UNIVERSITY COUNCIL

PLANNING AND PRIORITIES COMMITTEE

REPORT FOR INFORMATION

PRESENTED BY: Fran Walley, Chair, Planning and Priorities Committee

DATE OF MEETING: February 27, 2014

SUBJECT: **TransformUS Program Prioritization Process and the Task Force Reports**

COUNCIL ACTION: For information only

PURPOSE:

The planning and priorities committee is mandated by its terms of reference to seek advice from other Council committees to facilitate university-wide academic planning. This report provides the views of Council committees on the TransformUS program prioritization process and task force reports, including the planning and priorities committee's own perspectives.

A strong majority of the committee submits that irrespective of limitations that have been identified and may yet emerge, engaging in program prioritization is a worthwhile and responsible exercise of self-examination, which the university should undertake periodically. Based on the responses received and the planning and priorities committee's own deliberations, this report also provides a high-level summary of those elements of the TransformUS process to which attention has consistently be drawn as problematic so that these may be addressed in any future program prioritization efforts.

CONSULTATION AND PROCESS:

On December 19, 2013, a letter was submitted by the chair of the planning and priorities committee to all Council committee chairs (attached) requesting that each committee provide its views on the process used to create the reports, any themes the committee saw as emerging, any possible bias(es) that the prioritization process may have unintentionally introduced, and the recommendations within the reports themselves as viewed through the lens of the committee's mandate and terms of reference. Of note, is that each Council committee is comprised of Council and GAA members.

In addition to seeking the advice from other Council committees, the chair and vice-chair of the planning and priorities committee attended the meetings of several Council committees to hear directly from members their views in response to the task force

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reports. The coordinating committee, comprised of the chair and vice-chair of Council and all Council committee chairs, also discussed the process and means for seeking advice proposed by the planning and priorities committee. In order to meet the president's request for feedback on the task force reports, and in recognition of each Council committee's ability to establish its own view on the reports, committees were also asked to provide their feedback to the Provost's Committee on Integrated Planning (PCIP) directly. As Council committees report to Council, each committee's individual response is appended to this report.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND:

On January 24, 2013, Council approved in principle the undertaking of a process for program prioritization for all academic and administrative programs, in recognition of the fact that Council will ultimately be asked to approve any forthcoming recommendations that affect academic programs. This priority ranking of all university programs (academic and service/support) against defined criteria was undertaken to enable the university to allocate operating resources to programs on the basis of priority and to facilitate operating budget adjustments over the next three years without invoking across the board budget reductions. In response, the TransformUS process was undertaken.

In December, 2013, the planning and priorities committee submitted the TransformUS task force reports to Council for information. The committee is now reporting directly on its review, and that of other Council committees, of the task force reports. Development of an implementation plan by PCIP, which will in turn consider the task force reports and feedback received on them, will occur over the coming months with the implementation plan to be completed by April 30, 2014.

DISCUSSION SUMMARY:

Approaches to discussing the reports

Council committees considered the reports in the manner deemed most appropriate, as determined by the chair and respective committee members. The processes undertaken included structured break-out sessions, email comment, and in one instance, consideration of a motion relative to the reports. Due to the number of resource personnel on the committee whose units were reviewed, the planning and priorities committee elected to undertake discussion of the support services report at an *in camera* session comprised of voting members only. All planning and priorities committee members were expected to disclose any conflicts of interest relative to the discussion of both reports. In its review of the reports and with the goal of facilitating discussion at a high level rather than focusing down on details of the reports, the committee engaged in developing a set of suggested principles for PCIP to consider as it creates an implementation plan.

The committee agreed that the responses provided by individual committees spoke for themselves, and that these responses, together with the emerging themes presented in both reports, offered important insights into the prioritization process. Consequently, the

committee has not attempted to summarize the responses received, but rather to provide a summary of the committee's discussion informed by these contributions.

Comments on the process used to rank programs and suggestions for improvement

Given that Council has approved in principle that the university undertake a process of program prioritization, it is important to critique the TransformUS process with the expectation that there may be other prioritization reviews in the future. Importantly, the TransformUS process differed from other review processes approved by Council in the past, such as systematic program review, in that the basis for the review was prompted by the projected budget deficit to avoid across the board budget reductions in favour of selective measures. Undertaking program prioritization distinct from budgetary consideration may have yielded a much different response from the university community, for example, if low quintile rankings were not pointing to consideration of programs to be phased out, but identifying program weaknesses to be strengthened with increased resources.

A strong majority of the committee holds that program prioritization should inform the allocation of resources to programs. This is consistent with the recommendations of both task forces that program prioritization should be repeated in the future, with modifications. As the university has already invested in an integrated planning process, which looks both at the past and to the future and identifies areas for investment and disinvestment, the committee recommends that any future program prioritization efforts be integrated within the university's integrated planning efforts. As integrated planning is a campus-wide exercise that involves administrative and academic units on a cyclic basis, expanding it to include program prioritization would capture the benefit of having a comprehensive review of all programs at a point in time.

Those areas, which the planning and priorities committee found deficient in the TransformUS process and which were reinforced by the comments of other Council committees, are identified below.

