership and management functions:
- Create a collaborative structure for the teaching and scholarship of the faculty.
- Build synergies and collaborations among colleagues with similar interests.
- Design a cohesive curriculum that leads to excellence in student learning.
- Provide a natural and manageable reporting structure for faculty.
- History—departments exist because departments have always existed.
Until the creation of the unit deans, all of the departments reported directly to the Provost. Not an optimal organizational structure...

14 academic departments

BBT CBC CS HUA MA PHY SSPS

BME CEE CHE ECE FPE ME

MG

Provost

WPI “things”

A&S Eng FSB

7 other direct reports
Even More Compelling: WPI Is Not the University It Used To Be…

Back in the day, WPI was a smaller, more undergraduate-focused institution—part of a different peer group than today. The changes from 2005 to 2015 have been dramatic:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty Headcount</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T/TT</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulltime NTT</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>359</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enrollment (FTE)</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Undergrad</td>
<td>2,824</td>
<td>3,540</td>
<td>4,151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>678</td>
<td>982</td>
<td>1,287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3,502</td>
<td>4,522</td>
<td>5,438</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Expenditures</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$11,965,752</td>
<td>$15,117,369</td>
<td>$28,663,914</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We are a much larger, more complex organization than we used to be!

And yet, the most compelling reason for deans is not organizational efficiency…
LEADERSHIP and organizational management: Our deans must be inspiring academic leaders who enable WPI and our Departments/Programs achieve their goals. The following are some of the leadership they provide:

- Work with the Departments to craft a cohesive strategic vision for the (thing). Communicate, lead, and inspire the faculty and staff to support academic programs and achieve the vision.
- Work well with the President and Provost while serving as an effective advocate for the (thing).
- Establish, promote, and enhance high standards for our faculty; prioritize hiring across the Departments, including the recruitment of diverse faculty and staff.
- Be an inspiring representative with peers, stakeholders, and donors with the goals of increasing the visibility and resource base of the (thing) and WPI.
- Work with Academic Affairs to establish budgetary priorities for the (thing); ensure fiscal responsibility while achieving strategic vision.
- Enable new disciplinary and multidisciplinary activities that enhance both the (thing) and WPI; lead in the development of new opportunities.
- Train and develop leadership for our Departments/Programs, including strong succession planning.
- As appropriate for the (thing), lead and manage the process of accreditation.
**LEADERSHIP and organizational management:** Our deans must have the necessary characteristics to achieve our high expectations of them. The following are some of the core competencies we look for in our deans:

- **Impressive credentials** in teaching and scholarship that provide a role model for the faculty.
- Demonstrated **leadership skills**; experience as at least a Department Head or Associate Dean, and understands principles of shared governance.
- **Strategic agility** and the ability to create a compelling vision and sense of purpose; ability to be nimble and anticipate future trends.
- Outstanding **listening** and **communication** skills for a wide variety of audiences.
- Strong **business acumen**; knows how to manage resources, knows the market, knows the competition.
- A deep commitment to the **importance of diversity**.
- Potential to be an **effective fund-raiser** for our Departments, the (thing), and WPI.
- **Political savvy**; must know how to navigate both internal and external politics.
- Unquestioned **integrity**; must engender an atmosphere of trust.

**Bottom line:** Individuals who our faculty can admire, can learn from, and can be inspired by.
What Next?

To improve both leadership and organizational structure at WPI, we need to establish the unit deans as even more significant academic leaders of our campus. Among the next steps we as an academic community will need to take:

- Initiate the search for the next permanent Dean of Engineering.
- Start the process of creating empowered deans who can create visions for their (things) that align with our Strategic Plan.
- Streamline processes between the (things) and the Office of Academic Affairs—eliminate redundancies, improve workflow.
- Begin revising the Handbook to reflect more fully the important leadership roles of the deans.

*It is time to move forward with confidence and purpose! Let’s achieve our goals together with great leadership.*

Questions?