REPORT OF THE TASK FORCE ON PROFESSIONAL/EXECUTIVE
GRADUATE PROGRAMS

January 7, 2008

I. BACKGROUND

The University of Maryland is committed to excellence in all areas of graduate education, including academically rigorous professional/executive graduate programs responsive to the needs of local, regional, national, and international communities.

Professional and executive graduate programs are a growth area in graduate studies at the University of Maryland as at other institutions. Professional Master’s Education, a recent report of the Council of Graduate Schools, observes that “master’s education is the fastest growing and largest part of the graduate education enterprise in the United States, representing over 90% of the graduate degrees awarded each year.” And a recent New York Times article reports, “the number of students earning [masters] degrees around the country has nearly doubled since 1980. Since 1970, the growth is 150 percent, more than twice as fast as bachelor and doctorate programs.”

Professional/executive masters and graduate certificate degree programs at University of Maryland have increased in number and variety, enhancing academic outreach and the potential for increased revenue. To insure that such programs continue to develop with the highest academic standards and with appropriate flexibility, the Provost appointed a Task Force on Professional/Executive Graduate Programs to study relevant policies and practices.

II. OBJECTIVES

The Provost’s Task Force on Professional/Executive Graduate Programs was charged in October 2007 with reviewing overall academic policies and practices for professional/executive masters and certificate degree programs, both domestic and international, and with making appropriate recommendations regarding these programs. The goal is to insure that professional/executive programs maintain the highest levels of academic standards, integrity, and oversight, while remaining responsive, agile, flexible, and competitive in the marketplace.

The Task Force focused it attention on the broad sets of professional/executive programs that are “entrepreneurial” in nature. These include college-based professional programs with non-standard financial models; executive programs as a subset of those professional programs; professional and/or executive programs offered internationally, jointly with other institutions, or through distance learning; and the Masters of Professional Studies and Certificate in Professional Studies, housed in the Graduate
School and administered by the Office of Professional Studies. These sets, it should be noted, overlap, and sometimes overlap with “academic” programs.

The Task Force comprised senior graduate faculty with extensive collective service on the Graduate Council and Senate PCC (see section VII below). In addition to several internal meetings, the Task Force held two two-hour meetings to seek consultation from representatives of units offering or supporting professional/executive programs. These groups included: Dean Howard Frank (Robert H. Smith School of Business and Management); Associate Dean Robert Infantino (College of Chemical and Life Sciences); Professor and Associate Dean Stephen Koziol (College of Education); Dean Edward Montgomery (College of Behavioral and Social Sciences); George Syrmos (A. James Clark School of Engineering); and Senior Associate Dean William Powers (School of Public Policy); Associate Provost and Dean Judi Broida (Office of Professional Studies); Assistant Dean John Mollish (The Graduate School); Claudia Rector (Office of Associate Provost for Academic Planning and Programs); Dr. David Robb (Registrar); Associate Provost Saul Sosnowski (Office of International Affairs); Marsha Sprague (Maryland English Institute); and Valerie Woolston (International Educational Services).

The Task Force believes that the campus should address the growth of professional/executive programs in broad strategic terms, asking what is the vision, and what are the goals, for graduate education at University of Maryland as a research institution, and what roles do professional/executive programs play in realizing that vision and in reaching those goals? Though the Task Force discussed such questions tangentially, they fall outside of its charge and are not addressed in this report. (Financial models, likewise, fall outside the charge of the Task Force.)

The Task Force focused, instead, on basic academic principles and on specific academic policies and practices, with particular attention on those that have proven problematic in practice. The evolution of professional/executive programs on campus, that is, has produced positive results, but also some problems related to academic quality control, on the one hand, and to flexible and efficient administrative processes, on the other hand. Discontinuities between university policies and program practices, for example, have resulted in academic inconsistencies, administrative inefficiencies, and ad hoc decision making. The Task Force sought to formulate principles and to propose recommendations that would bring policies and practices into alignment and that would maintain rigor while increasing flexibility and efficiency.

The Task Force, finally, came to a conclusion that informs the principles and recommendations that follow: establishing a strong and clear framework for program review and oversight, with responsibilities shared at program, college, and campus levels, will require additional effort at the outset, but will enable greater academic flexibility and administrative streamlining over the long term.
III. PRINCIPLES

1. University of Maryland professional/executive graduate should maintain the same high standards as academic graduate programs and should achieve the same level of excellence, regardless of program location, curriculum format, or instructional delivery system. Professional/executive programs differ from academic graduate degree programs, however, and those differences necessitate some variation in academic policies and practices.

