

February 6, 2006

## **PRIORITIZATION TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS**

### Introduction

Program prioritization is in essence a process of self-study and reflection designed to develop and inform our understanding of our academic programs and the resources that support them in order to make planned and systematic changes that enhance quality and effectiveness. The process examines the current status of educational offerings, assesses the future potential of those programs, and identifies opportunities for program alignment and reinvestment to strengthen the University. Program prioritization enables the University community to take control of its resources and direction, ensure quality, and chart its future.

Review of academic programs is one element of a more general process of analysis and planning at ISU. All units are conducting reviews for efficiency, effectiveness, and potential reorganization. Student Affairs, for example, provides information about their unit self-inspection process at <http://www.indstate.edu/studentaffairsresearch/UnitSelfInsp.htm>. Units in the Division of Academic Affairs such as the library and the Office of Information Technology will be reviewed next year. This sequencing is necessary to promote a manageable process.

Indiana State University will be strengthened if it supports and nurtures high quality programs that are aligned with student demand; regional, state, and community needs; and the University's strategic goals. Becoming recognized and known for high quality programs will attract more high-achieving faculty, staff, and students and increase support from alumni and external funding sources.

Several external forces bring the need for prioritization into clear focus. These include issues and concerns raised by the Indiana Commission for Higher Education (ICHE) and the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association (NCA) and forces that affect

enrollment and funding. Particular concern arises from NCA feedback criticizing the large number of majors offered by the University, the erosion of enrollments as a direct consequence of competition from other institutions, the establishment of the community college system that has impacted freshmen enrollment, and the reduction in funding from the State of Indiana. These forces underscore that faculty and administration must exercise responsibility for ensuring that academic programs are organized to achieve the University's mission in a manner that is consistent with academic quality, student interest, and available resources.

In response to the charge, the Task Force has articulated a process for prioritization designed to position the University's programs and course offerings to achieve the University's goals. The anticipated result of this process will be to retain and strengthen programs aligned with institutional goals, thereby enhancing the University's program quality, reputation, and enrollment. It is also anticipated that some programs will no longer exist and others will undergo significant revision consistent with the goals of increasing quality, efficiency, and effectiveness. While there are long-term positive consequences critical to the University's future success, the process will negatively affect some programs and faculty. Therefore, the Task Force believes that it is essential that faculty leaders and administrators develop consensus about the need and the lasting positive effects of the prioritization process in order to sustain efforts through this difficult process.

Members of the Task Force believe the following underscore the necessity of program prioritization:

- Excellence demands focus and commitment.

- In order to ensure continued effectiveness, an organization must assess and evaluate what is working, identify areas of potential growth and expansion, and determine how the organization can best be positioned for the future.
- The University operates in a highly-competitive environment where not advancing means falling behind.
- The University must use its resources in ways that best serve its students and the citizens of the State of Indiana.
- By trying to be all things to all people, limited resources are thinly stretched and all programs are disadvantaged.
- Virtually all programs that have undergone the process of external review have received recommendations that they need additional resources, usually up-to-date technology, equipment, and laboratory renovation.

The accreditation reviews by NCA and examinations by the ICHE both express strong concern about University programs with low enrollment and few graduates. The evaluations by these groups are particularly critical for the University community to understand and address.

Both the ICHE, which recommends university budgets to the Indiana General Assembly, and the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association (NCA), which accredits the University, have scrutinized program productivity. The ICHE questions why ISU continues programs that have not graduated at least ten students in the last five years and is concerned about careful use of state resources and how programs with low productivity can be justified to the legislature and the public. The ICHE is also concerned that the relative costs of education at ISU are greater than those at other state-supported universities and is unsympathetic to

explanations that ISU enrollment has decreased as a consequence of State-initiated programs. The ICHE position can be addressed only by assertive and effective reform.

