ATTENDEES:
Provost Michael Bruno, Dean Peter Arnade, Christine Beaule, Faye Higa, Helen Baroni, Jonathan Pettit, Kapali Lyon, Laura Lyons, Marie Alohalani Brown, Michel Mohr, Ramdax Lamb, Seth Yoshioka-Maxwell, Tom Brislin, Wendy Pearson

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION:

Budget Situation
We are facing a short-term and long-term budget crisis in the State and at the university. The Governor intends to borrow $750 million from the federal reserve in the current fiscal year 2020-2021 (FY21) to address the State’s current budget shortfall; this loan must be repaid by the State within 3 years beginning July 1, 2021. The State and unions are currently in discussions related to possible furloughs (two days per month = 9.23% pay cut) for State employees over the course of the next four years. All University E/M employees will receive a pay cut beginning November 1, 2020.

While the University has not yet received its budget allocation from the State, we are confident that we will be in a good budget position for FY21 due to the current freeze on hiring, travel freeze and strong restrictions on equipment and other expenditures. However, we must plan now to position the University to withstand the future budget cuts and move away from furloughs and the painful cuts currently in place.

Process
The University cannot continue as a premiere R1 research university with four years of pay cuts and freezes; this is not sustainable. We must start now to identify cost-saving efficiencies and increase revenue, primarily through enrollment growth.

Cost savings measures will not come on the backs solely of the academic side of the University. On the administrative end, Phase 2 of the Mānoa reorg is currently under development and identifies for elimination approximately 12 E/M positions that will result in significant cost savings for the Mānoa campus. Additionally, a blue ribbon committee is currently reviewing the Athletics program to assess the current program and identify a sustainable future. We are also looking for efficiencies in other programs such as student housing, facilities, auxiliary services, and other areas of administration.

The Mānoa Budget Committee suggestions to academic units are not intended to be top-down mandates. The suggestions were based on external reports, information and data on hand, and are intended to be provocative and provoke conversations. The Committee is committed to meeting with highly impacted departments, listening to their thoughts/feedback, and working collaboratively in an effort to best position programs, departments and the University for success.

Review, approval and consultation with unions and affected stakeholders will continue through Spring 2021, it will take time to implement these plans. The aim is to be transparent and collaborative throughout the process as we continue to work to identify cost-saving efficiencies and increase enrollment revenue. Mānoa Staff Senate representatives will participate in these meetings as staff are also affected.

Background
At UH Mānoa, religion is the academic study of religion. Seeing and analyzing religion, trying to understand worldview, ethos and the fundamental way that people understand their relationship with the unseen and the effect it has on their lives and society. UHM Department of Religion (Department) is the only religion department in the United States with a focus on Asia and the Pacific and its mission is to safeguard the academic study of religion.
The Department had nine (9) faculty positions. Over time, 3 positions were lost due to hiring freezes, vacant position cuts, or lack of funds to cover the cost of a position. The Department is currently composed of six (6) faculty members, all world-renowned scholars in their field of expertise. The Department has produced 50% of faculty members throughout the UH system that teach religion and 70% of lecturers.

Details
The Committee’s initial suggestion was to merge the Department of Religion and Department of Philosophy. However, based on feedback from both departments, the Committee no longer believes this is a good fit.

Department faculty shared some of the following insights/concerns:
- Religion is one of the newest disciplines to academia and not well understood.
- Merging with another department will undo the safeguard to the academic study of religion and diminish the integrity of the discipline.
- The department is classified as a small department. Past departmental efforts to backfill vacant positions or acquire a new position (specialist faculty to develop a fully online degree) was not always supported by the University.
- Students in Religion can fulfill major requirements for taking Philosophy courses. On the other hand, students in Philosophy do not fulfill major requirements by taking Religion courses.

The Department does not have a lot of majors but faculty feel that per faculty SSH, average class enrollment and GenEd contributions are comparable to other departments. The Committee understands high SSH for the highly enrolled GenEd religion course, but notes that all other courses have low enrollment. In addition, there are only 17 majors and very few graduates. Comparatively, ACM has seven faculty and more than 10x the number of majors. In this context and given the current budget situation, it is increasingly difficult to present to the Board an argument on the need to preserve smaller programs with lower enrollments, without sufficient data elements to support this effort.

Outcomes:
The Committee no longer supports the merger of the Department of Religion and the Department of Philosophy.

The Department intends to regroup and engage in discussions on how best to position their programs and discipline to flourish.

The Committee looks forward to the department’s ideas/counter-proposal on how best to strengthen the programs and drive growth in enrollment. The Committee believes it may be beneficial for the unit to explore the following:
- Areas of opportunity to collaborate with or combine with other departments to increase enrollment.
- Opportunities for jointly offered programs or degrees with other comparative departments, e.g. in indigenous studies to build a track within religion.
- Ways to bring in more students who will pursue a degree in religion.

The Committee notes that a departmental merger in itself does not result in changes to degree requirements, articulation agreements, and other elements of a program. Only the faculty can make changes to their program. To maintain the integrity of the religion program, faculty within the Department of Religion should weigh in on what is best for the program vs. having another program weigh in on what they think might be best for the Department (which the faculty feel could occur with a merger with another department). There are processes that could be put in place for these changes, and OVCAA staff are available to assist with this process.