January 20, 2012

Dear Colleagues,

As I mentioned in our last faculty meeting of the year, Dean of Academic Affairs Andrew McClellan is returning to the Department of Art and Art History after six years of service.

I’d like to take this opportunity to share with you why this is such a loss for those of us in the Dean’s office. The role of academic dean is truly unsung. Operating behind the scenes, our deans of academic affairs are “in the trenches,” tackling challenges large and small to address the needs of more than 600 faculty members. By and large, we ask these deans to step away from the activities they love most—research, teaching—to focus on critical policy issues, as well as prosaic daily tasks. Moving from a role as an individual contributor—as faculty member, program director, or department chair—our deans of academic affairs become part of a pair: each responsible for half of the academic departments in the School of Arts and Sciences.

No doubt Andrew will, therefore, deflect the forthcoming praise saying he was just one of the school’s leadership team. To address this, I turned to the team members themselves, soliciting their reflections on Andrew’s accomplishments as dean. Their praise and mine, which follows, is authentic and heartfelt.

“As a consistent and staunch advocate for the arts and humanities,” one of Andrew’s “greatest achievements is his ability to pursue academic excellence and to inspire others to do the same.” Indeed, as dean, Andrew brought important programming to campus, such as a brilliant interview with Phillip Montebello, the former Director of the Metropolitan Museum in New York.

Andrew also “exhibited a remarkable ability to work collegially with others and to inspire others to work with him.” He was able to this because he “so effectively conveyed that his role was not about advancing himself or his interests” but rather those of the students, faculty, and institution as a whole. One recent example of this comes to mind: Andrew helped develop a “creative solution so the community health program would be in a stronger and more stable long-term position.” By allowing the program to offer faculty appointments through Tufts School of Medicine, Andrew “helped forge an important, cross-school collaboration without losing this highly regarded program’s focus on undergraduates.”

An academic dean’s to-do lists may not make for gripping reading, but they are critical to the day-to-day functioning of the academic departments. Specifically, “this means Andrew has dealt with urgent problems, such as flooding in department offices or the premature death of a faculty member. Sometimes it means he has delivered bad news and he has had to say ‘no’ to his colleagues and friends.” Sometimes it means mediating difficult conflicts. His “active and thoughtful role” in faculty hiring extends to “retaining esteemed faculty members who are being courted by other institutions.” This is the kind of hard work that requires “excellent people skills.” And “it makes a huge difference to our students, and to the long-term strength of our faculty and school.”

Over the past few years, we have seen new faculty and chairs orientations and what could only be called “heroic” efforts in revising and implementing workload policies to ensure equity and parity within our faculty. In this, “he demonstrated the willingness to make difficult decisions and stick by them.”
So, for all his work—seen and unseen—we thank Andrew for his steadfast commitment to the ideals of our liberal traditions, for his insight, for his direction, and for the example he sets for those who will follow him.

We will enjoy both thanking—and perhaps roasting—Andrew over the next few months. But we must also turn our attentions to filling the position he will vacate. To that end, the following process is in place. I will be accepting nominations and applications (of others or yourselves); and I am open to speaking with prospective candidates. The closing date for applications will be Friday, February 24. Finalists will be interviewed in March and an announcement made in April. There are three overarching qualifications for the position: candidates need to have achieved the rank of full professor (or expect to achieve it within a year), they should bring substantial administrative experience as a department or committee chair or program director, and they must bring a desire to work as part of an academic team to help shape the future of the school. I seek a dean who will focus on curricular issues broadly throughout Arts and Sciences and partner with Jim Glaser, the other dean of academic affairs, as well as with the school’s leadership team.

I look forward to exploring the opportunities that filling this important position offers. And I know you join me in thanking Andrew and welcoming him back to the faculty.

Sincerely,

Joanne Berger-Sweeney
Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences