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GS Libraries Faculty Meeting Essence Notes

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GS Libraries Faculty Meeting with Provost Carl Reiber
August 15, 2018
Essence Notes

Attending:


Faculty Lane Library: Douglas Frazier, Beth Burnett, Ann Fuller, Melissa Jackson, Aimee Reist.

Academic Affairs: Provost Carl Reiber

Introductions: Dean Bede Mitchell began the meeting by asking everyone present to introduce themselves by name and title.

Bede welcomed Provost Carl Reiber. Bede then described the work being done on the strategic plan which is being built upon the GS Libraries mission statement, aspirational goals, and SWOT. It is also being built upon information from each library department. Each department will eventually have their department-specific strategic goals, which together will work towards the achievement of the GS Libraries-wide strategic goals. Bede then turned over the meeting to Provost Reiber.

Provost Reiber began by thanking everyone for meeting with him. Provost Reiber has had a long rich history working with university libraries as an educator, as a scientist and as an administrator. The library has been the central focus for a lot of his work. He has worked closely with deans of libraries and has even presented at a couple of the Greater Western Libraries Associations meetings. When he was looking for the next step in his career, he had wanted to not only be in the southeast, but most important, to find an institution that was of the same mindset in regards to his teaching, scholarship and administrative philosophy. When the position at Georgia Southern University opened up, Provost Reiber spoke with many colleagues. Georgia Southern’s and Armstrong’s reputations preceded them.

Georgia Southern has a rock solid library that is very much forward thinking in terms of how libraries are developing in the future. Provost Reiber and Dean Mitchell have had long conversations which have convinced him that the GS Libraries have a great foundation on which to launch the new (consolidated) Georgia Southern University. Provost Reiber feels very strongly that the library is the central hub of the institution. In his previous position he worked very closely with the library when they were doing GenEd reform. The good part about the library is that it is neutral and supportive of everything educationally that happens on campus. Therefore Provost Reiber was able to work with the entire campus through the library in a
positive but territory-neutral way. Even though that was a decade ago, it opened his eyes to why libraries are, and will continue to be, crucial to the central mission of higher education. The ability to pull entities together on neutral turf is unique to the library because of their supportive role. He sees this extending to other program development activities, whether they are completely educational or scholarly, or an intersection of the two. The library is a wonderful teammate and will continue to be so in new ways as curriculum continues to be refined in GenEd and individual programs.

One of the areas the Provost would like to see expanded quite a bit at Georgia Southern is at the intersection of faculty scholarship and education (undergraduate scholarship). Georgia Southern has a long rich history in this regard and Provost Reiber would like to expand that in creative ways. He wants to incentivize faculty to work with undergrads and show them how the creation of new knowledge can be exciting. New knowledge creation needs a foundation on which to launch from and that is what the library does, along with taking multiple areas and pulling them together. This is the information literacy part. Information literacy used to be like a thread but it has now become multi-dimensional. Faculty can get caught in the thread concept and become experts in their one area, however they need to also learn to pull back. This is where the library can come in and provide new perspectives.

The Provost sees tremendous new opportunities in which to engage undergrads more in the creation of new knowledge. Get them excited about scholarship, get them excited about where the future is going to take them. This means tremendous collaborative opportunities between the various colleges, departments, faculty and the library. The library will be the hub of all of this endeavor.

The challenges will be prioritizing these new opportunities and aligning the resources to support those opportunities. It means taking advantage of areas of expertise at both campuses and working with the community, as well as community partners, not just in Statesboro and Savannah, but in the region up and down the southeast coast. Provost Reiber came to Georgia Southern because the great opportunities that the consolidation as opened up. Georgia Southern is well positioned on both the Savannah and Statesboro campuses, as well as the Liberty campus, which is expanding. We are near the ports, I-16, I-95, the airport, and the new businesses moving into the region. Georgia Southern is in great position to build a workforce development platform to support the growth of this region. Savannah is slated for growth because of its location. You cannot have a growing great city without a growing great university to support it. You cannot have a growing great university without growing great forwarding thinking university library. Provost wants to emphasize how central what the library does is to the future of Georgia Southern and to his own plans as they develop and evolve.

