Faculty Position Interviews (Spring 14)

Introduction
Full-time faculty hiring plays a vital role in the quality and direction of the instructional mission of the college. At Gavilan College, the process for identifying which faculty position is to be hired needed further examination. The findings from this study will provide a foundation for any efforts to improve the faculty hiring process.

In order to obtain detailed opinions from instructional areas, all department chairs were individually interviewed over a two-week period. Participants were asked to describe their understanding of the current hiring list and ranking process. They were also asked to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the current list and process and to provide suggestions for improvement (See actual interview items Appendix A).

A total of 12 interviews were conducted representing all campus departments. The interviews ranged from 15-50 minutes and averaged around ½ hour. Notes were taken during the interview and a summary of the comments were recorded in a spreadsheet. For each item, comments were scanned for themes. Each theme is listed only once, even though multiple respondents may have made like comments. The themes are highlighted below.

Results

Understanding of current hiring list:
- The list is composed of vacated positions.
- The list is composed of the remaining positions from the 5-year hiring plan and the vacated positions.
- The list should have been only the 5-year hiring plan positions.
- Not sure where the list came from and what positions should be on it.

Understanding of current process:
- The previous process was that each position on the list was considered and then discussed and filled.
- The process was to hire based on the timing established in the five year hiring plan. Each position was then discussed to see if it was still needed.
- Did not have clear knowledge about the process or the history of the process.
- The process was based on need, but not sure about how the need was identified.
- The positions were to be filled based on when the positions were vacated. The 5-year plan was put on hold until the vacant positions were filled.
- The process was he/she who yells the loudest wins.
- The faculty proposed positions, but the board and the president have their own goals.
- There were actually three processes: the refilling positions by hiring date, data-driven process, and Steve’s process.
- We ranked based on needs and state requirements.
Each department had an opportunity to present, but I assumed admin really made the decision.

Positions filled based on day of retirement, but this year another process developed.

**Strengths and Weakness of List:**

**Strengths:**
- The list makes planning predictable.
- The retiree-based list allows the college to maintain the full range of diverse offerings.
- The 5-year plan list was something the DC agreed to collectively.
- The list was generated from DC input.
- The retiree-based list represents how long a department has been waiting and thus feeling the effects of missing position.
- The college honors the commitment to these positions, as it was stated in the strategic plan.
- The retire-based list doesn’t prevent a faculty from retiring, since they know their position will be filled eventually.
- Many of the positions are based on legitimate needs.

**Weaknesses:**
- How can positions ever be added to the list, if it is just based on retirements? If a program emerges or is growing, they can’t get on the list.
- Using only vacated positions does not incorporate those who leave because tenure is not received.
- If the president can always change, then the process can get heated.
- The 5-year plan is outdated.
- The current list does not go back to prior staffing levels.
- Some areas are more assertive and savvy about ways around the process.
- The loudest voices get positions on the list.
- Folks are not flexible or adaptable and tend to be rigid about promises and previous processes.
- The list does not look forward for program need and future growth.

**Strengths and Weakness of Process:**

**Strengths:**
- This year’s process did attempt to incorporate data into decision making.
- Everyone had a chance to present and voice an opinion.
- The anonymous voting was a way for everyone to have a voice.
- Hiring by vacancy date, encourages faculty considering retirement that their position will not be lost.
- It was the best possible process at the time.

**Weaknesses:**
- It is frustrating to hear folks go on and on. It seemed like the loudest voices were heard and some programs were lost in the shuffle.
• The process needs to be more flexible to address emerging needs.
• Having administration subvert the decisions was frustrating and can lead to apathy.
• The process might be biased against CTE or other non-core instructional areas.
• It is bad for morale if you are constantly changing the process.
• Need a process for coming up with positions not on the list.
• Did not fully understand the process.
• Long timers and some DCs seemed to navigate the process better than others.
• Each chair has their own self-interest and may not be able to make decisions for the campus as a whole.
• The non-retirement date process is a waste of time and gets people stressed for no good reason.
• The tone of the discussions got personal, aggressive, and unprofessional.
• The data was not provided with enough time to incorporate into the discussion.
• Data should not be the only source of decision-making.
• Not having clear criteria led to personality influencing decision-making.
• Some DCs did not feel comfortable.
• There was not enough leadership and detailed information.
• Sometimes the decisions are not the best thing for the college or students needs.