2. Professional/executive programs should be consistent with the University’s mission and should advance the University’s strategic objectives for graduate education. New programs should have sound academic rationales, should add value to the University, and should have no adverse effects on existing academic programs.

3. Academic and administrative policies for these programs should be transparent and consistently applied. Policies and guidelines should be clearly articulated and readily available, in the PCC Manual and as a clearly designated set of guidelines in the Graduate School catalog. Policies and guidelines should be comprehensive, and should include, for instance, guidance on initiating new programs.

4. Academic oversight should be robust at every level. The Graduate School exercises academic oversight for all graduate programs. Colleges should assume increased responsibility for rigorous internal oversight, and the Graduate School should collaborate more closely with “Liaison Deans” (collegiate associate deans responsible for graduate education) to facilitate communication; to streamline administration; to insure high quality of programs, faculty, and students; and to conduct reviews and learning outcomes assessments. Full members of the Graduate Faculty at the program level, finally, should assume increased academic ownership and oversight of specific aspects of these programs.

5. Program reviews should be regularly scheduled and, in addition, should be an explicit part of mandated seven-year reviews of the sponsoring academic units and colleges/schools.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

Program Proposal, Approval, and Review

• Guidelines for program proposals and for subsequent approval processes should be clearly articulated and disseminated, and standardized templates and forms should be developed. The Graduate School and the Office of the Associate Provost for Academic Planning and Programs should assume responsibility for this effort. Such standardization should increase efficiency and shorten the time for program approval.
• Program approval should proceed in clear steps in order to increase the efficiency and speed of the process. Programs (new programs, new formats or locations for existing programs, and new iterations of the MPS and GCPS) first should be approved by sponsoring academic units and colleges/schools and then forwarded for review at campus and university levels. Unit/college review and approval processes can vary, but must include formal faculty participation as well as endorsement by the appropriate collegiate dean or deans. Formal review at the unit/college level should decrease time needed for review at the campus/university level.

• Approval processes at the campus level should be streamlined:

  Existing programs in new locations or formats, and new iterations of the MPS and GCPS: Campus approval should be by a joint committee comprising representatives from Graduate PCC and Senate PCC (and appropriate ex officio members) and meeting throughout the calendar year.

  New academic programs that result in new degrees or academic awards: Current approval processes, by regulation, are to remain in place.

• Rigorous program review at the approval stage should be complemented by rigorous program review at regular intervals thereafter, including an initial review three years after program implementation. Reviews should include but not be limited to factors such as program demand; quality of faculty, curriculum, and students; learning outcomes assessment; and degree completion rates. Reviews should be conducted at the department and college levels, with results forwarded to the Graduate School for assessment.

Admissions Standards and Procedures

• Admissions requirements should be advertised with thoroughness, clarity, and lack of ambiguity. Aggregate profiles of previously admitted students might be provided by programs to enable applicants to judge their likelihood of acceptance.

• Academic programs and departments review admissions applications and credentials and make admissions recommendations to the Dean of the Graduate School, who holds responsibility for admitting applicants to graduate programs. Increased rigor in the evaluation of candidates by programs and departments should decrease intervention at the campus level and thus streamline the admissions process.

• Minimum admission standards currently in place will continue to apply, but with some flexibility for exceptional candidates. Programs may request that candidates be admitted by exception, on an individual basis, using a “portfolio” approach. Under such an approach, for example, the requirement of an appropriately accredited bachelor’s degree would be waived only under extraordinary circumstances, while a GPA below the minimum standard, particularly in the case of a degree earned early in the career of an executive applicant, could be offset by professional experience. The
Graduate School and IES will continue to consult with academic units in determining and updating appropriate accreditations for international bachelor’s degrees.

- Graduate admissions are made on an individual basis and cannot be cohort based. Students admitted by exception may not constitute a majority of a cohort.

- English is the language of instruction in University of Maryland Graduate programs and courses, excepting in cases in which a language other than English is the object of study. English language proficiency for professional/executive programs must be evaluated in a way that maintains academic integrity, equity in the standards to which other international students are held, and fairness to admitted students with respect to probable success.

  Programs offered in international locations only: In order to increase flexibility, a menu of several options for evaluating language proficiency, from which programs will be free to choose, should be established collaboratively by MEI, IES, the Graduate School, and representative academic provider units during the initial stage of the implementation timetable outlined below.