Provost Reiber will be calling on the faculty of the GS libraries, both individually and collectively for ideas, to build relationships, to work across the other departments on campus, to work with students, both undergrads and grads. The library is going to be central to where Georgia Southern University ends up in the next decade and beyond. This is the reason Provost Reiber
wanted to sit down with the GS libraries faculty and begin the process of establishing this relationship because it will be a very important part of the future of Georgia Southern. He wants to make sure he is supporting the faculty at the GS Libraries so that they can do their job successfully.

Provost Reiber wants to encourage everyone to think outside of the box. Provost Reiber is an experimental scientist and so he likes to throw ideas out and get feedback. He also wants others to feel free to throw ideas out and get feedback, so that together we can be collectively thinking, moving forward in creative ways and defining what the GS libraries role is for the future. There was a time that what defined the quality of a library was how many volumes was in a library’s collection. Now with interlibrary loan this is no longer true. Instead, it is what a library is doing to advance the mission of the institution that defines its quality. Provost Reiber believes the GS Libraries are doing a great job and wants to support the GS Libraries in continuing to do so.

Provost Reiber is impressed with the level of dedication of everyone on all three campuses and how hard everyone works. He sees the GS Libraries as the center of everything he is looking to do at Georgia Southern. With that, in light of Dean Mitchell’s upcoming retirement, he will be beginning the process of looking for a new dean. He believes it is important enough to bring in an outside search firm to ensure that the best people possible are identified. He will be looking for a lot of input in terms of the type of leader the faculty desires. He views higher education as a family because of the time spent together and the work done. Picking the wrong leader could destroy the family. So, as the process of searching for a new dean begins, he wants feedback from the faculty on the type of leader they want. He also wants to make sure the faculty receives feedback from the search committee so that they can choose the best person, not only for the personality and persona of the libraries, but for the entire campus. He believes this will be a critical hire, as well as critical loss in losing Dean Mitchell as the dean of the GS Libraries. This is another reason he wants to partner with the GS Libraries in how they go forward. He wants to look at the consolidation of the new Georgia Southern and how they will engage the community and partner with the community in the future. The Provost then welcomed any questions.

Bede stated that the best strategic plan for a university is driven more by the provost than a president. Bede then asked if the Provost sees that the future of Georgia Southern may need to include a change in Carnegie classification because of the way GS’s emphasizes its priorities and how they going to have to be shuffled. Dr. Reiber agreed that the Provost’s Office is a critical element to strategic planning. They have been talking about strategic planning at the cabinet level and he is the co-chair. The Provost views strategic planning as a living document. Philosophically he believes that strategic plans should point a direction, as a vector analysis, and that the details should be evolving over time. Goals and aspirations should be set up, but how you get there can change. Strategic plans should be nimble and evolving. In terms of Carnegie classification, the Provost believes that with very little overt effort Georgia Southern
could move to an R-2 institution. Georgia Southern would have to bump up research and create a few more PhD programs. The foundations to do so are there. However the provost would hate to get fixated on a classification. He would rather create an environment where everyone wants to be better. Where we have really good programs at the undergraduate level, graduate level, PhD level, certificate program level and continuing education level that are serving the community in a real positive way. If we focus on serving our students and community, the natural outgrowth of that will be more scholarship, more research dollars, more publications, better education at all levels, more PhD’s students graduating, and then one day the school will be an R-2.

Bede stated that in the past, previous presidents have made comments which were probably intended to focus the campus on the directions noted by Provost Reiber, but they ended up being interpreted by some faculty as an expectation that we were going to try to be similar to Georgia Tech and UGA.

