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Transition Leadship Team Summer Report

Ann McClellan
Plymouth State University

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Transition Leadership Team Summer Report

Ann McClellan

Tue 9/5/2017 10:26 AM

To: Campus Communication <campus-communication@plymouth.edu>;

 1 attachments (20 KB)

TLT End of Summer report 2017 final.docx;

Dear Campus Colleagues:

We offer this update from the Transition Leadership Team (TLT) highlighting what we have accomplished this summer since being elected. In May we began meeting at least once per week, sometimes more, and we have had two day long retreats. We worked initially to come to an understanding regarding our charge as a whole and how each constituent understands and has experienced clusters since their inception. Most members of the TLT also attended a reporting session with the summer cluster working groups which gave us helpful insight into all of the hard work being done over the summer. We met with the president several times and the entire cabinet as a whole. We are currently contacting various constituent groups and scheduling meetings with them now that the semester is upon us. The three faculty representatives also met with Dean Parker, and we collaborated with Dean Mears on the University Days NEASC session. We worked on developing (and still we continue to develop) a communication strategy, and finally we have begun making recommendations to the president and sharing them with our constituencies (you).

As we understand our charge, the academic deans are directing the transformation for this fiscal year in consideration of any recommendations we make as a result of our work. We are an advisory group to the president and we are expected to play a role in communicating our work to the larger campus. Our role may evolve over time, as the transition continues. We believe it is important to consider the transition as a continuing process and not a static endpoint. The campus will be fully transformed by 2020, though that is not a stopping point because the campus will continue to be dynamic and evolving.

It is clear to us that while we see this transformation as intellectually, academically, and institutionally exciting, there is urgency to move expeditiously due to financial realities. The urgency we feel and understand suggests that if by 2020 we are not fully functioning as a “clustered” university (which would provide remedy to our financial condition) and if we cannot deliver the promises of our new vision to students (which will impact enrollment numbers and student persistence, thus hurting our budget goals), we will face more drastic changes imposed upon us by the USNH Board of Trustees, who have a fiduciary responsibility to the state in their governance of the public university system in New Hampshire. In addition to these two points, we are under a NEASC (New England Association of Schools and Colleges) accreditation deadline, which involves issues related to assessment of our general education program and other areas generally. Accreditation is essential to our remaining fully enrolled. Thankfully, based upon our understanding of where the campus already is in the process of “clustering,” the TLT believes our future is bright.

The campus is in many stages of transformation; it is astounding. The TLT had the benefit this summer of working with Mike Peznola, who since has left to be a dean at National Defense University in Washington, D.C. (National War College). Mike’s input and guidance were indispensable, including a summer inventory of cluster work and much needed research on cluster models, flat organizations, and collaborative team models in industry.

One of the most fruitful discussions the TLT had involved thinking about “cluster” as a verb and a noun. As a verb, clustering involves a movement and describes how we work across all campus constituencies. As a noun, it is a thing that houses disciplines. We think making this distinction in our understanding of clusters is key to how we conceive our work. It is also important that when we discuss clusters, we should include how we are talking about them, as a noun or a verb. For the TLT, cluster as a verb is the key to approaching our organizational changes and how we do our work.

We have come to understand that “a cluster” that focuses upon a structure of “management” was different than a cluster that entailed groups of leaders who engaged diverse communities to effect change/achieve goals. As a verb, we see a cluster as less a mini-college or a super-department, as some have expressed, and more as an **incubator for dynamic action**. We recognize there is a challenging tension between building a structure of semi-permanence for efficient management and a porous incubator for leadership and its fruits.

Also, we came to realize at an emotional level that there has been a tension between clusters as projects and clusters as curricular experiences. If we remember clusters as verbs, both projects and curricular changes are the actions we take within these incubators. Clearly, the President’s four tools (challenged-based first year seminar, themed general education pathways, a general education capstone course, and open labs) place general education not as something separate from clusters but as an integral part of clusters since three of the four tools involve general education curriculum. We see the general education committee as having a central role in leading curricular change within our new vision. Additionally, curriculum committee also has a significant role, and they have made significant progress toward this endeavor over the summer. We look forward to working with both faculty governance groups this year as we move toward clarifying campus priorities and needs.

In addition to our own meeting times, many members of the TLT participated in the Collaborative Leadership Institute this summer. This was a three day training on how to develop and facilitate effective meetings. We see this as key to our institutional success because we learned how to more effectively get work done and integrate more constituent voices in the process. We also learned how to honor the time of others and create more effective and efficient use of our time as we work together to transform our institution.

