

Notes from Senate Executive Committee Meeting with Brig Timpson  
May 29, 2020, 4 PM  
Topic: New Structure for Student Affairs

In attendance: Provost Mahoney, Brig Timpson, David Taliaferro, Kristen Tener, Dinesh Pinisetty (Chair), Keir Moorhead (Vice Chair), Sarah Senk (Secretary), Steve Browne, Christine Isakson, Matt Fairbanks, Elizabeth McNie, Cynthia Trevisan, Wil Tsai, Frank Yip [all via Zoom]

Absent: Steve Browne and Wil Tsai

Background: At 9:12 AM Brig Timpson requests 30-minute meeting “purely informational” meeting with Senate Executive Committee at 4 PM. Slides shared at 12:40 PM.

- I. Pre-Meeting Notes: Senate Executive Committee members meet before 4 PM to review slides and shared the following concerns and questions we hoped to address in the meeting:
  - We’re conducting a VPSA search right now and will be hiring an expert. Why wouldn’t we wait to get their input? Why the rush?
  - WHY are you adding this NOW to our workload when we are dealing with COVID?
  - What data is driving this decision?
  - What are the cost savings / financial implications?
  - What is the principle driving this reorganization?
  - Why would you make the Commandant head of housing and res life when no one in that office has expertise in that field? We already have problems with communication and now you’re going to put someone not in that field as a “middleman” responsible for reporting out.
  - Browne notes in an email he will be unable to attend the meeting due to a conflict, but requests colleagues get an answer to the following question: “I see that the OIC (Officer in Charge) of the Naval Science program (SSOP) is reporting to the Commandant. Although that makes sense due to the leadership training component of the SSOP program, this program has academic components, as well. They teach credit-bearing classes and offer a minor in Naval Science. Shouldn’t they report to the Provost for the academic programs? What would be the proposed relationship between the SSOP academic program and the Provost?”
  
- II. Discussion During 4 PM Meeting
  - Timpson begins by explaining content: “We took advantage of this opportunity [hiring the new VPSA]. Knew we had to go out and find next leader, took the time to understand what role of SA is on our campus, what are those programs we need to provide, what sets us apart. Job description posted for search was first attempt at doing that, correcting or realigning student affairs and making it fit on our campus. So the result of that wasn’t just VPSA but VPSA and Cadet Development. That’s what’s in play in terms of changes. Moving office of Commandant back to SA. Bringing focus to the role of that division to include not only programs/services/activities we provide as SA, but also development of leadership / Cadet development. Bundled together. Slides show organized breakdown of how SA should be organized. Why are we proposing it?” [begins to summarize the changes]

- McNie apologizes for interrupting but notes that we've *all* already read and discussed the slides. More pressing for us are questions we emailed, and the questions written in the chat.
- Timpson reads chat. Addresses concern about Strategic planning. Says "we did Phase 2 of SP, several things interrupted process obvi. We're not engaged because we have to prioritize COVID situation. Doesn't mean that goals established / focus areas are invalid. We're going to have to rely on those goals to steer campus as we move forward. Goal of enhancing cadet experience is still the campus-wide goal, part of larger strategy. Don't want to let organizational structure be a strategy. In order to achieve success must create environment. That's what reorgs do. They shape strategy. See your point in terms of how the process should dictate what the SA org structure should look like. Possibly. In this case we're approaching it the other way around. We have new VP coming in, that person needs to be handed something they can work with, that they can help implement and shape/design the organization for. We can't hand this person a blank slate or ask them to come in and spend a year or two to get to know it and say how it should be organized. We've got enough evidence and data, we need to be organized appropriately, we have big pieces in place. We have cadet development piece and student affairs point, need to add depth, structure for person coming in to have better outcome. Does that answer questions?"
- Senk follows up by reading typed question from chat: "You mentioned you decided this is right direction but I'm wondering did *everyone* in Student Affairs weigh in. Who decided? What expertise are you relying on? You say this is the most effective org. structure. What is informing that? This is what people are going to want to know, otherwise they're going to say "they're rearranging the deck chairs on the titanic." What are the financial implications? People are going to want to see. My concern is that the optics are bad. People are going to say why did we have a strategic planning process if Admin was going to make this decision anyway, and that's what I'm worried about."
- Taliaferro adds it's important to know we're going back to model of Commandant being within student Affairs, out from under president. "New VP announcement included that. So that's not a surprise. It was in position description."
- Timpson says we have a lot of work to do, we're not using strategy to do design; we're trying to create design to help strategy develop.
- Pinisetty adds: "I respectfully disagree. You explained that you want to provide structure to person taking this role. My perspective is we should give them option, they're taking over in month, to lead the whole division. At this time you're basically forcing person to take up structure you decided upon. It would be more practical to solicit input from constituents affected by this re-org. If you're trying to move our campus to shared governance, this is moving backwards. It's not forward to implementation of shared governance. Did students / SA team have input?"
- Senk adds follow up: in addition to surveying students, have you consulted Housing, AS, etc. about being moved under Commandant? That seems like quite a change.
- Timpson says "That is a big change, and no, they haven't been consulted." [Executive Committee overlapping responses include "WHOA!" / "are you serious?"]
- Yip asks, "So whose info *did* go into this plan? Who planned this?"
- Taliaferro says a lot of work presented here is between me and K. Tener. Spoke with constituents within student affairs. Says "still a lot of detail to flesh out. This is how