Provost Reiber would be counter to that. He would rather be creative and think out of box and come up with new paradigms. For example, in speaking with the Dean of Public Health, they cannot compete with UGA. The UGA program does a lot of bench science in public health. It’s very expensive and they have the research facilities for that, buildings that were built at a time when there was money available to do that. But public health has shifted its focus to a more community based type service. The future of public health is more embedding yourself in the community, working with the community, using those relationships to collect data, to then feed back on developing best practices for the health and well-being of the community. UGA doesn’t do that. They are completely and totally tooled up to do basic bench science. This leaves a swath of territory open that Georgia Southern can slip into, get good at, and take over very quickly. So why do what the others are doing? Why not come in and find a niche that GS can play in and that betters our community. He uses this model very specifically because what it means is that you are training undergraduates and graduates to move into those jobs. They are out in the community working with a whole array of wrap around services that the community needs. They are getting work experience as they are out doing their internships and working with the community. They are getting their name out there as being good, but they are also helping to collect data. They are doing undergraduate research. The faculty are engaged. Maybe they are writing proposals to support undergraduate research, but they are also then writing grant proposals that further that end of the scholarly endeavor.

Provost Reiber wants to work strategically with the community to find niches that GS can naturally move into and evolve over time. He asking everyone to find the next paradigm that GS can move into. Higher education is changing. Student demographics are changing. If GS doesn’t start looking at who the 18 year olds are over the next decade, plug them in and build their skill sets to be successful in the environment of the future, we will see our enrollment decline. The new demographic is not going to be the traditional middle class 18 year old kid, it will be more and more the exciting, wide-eyed, full of possibilities type student (in the Provost’s
view), the 1st generation college student. They do come with lower income, and GS will need to find ways to support their education. They come from school districts that didn’t prepare them for college as well as they should have and GS needs to find ways to make sure they are coming in prepared. Their families are not familiar with higher education and they need guidance. We need to place ourselves in the shoes of our students. We don’t just change lives we change family trees. Someone who gets a degree will be the support and help of their children, grandchildren and aunts and uncles, and it will help a family in ways that we cannot predict.

Leslie Haas commented that speaking for herself and her department they are very excited to hear the Provost speak about undergraduate scholarship and the fact that information literacy is multidimensional. It is something they acknowledge. They are working in terms of their own professional development to explore ways that they can become more engaged earlier on in the process with faculty. One of the moves that will help is the move of the Academic Success Center to the Henderson Library. However, one of the ramifications of having the Academic center move into the library is that we have lost some teaching space. This has forced her department to start thinking outside of the box. They are discussing how they can move forward, much like the provost has been commenting on, in new ways to better serve their undergraduate students and faculty. They are struggling now in how they can do this. One of the things they would like to talk about, and explore, is creating a multipurpose space in the library that is that is not just a traditional classroom. They would really like to build a space that is transformative.

Provost Reiber agreed with this. He recognized that the library has created a Makerspace. Leslie noted that the space is very small and needs money to grow. Provost Reiber stated that he would certainly like to see this space grow. He would also like to create an “incubator” space. A space where they can bring people together for an array of purposes. Getting faculty together periodically to talk. He would also like to see if they can develop some relationships with tech firms to see if they can put into that space beta versions of whatever is new, and let faculty experiment with it. Also allow limited scheduling in that space. Allow creative faculty to jump in and try things. He would like to find ways to get some stake holders to invest. He would like to partner with the faculty, the faculty senate, the library, and the students. He would also like to obtain ideas from students because they are not bound with the same limitations in the thought process as us (speaking mainly financially).

Leslie stated that part of what they struggled with is to whom to put those kinds of ideas in front of, so that it can then proceed with bringing about fruition of the idea. Provost Reiber stated that those ideas can be brought to him. To work with their dean of course, but to put those ideas together, and then bring those ideas directly to him. If he believes in the idea he will then look to see how he can pull the resources together to make it happen. At his former workplace they had a transformative makerspace that started small and then grew to a true transitional area. They had big glass maker boards, seating and projection. It was a modular space that could be used for traditional teaching but in a matter of minutes could be quickly
transformed into a very different space, for example, for a social gathering. He wants the library to think outside the walls.