  Programs offered domestically or with both international and domestic components: Current IES guidelines for evaluating English language proficiency will continue to apply.

- Programs whose admissions cycles deviate from the standard academic admissions calendar must specify this in detail in the program proposal. The campus collectively should make every effort to facilitate non-standard admissions cycles by decreasing response times from application, through review and recommendation, to approval and admission. Such streamlining will require additional resources, as discussed below.

Academic Standards

- Faculty teaching in graduate programs, including professional/executive programs, are to be appointed to the Graduate Faculty through established procedures. In approving appointments for professional/executive programs, the Dean of the Graduate School should take the practical credentials of nominees into consideration.

- Courses and curricula in professional/executive programs should be comparable in rigor and measure to those in academic graduate programs but might appropriately differ from them in matters of format and delivery.

  The Graduate Council, accordingly, should review current guidelines for courses and curricula (e.g., permissible ratio of contact hours per week to credits earned) toward the end of incorporating flexibility for programs with non-standard academic calendars and/or courses without compromising quality of instruction or fairness to
students. One example might be that of hybrid course delivery systems that embed an intensive classroom schedule within an extended distance-learning schedule.

• Double-counting of course credit for two academic awards, particularly when all credits used for a graduate certificate degree are also being used to fulfill the requirements of a masters degree, should be allowed only when academic value is added to the student’s experience (for example, the group of courses satisfying the requirements for a graduate certificate might represent a recognizable academic specialization within the general area of the masters degree to which they are being applied).

• Co-mingling of professional/executive students in academic courses, and professional/executive courses in academic programs, and vice versa, should be done in a way that insures (a) fairness and likelihood of success for each student constituency and (b) academic rigor for courses and programs.

V. RESOURCES

Professional/executive programs provide the campus many opportunities, and their growth should be encouraged. Enabling continued growth, particularly with the flexibility and streamlining proposed above, will require allocation of additional resources to relevant support and oversight units.

The Task Force recommends (a) the creation and funding of a position in the Graduate School, possibly at the level of Associate Dean, to serve as dedicated point-of-contact for professional/executive programs with academic units and with other support units; and (b) staffing in IES and MEI appropriate and adequate to the needs of professional/executive programs offered internationally.

Since professional/executive programs are entrepreneurial enterprises generating special revenue streams, support for services dedicated to them might appropriately be funded from those revenue streams rather than from state budget. The Office of the Provost should determine appropriate support and funding sources.

VI. IMPLEMENTATION

The principles and recommendations proposed above will benefit from further discussion and will require appropriate approvals prior to implementation.

VII. MEMBERS OF THE TASK FORCE

Chair: Charles Caramello, Associate Provost for Academic Affairs and Dean of the Graduate School.
Anand Anandalingam. Senior Associate Dean, and Ralph J. Tyser Professor of Management Science, Robert H. Smith School of Business.

James Baeder. Associate Professor, Department of Aerospace Engineering.

Sally Koblinsky. Professor and Chair, Department of Family Science.

Carol Parham. Professor of the Practice, Department of Education Leadership, Higher Education, and International Education.

Robert Schwab. Associate Dean, and Professor of Economics, College of Behavioral and Social Sciences.

Lawrence Sita, Professor, Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry.

Ex officio: Phyllis Peres, Associate Provost for Academic Planning and Programs.
SUPPLEMENT TO TASK FORCE REPORT ON PROFESSIONAL/EXECUTIVE GRADUATE PROGRAMS

May 24, 2008

Following the presentation of the Task Force Report to the Council of Deans on February 11, 2008, the Provost recommended that the Task Force reconvene to deliberate further on overall principles for professional/executive programs and on key recommendations in the Report. The Provost met with the Task Force on March 31, and the Task Force held subsequent internal meetings on April 15 and April 28. During this period, the Task Force carefully reviewed responses and recommendations forwarded from members of the Council of Deans, and solicited recommendations from several programs offering professional degrees abroad regarding, particularly, testing of English language proficiency.

The present document is a supplement to the Task Force Report that addresses several key issues. It makes recommendations that are intended to clarify further and, in signal instances, to supersede recommendations made in the Report. It is understood that these recommendations apply only to “professional/executive” programs, and that implementation will be phased in through “pilots,” beginning with degree programs offered in international locations.

