Faculty Senate

To: President Seth Bodnar
         Acting Provost Paul Kirgis
         Provost-Designate Jon Harbor

From: Executive Committee of the Faculty Senate

Date: Aug. 5, 2018

Re: Faculty Consensus and Concern in Allocating Faculty Reductions

In this memo ECOS responds to President Bodnar's call for more specific comments on the *Strategy for Distinction* at the May 3, 2018 Faculty Senate meeting. It is informed by the feedback submitted by faculty online comments and listening sessions, subsequent campus updates (in particular, the methodology detailed in Acting Provost Kirgis's May 7 Stage 2 Analysis, the President's May 8 Draft Recommendation Update), the update to the University Planning Committee (UPC) Data Subgroup (June 6, 2018) and the decision to include updated FTE and enrollment data through Spring 2018. Consistent with the Administration's most recent communications on the *Strategy*, which suggested that major strategic reorganizations of academic programs (e.g., reorganizing the College of Humanities and Sciences into 10 divisions) are under reconsideration, our comments focus on the President's revised recommendations for faculty FTE reductions expected in early fall 2018. Since originally drafting this memo Acting Provost Kirgis presented to the UPC (July 19, 2018) a revised method of determining staffing levels; this memo does not respond directly to that particular method, but ECOS hopes that this memo can help further refine whatever method is adopted by offering the following observations.

ECOS offers this response to continue the shared governance dialogue and ensure that the revised recommendations are informed by areas of apparent faculty consensus and concern before they come before the

Faculty Senate for final review and recommendations in the fall. ECOS considers the revisions to the preliminary recommendations already made in response to faculty feedback (e.g. the revision of the mission statement and adaptation of data processes) signs of the Administration's good-faith effort to honor faculty involvement in this process. It is in this collaborative spirit that ECOS offers the following observations informed by the faculty's feedback on the *Strategy for Distinction*.

ECOS has identified recurrent themes arising in the faculty feedback that suggest areas of consensus, as well as areas of recurrent concerns. The faculty, by and large, share the Administration's commitment to achieving sustainable faculty levels to maintain and improve the quality of the University of Montana's academic programs. General Comments, approximately 28% of the feedback submitted, supported the preliminary recommendations by 3 to 1. This reflects a shared recognition of the need to take strategic action and appreciation for President Bodnar's leadership and willingness to make hard decisions. The desire for change was palpable throughout all categories of feedback; even among the comments that critiqued the preliminary recommendations, there was often a shared understanding that the University was suffering from years of across-the-board cuts and needs a more strategic approach.

These areas of consensus, however, ought to be considered in light of recurrent concerns also raised in the faculty feedback. In our review of faculty feedback, we have identified three key procedural concerns. First, the Administration should provide transparency in the decision process and key metrics used. In order to effectively comment on substance or process, ECOS must be informed in a timely manner of substantive discussion about the Administration's plan. Second, the Administration should articulate a clear strategy to improve student recruitment and retention that maintains the distinctiveness and quality of the University of Montana. At a minimum, recommendations to align faculty with enrollment over three years must be based on realistic estimates of what enrollment will be when the recommendations are fully implemented. Third, the Administration should respect existing processes in reducing faculty, mindful of the Faculty Senate's oversight of the curriculum.

On the substance of the proposed *Strategy*, we have identified several broad areas of consensus and a few areas of continued concern. It is difficult to distill individual concerns from the comments, which primarily advocated on behalf of specific programs, although many expressed a concern for maintaining the University's commitment to the liberal arts. ECOS appreciates the efforts Acting Provost Kirgis and President Bodnar made to meet with individual departments to work through specific

concerns and encourages the Administration's continued responsiveness to department-level and individual concerns.

We have identified several areas of consensus on campus:

1. Strategic growth needs resources, some of which come from faculty reduction. Fulfilling our mission through the Communities of Excellence and other recognized opportunities for development will require new resources. Although the Administration should continue to advocate for increased state and private funding, and plan for increased enrollment and retention, faculty reductions play a necessary role in freeing funding for new investment, including in hiring new faculty in areas of critical needs.

2. Enrollment-based faculty reductions are preferable to eliminating programs. Several rounds of program review (from AAIP to APASP) have concluded that nearly all academic programs are successful. The budget deficit appears to be due to an enrollment problem not a program problem. Therefore, any reductions should be based on department enrollments to ensure programs can continue to serve student demand.

3. Student credit hours are an appropriate indicator of department enrollments but recommendations ought not be determined by demand alone. Although any metric will be imperfect, student credit hours (SCH) account for student demand and tuition revenues across departments based on students' instructional experiences. In each department, SCH should be counted, and faculty ratios determined, separately for undergraduate and graduate programs. The faculty frequently observe, however, that a simple SCH to FTE ratio cannot be used in isolation. Different programs require different SCH/FTE ratios. The feedback also suggests concern that research productivity and creative scholarship be considered when reviewing enrollment figures. In an effort to preserve transparency, ECOS proposes that the recommendations account for these distinctions in any deviations as described below.

4. Target faculty levels should start with broad benchmarks by department. Baseline faculty targets should meet a broad internal benchmark such as five-year average SCH per instructional FTE by department. This accounts for different departments' instructional demand and minimizes the impact of year-to-year anomalies such as sabbaticals, other research leave, and service leave. A broad external benchmark such as the applicable Delaware ratio should help identify outliers.

5. Identification of target faculty levels should begin in the Fall 2018

semester. Future growth depends on making the hard choices of allocating reductions sooner rather than later. Identifying target faculty levels in the fall will allow departments and individual faculty to plan toward those levels, maximize the opportunity for voluntary departures of more senior faculty, and minimize curtailment of junior faculty.

We have a few areas of concern about the *Strategy* and next steps:

1. The UPC should have been more involved in reviewing the proposed *Strategy*. Faculty feedback consistently indicates concerns that the recommendations for FTE reductions in the draft Strategy do not meaningfully integrate the work of both UPC subcommittees nor adequately communicate to the Faculty Senate and the UPC any basis for departures from that work. In the future we expect the faculty will be more involved in developing and implementing strategic decisions such as curricular changes, reorganizations, etc.

2. The Administration should address individual and systemic data problems. The use of broad benchmarks and target faculty levels ameliorates some data inadequacies and anomalies. Still, feedback suggests significant problems with the data that jeopardize the integrity of the process. After the 2018 data are released, but before the revised recommendations are published, ECOS strongly recommends that the Administration meet directly with department chairs to resolve remaining data accuracy issues. Furthermore, ECOS encourages the Administration to provide resources to improve data in support of future decisions. The legitimacy of the recommendations depends on the integrity of the underlying data.

3. The Administration should target faculty levels, not reductions from a changing base. The current "Stage 2 Analysis" appears to set targets (the "green circles") based on tenure-track reductions in the draft *Strategy* rather than the total instructional FTE targets that institutional budgeting and departmental staffing requires. The *Strategy* should set enrollment-based targets (subject to strategic deviations, below) for total instructional FTE (tenure-track, lecturer, adjunct).

4. Deviations from enrollment-based targets should be strategic and justified. All departments produce much more than SCH, including distinct instructional methods, research, public service, institutional service, and national reputation, any of which may merit a deviation from the enrollment-based target. In many cases these deviations will be reflected in departmental metrics, though strategy may dictate further deviations

from historical or peer benchmarks. Given that budget constraints require a fixed number of faculty, an above-benchmark increase of FTE in one department requires an additional reduction of FTE in another. The *Strategy* should clearly state the basis for any deviations and justify the decision with respect to generally recognized strategic principles.

Respectfully Submitted,

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