



OFFICE OF THE PROVOST

Greetings,

As I mentioned last month, I'll be sending a monthly message, updating the community on strategic initiatives and celebrating our achievements at Lewis. I'll also remind you about some things to look forward to in our community calendar, and offer reflections on the state of higher education and its impact on Lewis.

I'm particularly grateful for the series of educational opportunities offered by Bill Siler in the Office of Sponsored Programs entitled [Principles and Practices in Scholarly Pursuits](#). This foundational work for applying for and receiving federal and state grants is directly connected to our strategic plan goal to support opportunities for research by faculty. I also want to encourage faculty to stop by the [Career Expo Job and Internship Fair](#) on March 4 from 12:30-3:30. At this event, you can support students and also connect with employers associated with particular majors and potential internships.

I'm also grateful for all who participated in last Thursday's Civility in Academe panel and discussion. By all accounts, it was well-attended and engaging. I hope the conversations on Thursday are just the beginning (or a new beginning) to ongoing work and education around civility, inclusion, communication, and our continuing work in association.

One fixture of this season is the winter meeting of the Board of Trustees. This year the Board also had its biannual retreat and discussed issues related to our broader higher education context, including mission, finances, and student success. In addition, the Board had a regular business meeting where it approved proposed changes to the *Faculty By-Laws* and approved two new programs—a certificate program in training and development, and a master of science degree in health information management. Finally, the [Board approved](#) tenure and promotion for this year's slate of candidates. It was an honor for me to present these inspiring candidates and their extraordinary accomplishments to the Board.

I'm often asked about the purpose and value of tenure. There are many positive outcomes related to tenure and the tenure process—rigorous peer review, connections to national and international disciplinary standards and communities, university leadership through shared governance—but the primary purpose of tenure is to protect the academic freedom of our professors. Professors conduct scholarship and teach in fields that are both grounded in history and also always evolving as new facts, contexts, experimentation and innovation push the scholarship forward. Tenure allows faculty to publish and teach new findings without fear of reprisal from administrators, donors, or public officials. One example of why these protections are needed is the difference in understanding between the scientific community at large and the positions held by many of our elected public officials regarding the causes and risks of climate change.

I support the values underpinning tenure wholeheartedly and am working to increase the number of tenured and tenure track faculty on campus. This year we are conducting eighteen tenure track searches and ten reclassifications. I also know that the privileges and protections of tenure come with a set of responsibilities, including the call to serve as leaders modeling collaboration, and the practice of mutual respect and collegiality.

While tenure is an important element of a thriving university, *all* faculty at Lewis play a vital role at the university. Many of our faculty—and especially adjunct faculty and non tenure-track faculty—bring unique and relevant knowledge of professional contexts, providing students with practical workplace skills and realistic learning opportunities. This practical understanding is essential for a university that rightly prides itself as offering “a liberal and professional education grounded in the interaction of knowledge and fidelity in the search for truth.” Faculty with professional expertise and credentials also play a vital role in our strategic initiatives, such as the work of the Experiential Learning Task Force. With this in mind, I am delighted that the University Faculty Affairs Committee has begun a discussion of the creation of a new full-time faculty category, the Professor of Practice. As is typical at other universities, the Professor of Practice position emphasizes professional competence and accomplishment, along with teaching excellence and service.

Last month I noted the formation of the University Professional Status Committee, which has begun meeting in earnest this spring. One bit of completed work is the recommendations for 2020-2021 sabbaticals, which I am pleased to accept and account. Congratulations to Dr. Jen Consilio, Dr. Dana Dominiak, Dr. Ryan Hooper, Dr. Seung Kim, Dr. Erica Kwiatkowski-Egizio, and Dr. Nanci Reiland. We all look forward to hearing about the scholarship and reflection on teaching that emerges from your sabbaticals.

One tool that will help with the work of the University Professional Status Committee, as well as the annual evaluation of all faculty, is the student course evaluation. In December, the Faculty Senate requested that I form a task force to study and potentially reform the way we do student course evaluations. I am pleased to announce that the committee has been formed. Chaired by Associate Provost Bill Chura, the Task Force for the Improvement of Course Evaluations’ charge includes a consideration of the purpose and use of course evaluations, the evaluation instrument, and the use of consistent technologies and processes for deploying evaluations.

Thanks to everyone who has submitted comments and suggestions to the faculty staff portal [suggestion box](#). The ideas and observations are all discussed and reflected on by the President’s Leadership Team. I’d also like to remind you to respond to the HERI staff or faculty climate surveys that were sent initially on February 10. Participating in this confidential survey is another way to communicate, and also a way to make a positive impact on changes at Lewis based on data that is both comprehensive and nationally normed. I hope you will take advantage of the next Coffee with Leadership (February 20, 2:00 p.m.), open UPBRAC meetings (April 14, 2:00 p.m.), provost lunches, and other opportunities to share ideas and listen to others.

And finally, I’ve decided to offer open office hours for any member of the community who might want to express an idea or opinion on any topic. I’ll send a separate email with dates and times and instructions about how to sign up for those hours.

Thank you for joining in and please continue to contribute to our ongoing conversation. My best wishes for a great month!

Sincerely,

Christopher Sindt