Fred Smith asked about the year-end funding used to pay for things like journal subscriptions. He was wondering if there was a way to change how year-end money was funded so that it wasn’t a “wait, see and worry” if those items will be paid for. For years the bulk of our subscriptions has been paid for with year-end funding, however there is no way to assure that it will be paid, causing some stress throughout end of the fiscal year. The Provost recognizes the problem. The problem is not with the university itself but with the publishers. The publishers are driving themselves into a point that is unsustainable. He believes because of that this trend will slow a bit. It is the standard across all the universities he has worked with that the money for this is awarded towards the end of the fiscal year because of the continual increases by the publishers. This of course causes stress. Everyone would like a more predictable budget but because of the nature of academics that is not truly possible. He suggests that if for the last ten years this money had always been allocated for these costs, then the library can reasonably expect that funding and budget for it. The problem is the ever increasing cost and so the gap continues to develop, which makes it hard to add a permanent amount for those ever increasing costs. The Provost is going to try to minimize the problem.

Clement Lau thanked the Provost for coming and for his thoughts on how the library can be a competitive advantage for Georgia Southern. He stated that the library staff has been working very hard to add value to Georgia Southern. The Provost agreed that the value of the library is infinite. Without the library students would not be able to be successful. Clement has been trying to calculate how much students would have to pay to obtain access to the depth resources the library presently provides if there were no library. One of his “return on investment” scenarios estimates the cost per student would come out to be $31,000.50.

Clement wished to share an experience he had in a Hong Kong university library in regards to undergraduate research. The library wanted to promote the concept that the library is there to help the student become more successful and to also promote the library resources. In 2004 the team came up with a plan to organize the faculty and encourage each department and each college to promote research proposals and projects. The library marketed and promoted the entire endeavor. They provided support for the students in finding resources and in the research process. The library then, in collaboration with faculty members, formed a selection committee to choose the best research projects. The winning students received an award of $400.00 US dollars. They also received recognition. There was a ceremony and reception along with the presence of the vice president, deans and faculty. It helped to promote the culture of research.

The Provost likes an idea of having a research week for graduate, undergraduate and even faculty scholarship. He likes the idea of tying together research showcases especially in the undergraduate level with career services. That way the local businesses can come in and see Georgia Southern’s best and brightest. This gives promotion to the university as well as to the
students themselves. University level research can be intimidating. The library can eliminate this feeling of intimidation through individual classroom instruction, workshops and seminars. While the library does this now, the provost feels that this can be expanded. Especially since the different colleges will have a different approach to research. This is something that the library can do well. This will also help with fundraising. These kinds of things can help get donors involved.

The Provost is promoting 3 plus 2 and 4 plus 1 type of programs where students can blend their senior year into a masters program. He has noted that 50% of students nationally that enter a PhD program in 5 years are ABD and never finish. He notes that students in general work with one faculty member. The library would be the perfect place where the faculty can send a student who is doing research. The library can share information that is pertinent and current to the research that student is looking into. They can then help guide them to refine their interest. Then when the idea is refined, they can help them with the proposal. Here the library can connect them with a statistician, and provide support with the writing process, utilizing the writing center. So that when the student finally submits the proposal it is not rejected over and over by the proposal committee because of poor composition. This can be implemented at the undergraduate and graduate level. He believes they can streamline the thesis process, especially in writing.

Bede mentioned the quality enhancement plan. He noted that the library has struggled, as have other centers, to promote and provide the level of learning support to students that the library is capable of providing, in part because students are so focused on satisfying their professors that if the professors do not tell them to go the Writing Center or the Academic Success Center or go to library, they won’t go. One reason for the success of the quality enhancement plan is the concerted campus-wide effort to create a much greater culture of student writing across the board. This is what it is going to take to promote the library resources, etc. The library needs to continue to develop these partnerships with these other centers. The library cannot do this alone.