two of us think department can set up for arrival of new VP and onboard new VP. Kristen and I see that as primary responsibility. Trying to find ways to let frontline managers focus. Kristen and I will act as primary liaisons of SA and CD. Did we consult everyone? No, but we're leveraging our insight and experience in this field to structure to best of our knowledge, so it's simplified and delivers design that can achieve strategic plan. Alarm bells seem to be going off that SA and my office weren't consulted, but it's been an ongoing conversation, along with Brig and a few others. Probably some nuts/bolts we need to figure out. Want to deliver structure that is more sturdy/appropriate. Invites Tener to add something."

- Tener remains silent. Offers no comment other than "that's pretty good."
- Yip asks what is rational for having the Commandant have more purview over housing/res life? Says to Taliaferro that "No one doubts your sincerity. We want to know what kind of information went into arriving at this conclusion."
- Taliaferro says work done was this past year. "We see as central to housing, Cadet, res-life, reintegrated to AS and Corps staff to deliver Cadet Development model that integrates all, champions unique features of res life, AS, corps structure. Regular meetings have been taking place. We've championed this idea. We're expanding it. We're adding student athlete council into mix. See it more as student leadership functions driving that, central to why we think it should go under cadet development. Housing has a developmental function."
- Pinisetty says "you say you've been working on this for a year, it's been done by two people, but you recognize this as a team? If this has been done by two individuals, it doesn't make sense. Another thing: we've already made a mistake where we don't flesh out the details when we establish a structure, once structure is in place we'll try to figure out details. We made a similar mistake in Academic Affairs when we established the Three Schools model, but lots of details not fleshed out. Now we are facing repercussions. We're not learning from our mistakes here as an institution."
- Taliaferro says don't know all details, but maybe misspoke in terms of what we're working towards: putting office of Commandant back in Student Affairs
- Pinisetty says, "I get that. Doesn't mean original structure has to be disturbed. Things get disturbed when there are problems."
- Taliaferro: trying to work together more holistically on cadet development, what we've been trying to do this whole year. I need to know what you mean there. Commandants were not involved with housing until this point. They're not involved in new structure."
- Pinisetty asks what training did they get to move housing under Commandants.
- Taliaferro asks for clarification of what Pinisetty means.
- Pinisetty says Housing was never under Commandants' purview before. What were concerns/problems you're hoping to solve by moving it under Commandants?
- Taliaferro says "People still in charge of housing are in charge of housing."
- Pinisetty asks, why are they not still under SA then?
- Taliferro clarifies: "because it's Cadet Experience. Melinda and team are still central to housing. That won't change. Still under SA. Only difference is all of Triad support now rests under DT, Coms are still working with corps staff, AS and their team is still there, same with housing and res life. We've been working it whole year, trying to integrate as a team the whole year. There are technical pieces we need to work out. But we're going to rely on subject matter experts to do that."

