Task Group on Academic Incentives, Efficiencies, and Effectiveness

CHARGE: The task group will seek opportunities in academic operations that can be realized through use of incentives and efficiencies. These incentives can be for individuals or units, individually or collectively and they may enhance program effectiveness, broaden the reach of programs, use the facilities more effectively and enhance the educational experience of our students. Better alignment of individual goals with university goals is desirable.

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Report of the Task Group on Academic Incentives, Efficiencies, and Effectiveness

The Task Group on Academic Incentives, Efficiencies, and Effectiveness has focused its work around actions that would, if implemented, maintain the quality of our academic programs in the face of reduced State support. Incentives currently under study would ensure that academic units and programs see real benefits when they work to grow student enrollments, offer new degree programs, and attract increased research funding. Efficiencies under consideration would allow for maintenance of the full range of academic programs and offerings at reduced administrative costs.

The recommendations below are, within major headings, in the priority order set by the Task Group. In each case, these recommendations from the Task Group will be shared with the campus community and, where appropriate, considered for adoption by the University Senate.

Recommendations:

Program and Unit Consolidation

Development of new units and programs is part of the natural growth of universities. Over time, however, such development can result in some redundancies and inefficiencies. To that end, we propose recommendations for consolidation of units and functions:

Academic Units

I. Review all academic units for potential consolidation with other units. (This is not a recommendation for program review or elimination.)

Although small academic units contribute to the campus in many important ways, they present challenges in terms of administrative and fiscal efficiency, governance effectiveness, and academic integrity. Often, the ratio of administrative-to-total costs is more than in larger units due to the necessity of a chair and administrative support for relatively small numbers of faculty. Further, limitations on critical mass in governance can hinder both internal and external functioning of the unit. Although some small units may be necessary for disciplinary or other reasons, or may function very well at their current size, others could be absorbed into larger units without loss of the academic integrity and national reputation of programs and with potential increases in administrative and fiscal efficiency and governance effectiveness.

A special review process could be developed by the Provost’s Office with the assistance of the Senate Executive Committee, the Council of Deans, and APAC. Alternatively, structural changes could be implemented administratively, through negotiated mutual consent after a less formal review. Issues to be considered in the proposed review should include configuration of similar programs at other AAU universities, ratio of administrative-to-instructional costs, potential relationships with other campus programs, program and student quality, governance, and potential to preserve the integrity of the program within other units.
Graduate School

2. Examine the role of the Graduate School in the future of the University, the distinction between graduate and undergraduate programs vis-à-vis institutional control and oversight, as well as the special role of the Graduate Council in overseeing graduate curricula. Authority to award graduate degrees rests with the Graduate School, while the academic content, mentoring, and financial support are centered in the departments and colleges. The Graduate School provides oversight of graduate programs through the Graduate Council and its committees. It also oversees the distribution of campus fellowship funds, determines certain overall policies for graduate education, and recommends such specific policies as the size of stipends for teaching assistants. The maturation of the University, however, has rendered some of the responsibilities of the Graduate School either redundant or unnecessary. Every tenure-track faculty member is now a member of the graduate faculty, for example, so all faculty committees are competent to deal with graduate program and graduate education policy matters. Such matters as teaching assistant stipends are part of the overall picture of tuition revenue, student support, and course availability that are considered in other venues. Dual oversight of program curricula between the Graduate Council PCC Committee and the Senate PCC Committee is redundant and offers no obvious added value. It also significantly slows the program approval process as well as the process through which significant graduate education policy changes are initiated. With the recent delegation of fellowship funds to the colleges and the merging of the administrative functions of graduate and undergraduate admissions discussed below, it is time to re-examine the role of the Graduate School in the future of the University.

This re-examination should also include new roles and responsibilities for the Graduate School that have developed or are expected to develop in the future. One example is the role of the Graduate School in overseeing interdisciplinary graduate programs (e.g., the Neuroscience and Cognitive Sciences Program). The growing movement toward interdisciplinary graduate education and research is likely to expand this oversight role in the years ahead.

To move this process of redefinition forward, representatives of the Graduate Dean, the Provost, the University Senate, and selected college deans should meet to determine an appropriate oversight structure for graduate education and a process for moving to this structure. It will be essential to involve the Legal Office to clarify any legislative or charter issues that may have to be addressed.

Graduate Student Admissions and Support Processes

3. Continue consolidation of graduate and undergraduate admissions and student support functions.

The consolidation of admissions operations that is already taking place should be extended to other administrative and student supportive services. For example, graduation clearance and other records and registration functions could be consolidated in the Registrar’s Office, where similar functions are already carried out. Having a single organization that serves all students will reduce redundancy, increase efficiency, and improve customer service. While the first result might simply be to move some functions from the Graduate School, it is possible that services now being provided in other venues might move to a consolidated unit as well. To move this
forward, representatives of the Graduate Dean, Undergraduate Dean, and the Provost should meet to delineate those functions that are appropriate to be moved.

**Bioengineering**

4. *Continue exploration of increased collaboration through organizational restructuring of bioengineering programs.*

The University has recently initiated a graduate program in Bioengineering. This is overseen in the Department of Chemical Engineering and may connect at a later time with similar programs at the Medical School at UMB and at UMBC. We also have a long-standing ABET-accredited program in Biological Resources Engineering, offered through the department of the same name which is administratively in the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources. Students in the program have the option of being within AGNR or ENGR, and the vast majority choose the latter. There is also substantial related work within the Department of Kinesiology, in other programs within the College of Engineering, in the Center for Bioinformatics and Computational Biology, and within the College of Life Sciences.

