

A SPECIAL REPORT

of the Academic Priorities Council

Proposing Amendments to

the Termination and Reduction Procedures

Previously Adopted by the Faculty Senate

to be presented

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Introduction and Background

During the past year, the Faculty Senate has adopted two different reports proposed by the Academic Priorities Council, one setting forth procedures to be used in program termination (Sen. Doc. 90-064), the other in program reduction (Sen. Doc. 91-014A). It did so to enable the campus to avoid across-the-board cuts which are widely viewed as having the effect of reducing the scope and size of programs regardless of their importance or quality. It was believed that such across-the-board cuts would have a widespread demoralizing impact on the whole campus.

Reason for the Report

When the Reduction document was presented to the Senate, the body was informed that the Council would report to the Senate after the termination and reduction procedures had been used and tested.

PART I: TERMINATIONS

Four academic units were originally targeted for termination. Because of a substantial problem in the central Administration's data describing the Professional Preparation Program in the School of Physical Education, this program has now been placed on the reduction list.

The termination process for the other three units has continued throughout the year, and the review of the three proposed terminations is now in progress, as provided by Senate Doc. 90-064. In due course the Academic Priorities Council will provide the Senate with a separate special report relating to those three programs.

PART II: REDUCTIONS

Initially, ten programs were identified by the administration as possible candidates for reduction. In nine of the targeted programs, multilateral negotiations involving the Provost, deans, department heads and individual faculty members were initiated. In some cases these negotiations were relatively brief; in others they lasted several months. Eventually agreement was reached and significant savings were achieved, although it should be noted that the savings achieved were not so great as had once been anticipated, in part because the reduction targets were reduced as the negotiations were carried out.

Because it is expected that the negotiations with individual faculty members will result in the desired savings over the projected three year period, the Administration has concluded that the 1990-1991 reduction process has been carried out within the normal parameters of departmental size negotiations. In effect, this means that the Academic Priorities Council was neither asked to review them nor to act upon them. Nevertheless, the Council did not feel that it was absolved from evaluating the process at the end of the reduction cycle. Accordingly, a modest effort has been made to evaluate the reduction process.

The Council contacted each of the units targeted for reduction by telephoning or writing letters to chairs of the affected programs and to the chairs of the respective personnel committees. Seven responses were received. However the disappointingly small number of responses is somewhat offset by the fact that the responses are highly similar to each other.

The Academic Priorities Council 1990 Reduction Report expressed the hope that being singled out for reduction would not necessarily be viewed as a badge of dishonor. Unfortunately, the opposite turned out to be the case.

The responses received suggest, first, that the programs were rather unhappy that their units had been chosen for reduction. The unhappiness appears to have both substantive and procedural origins. This sentiment was never better expressed than by the respondent who wrote:

As almost everyone on Campus we in our Department were very upset about the way the reduction program was instituted and not only because we were immediately affected by it.

Second, the responses tended to fault the quality and accuracy of the data that were used to justify their inclusion on the reduction list. The Administration was faulted by some departments on account of the fact that "a committee of five administrators" had made the initial decisions about departments and programs "on the basis of statistics which in many instances proved to be highly questionable."

The inadequacy of the data used by the central administration to arrive at its initial judgments was a recurring theme in the other responses received. Some of the responding programs felt that the Administration should have made a greater effort to obtain up-to-date and accurate data from the departments themselves, rather than relying on data provided by the deans, or data obtained from the Office of Institutional Research and Planning which is part of the central administration. One respondent put it this way;

Information about programs was requested from the Dean's level rather than from the programs themselves. Thus data that were sent to the administration were not reviewed by us, nor were we informed that it had been sent over until afterwards. As a result, the data used to make decisions were seriously flawed, outdated, and sometimes absolutely incorrect.

Another major concern expressed by one respondent was that:

The entire process of reductions . . . took place with minimal faculty involvement. When faculty involvement was sought, it was after the fact and only to support decisions that had already been made.

Another major concern was the method used to measure faculty productivity in research and publications. A typical comment follows:

More important is the need for a more adequate means of measuring faculty productivity than the merely quantitative one used in the Rossi Report. Even if the data had been anywhere near correct in regard to (our department), they would not have provided a reliable qualitative index. Every effort should be made to develop more sensitive measures of the quality of productivity, and this should be done as soon as possible.

It is fair to say that some of the programs targeted for reduction concluded that the process was "fatally flawed." One respondent wrote:

. . . the report and its repercussions should vaporize, if that were a possibility, and that any future incarnations should be prepared by a more deliberative process. In the process, the Provost's Office might establish broader guidelines, such as appropriate size of each College and suggested criteria for evaluating suitability for reduction or termination. But decisions on reduction or elimination of programs within Colleges must clearly be left to the appropriate Deans and their advisory groups.

A very similar point of view was expressed in the closing paragraph of another respondent's letter to the Council. He said:

Finally, I wonder if the whole mechanism for reduction so awkwardly implemented last fall is really very useful or efficient. It seemed to me that the Administration was far too remote from the realities of structure and content at the departmental level to make appropriate determinations of target for either reduction or termination. I would favor a mechanism which places the determination of such matters, not in the hands of a small committee created by the Provost, but within the administration of each MBU.

