Section VI: Linked Institutional Planning and Budgeting Processes

Because several of the internal recommendations of the 2007 Self Study had to do with issues related to the linkage between institutional planning and budgeting processes, Section II of this report contains much of the background that would otherwise be in this part of the report. Here we provide a few key examples of how this linkage is evident in specific campus initiatives.

IV.A: The Strategic Plan and Resource Allocation

As discussed in Section II, the Strategic Plan has a central role in linking planning and budgeting processes that promote continuing improvements in the quality of our institution. The Strategic Plan establishes both broad goals and specific strategies. Its implementation has focused on the role of planning in resource allocation, assessment, and continuing innovation. Success rests on following planning with an analysis of resource use and in-depth assessment at every level of the University. At the division level, planning is ongoing, with major priorities identified and resources committed by the President to meet the highest of those. Additional discussion of this process can be found in Section II.A.1.

The annual reallocation of 2% of the University’s resources each year also plays a vital role. Reallocation occurs across all divisions and colleges, creating a continuing opportunity to reallocate resources to highest priority activities. Within the Division of Academic Affairs, annual reallocation provides funds that are redirected to a wide variety of educational, research, or other goals within each college. Oversight by the Provost helps to assure that budgeting decisions are consistent with agreed-upon priorities. The University has taken advantage of this opportunity for reallocation in both good and bad budget times. Reallocation strategies within the division of Academic Affairs are described in Section II.A.2. Several examples below illustrate links between planning, assessment, and resource allocation that have made major contributions to teaching and research.

VI.B: Planning and Financial Support for General Education

Development of the General Education program (see section II.B.3.d: Foundational Education: General Education) has required close integration of educational planning and financial models to support development of new instruction. While the net number of credits required in the new General Education plan is unchanged from the existing CORE program, some redistribution of instructional responsibilities across colleges and departments is expected. For example, the new plan reduces the number of courses required in the Distributive Studies category by one course and broadens these categories such that all academic colleges should be able to contribute, including the professional schools. Within CORE, most courses were delivered by just a few colleges: Arts & Humanities, Behavioral and Social Sciences, and the two natural science colleges (which in 2011 were combined into a single College of Computer, Mathematical, and Natural Sciences). However, the new plan also requires a course in Oral Communication of all students, adding demands to the specific departments with the requisite expertise to deliver this type of instruction, as well as additional requirements in Mathematics and Writing.

During FY 2010-2012 in the initial planning and implementation phase of the new General Education, financial incentives were provided to academic units across all disciplines to develop courses for the signature component of the new program, the I-Series courses. Instructors received a one-time payment to develop a new course and a teaching assistant for each course with more than 60 students enrolled. I-series courses were first offered in Spring 2010 under this plan, and new courses have been created each semester thereafter.
As the campus transitions to full implementation of the new plan, a more complex financial model has been created to support course offerings when new freshmen enter the program in Fall 2012. Permanent financial support for instruction in writing, mathematics, oral communication will be provided based on enrollment. In response to a call for proposals, a number of colleges have developed courses in oral communication that will be taught at both lower- and upper-division levels, receiving additional resources. The new I-series funding model is designed to meet the “transition” costs of offering new courses, with funding for each new course phased out over a three year period from its first offering. Following the three-year transition funding period, programs are expected to incorporate the costs into their overall teaching budgets. Incremental funding is based on enrollment, providing incentives for programs to modify or create new courses as student interests evolve. New assessment tools will be developed to evaluate instructional demands after the program begins. The University will have allocated approximately $3M by FY 2017 in I-series transition funding, targeted to serve approximately 16,000 students annually when fully implemented in FY 2017. Approximately two thirds of this funding will have been committed in FY 2013 and 2014, when the number of seats offered in I-Series courses should reach 12,000.

IV.C: Expanding Large-scale Multidisciplinary Sponsored Research

An extensive planning and resource allocation process underlies the University’s success in expanding interdisciplinary sponsored research. Planning in the Division of Research includes identifying prospective grant opportunities and providing mentoring, networking with federal and corporate partners, and other assistance to faculty researchers in the development of proposals. Assembling large teams of researchers is promoted by the division’s Research Development Committee, comprised of associate deans or other research representatives of every college and school, which helps identify faculty researchers from different disciplines with relevant expertise.

Financial support includes funds to conduct exploratory research, make site visits, complete proposals, and provide required matching funds. University support continues through the life of many funded projects, providing facilities and covering costs essential to the activity that cannot be charged to grants. The Divisions of Research and Academic Affairs are partners in many of these resource commitments, with decisions reflecting continuing assessment of the opportunities to expand activities over the life of the grant. Planning, assessment, and funding decisions often take place over a relatively short time period. One source of financial support is through Designated Research Initiative Funding (DRIF), which provides resources for equipment, graduate assistants, and other costs, as well as infrastructure and other costs in startup packages for new faculty. Additional details on how DRIF funds are allocated are found in Section II.A.3. This resource allocation process has helped to create many of the University’s largest research initiatives, in areas that include health information technology, the environment, energy, and the future of information.