Furthermore, during the last accreditation review by NCA (2000), the reviewers made clear that ISU must address the problem of low-enrollment programs. (The report is posted at [http://www.indstate.edu/acad-aff/caac/2003-04/nca\\_comp\\_visit\\_rppt.pdf](http://www.indstate.edu/acad-aff/caac/2003-04/nca_comp_visit_rppt.pdf)). Although the reviewers were very positive about most aspects of ISU, the glaring exception to their positive assessment is the need to reduce the number of low-enrollment programs and courses. The report states that: “the university must give the highest possible priority to the implementation of processes to redirect the use of resources historically allocated to low-enrollment programs so that these resources can be reallocated to support the achievement of the higher priority goals of the new strategic plan” (p. 19). The report also notes that:

the self-study agrees that there may be too many programs for the size of the faculty and student body. It is time to develop the mechanism to effectively address this concern. Addressing this issue will require strong administrative and faculty leadership and is likely to result in resources that can be reinvested/reallocated in the academic area to further move Indiana State University forward in accomplishing its goals (pp. 19-20).

NCA’s concern about low-enrollment programs is not new. The report states: “The team notes with concern that the subject of resources allocated to maintain the operation of low enrollment programs and courses has been addressed by the past two NCA visiting teams and is, for the third visit, a concern for this visiting team.”

Programs with low enrollment typically result in numerous undersubscribed classes. During the 2004-05 academic year, ISU offered 431 regular undergraduate sections that enrolled ten or fewer students.<sup>1</sup> This number of undersubscribed sections is very costly. The NCA report

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<sup>1</sup> Sections are combined and counted as one if taught by same instructor at same time/place (layered courses). This count excludes courses with no day/time (Web, arranged, etc.). Enrollment in IHETS sections is combined with enrollment in corresponding on-campus sections.

points out that “each section taught with a small number of students consumes at least as much preparation time and faculty salary as would be required if directed to a large enrollment course” (p. 25).

The 2000 NCA report ends with the following statement:

The university is an exceptional example of quality higher education...While complimenting the university for the achievements made since the 1990 comprehensive visit, the team challenged the university to address the reallocation of resources from low enrollment programs to provide additional support for the accomplishment of the many priority goals identified through this strategic planning process of the self-study (p. 35).

It is clear that low-enrollment courses and programs will be at the top of the list of concerns when NCA visits ISU in 2010. The University must provide evidence of real progress in reducing the number of low-enrollment programs and courses and reinvesting in programs high in quality and effectiveness.

While the above considerations strongly convince members of the Task Force of the compelling need, perspectives have been encountered that challenge the need for prioritization and redistribution of resources. At the program level, some have asserted that their program does not use resources. However, Dickeson,<sup>2</sup> who is a leading expert in prioritizing academic programs, states “All programs require resources. They tap from the time, treasure, and talent pool available to the institution. Stated another way, if a program truly consumes no resources, it is not a program. Falling for the ‘it takes no resources’ argument further diminishes institutional focus” (p. 93).

It has also been suggested that the Program Array Review (PAR) process conducted three years ago resulted in sufficient reduction of programs to a point that further elimination or consolidation is unnecessary. The PAR process resulted in the suspension or elimination of several programs but did not result in significant savings and discontinued only programs that

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<sup>2</sup> Dickeson, R.C. (1999). *Prioritizing academic programs and services*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

had no viability. Furthermore, comparison of the number of programs at ISU with those at institutions with similar resources reveals that the other institutions offer substantially fewer programs.

In reviewing the literature, the Task Force believes that a number of negative outcomes will result if ISU does not prioritize programs and redistribute resources. Consequences include:

- A universal weakening of all programs due to overextension of resources.
- Mediocrity due to the overextensions, thereby reducing resources available for investment in the University's future.
- Stronger programs unable to realize their potential.
- Negative perceptions by many elected officials and state policymakers with consequent recommendations for greater constraints on state support.

Because ISU must address low-enrollment courses and programs before its next NCA review, avoidance or delay are not options. We can either prioritize programs now in a thoughtful and deliberative manner with involvement across the University community, or do so in a year or two with less opportunity for campus-wide involvement due to expediency necessary to meet NCA deadlines.

The process proposed is difficult and, in some instances, may have significant negative consequences for programs and faculty despite the best efforts to soften the impact. The Task Force believes that in order to sustain the University community through the prioritization process there must be broad-based consensus that this effort is critical to the well-being of the University and the prioritization process must receive commitment and involvement by programs, departments, governance at all levels, and administrators.