Suggestions
• Use the vacated position list prior to hiring any other positions. Once this list is completed, start a new process.
• The list needs to be updated every year or two years rather than creating a long list.
• The original 5 year hiring plan should be honored, which was conducted collaboratively.
• Do not develop a list if there is no possibility of positions. Should be conducted as needed.
• A group should provide details as to the budget space for hiring new positions.
• Change the strategic plan if there are changes to the list.
• Non-tenured positions should go back on the list.
• Get clarity on how far back to go for the retirement list. Some areas had more positions at some point.
• Don’t throw away the process every time.
• Have the process clearly outlined.
• Continue to use DC input. They are the most informed about the needs of program areas.
• Consider the role of the vacated position.
• Admin should outline a process for intervening when there is a need.
• More faculty need to be hired regardless.
• Establish a process to be followed and evaluated annually. Include how to get on the list.
• Have a neutral external committee make the recommendations that would include DC, senate, admin., etc.
• A new process should include program growth, FTES/full time ratio, IEC recommendations, etc.
• Have a process with more integrity more data including anchor, program growth, student demand, and evaluation of the need.
• Folks should understand the data better.
• Remove the stress of the vote.
• Have admin and DCs develop a list and then get together to resolve the lists.
• Needs of the institution should be considered, beyond the vacancy list.
• Establish criteria or rubric where details are laid out.
• Have a process where a program can be removed from the top of the list.
• Use labor market data to examine what high skills, high pay jobs, and then give priority to those areas.
• Each department should not be able to rank their own program.
• Use voting and ranking like last time.
• Try to incorporate a variety of factors and develop a formula like other colleges. Using set criteria may drain some of the emotions out of the process.

Summary
Prior to summarizing the results some weaknesses of the current study need to be acknowledged. Firstly, the current department chairs represent a small proportion of the faculty and staff and may or may not represent the opinions of a greater staff, students, or faculty. The interview was also guided by structured questions. It may be that other questions or a less structured interview format may have generated different results.

It was very clear from the interviews there was a wide range of understanding and opinions about both the hiring list and the process for designating the next position to hire. For just the list, some interviewees stated that the list was the remainder of 5-year plan, positions vacated from retirement or the two lists combined, while others did not seem to know what was accurate. This disparity, along with suggestions provided by interviewees, strongly supports the need to have a clearly defined list and process laid out for all.

Several interviewees felt strongly that the vacant retirement positions list must be filled, noting the goal in the current strategic plan. These DCs contented that this list provides predictability and demonstrates a fulfillment of a commitment made by administrators. A smaller group of DCs suggested an updated list, which was based more on current need, noting the need to add positions in response to labor, statewide requirements, or college developments.

This year’s process seemed to be frustrating to most participants. Many participants felt like the loudest voices subverted the process and that the administration intervention was unfair. Others felt like they did not understand the process and that more information and leadership was needed. Some appreciated the anonymity of the ranking and the inclusion of data into the decision making process.
Suggestions from most participants (either before or after the retirement list is completed) seemed to coalesce on a well-outlined process which included a variety of criteria, including a FTES/full time ratio, state requirements, and anchor positions. Some suggested an outside group that included representatives from DCs, Academic Senate, and the IEC.

In sum, there is great disparity in understanding and opinions regarding faculty hiring. Further research regarding other college models will be conducted to continue to inform an evaluation of the college’s process. It seems necessary that a group should be established to resolve some of these issues. This group could use the current study and other college models to propose a list and process that works for most parties and best serves the needs of students and college.
Appendix A: Faculty Hiring Interview questions

- What is your understanding of our current hiring list?
- What is your understanding of our current process for designating the next position to hire?
- What do you feel are the strengths and weaknesses of the current hiring list?
- What do you feel are the strengths and weaknesses of the current process for designating the next position to hire?
- What specific suggestions do you have to either improve the current hiring list or the process for identifying which position should be hired next?