Report of the Boulder Faculty Assembly
Administrator Appraisal Committee Concerning

Steven Leigh, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences

Spring, 2015
Administrator Appraisal Program

The Administrator Appraisal Program (AAP) of the Boulder Faculty Assembly (BFA) seeks to provide substantive feedback about administrators based on a high rate of response reflecting a representative survey of the faculty. Faculty members have the opportunity to provide AAP feedback to the review/reappointment process when the president, chancellor, provost, or the dean of their school or college is undergoing the third- or fifth-year review.

This was the third-year or interim review of Steven Leigh, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.

Methods of Review

The Office of Planning Budget and Analysis (PBA), under the direction of the AAP committee, administers an online questionnaire, including the option for open ended responses, to the faculty under the administrator and to faculty nominated by the administrator. Details about the survey are given in Appendix A.

All faculty members of the College of Arts and Sciences, the population of interest (hereafter referred to as the “Population”), designated as eligible by the BFA were sent an e-mail requesting that they complete the online administrator appraisal questionnaire. In keeping with past practices, the AAP Committee requested Dean Leigh to nominate as raters people he judged especially likely to be knowledgeable about his role as dean. These will be referred to as the Administrator--nominated (AN) raters. All AN raters who are also members of the unit’s faculty are included only in the AN group and not the Population.

The Dean nominated 49 faculty of whom 43 (88%) responded to the survey. There were 1,153 invitations sent to the Population and there were 711 respondents (62%). The AAP Committee and BFA have agreed, on the advice of faculty who specialize in survey methods, that a 60% return rate is needed for a representative statistical study. This survey meets this requirement.

Results: Item Analysis

Figure 1 presents item content of all survey items, item means (on a 1-5 scale), and categorizations of items as reflecting strengths and weaknesses of the Dean. Data are presented separately for the two groups of raters. The items are ordered by the average of the item means for the AN raters with higher values appearing at the top and lower values at the bottom. In calculating the means, responses of “Don’t know/not applicable” were considered missing values; that is, means are based only on
respondents who provided an effectiveness rating.

FIGURE 1

Administrator Appraisal Program 2014-15
Survey Evaluation of Steven Leigh, Dean of Arts & Sciences
Summary of Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Means</th>
<th>POP</th>
<th>AN</th>
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<tr>
<td>1 Acts with integrity</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 Makes decisions in a timely manner</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 Acts constructively on student concerns</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>20 Responds receptively, timely manner: fac inquiries</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Promotes diversity</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>8 Solid understanding: fac gov, Univ pol, &amp; budget</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Supports recruitm/retention of underrep faculty</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>18 Rewards high quality research/scholarship/creative work</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 Acts constructively on staff concerns</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>14 Provides leadership for high-quality teaching</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Positions Sch/Col/Univ as leader among AAU peers</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Fosters equitable merit-based salary system</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 Rewards high quality teaching</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>2.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>16 Provides leadership for high-quality service</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Involves faculty in decision making</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>2.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>19 Rewards high quality service</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>15 Provides leadership for high-quality research/scholarship</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>9 Leads the industry/profession</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Acts constructively on faculty concerns</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Earns faculty trust</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
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</table>

POP: A&S faculty that answered the survey items (N=460)
AN: raters nominated by the dean (N= 42; not included in the POP)
Scale ranges from 1 (Very ineffective) to 5 (Very effective)

KEY:
- Strengths to build on: 60% or more ratings of 4 or 5
- Assets to protect: 50%-59% ratings of 4 or 5
- Issues to be mindful of: 25%-39% ratings of 1 or 2
- Areas that need improvement: > 40% ratings of 1 or 2
- Bimodal (more than one of the above)
- No consensus

Analysis of each item excluded raters who answered “Don’t know/not applicable” or who skipped the item. % answering dl/na ranged from 7% to 65% across items; median=23%, mode=23% or 24%, % skipping an item ranged from 0% to 3%.
The category ratings shown in Figure 1 are color coded to indicate relative strengths and weaknesses of the Dean based on percentages of raters who rated him as more effective or less effective on each of the 20 survey items (see the key to Figure 1 and Appendix A for details). As was done for the calculation of item means, responses of “Don’t know/not applicable” were treated as missing values.\(^1\) Overall, the AN ratings are higher than the ratings of the Population, with AN raters giving higher average ratings (ranging from 3.1 to 4.2) than the Population (average ratings ranging from 2.6 to 3.6). But both the AN raters and the Population agree on the relative strengths and weaknesses in Dean Leigh’s performance. The Pearson correlation is .85.

