

Jan. 28, 2014

Fran Walley, Chair
Planning and Priorities Committee of Council

Dear Professor Walley

On behalf of the Academic Programs Committee, I wanted to inform you about the results of the two discussions held regarding the TransformUS reports.

Much of our discussion concerned the Academic Program report, its recommendations for overall changes in program directions, and its likely impact on committee workload.

During our first discussion, committee members raised a number of concerns about task force recommendations.

- Regarding the recommendations to delete the three-year degree and post-graduate diplomas, it was noted that some of these programs are directed at mature students and at Aboriginal students; it is an important credential in some communities, particularly in northern Saskatchewan, and for some students (for example, parents studying part-time). To unilaterally disengage from these programs could prove to be a disservice to an important demographic for this university. It was suggested that in many cases these programs could be considered as early exit points rather than as programs in their own right.
- Regarding interdisciplinary programs, the Task Force noted that when they are resourced, they succeed. It was challenging to determine what resources were being allocated to them, and it was likely difficult for the Task Force to understand how these programs function. It was virtually impossible to assign teaching and research effort by faculty teaching in the interdisciplinary programs through the templates. Interdisciplinary programs are celebrated in the university as they are able to take advantage of the breadth of programming offered here and they equip students to succeed in an increasingly complex world. Moreover, interdisciplinary research is becoming the norm where large teams of researchers are expected to tackle research problems. However, interdisciplinary programs continue to be challenging at the University of Saskatchewan; structural changes may be needed to remedy this problem within and between colleges.

- The university is working on a distributed learning strategy based on the principle that students should be able to “learn where they live”. Many believe that these goals are very important for rural and remote communities. If the university wants to succeed with this strategic initiative, there will need to be central support for the distributed learning programs through eMAP and CCDE in particular.
- A problem with program-by-program review is inability to see the connections between programs. The university needs to look at each ranking individually to determine its basis, to be aware of the limitations in the ranking structure, and to not make mechanistic decisions. For example, some intellectually rigorous programs such as Mathematical Physics and Bioinformatics enroll small numbers of academically superior students.

During the next discussion, the committee focused on what impact the task force recommendations would have on its workload and how its review of programs could be informed by the TransformUS templates and approach.

As a committee of Council, our concerns are the quality of programs, the diversity of programs, their alignment with university priorities and their budgetary implications. Committee members discussed whether the review mechanisms and procedures now used would be sufficient in the future, both in terms of assisting colleges with their own review of programs, and providing committee members with sufficient information about programs to make sound recommendations to Council. It was suggested that the committee could discuss issues raised in the report in a pro-active way, with the goal of providing assistance to colleges in dealing with overarching issues such as interdisciplinarity, what distinguishes an honours program, the features of minors and certificates, and so forth. It was noted that there is now a great deal of information about programs available to APC and to the university as a whole, which may make it more feasible to conduct “best practices” reviews of programs offered across the university, such as honours programs. This information could guide program creation, revision and overall administration.

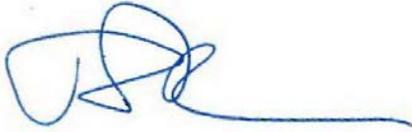
It was also suggested that the committee should reexamine its review processes for program proposals. There should be some recognition of the importance of not continuing to add programs beyond what the institution can support. Given the ad hoc nature of the work done by APC, dealing with programs sent from colleges as they are ready, we anticipate more discussions about these issues.

Over the last year, the Academic Programs Committee has routinely asked colleges proposing new programs to make sure these are reviewed within a three- to five-year schedule, to ensure they are meeting the goals that were outlined in the program proposal.

A subcommittee has now been established to review the criteria for program evaluation and approval and the APC worksheet to ensure these processes consider the university signature areas, the third integrated plan, and the impact of program costs. In particular, the report of this subcommittee will provide recommendations as to how APC can evaluate a proposed program’s cost, and how to measure a program’s success. The issues

raised by the TransformUS task force will contribute to this review. For example, niche programs will need to align with university priorities to be viable; for interdisciplinary programs, it will be important to ensure that there will be resources available to sustain growth, and so forth.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'RD', followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Roy Dobson, Chair

Cc: Members of the Academic Programs Committee
Brett Fairbairn, Provost
Crystal Maslin, Office of the Provost

Task Force Results relevant to Academic Programs Committee and to Council review of programs

1. Academic Program Task Force

The following observations may affect academic programs and/or contain suggestions affecting proposal reviews.

General observations

Interdisciplinary programming. ... the interdisciplinary programs that did less well were those that were most heavily reliant on volunteer efforts of faculty to sustain them. Strong alignment with the strategic directions of the institution was only one component of assessment. Some programs received lower scores because no significant investment of dedicated resources had been made in them, and this was often linked to poor or uncertain outcomes, low levels of demand from students or other constituencies, and an inability to realize fully the collaborative potential of the program. Though participants in these programs are bringing their good will to the enterprise, it is difficult for them to mount effective programs without an adequate resource framework.

Stronger links between related programs. ... more steps could be taken to foster links between academic units offering programs in related areas.