In 2011, the University created the Maryland Council on the Environment to promote further expansion of the University’s programs related to the environment and to increase their visibility. The Council is to serve as an advisory group to the University on research, education, outreach, and economic development, and to place the University at the forefront of environmental and earth system science. The Council will coordinate strategic efforts extending core research competencies, develop new partnerships with the public and private sector, and create new interdisciplinary funding opportunities. The Council will work closely with unit heads throughout the University, state and federal agencies, and companies and foundations. The Council director reports to the Senior Vice President and Provost and the Vice President and Chief Research Officer, and is supported by funds from the Divisions of Academic Affairs and Research and from three major colleges.
VI.D: Living-Learning Programs and other Special Offerings

The development of new undergraduate curricular opportunities is a continuing process of creative design of new programs, assessment of existing programs, and reallocation to support new initiatives. Assessment of living learning and other special offerings by the Provost’s Committee on Living-Learning Programs, using a common evaluation framework considering student interest and success, has helped to identify areas for improvement or opportunities for new programs. The details of how these programs are assessed and kept fresh are in section II.B.3.a. Here we focus on how they are financially supported.

New programs in Honors, College Park Scholars, or in interdisciplinary areas have been developed through a competitive call for proposals from the Provost, with programs initially financed by cost-sharing between academic units and the Provost. Permanent funding is typically provided to the sponsoring college after the program has proven to be successful. In the last three years this process has supported the following developments:

- Three new living-learning programs within the Honors College: Digital Cultures and Creativity, a highly interdisciplinary program that builds on expertise in digital humanities and computing, Integrated Life Sciences, which has a strong focus on biomedical research and education, and Entrepreneurship and Innovation, which has a collaborative business and engineering focus on developing innovative solutions to contemporary problems;
- Two new programs within College Park Scholars with a global focus: Science and Global Change, and Global Public Health, as well as a Global Communities Living-Learning program;
- Two new minor programs with a highly interdisciplinary component: the minor in Global Studies, and in Sustainability Studies, offered jointly by the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources and the School of Public Policy;
- The Blended Learning Initiative, which is providing funding on a competitive basis to develop a suite of high quality courses that use a mix of face-to-face and online interactions to enhance student learning opportunities in areas that are particularly challenging for either students, because of conceptual difficulty of the material, or faculty, because of large enrollments. Ten courses were funded and are being initially delivered in Spring 2012.

In each case, the strategy has been to put the financial resources directly into the colleges, academic units, or in the Blended Learning Initiative, to the faculty, who provide the provide oversight, management and instruction. This entrepreneurial model has worked well to stimulate new initiatives while at the same time giving faculty a sense of ownership of the curriculum.

IV.E: Doctoral Program Review and Revision

As discussed in Section II.B.5, in 2008 and 2009 a comprehensive review of all doctoral programs on campus was carried out, with the goal of optimizing their size to produce an excellent student body that is both mentored well and financially supported. Academic units provided data on student quality, time-to-degree, financial support, and career placements, within a context of the national norms for their specific disciplines. The Graduate School analyzed the data, provided summary reports to each college or school, met with each dean, and then, after discussion, made recommendations on admissions targets, taking both student quality and yield into account. An important consideration in the right-sizing exercise was managing the available resources so that doctoral students could be fully supported through the majority of their academic career. The doctoral program review process provided a thorough baseline for ongoing assessment, analysis, and improvement.
This exercise also resulted in extensive discussion across campus and in self-assessments leading to comprehensive review in some programs. Two examples are the doctoral programs in the departments of English and Communication. Until recently, the Department of English had required a master’s degree for admission to the doctoral program. After a comprehensive review, both graduate programs were redesigned based on the anticipated career paths of applicants and enrolled students. A significantly smaller class of students is now recruited, they are admitted to the Ph.D. program directly from the baccalaureate, the number of courses was reduced, and strong advising practices were put in place to strengthen student scholarly and professional development. Strong benchmarks for assessing progress through the program are now in place. The program now focuses on a smaller group of students who are preparing for academic careers. The Master of Arts program remains in place for students who wish to pursue graduate study but who intend a career path in which a Ph.D. is not required; a Master of Arts in Rhetoric and Composition is an example. The Department of Communication has made similar changes to its graduate programs, modifying its first year curriculum, focusing recruitment and selection on those students planning to complete the doctorate, admitting students directly from the baccalaureate, and providing them with financial support for five years. Both departments expect that the programs will now be able to compete more successfully for the highest quality students, that retention and graduate rates will improve, and that time to degree will be shortened. Changes in these programs were implemented in Fall 2011.