Both sets of raters gave positive ratings (strengths to build on or assets to protect) to the following:

- Acting with integrity
- Making decisions in a timely manner

Data from the Population indicate that there is no consensus on three areas of the Dean’s performance: acting constructively on student concerns; responding respectfully and in a timely manner to faculty inquiries; and promoting diversity. The AN raters consider each of these areas as strengths to build on.

The Population’s lower ratings compared to the AN raters on ten of the twenty survey items resulted in the more negative evaluation from the Population indicating that there were “issues to be mindful of.” Issues the Population would like the Dean to be mindful of include:

- Having a solid understanding of faculty governance, university policies and budget
- Actively recruiting and retaining underrepresented faculty
- Rewarding high quality research and scholarship
- Fostering an equitable, merit-based salary system
- Positioning the school as a leader among AAU peers
- Acting constructively on staff concerns
- Rewarding high quality service
- Providing leadership for high quality teaching
- Rewarding high quality teaching
- Providing leadership for high quality service

For each of the above survey questions, the higher rating given to these survey questions by the AN raters meant that the Dean received a “strength to build on” or an “asset to protect” rating from AN raters in contrast to a greater expression of concern from the Population.

In the five areas where the Population felt that the Dean needed to see this area as an “area

\(^1\) n previous AAP reports, presentation of these “categories” data included respondents who replied “Don’t know/not applicable” to an item. For clarity, we have not included that dual presentation this year.
that needs improvement,” there was not a consistent pattern of relationship to the responses of the AN raters (see Figure 1). The widest disparity between the Population and the AN raters was for involving faculty in decision making, where the Population felt it was an “area to be improved on, while the AN raters saw it as a “strength to build on.” The five areas the Population suggested needs improvement were:

Involves faculty in decision making
Provides leadership for high-quality research/scholarship
Leads the industry/profession
Acts constructively on faculty concerns
Earns faculty trust

The grey boxes in Figure 1 indicate bimodal distributions on the AN raters’ evaluation of the Dean. That is, sizeable numbers of raters made positive ratings and sizeable numbers of raters made negative ratings on these items.

Both sets of raters agreed that the Dean received his lowest ratings on earning faculty trust.

An analysis of average item response by departments was performed. There was a strong departmental effect accounting for 19% of the variation in faculty ratings for the general Population. There was a weaker but still significant effect accounting for an additional 5% of the variation for broad areas within A & S (e.g., Arts and Humanities, Natural Sciences, Social Sciences). Importantly, the departmental effect (reflecting substantial differences among average ratings) was present within each of the three largest divisions and could not be attributed to outliers (i.e., a few extreme departmental means). These results suggest that within each of the large areas, some departments view Dean Leigh favorably, while others have a less complimentary perspective.

**Results: Comments from Raters**

Two hundred eighteen faculty (nineteen of whom were AN raters) commented on Dean Leigh’s performance. Many of the comments were quite lengthy, and covered many topics. A brief discussion of each of the themes in the comments follows. There were 26 responses that were completely positive in their evaluation of Dean Leigh. There were 150 negative responses. There were 31 comments that were mixed (included negative and positive comments). The remainder of the responses stated that the responder did not have enough information to respond. Each comment could contain several themes, and the counts below refer to mentions of themes rather than overall comments. The total number of thematic positive and negative comments is therefore higher than the per-rater comment evaluations above.

The comments are divided into six thematic sets: communication; scandals; teaching and student treatment; support; leadership skills and focus; and hiring. Within these thematic
sets, there are issues of compensation, follow through on initiatives and campaign promises, faculty hiring and retention, support for institutes, treatment of instructors, treatment of minorities, support for research, focus on a business model, and treatment of individual units.

**Communication**

We categorized the communication-related comments into four groupings: communication quality (15 positive; 37 negative), integrity of communication (7 positive; 28 negative), communication related to new schools/units (1 positive; 13 negative) and respect for committee recommendations (1 positive; 3 negative).

