

Dear Faculty, Staff, and Students of NDSU,

Dr. Warren Christensen, Faculty Senate President, sent specific questions for us to answer relating to the Provost Office reorganization. His questions and our answers are provided below.

Question: Could you please provide a rationale for the decisions announced in your email on Friday, September 15, 2023?

The reorganization of the Office of the Provost attempts to address many serious challenges facing our university, including first-year teaching and retention; diversity, inclusion and respect; enrollment declines; and institutional equity/risk.

1. **Vice Provost of Faculty Affairs, Instruction and Retention.** This position will replace the former Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs and Equity. Its focus intentionally supports faculty needs related to teaching and student retention in alignment with feedback and recommendations from the [President's Council on Retention](#). Student retention is one of the most significant areas where we need to improve. This role will continue to maintain a strong faculty advocacy function and oversee faculty retention and faculty development needs, as it has in the past. The role will no longer formally oversee Diversity, Inclusion and Respect and Institutional Equity. Those functions are being shifted to other roles detailed below. This position reports to the Provost and will be on the President's Cabinet. Our goal is to initiate an internal search for this position, once we've received adequate campus feedback.
2. **Senior Director for Access and Opportunity.** This new position was recommended by the [President's Council on Diversity, Inclusion and Respect](#) to provide leadership and support across these critical areas, including the Office of Multicultural Programs and Inclusive Excellence initiatives. This position will *advocate* for an open and welcoming environment to all students, staff and faculty. This position reports to the Provost and will be on the President's Cabinet. The final duties of this position have not been finalized, and we welcome discussion and feedback from the campus community. A general description was included in a recommendation provided by the President's Council on Diversity, Inclusion and Respect: *"This position will work to establish ways NDSU can promote, engage, and enhance the values of the unique perspectives, skills, perspectives, and identities of every individual on campus while improving collaboration, understanding, and trust. Striving to 'reinforce belonging of veterans, religion, first-generation, Pell-eligible, sexual orientation, disability, race/ethnicity, nationality, age, or citizenship'."*
3. **Senior Director for Strategic Enrollment Management.** Seinqis Leinen, the former Director of Admission, is being elevated into this new role. Seinqis has done an excellent job leading the NDSU Office of Admission and will help set the strategic direction of our enrollment management efforts moving forward. She will also oversee the Financial Aid and Scholarships office and support the important, difficult and excellent work of the Director, Dr. Matt Sanchez and his experienced staff. This change is being made to emphasize our strong commitment to address enrollment, one of the most significant challenges facing the institution. This position reports to the Provost and will be on the President's Cabinet.

4. **Vice Provost for Student Affairs and Institutional Equity.** In order to properly focus on this new role, Dr. Laura Oster-Aaland, will shift into this new role. Her Enrollment Management responsibilities will move to the Senior Director for Strategic Enrollment Management. The Office of Equal Opportunity and Title IX Compliance and Center for Accessibility and Disability Resources will report to Laura. The President will appoint a *Title IX, Equity, and Accessibility Advisory Committee* to support this important work. The Office of Equal Opportunity and Title IX Compliance has a *compliance* role meaning that its role is to investigate claims related to discrimination and Title IX and to provide training on those topics. The Center for Accessibility and Disability Resources also has a compliance role in ensuring equal access to NDSU for students with disabilities. These offices are being placed in Student Affairs because this area already has responsibility for adjudicating student discrimination and Title IX cases and has resources and experience with investigations involving complex and sensitive matters. That said, the Vice Provost of Faculty Affairs, Instruction and Retention will serve on the internal advisory board to provide faculty perspectives as they related to these issues. Title IX and Compliance issues must be managed with impartiality, professionalism, and care, given the tremendous risk they pose to our students, faculty, staff and our institutional reputation. Dr. Oster-Aaland's long-standing leadership on campus provides the professionalism and expertise required to support and lead these critical areas.