- McNie says, “my experience with strategic planning (which I do with research orgs) is that you ID goals/objectives first and design technical systems second. My question is, does the reorg require creation of new VP or any new additional admin positions?”
- Timpson reports there will be no new positions. Still have single VP. VP has two “number 2s”, one on Cadet development. Kristen Tener will be promoted to AVP.
- McNie asks for clarification: “so there will be a new AVP on campus?”
- Timpson says: “but not a new budget line, not a new salary.”
- McNie responds: “so optics of that is not great, especially if she’s the only woman AVP on campus and not get a raise, that doesn’t deal with equity issues.”
- Timpson adds: “we’re not adding a new budget line item. Impact on budget: absolutely should there be salary increase. Kristen will take current budget line and reclassify it. So we’re not adding new positions.”
- Yip asks for clarification: “so the change is not budget neutral, then?”
- Pinisetty adds, “I think input should still be solicited from students. Not getting their input doesn’t seem to be right.”
- Taliaferro says “we have had student input.” Committee asks about surveys and how they were conducted. Taliaferro says info was collected when they met with Triad. Yip notes that it “seems like pretty small sample.”
- Taliaferro notes Committee’s resistance to the proposal and asks, “is there deeper thing that’s not spoken here? Help me understand.”
- McNie says: “One perspective is that we sat through the president retreat, started working on Strat Plan, had teams, and then to come out with totally new organization is thumb in the eye of everyone who’s been involved in strategic planning. Why volunteer for SP activities if these things happen? Probably makes sense to move Commandant into SA, but it’s optics that’s bothering me. I don’t know enough about it.”
- Senk adds: “On surface, makes sense to have all elements of Triad under house. But we don’t have data that informed decision. Reiterates what McNie said: we *ave* to consider optics. Morale is low among faculty and students, and there are trust issues that have gone back for years. Having a rationale and justification is crucial. There’s also a sense that many students are skeptical of those in leadership. I’m reporting what I’ve heard in personal papers student write. It’s sad, but they call them “corps whores,” the see them as sycophants thirsty for power. (I have 100+ student surveys if you want evidence to support that claim.) *THAT’S* your audience. We need to turn that mentality around. And saying you only consulted the Triad doesn’t do that.”
- Taliaferro says that Executive Committee members’ points are well made, and *that’s* why structure makes sense: “I don’t have institutional memory, but “corps whore” isn’t new, you’re right we do need to have AS and res life feel like they’re on same playing field. That’s exactly why structure is going in the way it is. Data you’re looking for is this [referring to student complaints, low morale]. That’s why we’re bringing in athletics. They’re the outlier. You’re spot on; Kristen and I definitely want to attack that stigma of our cadet leaders seen as this cut above, or this untouchable group. We definitely want that consistency addressed.”
- Senk responds: “what you just said is *perfect* as explanation! It’s exactly the explanation that will get you buy-in!” Yip agrees, notes “if you have this data, it’s not communicated in this plan!”

