



PRAIRIE VIEW A&M UNIVERSITY

A Member of the Texas A&M University System

When I first arrived on the Prairie View A&M University campus, I was overwhelmed with excitement. Having had family members who graduated from PV, I was familiar with the rich history and lasting traditions that this venerable institution had garnered throughout its 140 year history. After several months here, I have seen first-hand the enormous potential of this “institution of the first class” and been deeply moved by the intelligence, ambition and strength of character of our students.

I have also seen – as have many of you who have shared with me your vision for the future of the university – that there is much work to be done if we are to make good on the inherent promise of the Prairie View mission: providing excellence in teaching, research and service to historically underserved populations.

We now have what I believe is a unique opportunity to review our policies and revise our structure so that we are appropriately organized to meet the needs of our faculty and students. One of the questions I have raised to the Executive Leadership Team and others is “Critically assessing our outcomes across the board, how should we prioritize our most urgent needs?” Over the course of these last few months, we have had many passionate discussions about how to simplify our processes, eliminate unnecessary procedures, improve customer service, clarify roles and responsibilities and reorganize our structure to align with these goals. To this end, we identified departments and units that are functioning effectively and we recognized key areas where we are underperforming. We have now begun to formulate and implement strategies to address lacunae and to build up areas critical to meeting the priorities above.

We all understand that change can be difficult, but in order for Prairie View to realize its full potential as an academic institution, we must demonstrate the same rigorous self-examination that other high-performing successful institutions demonstrate. We should be careful to preserve all that is valuable and unique in what the University is and represents while making improvements that highlight and extend that

uniqueness. The measures described below are part of this process. In that vein, a number of changes are taking place that we hope will achieve the desired result.

Academic Affairs

It is clear that in order for the academic strength of the university to improve, we should concentrate on supporting and enhancing our teaching and research activities. We recently announced a new Faculty Development Initiative, led by former provost Felecia Nave. This program will provide additional resources for faculty research, teaching and travel so that departments can be assured greater opportunities for innovative curricular development and improved academic performance vis-a- vis peer departments.

At the same time, we are discussing and developing greater clarity with respect to faculty advancement. Some faculty complain that their opportunities for promotion, advancement and fair compensation have been stalled. Interim Provost James Palmer is leading an effort to review faculty teaching loads, issues of salary inequity, and opportunities for advancement within faculty and research staff ranks. These initial steps, along with the work of the Faculty Executive Committee to improve governance and initiate regular campus-wide faculty meetings, will ensure that the work and input of faculty at Prairie View resembles long established best practices in higher education across the nation.

BUSINESS AFFAIRS

I have been assured that the implementation of Workday will eliminate many of the procedures and excess paperwork that have caused significant difficulties, delays and frustrations about our hiring process. Working with the EEO Officer on campus to develop a more meaningful approach to determining our institutional compliance with EEO rules and regulations, we are streamlining these processes also. No longer will we have to complete the perfunctory matrix and interview questions that only serve to cause more paperwork, creating a disjunction with the “spirit” and purpose of the EEO laws. We will now have a process driven by data collection and data management that provides an overview of the success or failure of our diversity and inclusion efforts and gives greater insight into how we can improve on our fairness as an employer.

Additionally, Corey Bradford and his team are working to streamline processes within Business Affairs that make it cumbersome for students, faculty and staff to conduct business internally and externally. I am finding that many of our processes and practices developed in response to audit findings. Measures initiated in response to such findings are a means to correct previous deficiencies and prevent their recurrence but they need not impede our ability to improve our practices on a continuous basis. It is time we review longstanding practices to ensure that we are not still overcorrecting for issues that have long since been resolved. As we modify outdated processes and practices, future announcements will alert the campus to the changes.

STUDENT AFFAIRS

The Department of Student Affairs and University Advancement will be renamed the Office of Student Affairs. Advocating on behalf of students and creating dynamic programs to complement academic learning, this kind of enterprise is an essential university function that requires focused efforts to ensure that our students have excellent access to opportunities for personal growth and applied learning. Following Professor Laretta Byars' decision to retire, we will soon begin a search for a Vice President for Student Affairs who will start on or before July 1, 2018. The search will be a national effort to identify an outstanding leader for this area that is so important to the long-term engagement, retention and support of our students. An announcement of the details of that search will occur in February.

Development

The Office for Development and the Office for Marketing and Communications will no longer report to the Department of Student Affairs. As previously announced, following a national search, Carme Williams, a seasoned development professional, will join the University as Vice President for Development to oversee and build up our capacity in fundraising. Williams will report to the President and be a member of the President's Cabinet. Adding a Vice President for Development recognizes the fact that effective and ambitious fundraising is a critical component of future institutional viability and success.

An Office of Alumni Affairs along with an Office of University Events, will also be established. Principally formed from relocating and consolidating existing efforts, this structure will clarify areas of

responsibility that should coordinate to ensure that we are reaching and involving alumni in a meaningful ongoing way. An Office of Alumni Affairs, led by an alumnus, that continuously engages alumni will not only assist us in repairing some of the negative perceptions that some alumni have about the university, it will also assist us in our fundraising efforts. The search for a leader of this effort will also be announced in February.

We have a large number of events at Prairie View! The Office of University Events, led by Carol Campbell, will provide the campus community with the tools, resources, guidelines and information to plan and produce events that consistently meet PVAMU standards. The Office will be responsible for training materials, resources and advice to departments on successfully managing large scale special programs and events.

For the time being, the Office for Marketing and Communications will remain reporting directly to Yolanda Bevell, Assistant to the President. That office will continue to reposition the university more advantageously in the national, regional and local press while working to expand the University's digital footprint on the web and in social media.

I want to thank everyone who provided input and criticism throughout this process. While these changes represent a preliminary attempt to address some of the concerns identified, we will need to continue the efforts to address longstanding problems. Areas that need attention include our onboarding process for students (admission, financial aid, housing, etc); staff concerns about the campus climate for employees; needed quality improvements in areas required for greater efficiency, etc. As we continue to move through this process, please do not hesitate to share your concerns and suggestions with the senior leadership team for those areas.

Ruth J. Simmons