5. **Director of Student Engagement and Retention Initiatives.** This recently posted staff position will help launch and sustain a new initiative that is focused on first- and second-year undergraduates and transfer students, with a mission to foster a success-driven attitude, a sense of belonging, profound learning, and robust social interactions among faculty, students, and the community during the pivotal initial two years at NDSU. This position will report to the Provost.

Question: Could you explain the purpose and significance of moving "equity" from the Provost's Office and into Student Affairs? Could you explain the purpose and significance of moving the Title IX Office from the Provost's Office and into Student Affairs?

We have received a number of questions about the movement of the Equal Opportunity and Title IX Compliance Office to Student Affairs as well as the role of the new Senior Director for Access and Opportunity. The primary reason for this change is to improve operations of the Equal Opportunity and Title IX Compliance Office. To understand this matter, it's important to understand the difference between those roles. The Equal Opportunity and Title IX Compliance Office is a *compliance* role meaning that its role is to investigate claims related to discrimination and Title IX and to provide training on those topics. That role is not an advocacy role. It is a neutral fact-finding and training role. It was placed in Student Affairs because many of the cases they oversee involve students, and Student Affairs already has resources and experience with investigations involving difficult and sensitive matters. The new Vice Provost will serve on the internal advisory board. We believe this office fits better within Student Affairs because of operational similarities.

In contrast, the Senior Director of Access and Opportunity is an *advocacy* role. This position will *advocate* for an open and welcoming environment to all students, staff and faculty, and the Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs, Instruction and Retention will continue to advocate on faculty issues. This position

was a top priority of the President's Council on Diversity, Inclusion and Respect, and we are excited about its possibilities. Before the reorganization, the impartial fact-finder role was combined with the advocacy role leading to an inherent conflict. With the roles separated, each will be better able to concentrate on their respective roles.

Question: What will happen with the PTE processes for tenure and promotion already in motion in AY 2023-24? Who will ensure that these reviews are conducted equitably with Dr. Bilen-Green's position as the VP for Faculty Affairs and Equity no longer in place?

Ensuring that PTE processes for tenure and promotion move forward is a priority, and we will ensure the highest standards. There are 4 key parts to the process:

1. PTE portfolio reviewer training sessions will continue to be held.
2. The Provost's Office will manage requests for recusal of committee members due to conflict of interests.
3. The Provost's Office will ensure that policy and processes are followed and will answer questions as needed.
4. The PTE portfolio review process in the Provost's Office will be handled by a committee that is already in place.

Without a Vice Provost currently in this role, all questions will be directed to the Provost until the new Vice Provost position is filled. In addition, the Provost will work with Faculty Senate to identify an interim faculty leader to manage and support the process until the Vice Provost position is filled.

Question: Given the President's and the Provost's stated commitment to shared governance under SBHE Policy 305.1.4.1, which states that "Each President shall [e]nsure effective and broad-based participation in the decision-making process from faculty, staff, students, and others in those areas in which their interests are affected," why was this decision made without any faculty input?

We agree with the critique that we should have gathered more feedback during this process.

At this time, we are asking for your feedback on the positions described above, your help in crafting position descriptions, and your critique of the proposed organizational chart.

The positions and structure of the Provost's Office reorganization were driven, to a great extent, by the recommendations and feedback from the President's Councils:

- [President's Council on Retention](#)
- [President's Council on Diversity, Inclusion and Respect](#)
- [President's Council on Campus Well-being](#)

[Recommendations from the Councils](#) were provided to the Leadership Assembly group back in April. Final reports also were emailed to campus and posted on their respective sites. We believed this process engaged the campus community. That said, feedback we've received since our announcement suggests otherwise. We recognize that it has been several months since the university community has engaged with the recommendations provided by the Councils' collective efforts and the reports were difficult to find on the website. As we've stated before, the communication about the reorganization of the Office of the Provost was regrettably poor, and we are seeking your feedback to improve.

Question: Was Dr. Bilen-Green part of this decision-making process, and if not, at what point was she notified of her termination as an administrator in the Provost's Office?

This is a personnel matter, and as such, inappropriate for comment.