## **Goals and Charge to the Task Force**

Provost Maynard appointed the Task Force on Prioritization of Academic Programs in October. The list of members is attached in the appendix. The Task Force is to make recommendations to the Provost for consideration and implementation on the process of prioritizing academic programs. The specific charges to the Task Force are:

- Develop processes in sufficient clarity for the campus to implement. The processes must provide opportunities for input at the department, college, and university levels.
- Recommend criteria for decision-making.
- Ensure the alignment of all processes and criteria with the University Mission and Strategic Plan.

Additionally, to provide sufficient resources to invest in programs identified as central to the University's future, the Task Force was charged to identify two million dollars for reinvestment. Depending upon the programs affected and the nature of the final decisions, two to three years may be necessary to redistribute the targeted funds. The goal of this process is to identify resources to reinvest in academic programs. Background on the process is available in a paper entitled "Prioritizing Academic Programs and Services" posted at the Task Force Web site, <http://www.indstate.edu/site/acad-aff/2757.html>

## **Development of Criteria and Data**

Work by three Faculty Senate committees has played a central role in development of criteria and data. The Curriculum and Academic Affairs Committee (CAAC) received the charge below from the Senate Executive Committee. Graduate Council and the Faculty Affairs Committee (FAC) received very similar charges.

Review the prioritization scheme developed in the book *Prioritizing Academic Programs and Services*. Then develop, with input from Grad Council and FAC, a set of criteria that

can be used in evaluating program viability. We must not accept externally provided criteria without our modification and approval. This is our primary authority.

The focus should be on establishing a **multiple** criteria scheme that captures the many various contributions that programs make that allow the university to accomplish its mission. One size does not fit all.

Each Faculty Senate committee developed a separate document. They are posted at the Web site for the Prioritization Task Force. To reduce the reporting burden on departments, the Task Force developed a reporting procedure with fewer criteria than were listed in the original committee documents.

### **Principles Informing the Prioritization Process**

The work of the Prioritization Task Force has been guided by principles embedded in the charge from the Provost, input from governance groups, and values reflected in the Task Force members' deliberations. The principles are presented below and provide a context for the prioritization process.

The principle of *fairness* has guided the Task Force in designing the prioritization process. Essential to fairness are *reliability of data* and its *comparability across programs*. Reliability is fostered by identifying relevant criteria, objective measures, multiple and independent sources of rating and ranking, and applying equivalent procedures to all programs. The process must also address the inherent complexity of analyzing individual and unique programs, interpreting measures, applying them to comprehensive evaluations, examining interactions among different variables, and generating recommendations. Those who rate and rank programs and generate recommendations must exercise judgment and choice. In order to ensure the fairness of assessments requiring judgment, the process has incorporated multiple and independent ratings that provide a basis for establishing reliability and recognizing differences in

perception. The final recommendations must be reviewed by appropriate faculty governance groups and academic administrators.

Fairness also dictates that the process be conducted in a manner open to scrutiny by all members of the academic community through the publication of all data, reports, rankings, and prioritizations. In addition, fairness dictates that confidentiality of an individual's decisions in rating, ranking, prioritizing, and in deliberating recommendations. Confidentiality for participants is an important safeguard to preserve process integrity.

Process *integrity* is also fostered by limiting an individual rater's input to one set of ratings for any program and recusal by raters from review of programs in order to avoid any appearance of conflict of interest. Programs must contribute to integrity of the process by accurately and honestly presenting and interpreting data. Furthermore, the process is best served when the faculty of the program under review: 1) provide input that demonstrates rather than declares that the criteria are met, 2) do not withhold relevant information, and 3) accurately portray accomplishments. Finally, process integrity requires that faculty and administration be engaged in a collaborative effort that conforms to the *University Handbook*.

The Task Force is aware of both positive and negative effects for individual programs and faculty inherent in the prioritization process. This has informed the Task Force's commitment to *fairness, reliability, openness, and integrity*. Furthermore, the implementation of recommendations arising from the prioritization process must strive to minimize potential negative impact on students and faculty.

### **Organizational Development**

The first issue the Task Force addressed was defining what constitutes an academic program. Operationally, "program" could be defined as any academic activity or collection of

activities that consumes resources including facilities, equipment, money, and time. Within any given department or unit there may be multiple, overlapping, programs. Thus, majors, minors, certificates, and various concentrations or areas of emphasis might all be identified as programs, but within a department some or all may overlap.