The Provost agrees. He also believes that the library can be instrumental in helping courses such as writing and math be more engaging and fun for students, especially because those subjects are hard. The library can be the place where students doing research can find the fun.

David Lowder asked if there was anything being done about salary compression. Dr. Reiber reported that there are two studies under way, one for staff and one for faculty. These studies should be done by the end of the semester. They have a ball park figure of how much it going to take to solve it. It is not possible to solve in one year, it will need to done in increments over a couple of years. The interim President Shelley Nickel understands that money must be set aside to fix some of these issues. Georgia Southern’s funding level is determined by student credit hours, and when this does not increase then the money must be divided differently. He wants to grow the funding so that he can begin to address the salary progression issues, and the inequities in terms of gender and merit issues. He believes something should be coming
out soon in regards to merit and equity. Provost Reiber will do everything he can to advance in this area of concern. He had the same issues at the UNLV. What they did there is with staff they brought the pay up to a livable wage. Then they set a floor for assistant professors. Two years later they set a floor for associate professors and then guaranteed a cost of living advance so that they would never fall behind in terms of hiring at those levels. They then did a salary study within discipline comparisons to see where they had serious salary compression, gender and ethnicity issues. He believes the salaries need to be competitive. He wants to make sure people are being paid equitably across their disciplines. He wants to do this here, but it’s going to take time. There is no new money. Enrollment is down. This is why he is wanting student recruitment to become a campus wide endeavor.

Yesterday Georgia Southern had the border state waiver approved for 3 years and it includes North Carolina. Vice President Amy Ballagh is forming a recruiting strategy that everyone will need to engage in in order to build up the student body. This is where the new money will come from. Research studies and private fund raising will be other ways to obtain new dollars.

Leslie Haas asked about hiring freezes. Provost Reiber stated that hiring freezes is not right term to describe what is being done. All hires are being scrutinized more carefully than in the past. This is being done at the request of the President. She wants to make sure that it is not business as usual. This is especially true with staff presently. The academic side of the house is different. Provost has asked the deans to give him their vacant positions and justify them. For staff vacancies, the President will be sending out a form asking such positions be justified. It is simply a review of everything that is being put forward to make sure that they are being efficient. It will come to the Provost, he takes it before the cabinet, and then if approved the recruitment may move forward. For faculty positions he has approval for dean searches, chair searches, and is going through each of the colleges. He has to assure cabinet that these positions are supporting the endeavors of the institution. It is slowing the process down but the President wants to make sure we are looking at the new Georgia Southern University and asking strategic questions of everything that is done.

Jessica Garner asked about adding new positions as they generally feel short staffed already, on top of the fact that the staff they do have are not paid enough. She feels more support is needed for staff. Provost stated that new positions will be hard to come by at the present time. There are simply not enough funds coming in. Every area needs to be looked at and supported in their growth, but to do that the student body needs to grow as well.

Bede recognizes that there has been unexpected expenses this year with having to pay off the financial aid penalty. There is also new College of Behavioral and Social Sciences which was supposed to be funded with money from consolidation, but that did not come to fruition and it is now without a budget. The Provost confirmed that there was no money to create that college but the college nonetheless now exists. The Provost has to work out how to fund it. He had to redistribute money from different areas to pay for things for that college. Bede
recognized the challenges that the Provost is facing and thanked him for his hard work so far and the hard work he will putting forth in future.

Dr. Reiber ended the meeting challenging everyone to find more ideas with the help of students and faculty and bring those ideas to him. He wants Georgia Southern to be so indispensable to the communities around us, that if anyone were to challenge the institution in terms of its support or budget, that the community would rise up and tell them to go away. He believes we can do that. Georgia Southern is a well-respected institution. He wants that respect to continue to grow. And he wants the library to be the center of it.