Timeframe

Changing the culture of an institution as complex and distributed as the university so that a new process can be introduced requires time for adjustment. As the TransformUS process was driven by the desire to proactively address the university's projected budgetary deficit, the process was condensed in order to derive outcomes that would have a more immediate budgetary impact. This put constraints on providing meaningful and thoughtful feedback to the task force reports, in addition to greatly compressing the time available for the task force members in reviewing the reports. Related to the condensed timeframe, there are concerns that the task of program prioritization that task force members undertook was simply too great, and that the commitment of time and energy surpassed reasonable workload expectations. Any future program prioritization efforts should employ a deliberative approach, which includes the opportunity to ensure all necessary information is available, and that adequate time is provided to assess that

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information and any related recommendations. This must be balanced against the value of an assessment process that captured the state of the university, campus-wide, at a single moment in time.

Data collection

The quantitative data in the templates upon which task force recommendations are based was acknowledged by both task forces to be in some instances incorrect or incomplete. Due to these data shortcomings, extensive further analysis is required prior to advancing any of the recommendations in the reports. Ensuring the integrity, relevance and completeness of the data provided is critical. Due to the concerns about inaccuracy of the data provided, in part, due to the fact that budgets are allocated to units and not to programs, verifying and standardizing the financial information provided with each program and unit is suggested as a necessary step in any future prioritization review process. In this manner, programs and units could raise any issues regarding the data provided prior to a public discussion of the program or unit. Future timeframes should allow for this important check and balance.

Granularity

Providing clear direction of the level of detail desired will enhance efficiency of the process and ensure that individuals associated with programs and units are not identifiable. The level of fine granularity in some instances in the TransformUS reports, particularly the support services report, created the potential for feedback to be misread as commenting on the performance of individuals and their position responsibilities, rather than on programs and units as collective entities.

Structure versus Function of Support Services

Making clear the difference between structure and function so that the function and purpose of essential services are valued, notwithstanding any structural or organizational impediments that hinder the delivery of those services is an important distinction to capture. This would either require providing reviewers with some scope to make value judgments of what is fundamentally important in a university setting or providing reviewers with some direction on key supports.

SUMMARY

The program prioritization process is not without limitations, and the committee acknowledges the stress upon faculty, staff and students that the TransformUS process has generated, and continues to generate. The TransformUS reports can be viewed as one component of a decision making process, which should be supported by further input and assessment, particularly of the complex inter-relationships of programs and support services, before any decisions are made. A strong majority of the planning and priorities committee supports program prioritization, based on the view that reviewing our academic programs and support services yields valuable insight and information about

the many parts that constitute the whole. As such, the process of program prioritization provides a unique campus-wide assessment, which gives us a place from which to debate the merits of continuing or discontinuing our present array of programs and services that support academic endeavors.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Planning and priorities committee request of Council committees dated December 19, 2013

2. Responses from Council committees to PCIP submitted January 29 and 30, 2014:
    *   Academic programs committee
    *   Governance committee
    *   International activities committee
    *   Nominations committee
    *   Planning and priorities committee
    *   Research, scholarly and artistic work committee
    *   Scholarship and awards committee
    *   Teaching, learning and academic resources committee

3. Academic Programs Transformation Task Force Report

4. Support Services Transformation Task Force Report

    The task force reports are available at http://words.usask.ca/transformus/reports/

5. A description of the TransformUS process and Task Force committees is available at: http://www.usask.ca/finances/project_initiatives/transformus/taskforces.php

UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN

MEMORANDUM

TO: <>, chair, <> committee of Council

FROM: Fran Walley, chair, planning and priorities committee of Council

DATE: December 19, 2013

RE: **TransformUS Reports: Council committee feedback**

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I am writing to invite you as chair of the <> committee to consider how you might engage your committee and provide feedback on the TransformUS task force reports. As you know, the university community has been invited at large to engage in the consultation phase of the TransformUS task force reports by providing feedback to PCIP. As the planning and priorities committee terms of reference state that the committee is responsible to seek advice from other Council committees to facilitate university-wide academic planning, on behalf of the committee I am coordinating the response of Council committees to the reports.

The planning and priorities committee is interested specifically in your committee's views on the process used to create the reports, any themes the committee sees as emerging, any possible bias(es) that the prioritization process may have unintentionally introduced, and the recommendations within the reports themselves as viewed through the lens of the committee's mandate and terms of reference. The intent is that the planning and priorities committee will submit its report on the taskforce reports to Council in February, and will append to its report any submissions received from Council committees. Your committee's feedback and comments will assist the planning and priorities committee in preparing a comprehensive report that not only provides the planning and priorities committee's view, but encompasses the views and perspectives provided by other Council committees.

The consultation and review process of the task force reports ends on January 31st. Given the TransformUS timelines and the fact that PCIP is having a day-long retreat on January 31 to review the feedback received during the consultation phase and begin its work on the implementation plan, committee chairs are asked to provide any written feedback electronically to me, copied to the provost as chair of PCIP no later than January 30.

If you have any questions about the process outlined, please contact me at 966-6854 or by email to fran.walley@usask.ca.

Sincerely,

c   Jay Kalra, Council chair
        Brett Fairbairn, provost and vice-president academic