While there is substantial collaboration among these separate units, it may be possible to improve this collaboration through organizational restructuring. We understand that conversations have begun to explore this possibility and strongly recommend that they be continued. It is important that these conversations include participating faculty, along with representatives of the Provost, the Vice President for Research, and the deans of the colleges concerned.

**Technology Outreach and Transfer**

5. *Review technology outreach and transfer activities within the University for potential consolidation to unify activities for greater visibility, provide ease of client interactions, and to more effectively leverage our resources.*

The technology outreach and transfer activities on campus are diffused throughout several units (i.e., Graduate School, Business, Engineering) creating likely redundancies, confusion for partnering companies, suboptimum utilization of limited resources, and internal competition for clients. Lack of a single focal point for these activities makes it difficult for the University to develop a cohesive strategy.

**Incentives**

In order to operate at optimum efficiency, the University must determine which behaviors we wish to encourage in our academic units and find ways to automatically reward those that improve in these areas. The following ideas are recommended for further exploration.

**Distribution of Funds**

6. *Tie the distribution of DRIF, summer program profits, winter term profits, and spendable endowment more directly to the academic units where these funds are generated.*

This will provide a simple incentive mechanism, encouraging units to maximize their effort in being entrepreneurial. Currently, a certain amount of DRIF, summer program profit, and winter program profit goes to the Office of the Provost in the form of discretionary funds. We suggest that a similar amount, which could be in the form of base budget, be kept by the Office of the
Provost. To achieve this, the Provost may need to apply a certain percentage of base budget cuts across the board. We also suggest that, at the discretion of the Provost, certain small units that have a central and important mission for the institution be protected from significant losses. To minimize the negative impact of this exercise on some units, a transition plan may be needed. The campus should also examine the cost of operation of the summer program and the winter term and the various continuing education programs and propose changes that would achieve maximum return to the academic units.

Resource Allocation
7. Establish a simple procedure for annually adjusting the resources allocated to all units based on some measure of productivity, including student enrollment.
At present, there is no systematic way to align the resources allocated to an academic unit and the level of productivity associated with the unit. The productivity can be measured in different ways, but most notably in terms of student demand (e.g., credit hours generated per faculty FTE) and research (also on a per-faculty basis) as well as various indicators of quality. Typically, when the enrollment in a program increases (usually due to market forces), the campus responds by providing additional resources to the unit. Unfortunately, when the enrollment declines (again, usually due to market forces), there is no established mechanism to take away resources. Continued over many years, this problem could lead to significant inefficiencies. This plan will enable the campus to utilize its resources most effectively.

Differential Tuition/Fees Program
8. Develop a plan to allow certain programs, surely at the graduate level but possibly even at the undergraduate level, to have a differential tuition or differential technology or lab fees.
In order to allow our programs to compete with the very best, we need to secure new resources. We recommend that this be done for programs where the market forces and the program expense justify such differential expenses.

Efficiencies

In some cases, improved operating efficiencies can be achieved by administrative actions, such as the following:

Academic Efficiencies
9. Construct a single point of contact on the web for any student to begin a search for advising, degree requirements and tracking, mentoring, internships, and career placement assistance.
This should be ‘robust’ in that it would link to majors and colleges. OIT should be charged with implementing and supporting this service.

10. Work to maximize compliance with Board of Regents’ faculty workload policies.
Currently 86% of all tenure-track faculty meet Board of Regents’ workload requirements in terms of courses taught, graduate and undergraduate students’ research supervision, funded research, and participation in academic administration. The Provost should work with the deans to reduce the number of faculty who do not meet these guidelines.
11. Investigate whether 12-month employees in academic units could be offered, where appropriate, 9-month contracts.
If even a small percentage of staff are interested in working for 9 rather than 12 months, we could see considerable savings, and some staff might value the opportunity to work only 9 months (with benefits paid for 12 months). We would need to see the effect on medical benefits (a wash?), annual leave, tuition remission for staff and dependents, as well as office work needs.

12. Explore implementation of the practice of consciously overbooking initial course offerings by a number designed to meet the 'normal' course size at freeze-point.
This will require an investigation of whether it is possible to execute this using existing computer facilities and whether it is advisable to do so. We need to determine the consequences for students as well as for course offerings.

13. Change the drop-course deadline to a date at least two days before the add-course deadline.
This will allow students to get the courses they want more readily, since any openings due to course drops by other students will occur before the deadline for adding courses.

IT-Related Efficiencies
14. Explore out-tasking those IT-related functions that are not core-competencies and do not provide the University with a competitive advantage.
This would include, but not be limited to, traditional voice communications, server support, and hosted services for enterprise applications.

15. Consolidate the purchasing of computer hardware and software.
Centralize, where appropriate, bulk purchases of IT-related technologies to drive down the total costs for the University. An example would be to consolidate multiple department purchases of PCs into one very large purchase to reduce the overall cost of each PC.

16. Expand Office of Information Technology support for web-based services to the colleges.
Provide centralized support for web-based applications for the University community. At present, web support is largely decentralized and, in many cases, ad hoc. This approach would provide consistent support across the University.

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