After considerable deliberation the Task Force elected to define academic programs as:

- Majors
- Minors or certificates requiring six or more hours not offered within a major
- Master's degrees, with the exception of master's degrees that are embedded within a doctoral program
- Specialist's degrees
- Doctoral degrees

The following will **not** be treated as separate programs: Minors, certificates, or master's in which all or nearly all (not exceeding six hours of coursework) of the required courses are also required in a program that is more inclusive (e.g. major or doctoral program).

In other words, minors or certificates that share resources and are totally subsumed under the major will be identified as subprograms of the major; they will not be rated or reviewed separately from the major, although they will be identified and may be evaluated. Minors or certificates not associated with a major will be identified as separate programs. At the graduate level, doctoral and specialist's degrees and most master's degrees will be identified as programs, but master's programs completely contained (not including thesis credits, master's projects, practica, field placements, and similar courses) within a doctoral program will be treated as subprograms.

In some colleges there may be academic programs that do not conform to the traditional departmental/program configuration. In these instances, the dean, in consultation with faculty, will recommend to the Task Force how these programs should be organized for analysis.

The process for identifying programs for review will be implemented by college deans in consultation with department chairs, or by a leader designated by the dean if the degree or certificate is not associated with a department. A list of programs in each college, identified by Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) Code (a classification scheme from the federal government) by degree level, has been sent to the dean of each college. The dean will work with each chairperson to identify the programs and subprograms for each department. In instances in which the program designation is not appropriate for the unit, the dean will recommend an appropriate system of designating programs for the Task Force to consider. The dean will forward to the Task Force a list of programs and subprograms for each department or other unit. The Task Force will review and approve the lists and consult with the dean to address questions and concerns.

### **Program Report**

The Program Report will provide data and information for each of six criteria:

- I. Consistency with University Mission, Vision, Values, and Goals and Goals for Higher Education in Indiana<sup>3</sup>
- II. External and Internal Demand
- III. Quality
- IV. Productivity, Costs, and Efficiency
- V. Potential

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<sup>3</sup> Posted at <http://www.indstate.edu/site/acad-aff/2757.html> .

## VI. Crucial information not addressed by other criteria

The report format is posted at the Task Force Web site. The department will submit a report for each program using the format below. The report will be no longer than 10 pages, double spaced, 12 point type, Times New Roman, in MS Word.

All of the department's programs will be addressed together but rated and ranked separately. Thus, if a department has a major, minor, master's degree, and doctorate, and the courses in the minor and master's degree are the same as those required in the major and doctorate respectively, then only the major and the doctoral program would be reviewed.

The reports will be used by the college review committees and deans to rate the program on each criterion and rank the programs within the college and then by the Task Force to rank the programs within the University. Due to the nature and size of the task, standing academic review committees within a college may or may not be organized in a manner that would allow their members to effectively prioritize programs. Therefore, the governance group within each college will identify a College Review Committee. The Review Committee may be organized in a manner that is most fitting to the individual college and may use the standing academic review body of the college or a group constituted by the college governance group. The college review process should provide for interaction with all faculty and ensure that everyone has a voice. The Review Committee may employ panels or other organization to conduct ratings of each criterion and ranking for the entire college. If the College Review Committee employs panels or other sub-groups for making the ratings, the final ratings and rankings must be approved by the entire group. The Task Force will provide support and training for college review committees.

## **Special Cases**

The General Education Program, the Teacher Education Program, the Business Core Curriculum, and other special cases will need different forms of analysis. While the resources associated with General Education may be accounted for through the departments, the Task Force believes that it would be best to address the program as a whole. This process is described in the “Prioritization Process” section of this paper. The form of analysis for the other special cases will be determined by the dean.

## **Information**

The Task Force has established a Web site where the campus community can access, as the information is available, OSPIRE, Office of Sponsored Programs, and University Budget Office data on the programs, program reports, College Review Committee and college dean ratings and ranking of programs, and results of the reviews of General Education. The Task Force will inform the campus community through Global Email as information is posted on the Web site.

