

Task Force on Faculty Office Assignments

Final Report – February 1, 2005

Charge and Activities

The Task Force was charged on October 20, 2004, by Lori Bechtel, the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs. The stated purpose was to provide recommendations regarding the process and procedures for assigning faculty to offices in the new classroom building, and also to identify a fair process for handling future requests by faculty to transfer their office to an open, available office.

The Task Force met weekly from that date through the end of the fall semester, and continued to meet for the first few weeks of the spring semester. It was suggested in the charge that we gather information from the faculty, and thus we organized several activities to that end.

- * We held two open forums - one in the new building combined with a tour of the building, and one at a faculty senate meeting - to allow faculty to express ideas and ask questions about the move of faculty offices into the new building and about office assignments in general.
- * We developed a survey to assess faculty opinions about office organization and assignments in general, and attitudes about criteria that might be used to make decisions about office assignments. This survey was sent to all full-time faculty with several reminders and extended deadlines to ensure a good response rate.
- * We talked personally with many faculty, particularly those in Eiche who must move by the end of the spring semester.

In addition to information gathering, we discussed many possibilities for determining office assignments and reviewed some plans that had been proposed prior to the Task Force formation.

Findings and Recommendations

Assigning Offices in Hawthorn

Over 80 surveys were returned. (Although this is a high rate with respect to survey research, we want to be cautious in using the results to make decisions about all faculty since not all faculty are represented.) The responses to questions about campus organization of offices strongly supported the concept of discipline clustering. Respondents believe discipline clustering would benefit the college, programs, and individuals. There was little support for the idea of reserving prime office space as a recruitment tool or for rewarding faculty excellence. Working relationships between faculty and staff assistants were considered important, as was the need for special office and technology requirements. Of the criteria to be considered for making office assignments, faculty considered the most important to be health issues, proximity to discipline/program cluster, windows, administrative/service responsibilities, proximity to teaching/research resources, and quiet location. The least important were busy, central location

and meritorious performance. Faculty were divided or neutral in their opinions about the importance of office size, years of service to Penn State Altoona, academic rank, in-office equipment needs, proximity to support services, and dissatisfaction with current location.

Based in part on the survey results and also on discussions with faculty, we believe the idea of discipline/program clustering has strong support and should be a goal of office re-assignments. With our existing buildings and office locations, we would not be able to cluster all faculty in a discipline/program in one area. We also would prefer to avoid coercive moves. However, we recommend a campus-wide plan that could call for office moves other than just the faculty in Eiche in order to create more clustering than we currently have. Such a plan must also accommodate new faculty who may join a program in the next few years.

We would also recommend that there be a goal of providing as many faculty as possible with functional, pleasant offices. The survey results suggest that windows are very important as well as location with respect to some individual needs. There are a number of faculty who have had less functional offices for several years and we believe these should be given some consideration in the planned moves.

In the development of the office assignment plans presented here, we were guided by several underlying principles:

1. Recognize that Eiche faculty must move and have the choice of an office in Hawthorn. (Note, however, that the office may or may not have a window.)
2. Clustering by discipline should be a major goal.
3. Seek to retain an element of non-discipline integration by placing different discipline clusters in proximity to each other.
4. It's important to integrate new faculty members with others in their discipline.
5. Reduce the number of less functional offices. The definition of functional is in part determined by individual faculty feedback.
6. Look for opportunities to implement items 2 through 5 throughout the campus, not just in Hawthorn.
7. Keep in mind the goal of developing a distributed Division Head and associated Staff Assistant office model.
8. Include "permanent" offices for current Division Heads
9. Maximize the distribution of "prime offices" in Hawthorn among disciplines.
10. Limit the number of windowless office assignments for those faculty that MUST move to Hawthorn to a maximum of 1 per discipline. This applies ONLY to those faculty who MUST move.
11. Evaluate and, based on this evaluation, attempt to honor meritorious room change requests made by individual faculty. Typical criteria might include office functionality, medical needs, research, and other individual concerns.

With the above goals and principles in mind, we have attached five potential plans (Appendix A) for office assignments. The relative strengths and challenges of each plan are presented and we leave it to the Dean to determine which might be the best plan.

Policy for Future Office Requests

Based on responses to the survey and discussions with faculty, the Task Force has developed some guidelines for determining in future years how available offices should be assigned to faculty.

I. General Guidelines:

- A. An announcement of office availability along with guidelines/criteria for office reassignment shall be sent to the faculty by the office of the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs.
- B. Faculty who wish reassignment to a different office space must submit a proposal outlining their specific office needs and any other suitable justifications, including why the current office does not sufficiently meet the needs of the faculty member. (see attached form)
- C. The Office of Academic Affairs shall maintain a dated listing of faculty wishing reassignment (the “applicant list”).
 1. When an office becomes available, it seems reasonable that every effort for reassignment be made on a first-come/first-served basis (except in cases involving “clustering”, which are outlined below in section II.) However, the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs may find it suitable to adjust a faculty member’s placement on the applicant list in order to make office assignments according to criteria that were ranked as most important by faculty on the survey administered during the Fall 2004 semester. The most important of these are:
 - a. A faculty member currently occupies an office that is unsuitable according to real, documented physical or health needs.
 - b. A faculty member has administrative or service responsibilities with specific office requirements.
 - c. A faculty member has many years of service to PSU Altoona.
 - d. A faculty member has demonstrated a high service profile to the college.(The complete list of ranked factors is attached in Appendix B)

The Associate Dean of Academic Affairs would most likely also want to consider other factors, such as particularly valued activities performed by a faculty member. Any such factors, however, must be clearly identified and made public to the entire faculty in order that everyone understands how office reassignment decisions were made.

