Background: I received the faculty prioritization from president Brown(Nenagh) on October 3rd. I promptly asked Dr. Sokenu(Julius) and Dr. Gebru(Amanuel) to review the list and advise me of their recommendations for any changes to the list based on the need for full-time faculty in any discipline as it relates to FTES generation. Why did I ask for those recommendations? As you know, our college anticipates a budget deficit of approximately $750,000 to $1.5 million dollars in the 2018-19 fiscal year. To avoid lay-offs and program closures, we are contracting our general fund expenditures through attrition and humane expense reductions. We have already done some of this work by holding off on some classified replacement hires, and we also need to be judicious with full-time faculty replacement hires. How many full-time faculty we can hire depends on exactly how large the budget deficit proves to be. We will know more about the size of the deficit after negotiations with AFT have concluded, and after the Governor’s budget announcement in January. If we could postpone all hiring decisions until then, we could avoid almost all controversy over prioritization. If the budget allows us to hire eight full-time faculty, it hardly matters whether a position is in first place or in eighth. But so far no one is advocating that we wait until late January to make those decisions, because everyone is anxious to start recruiting for top candidates. Thus, we had to determine which disciplines could get by without full-time faculty (relying, obviously, on part-time faculty in the meantime) this year, without sacrificing FTES, and which disciplines would lose FTES without a full-time faculty hire. This prioritization emphasis---somewhat akin to triage---is similar to but not identical to the prioritization criteria used by the Joint Council, which has the luxury---but also the limitation---of asking about longer-term considerations for each discipline.

As you know, last year I left the recommendations from the Joint Council intact, and I was happy to honor the well-developed democratic process without any presidential edits. I do not have that luxury this year, unless I sacrifice some of our FTES goals, which would necessitate accelerating and intensifying our expense reduction strategies.

Is FTES “all about chasing money”? It would be disingenuous for me to claim that I am not acutely conscious of the budgetary implications of enrollments. But I would also point out that FTES is all the more about access----how many students are we serving? Again, I recognize that maintaining (and increasing) enrollments is a part of the criteria considered by the Joint Council, but for the challenging year ahead, it was and is my judgement that this criterion required additional weight---and thus my request for the VP recommendations.

My philosophy of participatory governance: I believe I have demonstrated my commitment to participatory government in my three years at Moorpark College, as in my nearly thirty years in higher education. This does not mean that I think a good president should “rubber stamp” the will of a specific group, or even a majority of employees, on every occasion. That is not leadership, and such timidity would be unworthy of the position I hold. But neither do I ever wish to be autocratic or imperious. As you know, I regularly consult with the Academic Senate president on matters well outside the Senate’s 10+1 jurisdiction. Indeed, it is a rare decision that I make without first consulting our senate presidents, and even more rare is any decision I have made that is strongly opposed by the faculty, classified staff, managers, or students. On the contrary, it would take several pages for me to list all of the faculty and staff-endorsed decisions that I have happily supported since I arrived here, despite competing cost considerations. They include the renovation of our gymnasium, the renovation of our Campus Center, the opening of our Veteran’s Resource Center, and the return of our Wrestling program, to name just a few such decisions.

I realize that in every organization---and perhaps even more so in an academic institution---there are a few individuals who are ready to cast every administrative decision with which they disagree as evidence of a “dark side” conspiracy. Fortunately, I have found very little of that cynicism at our college, and I aim to always remain transparent and collegial in order to protect a culture in which good intentions are assumed, and mutual respect is the norm, especially when, on rare occasions, we may reach different conclusions.

Did my decision disregard the prioritization process of the Academic Senate? I certainly hope not, and I think not. To begin with, it is rather facile to characterize the effect of the re-prioritization as “eight out of nine positions having been altered”. The same could be said in a baseball batting order by simply moving the ninth batter to lead-off position, but the implications would be misleading. Of the top eight positions prioritized by the Joint Council, only one (Film Studies) was displaced from top eight status in the re-prioritization, bringing the Joint Council’s ninth-ranked position (Math #2) into the re-prioritized top eight. Of the other seven positions, Math (1) stayed in first place, while Physics/Astronomy moved by a single spot to second place place( a completely immaterial move, since the top four positions are all going forward irrespective of funding). Communication Studies dropped three spots, while Engineering moved up three spots. World Languages (Spanish) dropped five spots, while English moved up one spot, as did Business (Hospitality). In strictly mathematical terms, three positions moved up by all of one spot, and one position remained intact. The average “movement” for all eight positions was two spots. Notice that at no point did any of the Joint Council’s bottom nine positions move into the re-prioritized top eight positions, and further notice that the exact order of the top four positions is irrelevant, since all four top positions will advance for hiring. Moreover, it is possible, once the scale of the budget deficit has been clarified, that the precise order of the top eight positions will be irrelevant. Thus, we could abate any controversy immediately by moving forward all top eight positions “contingent upon funding”, but no one seems to be advocating that egalitarian course.

There are, of course, some subtleties in the re-prioritization that are hard to capture in this memo, and which Julius and Amanuel can better describe(including, for example, Helga’s return to the classroom in the re-prioritization of the World Languages position).

Am I Willing to Change My Mind? I have known of college presidents who would, in the futile desire to avoid controversy, resist making any final decisions. That is not my nature or my goal. Such indecision causes harm to an institution. On the other hand, I always want to keep an open mind when my decisions are illogical or unsound. Therefore, I am more than willing to reconsider our re-prioritization, but I cannot do so and simultaneously expedite these positions through our HR processes. In some ways, I see that mandate (review the Joint Council’s prioritization immediately and get them through HR and our Board as fast as possible) as a partial source of angst over this reprioritization. I can be deliberate and thoughtful, and I can be fast and expedient, but it is hard to be both simultaneously, and we should revisit this part of the process next year. Moreover, if I were to reconsider our prioritization, I would want to do so only with the guidance and concurrence of our Vice President of Academic Affairs and our Vice President of Student Support, and my question would still be: which disciplines most need full-time faculty in 2018-19 in order to maintain and grow enrollments?

Are there Lessons for Next Year’s Process? Yes. I love the process and criteria which the Joint Council employs for faculty prioritization, but no process is flawless or inerrant, and none should be deemed sacrosanct. The prospect of any re-prioritization could be mitigated if the college president were invited to speak with the Joint Council before they began their deliberations. In this way, if there is a unique and momentary criterion (such as this year’s) that the president believes warrants additional weight, the Joint Council would have an opportunity to consider that recommendation in their deliberations.

Finally: I love this college. You have often heard me speak in public settings about the collegial, respectful climate we inhabit, and how proud I am of our faculty and staff. I have no desire to disrupt our climate of mutual respect, and I take no pleasure in departing from the earnest recommendation of the Joint Council. Nevertheless, I take the duties of my position very seriously, and as a corollary of that I suppose that from time-to-time I will make unpopular decisions, but I do not do so often, and I do not do so lightly. I look forward to seeing each of you on Tuesday.