September 29, 2011

To: All Faculty, College of Arts and Sciences, College of Business, College of Education

From: Steve Adkison, Provost

Re: College Task Force

I hope that everyone’s Fall term is off to a fine start as our first week is coming to a close and that our students are settling into their new courses well. The sense of excitement and new beginnings that mark the start of fall terms everywhere has always been my favorite part of the academic year, and nowhere have I seen more excitement and engagement from our students than we enjoy here at Eastern. Thank you all for the dedication and commitment that makes all of this possible for our students.

I wanted to take this opportunity to thank many of you as well for the well-considered and thoughtful feedback you’ve provided concerning how to approach our college task force and the work we need to do this year in terms of bringing consistency and efficiency to how we address the administrative needs and operations of all three of our academic colleges. As I envision it, the mission of Academic Affairs, both in my office and at the college administration level, is to provide leadership, support, and advocacy to the colleges, other academic units, and regional centers at Eastern Oregon University, ensuring quality and innovation in academic programming, faculty scholarship and creative endeavors, institutional planning and effectiveness, and enrollment management, on campus, online, and onsite.

In an operational sense, this entails the dynamic balancing of vision, planning, and sound management within our envelope of available resources, both fiscal and human. When done effectively, this minimizes the purely administrative concerns and details that flow downhill to all of you—our faculty—in the form of ad hoc service burdens that distract from your larger concerns of teaching, scholarship, service, and community engagement.

The functional challenges that we need to address through our college task force efforts are clustered around four broad areas:

1. Annual evaluations and their needed/inherent connection to 3rd year review and our tenure and promotion processes.
2. Course scheduling and curricular planning over multiple years.
3. Academic programming to serve our distant students.
4. Academic advising.

The questions central to our college task force will be focused on whether our criteria and processes and/or organizations and structures for each of these areas are meeting
the needs of our students and our faculty, our larger institution. Answering these questions will entail a detailed examination of the functions and the accompanying processes to determine if we are both as effective and as efficient as we need to be for long term institutional sustainability.

For instance, how do annual evaluations point to 3rd year review and the larger tenure and promotion process? How efficient and effective are our processes for all of these? How does our organization of these tasks and our administrative structure help or hinder these processes?

Relative to course scheduling and curricular planning, how does the way that we approach these tasks at the college level help ensure that we are making the most effective use of our precious faculty time and expertise (instructional capacity), according to both our students’ need to make good progress toward graduation and our understanding of best instructional practice?

Given that academic programs for all students, no matter where they are, should be controlled by the program faculty as part of our larger academic enterprise and not walled off behind a separate administrative structure, how effectively have we integrated our distance programming across our curriculum? How can we best provide administrative support and coordination for distance programming within our academic colleges?

Finally, how well does our current academic advising organizational structure serve our students’ needs across the advising continuum, from new student/undecided advising to major advising to graduation? Is our academic advising for all students—regardless of their location—meeting student needs relative to our faculty’s understanding of major and minor requirements?

While these kinds of questions are not comprehensive relative to what I will be asking our task force to undertake, they certainly represent both the range of concerns we need to address and should suggest the interactive nature of how these areas are connected into coherent structures for all three of our colleges.

Many of you have pointed out that our task force could not possibly—at least not credibly nor authentically—address these challenges in an unrealistically compressed time frame, and that is true. But it is also true that the larger economic environment in which we exist and its attendant fiscal challenges necessitate both well-considered and timely actions. I do not see that this confluence of changes, as Bob has articulated it, gives us the luxury of taking the whole of this biennium to consider how to move forward. To work our sustainability plan, which we came together on and finalized last year, requires that we come to an understanding of how to address these challenges this year. Accordingly, the time frame for our college task force to discuss these challenges and to formulate recommendations needs to be from now through early
spring term, at which point Senate and our larger faculty, myself and our deans, will begin reviewing and shaping the decisions we need to move forward, much as we spent last spring developing and finalizing our sustainability plan.

But these larger challenges and our ability to meet them over the longer term also mean that we cannot delay our search for a dean or deans to lead our colleges until next year. And, these larger challenges and the longer term implications for meeting them begin with our current fiscal challenges.

While the planning and budgeting underlying our sustainability plan is fundamentally sound, we also are coming under the additional continuing pressures of increased costs of compensation and benefits, enrollment projections that are strong but still slightly under projections, and less than robust state tax revenues. All of these pressures further reinforce for me that the choices we will have to make to work our sustainability plan need to be focused on further flattening administrative structures, protecting our instructional capacity. Thus, my strong preference for a single academic dean for all three colleges. The choice really boils down to how we can best afford to account for about $250,000.

We currently have stable and sound leadership in place for our colleges for this interim period, but we need to begin our search for new leadership this fall; the earlier in the cycle we begin our search the better our chances for the successful search that we require. Accordingly, before the college task force begins considering the overall structures and operational details laid out above, I will ask them to consider and articulate for me the advantages and disadvantages that attach to both our current two-dean model as well as a single dean model. This knowledge will be critical to us as I structure a search process and whether that process is focused on one dean or two.

I have received numerous nominations for task force members across all three colleges and am confident that we can constitute a strong and capable group, which I have discussed with our deans and will be moving on over the next week. Once the nominees have agreed to serve and we know who the members will be, I will provide further communications concerning the task force, their specific charge, and their schedule.

Please continue to let me know if you have any questions, concerns, or further feedback.

Thank you.