IDENTIFICATION OF PROGRAMS

A precise definition of “professional/executive” graduate programs, and demarcation of them from “academic” graduate programs, remains elusive. For two reasons, however, an operational identification of “professional/executive” programs is desirable: 1) in order to recommend guidelines that are responsive to the objectives of entrepreneurial programs and flexible with respect to their delivery; and 2) in order to implement those recommendations responsibly on “pilot” bases that can be monitored and assessed for success. Appendix A: “Operational Identification of ‘Executive’ or ‘Professional’ Programs,” proffers such an identification.

GOVERNING PRINCIPLES

The Task Force reaffirms its belief that establishing a clear framework for program review and oversight, with responsibilities shared at program, college/school, and campus levels, will require some additional effort at the outset, but will enable greater academic flexibility and administrative streamlining over the long term.

The Task Force wishes to add, explicitly, an important governing principle: “trust but verify.” The recommendations that follow (and recommendations in the Report not revisited here) are predicated on the principle that the Graduate School will retain authority and responsibility over graduate admissions and academic standards while delegating considerable operational authority and responsibility to programs and colleges/schools; that auditing, reporting, and assessing mechanisms will be instituted at
program, college/school, and campus levels; and that programs will be accountable for adhering to the guidelines and criteria that they propose (and that are approved) and for producing student success.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Program Proposal, Approval, Review

In order to facilitate the approval process, standardized templates and forms for approval for each of the various types of degree programs will be developed. This process has begun and will be completed this summer. In response to COD request for a sample, Appendix B, “Offering Approved Executive or Professional Programs at New Locations” provides one such template.

In order to streamline further the approval process for those professional/executive program actions in which the Senate PCC has final approval, a joint (sub)committee of the Graduate PCC and the Senate PCC would consider appropriate proposals on a year-round basis. Such a joint (sub)committee would provide both effective shared governance and more efficient responses to proposals. Programs in this category would include the Master of Professional Studies, the Graduate Certificate in Professional Studies, and professional/executive versions of existing programs.

In addition, the Task Force endorses the action taken by the Graduate Council in Spring 2008 to streamline the Council’s steps in the overall graduate program approval process. This action will positively affect the approval process for new professional/executive programs, or those with significant changes, that go before the full Senate. These types of proposals, however, are subject to further consideration by the Board of Regents and the Maryland Higher Education Commission.

Admissions Standards and Procedures

Minimum admission standards currently in place for campus graduate programs will apply for students entering professional/executive programs, with exceptions outlined below. Minimum admission standards do not apply for non-degree certificate programs in which students do not earn academic credit for courses taken.

The Dean of the Graduate School will retain authority and responsibility over graduate admissions, including signatory authority for letters of admission. In order to increase flexibility and to streamline processes, operational authority and responsibility will be delegated as follows:

Students who meet minimum admissions standards. Programs recommending students for admission or rejection can act on those recommendations directly, without prior or subsequent approval from the Graduate School. Reporting and auditing mechanisms should be instituted at both collegiate and campus levels. (The Graduate School will collaborate with ESO and IES to implement this change.)
Students who do not meet minimum admissions standards. Programs may recommend to the Graduate School that some candidates be admitted to degree programs by exception, on an individual basis, using a “portfolio” approach. Programs will provide justifications for such exceptions, and the Graduate School, in reviewing these recommendations, will remain cognizant of the fact that applicants to professional/executive programs may have profiles differing from those of applicants to other graduate programs (such that a GPA below the minimum standard, for example, particularly in the case of a degree earned earlier in the career of an executive applicant, could be offset by professional experience). The Graduate School will respond promptly to recommendations for exceptions.

English Language Proficiency.

Programs offered in international locations. The Task Force recommends that programs have considerable flexibility in testing English language proficiency for programs offered in international locations, particularly programs with closed cohorts. A program proposing a degree will be free to choose from a menu of testing options, and, within these options, will have additional flexibility with respect to specifics of testing. The program will indicate the option chosen, and additional specifics, as well as a plan for measuring success, when applying for degree approval. In response to COD request, Appendix C: “Menu of Options for English Language Proficiency for Programs Offered in International Locations,” offers a menu of options.

Programs offered domestically or with both international and domestic components. Current IES guidelines for evaluating English language proficiency will continue to apply; other possibilities, however, will be investigated.

ACADEMIC STANDARDS

Code of Maryland (COMAR) Higher Education regulations specify contact hours per credit. The Graduate Council has established further policies regarding permissible number of contact hours per day and of credits that may be earned per week.