Overall, supportive comments included: “I have on a few occasions disagreed with his positions, but he has been respectful and willing to listen to differing viewpoints. CU is very lucky to have him!” and “Dean Leigh presents as personable and communicative. This approach goes a long way in fostering connections and relationships with faculty.” Among the negative communication-related comments: “Dean Leigh has not demonstrated adequate leadership concerning all the new proposals for various schools and colleges... The whole process in which new schools are being proposed is extremely chaotic and nobody knows what's going on or where anything is headed” and “He comes to faculty meetings and after talking at us, then does not answer specific questions, dodges hard questions, and then leaves quickly. It sends a very negative message, and the overall feeling is that he is not listening, and does not really want to talk to us, but simply at us.”

**Teaching and Student Treatment**

Of the 41 comments for teaching and student treatment, one was positive and 40 were negative. The positive comment addressed student retention: “Dean Leigh’s mission to improve student retention is strongly applauded.” There was one negative comment on student retention.

Instructor treatment accumulated the most negative comments. There were thirteen comments on instructor treatment, mentioning his “attempts to further exploit the instructors” and “his unjust system of having instructors forced to take 75% appointments if they want to maintain the ability to teach overloads.”

There were ten negative comments on loads and credit hours, mostly directed at instructor loads. But one commenter noted generally that “prioritizing faculty hiring with a heavy emphasis on credit hours and a deemphasis [sic] on research needs could negatively impact the university’s standing and a top research university in the sciences in the long term.”

There were ten negative comments about class size. One commenter was concerned that the Dean “seems more concerned with large departments with large lecture courses taught with Power Point and clickers than with small departments and programs that do much, even most of the quality teaching that really touches students and makes college
special to bright and good students.” On the treatment of the RAP program, one of the six commenters noted that “He had no understanding of how the RAPs work, the type of co-curricular events we do, or why our current contracts consist of 75% teaching and 25% service.”

Support

Another theme was support. There were 68 comments regarding support. Eleven were positive and 57 were negative. The comments focused on support for research generally, support for various departments within Arts and Sciences, financial support, and support for diversity.

There were 37 comments on research (6 positive and 31 negative). Positive comments include:“ I had no interaction with Leigh regarding service ... otherwise I feel as he is doing a great job, particularly on the background of the current financial situation, within the University, but also with regard to generating outside funding (e.g. NIH, NSF, etc.).”…and “there are expectations of high quality teaching and research as there should be.” One representative negative comment was: “There seems to be a lot more support and emphasis on teaching than on research from the Dean and his staff.”

Regarding support for the various arts and humanities, there were 25 negative and 3 positive comments. A representative negative comment noted that “I see no support for the humanities,” and “I would note that my large department has had one meeting, two at most, with the Dean since his arrival. Certainly, he has proposed no major compelling initiatives in the Humanities” while another noted, about a humanities program, that “the Dean has been supportive and responsive towards our cause.” There were three comments (2 positive and 1 negative) about support for the hard sciences, noting that “I find his thinking and acting biased heavily favored in the science” while another commenter noted that “there is precious little infrastructure for laboratory facilities.”

Regarding financial support, there were 29 comments. One was positive, commenting on the difficulty, at the decanal level, of managing the results of the recession. Negative comments included funding for research, access to travel funds, and the need for equitable and merit-based salary increases. One commenter noted that” “salary disparities are of no concern to him,” while another noted that “It is important to reinstate annual college $1000 accounts to faculty that have grants.”

There were ten comments on diversity, of which 9 were negative. One commenter noted that “more women and people of color need to be admitted into the hallowed halls of administration,” while another noted that “The faculty of color on this campus are not rewarded for their fortitude in the face of constant trial but more problematically, they are not even recognized.” The positive commenter stated “I think the dean’s leadership in diversity is strong, and I encourage him to continue his efforts in this area.”
College Leadership

Under the category of College leadership, comments could be grouped under the two themes of leadership generally and governance and strategic planning. A total of 87 comments were submitted under this category; 29 were positive and 58 were negative.

