

President Miyares and Provost Cini Launch Reboot of UMUC Academic Governance

By Gil Klein

President Javier Miyares and Provost Marie Cini launched a process to improve academic governance at University of Maryland University College at a Town Hall-style meeting with UMUC's core faculty on June 11.

Speaking to 12-month stateside collegiate faculty, program directors, librarians and deans gathered at the Academic Center at Largo—and participating online—Miyares called the process a “critically important initiative, which will help shape the future of academic governance at UMUC.

“This may be the most important legacy I want to leave behind,” he said.

“I hope that you will approach this process with a spirit of openness, exploration and discovery,” he added, “as we work together to establish the framework within which our curricula and academic policies will be developed.”

Cini said a number of focus groups will be scheduled over the next few weeks. They will be facilitated by Dr. Ford Rowan, who organized similar groups last year to explore changes in the UMUC business model. Rowan has facilitated focus groups for several other universities.

Participants in these sessions will be selected at random, but a few additional spots will be reserved—first come, first served—for faculty members who specifically ask to take part.

In addition, the UMUC Future web page—umuc.edu/umucfuture—will be transitioned from hosting the community dialogue on the new Strategic Plan 2015–2018, to serve as a source for information, updates, comments and questions regarding the academic governance initiative.

The goal, said Cini, is to develop a draft model by the end of July. A final draft will be shared with the faculty for input before it is presented to

the Board of Regents for approval in September, with the new system expected to be ready for implementation in October.

Miyares emphasized that academic governance at UMUC has always been advisory and that will continue in the new model.

Interactions with the present Faculty Advisory Council have been “challenging and not wholly productive,” he said, in part because of longstanding confusion about faculty roles at UMUC and the scope of academic governance. The current Faculty Advisory Council comprises a majority of part-time faculty.

In the future, the president said, governance will be led by the university’s core faculty, which includes program chairs, 12-month collegiate, as well as librarians holding permanent status. The Adjunct Faculty Association will represent stateside contingent faculty via “Meet and Confer.”

Added Cini, a governing structure led by the core faculty “is key to our success.” The recent downturn in student numbers, which required painful staff and faculty cuts, highlighted the need for change, she said. Now the student population is stabilizing and even growing. The university came through that painful experience “with a greater understanding of what we can do together.”

Now, with the university competing nationally and internationally for adult learners, it must be even more flexible, more agile and more innovative, said President Miyares.

With the new business model and a new form of governance, he added, UMUC will be positioned “to compete and lead in the world of 21st-century adult higher education.”

Cini said that by providing more agile and high quality ways to deliver education to adult learners, UMUC will maintain its leadership as the demographics of the nation move in its direction.

“Other universities are under great pressure to do what we already do well,” said Cini. “Our demographics are becoming the new norm.”

Miyares said that two questions will guide the series of forums this summer: First, who has stewardship of the curriculum and its delivery, and how is that stewardship exercised? Second, in what other ways should the core faculty be involved in providing advice and feedback?

The goal is to have UMUC managed as a “best-in-class employer,” with special emphasis placed on treating all faculty and staff with respect and offering them input into the criteria used for their evaluations, he said. It will be managed with transparency with the president and senior leadership team communicating regularly with the entire university community.

The new governance structure, the president said, must recognize that the Board of Regents approved a faculty body that was advisory in nature—the Faculty Advisory Council—instead of a more traditional faculty senate. At the same time, it must maintain the integrity of UMUC leadership structure, which gives the president the responsibility of making strategic decisions and gives the provost final academic accountability.

With competition so fierce in the online adult education market, the governing structure must also allow for some information to remain confidential, he said.

Miyares said his assumption is that design of the curriculum and the assessment of student learning experiences should be the responsibility of the core faculty.

But, he added, that still leaves several questions to be answered in determining how the university is governed: What is the stateside core faculty’s understanding of its role? How should the roles and responsibilities for these faculty be defined in ways that foster coordination, cooperation and productivity? How should the stewardship of the curriculum be structured? And how can adjunct faculty provide input and feedback on their courses?

In streamlining titles, he asked, should *collegiate* be reserved for core (stateside 12-month) faculty only? What should be appropriate titles for overseas full-time traveling faculty?

“Over the course of the next several weeks, these are questions and considerations you will address,” Miyares said. “We look forward to your participation. We value your perspectives, and thank you for your thoughtful support and dedication to the mission of UMUC.”

###