Aboriginal programming. ... alignment with the stated strategic aspirations of the university, albeit significant, was only one in the list of criteria on which our evaluation was based. As with interdisciplinary programs, some of the programs with an Aboriginal focus have languished because the unit or the university has not devoted sufficient resources or attention to them, and some have apparently failed to tap into sufficient student demand to make them sustainable. ... some programs focused on Aboriginal issues are flourishing and merit continued institutional support. A number of units have taken innovative steps, and have established instructional and research programs, as well as centres, that confirm that the university is making progress in fulfilling the ambitions it has articulated in relation to Aboriginal Peoples. ... some programs that do not claim to have a specifically Aboriginal focus have succeeded in attracting increasing numbers of Aboriginal students.

Number of programs within units. ... the number of programs offered by some academic units is beyond their capacity in terms of resources, or has resulted in a dissipation of the focus of the units. ... these programs do constitute a drain on unit resources and energy, and that in a number of instances, the return on these investments is questionable. ... look at the range of programs they offer with a view to deciding whether all of them can be sustained as vibrant and distinct programs. It may be, for example, that a unit could strengthen its undergraduate programs by creating more specialized streams, options or clusters within programs rather trying to maintain a host of independent programs

Three-year bachelor's programs.... for some units, the elimination of the three-year degree program would permit them to focus more intensively on four-year and honours programs, to the benefit of students wishing to specialize in the discipline in a meaningful way. For others, however, the three-year program does represent an important building-block in departmental offerings.

...possibility of eliminating three-year programs for which no positive justification can be made in terms of service to an identifiable student constituency or support for the academic objectives of a unit.

Service teaching. Service teaching in itself makes an obvious contribution to the mission of the university by exposing students at both the undergraduate and graduate level to perspectives beyond their chosen field of study. The information about service teaching also gave us an insight into the wide range of activities to which some units are committed, and the basis these activities might create for links across disciplines or administrative entities.

The value of strong programs. ...we saw evidence in many templates of exceptional student and research outcomes, strong community engagement, national and international reputation, and effective use of resources. ... these very strong programs may provide inspiration and guidance for re-imagination or re-conceptualization.

2. Support Services Task Force

Recommendations regarding the following units may result in policy changes or have impact on academic programs which are monitored by the Academic Programs Committee.

Administrative Unit	Office	Program	Q	Comments of the Task Force
College of Arts and Science	Dean's Office	Academic Programs and Supports	2	
College of Education	Dean's Office	Programs Office	3	Budget allocation seems large
College of Engineering	Academic Program Administration and Student Support		4	Consider reconfiguration to improve effectiveness and improve student outcomes eg retention
College of Graduate Studies and Research	Special projects/International/Recruitment		5	Consider transferring responsibility to SESD, International Office, etc for delivery of this service
College of Medicine	Instructional support – undergraduate medical education		4	Service would be better classified as academic overhead. Make better use of technology. Reconfigure to improve outcomes for medical graduates
	Recruitment and Admissions		2	
College of Nursing	Recruitment and admissions		2	

Western College of Veterinary Medicine	Dean's Office	Recruitment and admissions	4	Explore use of services provided by central recruiting and SESD. With large applicant to acceptance ratio, how much recruiting effort is necessary?
Office of the Provost	Office Of The AVP Student Affairs	Executive office	5	A review and reconfiguration of the structure of SESD is recommended with respect to organizational design eg amount and layers of administration, accountabilities – AVP vs Directors, the number of managers. Student services would benefit from further investment, however an appropriate streamlined leadership structure will be important to ensure students are well served.
		Registrarial services	1	Automation of manual processes through updating of software systems is recommended
		Admissions, Credential Evaluation and Transfer Credit	1	Important to invest in this service in order to increase enrolment while maintaining academic standards. Continue to automate processes and take on mechanical aspects of admission in non-direct-entry colleges and in non-credit programs ie CCDE
		Undergraduate student recruitment	4	Need to integrate, better support and establish balance with student recruitment efforts in academic units. This would reduce duplication and create more consistency among academic units. Consider expanding to include graduate student recruitment.
Office of the Provost	Office of the Vice-Provost Teaching and Learning:		5	Functions and authorities be reviewed in conjunction with clarification of the mandates and review of the funding models, eg operating budget vs fee-for-service, of the units that report to this office (EMAP, CCDE and ULC/GMCTE) The goal would be to eliminate overlap, duplication, and competition among these units and with other units on campus (colleges, ICT) hence

				improving efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery and enhancing accessibility to services. It is not clear that creating a senior administrative position to oversee these units has resulted in better outcomes..
	Centre for Continuing and Distance Education (CCDE)	degree credit distance development delivery and off campus delivery	4	CCDE could be the campus leader for distance delivery, a central support unit working with academic units to deliver courses. However, CCDE mandate would need to be reconsidered to ensure it is meeting the needs of academic units. Revenue sharing model should be reviewed.
	University Learning Centre/GMCTE	director, financial services, curriculum development and instructional design, educational development	5	This unit provides valuable and high quality services,. However, demand for services, more so with GMCTE than with ULC, is not commensurate with the resource allocation.
		Undergraduate support and development	4	Might there be a role for the College of Education here?
University library	Development of collections		1	It is critically important that the university maintain the diversity and quality of its collections, including electronic items.

Quintiles:

Q1 – Candidate for enhanced resourcing

Q2 – Maintain with current resourcing

Q3 – Retain with reduced resourcing

Q4 – Reconfigure for efficiency/effectiveness

Q5 – Candidate for phase out, subject to further review