2. If an office becomes available, consideration goes to the person closest to the top of the applicant list with consideration given to the ranked criteria. If a faculty member declines the available office (i.e. - in cases where the office is not a suitable ‘upgrade’ or ‘trade’), then consideration goes to the next individual on the list until someone agrees to move. If no applicant on the list wants the office, the Academic Affairs

Office should consider making a significant remodel/upgrade to the office space (funds permitting) so that it attracts someone. In the case that an upgrade to the space is not feasible, the space becomes reserved for a future FT 1-year hire and in the interim time period can be temporarily used for other purposes (such as storage of many bags of used clothing, etc.)

II. Clustering Criteria:

- A. If a vacated office is located in a disciplinary cluster, all available means should be utilized to maintain the integrity of the cluster. This could affect the order of the applicant list to give a faculty member in (or closely associated with) the cluster's discipline highest priority for the open space. If there are no applicants on the list in (or closely associated with) the cluster's discipline, reassignment of faculty in neighboring offices could be considered. In this case, an adjoining cluster could expand by assigning highest priority to faculty members in the adjoining cluster's discipline.

If the original cluster discipline plans to hire someone in the near future (within one academic year) and does not wish to relinquish the office from the cluster, a temporary assignment should be considered for the office by a faculty member from another discipline that is amenable to the temporary nature of the assignment. If the cluster has not found a permanent occupant for the vacated office after one year, the original discipline owning the cluster loses the office and the cluster size could be modified by increasing the size of an adjoining cluster as outlined above.

- B. If a vacated office is located in an area where creation of a disciplinary cluster is desirable and feasible, highest consideration should be made to the faculty members on the list in the potential cluster's discipline. Appropriate reassignments may be necessary and encouraged in adjoining office spaces to facilitate and improve the integrity of the cluster as needed. In cases where persons in the adjoining office spaces are not amenable to relocating (for this to be a feasible cluster there shouldn't exist many such persons), an office assignment could be made on a 'temporary' basis to faculty on the applicant list from any discipline given the understanding that they can occupy the office only until such time that a member of the potential cluster discipline can take possession. At this point, the affected faculty member will need to relocate (perhaps to a less desirable location and repeat this entire process again).

Appendix A

Each of the proposed plans for office assignments (except Plan E) is presented with a map of campus office spaces color-coded to indicate discipline placement and a detailed grid identifying affected individuals within each discipline along with their current office and proposed new office location. With the development of clusters, no specific offices have been designated for individuals; the faculty in each discipline cluster would determine for themselves who would get which office. We have recommended a few specific individual placements for special reasons.

Plans A-D all have some common features. All include large clusters for biology, communication, criminal justice, earth science, education, engineering, English, HDFS, history, math, modern languages, nursing, and physics; and some degree of clustering for chemistry, integrative arts, political science, and psychology. None of the plans allows for clustering of interdisciplinary programs such as environmental studies or women's studies due to space limitations and a desire for flexibility. All plans would allow for multiple configurations of the second floor of Hawthorn. And all plans call for some faculty to move beyond those who must due to the changes in Eiche; these faculty would need to be consulted to determine willingness to move.

Plan A

This plan clusters nearly all math faculty in CLRC and business faculty in Hawthorn.

- Strengths:
- * both math and business would have strong clusters that would give each a clear identity
 - * the math program would have greater opportunities for communication and research, which in turn would have the potential to help the program attract more students
 - * there is room for expansion of the math faculty in the cluster
 - * the math faculty have been consulted and are, with a few exceptions, in agreement with the plan
- Challenges:
- * the business faculty members in CLRC who would have to move have not been consulted
 - * the math faculty are in agreement with the plan but with some conditions that would need to be approved by the administration (see attached proposal)
 - * integration of new faculty in business and other clusters would be difficult; two spaces are lacking for next year's hires in business
 - * the plan is one office short in Hawthorn for the three math faculty members in Eiche who do not want to move to CLRC

Plan B

This plan clusters nearly all math faculty in Hawthorn and business faculty in CLRC.

- Strengths:
- * identity and communication are improved as above

- * space is used more efficiently since room requested in math proposal would not be provided
- * the distribution of Division Heads across campus is provided for with a division head in CLRC
- * two prime office in Hawthorn are left open for future use

Challenges: * consultation would be required with faculty in CLRC who would be asked to move (business, engineering, math, psychology)

Plan C

Plan C is basically the same as Plan B except for allowing two business faculty from Eiche to move to Hawthorn if they refuse to move to CLRC.

Plan D

This plan divides business and math into two primary clusters - one each in CLRC and one each in Hawthorn.

Strengths: * both math and business would have opportunities to place faculty in the new building
 * there's greater flexibility to accommodate new faculty by having multiple clusters for the larger disciplines
 * fewer moves of CLRC faculty would be required
 * the Division Head distribution would be aided with one division office in Hawthorn

Challenges: * one HDFS faculty member would be stranded in CAC
 * one integrative arts faculty in theatre would not be able to move closer to the theatre, the site of his teaching and creative work
 * the reduction of less functional offices is only 4 instead of 5 as in the other plans

Plan E

Plan E would be the simplest - just place all Eiche and new faculty being hired this year in Hawthorn with office assignments to be determined by the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs. There would be 2 or 3 open offices to be filled at the Associate Dean's discretion. This plan would not advance our goal of developing greater clustering of disciplines and would not adhere to the principles we identified. Thus, we do not endorse this approach.