## **Prioritization Process**

The prioritization process will begin at the program level. Data from OSPIRE<sup>4</sup> and the Office of Sponsored Programs will be provided for each program. Each department or group identified by the college dean will conduct a review that will be summarized in a report following the format provided by the Task Force. Program faculty and the chair of the department will approve the program report. In addition to information about the current and past characteristics of the program, the report asks programs to describe potential plans for

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<sup>4</sup> Data for programs that have changed title or department may be listed under the old and new title/department. This is to accurately reflect history. In these cases, programs should describe the change in the appropriate sections of the report, such as including the aggregate totals for the program.

reallocation and increasing efficiency. Programs are encouraged to examine and comment on the number of courses and sections offered and whether course offerings could be rendered more efficient. Programs may determine that removing some subprograms and reducing course offerings would strengthen the program and potentially move it up in the ranking.

By March 31 electronic and paper copies of the Program Prioritization Report for each department will be forwarded to the academic dean who will in turn distribute the reports to the College Review Committee. On the basis of the Program Report and in consultation with the college dean, by April 28 the College Review Committee will rate all programs on each criterion and rank all programs within the college. All programs within a department should be evaluated at the same time. If needed, the college committee may request additional information or clarification from the program. The College Review Committee will forward the ratings and rankings of all programs to the college dean. By May 15 the deans will also rate and rank all programs and forward both sets of ratings and rankings to the Task Force.

As noted above, the General Education Council, building upon the work that it has already started, will review the General Education program and make recommendations to increase focus and efficiency, while maintaining or enhancing quality. The Council will recommend an optimum course inventory by core area, including suggested courses for Web delivery to meet the needs of distance education students. The Council's analysis and recommendations should be informed by the Indiana Commission for Higher Education's implementation of Indiana law regarding the transfer of courses among Indiana public colleges and universities.

By March 31 the General Education Council recommendations will be forwarded to CAAC. By April 28 CAAC will then review them and make recommendations and forward the

reports to the Task Force. The information will be shared as soon as it is available with the departments that offer the general education courses.

The Task Force will collect, collate, and employ the ratings and rankings by the College Review Committees and the college deans in rating and ranking programs. The Task Force will integrate findings from the review of General Education into review of the programs. By July 10 the Task Force will rate and rank programs from across the University. The Task Force will return the ratings and ranking for each college to the dean, at which time the dean may consult with departments to identify strategies that would increase program efficiency and effectiveness or to provide recommendations for consolidation or discontinuation. Deans will send these recommendations to the Task Force. By August 4 recommendations will be returned to the Task Force. The information will be used in developing final prioritization and recommendations. On the basis of all available information, the Task Force will place each program into one of five categories:

1. candidate for enrichment,
2. retain at a higher level of support,
3. retain at a neutral level of support,
4. retain at a lower level of support,
5. candidate for phasing out, reduction, or consolidation.

The prioritization by the Task Force will take place in three panels, and the membership on the panels will be systematically rotated to vary the composition of panel members making the ratings and rankings. The programs within a department will be evaluated together to allow for assessment of their interactions but rated and ranked separately.

By September 1 the Task Force will submit ratings, rankings, final prioritization, and recommendations to the Provost. The final assignment to categories will be made by the entire Task Force with members recusing themselves for potential conflicts of interest. The Task Force will work with the Office of Academic Affairs to estimate funds available for redistribution.

The Provost will share the findings with the campus community and develop recommendations that will then go in September to the Curriculum and Academic Affairs Committee, Graduate Council, and Faculty Senate for input. Upon receipt of their recommendations the Provost will forward the final set of recommendations to the Faculty Senate for a vote at their October meeting. Recommendations from the Faculty Senate will be sent to the Provost. The Provost and President will then make the final recommendations to the Board of Trustees.

## Appendix

### Task Force Membership

Task force members include faculty from all colleges. Most were recommended by Faculty Senate Executive Committee. Members are listed below.

Brad Balch, chairperson, Educational Leadership, Administration, and Foundations

Will Barratt, Educational Leadership, Administration, and Foundations

Sue Berta, chairperson, Geography, Geology, and Anthropology

Blanche Evans, Physical Education

Ron Green, dean, College of Business

Harriet Hudson, English

Dave Malooley, Electronics and Computer Technology

Connie McLaren, Operations Management and Analysis

Marcia Miller, Nursing

Michael J. Murphy, Psychology

Tom Sauer, dean, College of Arts and Sciences

Karen Schmid, Office of Academic Affairs

Kevin Snider, OSPIRE, ex officio

Diann McKee, Budget Office, ex officio