

Joint Retrenchment Committee Recommended Criteria for Academic Program Evaluation and Comprehensive University Planning August 25, 2003

Introduction

The Joint Retrenchment Committee (JRC)-a Board-authorized University body with representation from administration, faculty, and students-has completed its response to President Norton on the financial-exigency issue, and turns now to a consideration of criteria for academic program evaluation in the context of the comprehensive planning currently being conducted by several University bodies.

The JRC has discussed these criteria in two full meetings and in a meeting of an ad-hoc sub-committee, drawing on both the 1998 internal planning document developed out of the office of Academic Affairs with input from the University community and on the recent book on university planning by ex-UNC president Robert Dickeson. In using the Kovar and Dickeson documents as catalysts for discussion, the JRC is not endorsing either *in toto*, and goes beyond both in expressing positives and concerns about the use of various criteria in the University planning process. These criteria are not arranged in a specific order of priority or importance.

1. History, development and expectations of the program

Knowledge of the history, development, and expectations of an academic program is an essential component in an informed evaluation of the current state of that program. Relevant information includes the date of establishment of the program, academic antecedents for it, the program's original mission and goals, and how the program has changed and matured over the years.

2. Centrality to Statutory Mission

The JRC believes that UNC's statutory mission should drive University planning criteria. The mission clearly states that UNC "shall offer a comprehensive array of baccalaureate programs." The JRC takes this to mean that the University has a primary obligation to deliver majors, minors, and general education. Therefore, the departments that deliver these essential programs should be given special emphasis in University planning. At the graduate level, the mission stresses UNC's statewide authority to deliver programs in education. In University planning then, graduate programs should receive special scrutiny. The language of the statutory mission, indicating that UNC will offer masters and doctoral degrees primarily in the fields of education, indicates that being in a field of education is an important criterion, but not the only possible one, for inclusion in the University's programmatic array. We believe that another should be a compelling statewide need for graduates with the credential conferred by the program that is not adequately met by programs at other institutions in the state. Uniqueness of a program may be a plus, especially at the graduate level, but for the undergraduate core of programs lack of uniqueness should not be considered to be a weakness.

3. External demand for the program

The demand for the program needs to be distinguished from the demand for the credentials which the program confers. National trends are applicable only if they correspond with regional demand.

4. Internal demand for the program

“Many academic programs are necessary simply because they are required to support other programs.”¹ The number of program majors and minors, and the degree to which courses in the program are needed to serve students in other programs are both factors in assessing internal demand. Additionally, a number of programs offer courses, which meet the needs of the General Education curriculum as well as requirements in their own major and minor. This factor also needs to be measured in an assessment of internal demand.

5. Quality of program inputs and processes/quality of program outcomes

Quality is difficult to determine and, arguably, not quantifiable. If program evaluation and prioritization is used as part of comprehensive review to strengthen and enhance programs university wide, then using quality as a criterion is justified. On the other hand, great caution must be used in considering quality-especially quality of faculty-as a factor to be used in connection with a reduction in force. A reduction in force must not be confused with dismissal for cause. In so far as subjective judgments, exercised by administrators, are indispensable to qualitative judgments, there is a danger that academic freedom will be compromised.

Measures of this criterion may include the following factors: faculty and staff credentials, skills, and capacities; student performance as indicated by scores of students on national and state tests; level of faculty and student participation in research, scholarship, and creative work, service, etc.; teaching evaluations.

6. Size, scope and productivity of the program

Program productivity measures may include, but are not limited to, Student Credit Hour (SCH) production, enrollment, degrees granted, and number of courses offered.

7. Revenue and other resources generated by the program

Institutional revenue will be assigned based on SCH production of the program. Other sources of revenue may include research grants, funded project grants, fundraising, endowments, equipment grants, cash funds, etc.

8. Costs and other expenses associated with the program

“Analyzing program costs, as against program revenues, is a key criterion. Obviously some programs are more expensive than others. Some are more productive. Decisions made solely on this criterion would result in a seriously imbalanced institution at the same time that certain programs may be found to be too costly for the resources available.”²

Examination of program costs needs to consider what the structural discipline based costs are for delivering the program rather than the accidental costs for current delivery of the program. For example, faculty salaries in the discipline nationally, rather than the salaries for faculty at UNC in the discipline, would give a truer picture of structural costs for the program, rather than costs attributable to the accident of demographics in a particular department or program.

Costs will be measured by direct and indirect expenses of the program.

9. Future Potential of the Program

This criterion involves evaluation of untapped demand, potential strategies to enhance revenue and contain costs, etc., which the providers of the program may not have considered previously.

Summary

Parallel to a comprehensive prioritization of academic program, a similar comprehensive evaluation of the non-instructional components of UNC should be done. The portion of UNC's budget which is directed to Instruction is between 50% and 55%. It is reasonable to assume that savings could also be identified in a comprehensive review and evaluation of non-instructional activities of the university, which comprise the balance of UNC's state-appropriated budget.

1. Robert C. Dickeson, *Prioritizing Academic Programs and Services* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, A Wiley Company, 1999), 61.

2. *Ibid.*, 70.