The Task Force recommends that the Graduate Council revisit these policies at its earliest convenience, with input from relevant programs, toward the end of incorporating increased flexibility for professional/executive programs with non-standard academic calendars and/or courses without compromising quality of instruction or student success.

RESOURCES

The Report had offered recommendations for the Provost’s consideration regarding resources. These recommendations should be reconsidered in light of the Strategic Plan and the current budgetary situation.

Submitted by the Provost’s Task Force on Professional/Executive Programs
Appendix A: Operational Identification of “Executive” or “Professional” Programs

• Executive or Professional Programs differ in function from first professional or advanced professional academic degree programs. Executive degrees such as the (E)MBA or the MPM, or the Master of Professional Studies and Graduate Certificate in Professional Studies, are academic awards but with distinct purposes and for distinct constituencies. These awards should be distinguished from “first professional academic degrees” that prepare for particular professions. At UM, these “first professional degree programs” include such degrees as the MLA, MPH, MPP, M.Arch, D.Aud., M.Ed., and Ed.D., which are regulated or accredited by a governmental or government-approved body. Within some units, first professional or advanced professional degree programs are the primary educational focus.

• Executive or Professional Programs, as understood in this Report, are supplemental to the primary educational enterprises of units and constitute entrepreneurial ventures distinct from state supported activities.

• Executive or Professional Programs optimally are delivered to working or practicing professionals who wish to obtain an advanced academic award that focuses primarily on skills and application as opposed to research and theory. Such programs improve skills and knowledge, and often enable professionals to move into a different sector of their field or prepare professionals for positions in related fields.

• Applicants to Executive or Professional Programs are admitted to the University of Maryland as graduate students in those specific programs. Though applicants should meet minimum campus admissions standards, some exceptions and flexibility are in order.
Appendix B: Template for Offering Approved Executive or Professional Programs at New Locations

Definition:
1. An existing degree or certificate program that offers more than 1/3 of required course work for the major or certificate at a non-campus site during any 12-month period; or

2. An existing degree or certificate program for which an institution advertises that course work at an off-campus site will lead to award of certificate or degree, regardless of the portion of the program offered at the off-campus site.

A. Initiating Unit(s):_____________________________________________________

B. Primary Contact: _____________________________________________________

C. Program: ____________________________________________________________

D. Existing degree or certificate to be awarded: ____________________________

E. Location and site: _____________________________________________________
   (with a pull-down menu for further instructions depending on the following criteria: location in the State of Maryland, Out of State, International)

F. Closed cohort or open enrollment? _____________________________________

G. Offered solely through UM or in cooperation with another entity? __________
   (with a pull-down menu asking if an agreement with the cooperating entity has been approved)

H. Need for program? ____________________________________________________

I. Who will administer the program? ______________________________________

J. Please attach a one page listing of the program courses, method(s) of delivery, and faculty.

K. Admissions requirements and process for the program? ___________________

L. How will English language proficiency be tested (for programs offered abroad)?
   (with a pull-down menu of options asking for further details for the option selected)

M. How will student services be provided? ________________________________

N. How will library and other instructional resources be provided? __________

O. Please attach the proposed financial model including all resources and expenditures.
Appendix C: Menu of Options for Testing English Language Proficiency for Programs Offered in International Locations

1. Standardized Tests

The principal standardized tests are TOEFL (Test of English as Foreign Language) and IELTS (International English Testing System). IES (International Educational Services) recommends appropriate minimum scores to the Graduate School.

2. Testing through MEI (Maryland English Institute)

MEI can work with graduate programs to create customized tests and testing procedures for professional/executive programs offered in international locations. Many variations are possible.

3. Testing Administered through a Third Party

Programs and colleges that have close partnerships with high quality, accredited universities abroad might arrange for those institutions to test English language proficiency for students applying to UM professional/executive programs. This option assumes UM approval and oversight.

4. Testing Administered by UM Graduate Program

Programs might administer and assess their own testing for English language proficiency. This option presupposes some consultation or collaboration with MEI; a thorough proposal, detailing criteria, testing mechanisms, assessment procedures, guarantees of capability, monitoring procedures, and outcomes assessment; and oversight at the college/school and campus levels.

5. Courses/Programs Offered in Local Language

In rare instances, a program might have both justification for offering courses in the local language and the capability of doing so. This departure from current policy and practice requires further consideration.

6. Other

It is conceivable that a program might wish to propose an option other than those indicated above. Such a proposal would require a clear and pressing justification and would be reviewed carefully at college/school and campus levels.