PART III: SUMMARY OF PROBLEMS

Some readers will choose to interpret this report as an indictment of the termination and reduction procedures developed by the Council and adopted by the Senate. Others will choose to place the blame elsewhere. To the Academic Priorities Council, however, the value of this Report is that it pinpoints several unexpected developments and problems that emerged as the dual process of termination and reduction evolved. These are:

Inadequacy of Original Briefs

The urgency of the 1989-91 fiscal crisis, and the fact that it seemed to get worse with each passing day compelled the Administration to act more hastily than might have been the case in more normal times. One result of this situation was that the Administration was forced to rely on central data generated by the Office of Institutional Research and Planning. A consequence was that the original briefs called for in both documents were neither as detailed nor as accurate as might have been the case, had more time been available. In any event, several of the targeted departments were forced to spend their time correcting the data. In some areas, the units seem to have spent more time correcting the briefs than in developing the unit's response, as called for in the procedures.

Application of the Criteria

It appears that the criteria used by the Administration in the initial round of terminations and reductions announced last October were heavily weighted toward instructional effort at the undergraduate level and ignored graduate teaching. Other subjective criteria—such as research productivity, reputation, intellectual liveliness, uniqueness and centrality—were apparently not given much consideration. The procedures did not fully follow the evaluative criteria set forth in the termination and reduction documents.

Further, while some programs of great research productivity were targeted for termination or reduction because of a lack of undergraduate students, in no case was a program with high undergraduate enrollments included in either list because of a lack of scholarly or creative quality.

Negotiations

In the deliberations that led to Senate Documents No. 90-064 and No. 91-014A, the Council did not anticipate the large number of personnel negotiations that ensued in the wake of program reduction and termination announcements made on October 11. However, the sense of the Council is that good-faith negotiations are far more preferable as a means of resolving critical termination and reduction issues than is the adversarial administration vs. faculty model that the Council had originally anticipated. Some of these negotiations may have occurred in an environment involving excessive pressure.

Timetable

The timetables proposed in the two documents proved to be unworkable, because they turned out to be too rigid. Neither provided for the annual extended break from mid-December through the end of January. The Council is reluctant to suggest revised timetables, because it is unlikely that any alternative proposed would be flexible enough to accommodate all eventualities.

Distribution Requirement

The Termination document requires that “After the brief has been developed, and the program’s response has been submitted, the Dean shall distribute the brief and the program’s initial response to all MBU faculty members.” In practice this proved to be an unrealistic requirement, in part because some of the program responses were very lengthy documents, and also because some of the MBUs consist of a very large number of persons. To make copies available to all would have been very time consuming, and very expensive.

During the first round of terminations, a sensible compromise was adopted, and a change in the document is proposed to make it a permanent part of the termination process.

PART IV: CONCLUSIONS

The Council identified three alternative courses of action. The first would be to do nothing, and to assume that neither the termination procedures nor the reduction procedures will ever be activated again in the future.

The second would be to revise drastically both sets of procedures. The Council considered this possibility, but rejected it, not because it was unwilling to devote additional time to the task, but because it concluded that since neither of the procedures have yet been applied as was originally anticipated, there is not sufficient experience to justify re-writing them completely.

The third possibility would be to modify the procedures by adopting amendments to deal with each of the problems that have been identified to date. This is the course that the Council has chosen, and accordingly, the final part of this report is devoted to a series of amendments, each intended to deal with one or more of the problems identified above.

PART V: MOTIONS

The Council believes that the following amendments to the Termination and Reduction documents are appropriate.

MOVED: To make the following amendments to the Termination document:
67-91

- (a) In Section 2.1, titled Initiation, delete the sentence “This brief shall be supported by such data as the Dean or Provost believes to be appropriate” and add the following sentence:

“In preparing the briefs, the Provost and/or Dean shall address each of the criteria listed in the Termination document, especially those that pertain to centrality and scholarly and creative activities.”

- (b) In Section 2.1, add a sentence at the end of the second paragraph, as follows:

“In preparing its initial response to the Provost’s or Dean’s brief, an affected unit shall address each of the criteria listed in the Termination document, and label them accordingly.”

- (c) In Section 2.2, delete the following language: “the Dean shall distribute the brief and the program’s initial response to all MBU faculty members.” and add the following:

“. . . the Dean shall make the brief and the program’s initial response promptly and readily available to all MBU faculty members.”

- (d) Add a sentence to 2.6, immediately after the heading Timetable for the Review Procedure, as follows:

“The timetable provided in this document shall be advisory rather than prescriptive, and is intended to provide a framework for the process to be carried out, rather than a rigid time frame for completing the termination process.”

- (e) Add a paragraph, numbered 27 titled Personnel Negotiations:

“Personnel negotiations shall be considered an integral part of the termination process, providing that all such negotiations shall be conducted in a good faith non-adversarial atmosphere. Faculty members shall be given at least a week to respond to any final offer that would result in a major change in their status.”

MOVED: 68-91 To make the following amendments to the Reduction document:

- (a) After the first paragraph of Part II, add the following language:

“Personnel negotiations shall be considered an integral part of the reduction process, providing that all such negotiations shall be conducted in a good faith non-adversarial atmosphere. Faculty members shall be given at least seven days to respond to any final offer that would result in a major change in their status.”

- (b) After the first paragraph of Part III, add a new paragraph as follows:

“The timetable provided in this document shall be advisory rather than prescriptive, and is intended to provide a framework for the process to be carried out, rather than a rigid time frame for completing the reduction process.”

- (c) In Step 1 of Part III delete the sentence “This brief(s) shall be supported by appropriate data, and sent to the unit(s)”, and add the following language:

“In preparing the briefs, the Provost and/or Dean shall address each of the criteria listed in the Reduction document, especially those that pertain to scholarly and creative activities.”

- (d) In Step 2, add the following sentence:

“In preparing their initial written response to the Provost’s or Dean’s brief, affected units shall address each of the criteria listed in the Reduction documents, and label them accordingly.”