In case you missed it, we recently announced the first stage of a campus-wide communication strategy: a dedicated TLT email: Transition-leadership-team@plymouth.edu. The TLT has spent much time discussing how we incorporate the perspectives and experiences of the various constituencies on campus and how we define constituent groups more broadly, beyond those that are defined by our benefits classification. We are in the process of establishing a timeline to schedule meetings with various groups across campus and identifying subcommittees to organize our work ahead. In the coming days, we will be meeting with governing bodies (OS, PAT, and faculty) and we are planning early in the semester to meet with faculty governance committees, Physical Plant, Student Success Coaches, Student Engagement/Residential Life, Alumni Relations, Financial Services, Campus Events and Conferences, and the Registrar’s office (to start).

In terms of inventorying things this summer, we realized the way we communicate on campus often reinforces divisions across campus (both literal and figurative). Communication coming from the Academic Affairs division and/or Student Affairs division (separately) does not model an integrative campus, so we recommended to the president that there should be an integrative communication plan forthcoming this fall. In this same spirit, the TLT agrees that all campus constituents should have a shared language about our work with students that models integrative collaboration, no matter where you work across campus. In light of this discussion, and in conjunction with the general education committee developing “habits of mind” learning outcomes for general education, discussions are occurring across campus about having university outcomes allowing all constituents to share language and sentiment about the work we do with our students, regardless of what we do and where we do it. Finally, while we see the momentum increasing across campus, also we came to understand two things of immediate importance.

First, our timeline is tight and we have no time to delay. By timeline, we're looking at two larger external forces influencing our transformation: the USNH Board of Trustees' fiscal deadline for transformation by 2020, and the NEASC assessment deadlines coming over the next year. We have an interim progress report due to NEASC by August 2018 whereby we need to articulate—and support—our new clustered gen ed model with an articulated assessment plan. Because our curricular and catalog deadlines for new academic years occur in February of the prior year, we need to initiate new curricular models (themed gen ed and new INCO capstone experiences, to name two examples) by this coming February. Curriculum Committee and the General Education Committee most likely will be reaching out for participating in getting this initiatives started this year and we encourage you to participate.

Second, we worry that we won't fulfill the curricular and experiential promise we've made to the incoming class if we delay our progress. For example, our hard-working admissions representatives have recruited the class of 2021 with the promise of a clustered university. (For more information on the 'promise,' see [this six minute video](#); if you are really constrained for time, start at 2:34; or at least watch the final 43 seconds). To summarize the admissions message dramatized in the video, we have promised the entering class of 2021 that first-year students will take a first-year seminar introducing them to cluster learning. As students persist to become sophomores, juniors, and then seniors, they will receive integrated cluster learning experiences within general education and in their anticipated academic major(s) and degrees. [<https://vimeo.com/213092504/c0e6862140>]

Right now, we have cluster curriculum for traditional first-year students through First Year Seminar and cluster Composition. However, we do not yet have a program for immediately continuing cluster experiences, consistently and for all students, in their sophomore and junior years. If an incoming student has to wait until their junior year to have another cluster experience in their INCO capstone, we risk losing the student and tarnishing all of the hard work we have already done to establish clusters and transform our role in higher education. We believe that the faculty need to prioritize the curricular aspects of the cluster model as soon as possible, keeping in mind we have a February catalog deadline.

We recognize that integrative learning is not just about curriculum, but also what happens outside of the classroom in our students' lives. Student engagement, student organizations, residential life, and our communities all play important roles in creating a new cluster ethos. We have already heard about the pilot summer bridge program, Plymouth Pathways; PSU also is looking at living/learning communities and expanding this year's 'Residential Scholars' program which partners faculty with residential halls. We need to begin to think more holistically about students' experiences across campus and how they might contribute to a broader clustered learning approach.

Overall, the TLT had a full and productive summer, as well as did many other constituents. We will be meeting every Friday this semester, with additional meeting times and collaborations as needed. We welcome your feedback and input.

Thank you.

Email us @ transition-leadership-team@plymouth.edu

Lori Armstrong
Jane Bjerlie-Barry
Melissa Furbish
Annette Holba
Joyce Larsen
John Krueckeberg
Ann McClellan (chair)
Jason Moran

Janette Wiggett

Ann K. McClellan, Ph.D.
Professor and English Department Chair
Arts & Technologies Cluster
Ellen Reed House #15
FALL 2017 Office Hours: TR 10-12pm, WF 12:30-2:30, and by appointment

Plymouth State
UNIVERSITY

Dr. Ann K. McClellan
English
☎ (603) 535-2683 (o)
www.plymouth.edu
17 High Street
Plymouth, NH 03264



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