With regard to leadership, which included comments related to leadership style and skills, delegation of responsibility, and effectiveness, a total of 61 comments were collected with 25 being positive and 34 being negative. Some positive comments highlight Dean Leigh’s perceived leadership skills, such as being personable, communicative and diplomatic, as well as demonstrating strong integrity and commitment to the College. With respect to leadership, one commenter states that Dean Leigh has thus far worked to “foster connections and relationships with faculty,” and further “demonstrates considerable investment in the evolution of our [Department’s] development.” Another reviewer, in describing Dean Leigh’s leadership states: “He understands how the university is changing and needs to be changing in the 21st century; at the same time, he builds consensus and wants to allow the necessary change to come from the bottom up. His position among the many different stakeholders in the university community is difficult; some of the changes required to allow a research university like CU to survive in the 21st century will, by necessity, redistribute resources and may therefore be opposed by influential stakeholders within the CU community.”

The majority of the reviews submitted under the category of leadership execution were negative, with a number of comments describing Dean Leigh’s leadership as being untrustworthy, with administrative decisions lacking transparency, and his messages being mixed. To this end, one reviewer explains that instead of “building trust with faculty” early in his tenure as Dean, he pushed major initiatives rather than “becoming familiar with [CU] and its mores.” One commenter characterizes Dean Leigh’s leadership as having an “autocratic and confrontational style, which I find to be deleterious to the campus.” Another reviewer cites the perceived lack of communication and transparency with regard to new College initiatives including the creation of new units and increasing student retention, such that there seems to be “a real absence of leadership and direction coming from the Dean’s office,” with the result being “confusion and uncertainty at the department level.” A consistent and recurring theme throughout the negative comments was that Dean Leigh’s administrative priorities are not aligned with those of the College’s departments. Further common concerns from A&S faculty are captured in one reviewer’s criticisms that: “There is little or no innovation yet from this Dean. He seems to not listen very well and takes a very long time to make decisions. However he does respond respectfully. Further, it appears that he is more concerned with balancing budgets, than promoting good ideas.” Deficiencies in Dean Leigh’s leadership approach are cited by many reviewers, especially in regard to the recent problems in the Departments of Philosophy and Sociology, and are discussed in a following section.

Regarding the area of College governance and strategic planning, a total of 26 comments (2 positive, 24 negative) were received. Common themes identified amongst the reviewers included the unilateral restructuring of Arts & Sciences, including the
Formation of the School of Arts, an ineffective College administration, and an unclear vision for the College’s future. One reviewer highlights the perceived poor perception of the College’s reorganization efforts, asserting “Dean Leigh's project to consolidate academic departments into a School of the Arts has been ill-conceived and executed poorly, so that many faculty feel this is a top-down measure rather than an department/faculty inspired one.” Another reviewer noted a “tendency to bundle good units along with weaker units without distinction.” With regard to the College administration, one reviewer states that “[Dean Leigh] gives too much authority to a weak cohort of Associate Deans,” an administration as a whole that has been “too reactive and emotional in decision-making.” A positive comment noted “Although I certainly have disagreed with many of the dean's decisions, I have tremendous respect for the integrity demonstrated in the taking of many of those decisions.”

Handling Complaints about Faculty

Another theme identified in the faculty comments was the handling of the Professor Patti Adler affair and the scandal in the Department of Philosophy. There were 19 comments made, all negative. The raters cited poor administrative judgment, including the subversion of faculty rights and campus policy and procedure. For example, one reviewer states “Steve Leigh's handling of the Adler case last fall and spring, in the Department of Sociology, made me question his fairness and distrust him completely.” Another reviewer summarizes many of the comments under this theme, saying that “I have concerns with how both the Philosophy and Sociology department situations were handled. If the Philosophy Department had, indeed, been told the internal report would be kept confidential, the Dean did not keep his word. In the case of Sociology, the Dean did not appear to recognize the incredible damage wrought by the Adler debacle to the reputation of the department. In both cases, far more effort should have been made by the College in support of the departments.”

Conclusions

Two main issues that arise from many of the comments are lack of transparency and accessibility. Both the item analysis and open-ended comments indicate that the faculty on the whole do not understand Dean Leigh’s vision for the College or his decision-making process. Openness and transparency about the vision of the College, and how decisions about individual departments affect the vision as a whole might help ameliorate the overall negative perception of the College’s faculty.² The committee also notes that poor ratings received on the question “provides leadership for high quality research/scholarship” (rated as an area that needs improvement by the Population and as no consensus by the AN raters) may indicate that Dean Leigh needs to work on articulating and communicating a strategy for maintaining and improving A & S’s

² To test whether the opportunity to comment was especially attractive to respondents with strong feelings, we examined whether a majority of negative comments should be expected from large and diverse units like A & S. Only one of the last three A & S decanal reviews included sentiment analysis of the qualitative comments, but in the 2007 review of Dean Gleeson, there were 177 written responses and 77 (65.8%) contained positive statements and 46 (41.0%) contained negative comments.
national and international research standing.