- Pinisetty adds: “it’s not that we’re hiding something, whole point we’re trying to make is about process. We’re not concerned about the structure as much as process. The question you’re posing about if we don’t have a problem of Commandant reporting to VPSA. Before you joined campus that was the structure. It went to president due to turnaround in Commandants’ office. President took control to get stability. We realize you brought that stability. Whole point we’re talking about is process. We want to move forward with standard process in place. Our intentions may be good, but bigger piece missing is process. Which is what we’ve seen HUNDREDS OF TIMES on our campus, we fail at that process. We try to learn from it but I don’t see that happening. What you said may be correct. All your work of your team may be wonderful, but did you communicate it? It’s not about you or the result, that’s the bottom line. We have no ill intentions we’re not revealing. The whole story is process.”
- Timpson says Dinesh “is spot on with that. Duly noted, capturing this and this will be part of Cabinet discussion on Monday. A lot of this should have been done. If there wasn’t fire/COVID we would have arrived here. President’s intention was to go through SP process, come out with something to dictate what Student Affairs is. But we haven’t had luxury. It was a misstep. We’re trying to give a shell for something. We lost so much time. If we’re good conceptually, then all of the pieces around job descriptions, reporting, that becomes the work of the new leader. I get that process is more important than time.”
- Pinisetty responds: “that’s exactly what we learned at the retreat from external consultants. ID our weaknesses, follow shared governance process. We got consultants who addressed that. That’s what hurts the most. It’s exactly why we devoted 2 days of time to that retreat.”
- Timpson agrees, expresses that he is glad we had discussion. “It’s an uncomfortably place to be but conversation we needed to have, as a result of the retreat.” Asks if there are additional comments.
- Committee members pose additional questions about reporting structure, read the question Steve Browne posted over email. Timpson reports that there are typos in the slides regarding the reporting structure that will be corrected.
- Senk adds: “it’s also important to note that anger about lack of budget transparency among faculty is *still* present; may be invisible because everyone’s focusing on COVID, but it’s there. So I recommend you include a statement indicating impact on budget. Is it neutral? [Brig says no.] It’s *not* neutral? There will be more admin spending. That needs to be justified to people. Your audience here does not have to be at the furthest end of the extreme. But it needs to be the people toward the middle. Same with students. You need to explain things transparently. Also owning that it was a problem in the past is necessary to selling the idea to students that *this plan* is how to rectify it. You’ll get buy-in in a way that you wouldn’t if you just roll it out without framing it like the solution to a problem.
- Pinisetty adds, “let’s not be ambitious with date of implementation. Even if we don’t give a proper structure, we should include them as part of process.”
- Yip adds, “having seen the CVs of people we’re interviewing, they come with wealth of expertise that could help in a re-org. Makes no sense to constrain the new hire. It would be foolish not to include them.” Timpson responds: “noted!”
- McNie: “we have great conversations with VPSA/“CD” candidates and we want you to know that faculty are looking forward to building relationships with student

affairs, we *believe* in the whole cadet, we want to make that a success, we want to build bridges with student affairs. My reaction was orientated toward process and issues of strategic planning. If it makes the students' lives better, that's great. But process really matters, and optics really matter." Taliaferro: agrees.

- Pinisetty says he wants to "get on record that Taliaferro was first commandant to approach senate exec, at least in my time at Cal Maritime. First time commandant participated in general senate meetings, got feedback. Want to give credit to you and your team. We want to strengthen good atmosphere we've created. We don't want to go back to the time when we had these struggles. We are not against the structure, your intentions, etc."
- Taliaferro appreciates, says the conversation is meaningful and appropriate.
- [*Commence momentary love-in about how much we respect each other and want to work together.*]
- Taliaferro adds, "showing up is bare bones requirement. We want to fix this process. I appreciate all of the engagement in last year and am excited for your feedback as we get ready for fall."
- Timpson asks: how would you like to proceed?
- Senk says "we would like to see detailed minutes of cabinet discussion to make sure our message has been communicated accurately and fully."
- Yip adds that the target audience for rationale is exactly person who says "this hasn't worked in the past, how does this help?"
- Taliferro says, "we need to acknowledge past problems, need to live in reality, not what we want it to be. As a constructivist POV, this is co-created. That's the point of corps of cadets, it's co-created. And we get AS, we get housing, and we get this structured up in a way that makes sense. Will it happen all at once? No. We need to address it."
- Isakson adds: "In summary, we don't have enough info to create a consensus. When we're talking about process, that process requires more info so we can say. I understand you're not here to get consensus. But we're trying to warn you that you may have more difficulty implemented this than might seem obvious now."
- Taliaferro says that's all the more reason to articulate rationale: "We tried to do that today, but we need to clean it up, need to provide that info back to this group."
- Isakson reiterates McNie's point that someone getting a promotion and not a raise is serious, but so is the budget. The budget implications need to be articulated right out of the gate, will be helpful when you decide to implement this.
- Committee reiterates main points: We would like coherent justifications; we advise the administration to make the rational clear to audiences affected by the proposed change and provide an account of budget implications.
- Timpson agrees: "100%. So you'll get from us confirmation of discussion we had in cabinet, what we had, and this will continue as iterative process. Must determine what next steps are."
- **Action Items: Timpson will provide senate executive committee with minutes from the Cabinet discussion and a clear plan for the next steps.**

Meeting adjourned.