With an average item rating of 3.05 from the Population and a substantially higher 3.63 rating from faculty members nominated by Dean Leigh, the AAP committee considered that Dean Leigh is meeting expectations. This is a time when the global recession and cuts in state and federal funding have created significant pressures. The AAP Committee is giving Dean Leigh the benefit of the doubt in this 3-year review, assuming that at the time of his 5-year review he will have taken steps for substantial rating improvements. For example, the comments indicate that a sizeable number of faculty is unhappy, and it is telling that both sets of raters agree that the Dean’s constituents lack trust in him. It is not the provenance of the AAP committee to provide a substantive evaluation of the Dean’s decisions or priorities. Rather we trust that the results of this survey will be helpful to Dean Leigh in considering what he must do to create a greater shared vision for A & S.
Appendix A: Procedures

The administrator appraisal survey (posted at http://www.colorado.edu/pba/aap/index.htm) contained 19 core items* addressing the effectiveness of the administrator’s performance in key areas, such as administrative/leadership style; support for teaching, research, and service; meeting faculty, staff, and student concerns; and making progress toward diversity goals. Administrators have the option of submitting additional items on topics they consider of importance to their roles and performance. Dean Leigh added one item to the survey (acts constructively on staff concerns). Faculty members responded to the items using a 5-point Likert-type scale** (5=Strongly agree, 4=Agree, 3=Neither agree nor disagree, 2=Disagree, 1=Strongly disagree), with the option of answering “Don’t know/not applicable.” Higher scores indicate a more positive evaluation.

In addition, space was provided for respondents to write open-ended comments about the Dean’s performance. The rater had an option to have the open-ended comments transcribed and transmitted to the administrator or to have them available only to the AAP committee. The questionnaire was completed online.

In keeping with past AAP practices, item responses were categorized as:

a) **Strengths to build on:** items rated “agree” or “strongly agree” by a substantial majority of the faculty (60% or higher of respondents gave a rating of 4 or 5 on the scale)

b) **Assets to protect:** items where at least half of the respondents responded “agree” or “strongly agree” (50-59% of respondents gave a rating of 4 or 5 on the scale)

c) **Issues to be mindful of:** items rated “disagree” or “strongly disagree” by a sizeable minority of respondents (25-39% of respondents gave a rating of 1 or 2 on the scale)

d) **Areas that need improvement:** items rated “disagree” or “strongly disagree” by a large portion of respondents (40% or more of respondents gave a rating of 1 or 2 on the scale)

e) **Bimodal:** items that meet criteria for two of the above categories. Note that one of these categories must be (a) or (b) and the other (c) or (d). Hence, a bimodal category implies significant disagreement among the group about the administrator’s strength or weakness in an area.

The percentages used to construct categories were based on all non-missing values and excluded raters who responded to an item with “Don’t know/not applicable.”

Members of the AAP committee were Gregory Carey (chair), Bud Coleman, Roger “Buzz” King, Kai Larsen, Susan Nevelow Mart, Chuck Rogers, Lorrie Shepard, Conrad Stoldt, and James Williams. Frances Costa was the PBA liaison and Cathy Kerry was the PBA analyst and data manager.

* The committee agreed on an updated set of 19 core items. The new set of core items is based on an item
analysis carried out by Greg Carey. The goal was to make the survey shorter. Based on the analysis, items with "don't know" or "missing" responses greater than 40% were dropped, some items were merged into a single item (e.g., "Acts constructively on undergraduate concerns" and "Acts constructively on graduate student concerns" into "Acts constructively on student concerns"), item text was shortened in some cases, and three items were added (e.g., “Rewards high quality teaching”).

** Survey items from the 2000-01 through the 2013-14 AAP assessments used five response options that ranged from “Very effective” to “Very ineffective.” In those earlier surveys, the stem for all items was "How effective has the Dean been at:"