

**SPECIAL REPORT**  
**of the**  
**GRADUATE COUNCIL**  
**concerning**  
**THE PROVOST'S ACADEMIC PROGRAM REVIEW**

Presented at the 522<sup>nd</sup>  
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The Provost's Academic Program Review (APR), submitted by the Rules Committee of the Faculty Senate reached the Graduate Council on January 25 with a request to prepare a Special Report on the APR for the Faculty Senate's February 8 or February 22 meeting. By our last meeting in Fall nothing in writing had been available. A draft of this Special Report was reviewed by Graduate Council at Meeting No. 334 of February 15, 1996. On February 19, the second draft of this report was submitted electronically to the members of the Council for review, editing and approval. The final version, as approved by the membership of Graduate Council, has been prepared on February 21, 1996.

The Special Report of the Graduate Council on the APR is written so as not to duplicate the considerable and very constructive efforts summarized in the report of the Academic Priorities Council (commissioned by the Rules Committee as soon as the APR had been distributed and released at the Faculty Senate Meeting of February 8, 1996).

## **I. THE PROCESS**

All academic programs need to be evaluated and reviewed. Such evaluation should be going on at all times, in a process that helps to define strategies, set priorities and goals, and assess and improve performance. The APR was mandated by the Trustees. Compared to other academic program evaluations with which we are familiar, this mandated process had a number of unusual features: the time-frame was exceptionally short; program evaluation was uncoupled from strategic planning; external and peer review were avoided; and "one-shot," undifferentiated grades were required (in lieu of more sensitive assessments that would point to strengths and weaknesses, set goals for improvement, and require periodic re-evaluations of goals, performance, and grades for all of the programs evaluated).

Graduate Council is well aware that Provost Crosson was carrying out an unusual and difficult Trustee Mandate when she was asked to prepare the APR for this campus. Her charge was to place all academic programs into three groups: those to receive additional resources, those to maintain their funding level, and those to receive fewer resources. Even the grading criteria—cost, demand, centrality, and quality—were mandated by the Trustees.

Graduate Council was not involved in the development of the APR. It also was not included in the distribution list for the departmental profiles that were to make campus units scoreable for the required variables as these were developed in the Provost's Office. The Provost did invite input from graduate faculty when she attended a couple of Council Meetings in the Fall term. She also encouraged departments to revise their "departmental profiles" so that the data on which she wanted to base her decisions would be as reliable as possible under the circumstances. For the Provost, the APR in part duplicated, in part side-tracked, other long-range planning efforts carried out on campus. If one assumes that the data available allow for a fair scoring of campus departments in terms of these criteria, the Provost carried out the trying and unusual Trustee mandate under tremendous time pressure, in the time available, and in a systematic fashion. Nevertheless, campus governance procedures were not followed in generating the APR. We assume that had they been followed, and if Graduate Council had been actively involved at early stages of the APR production, the comments that follow would be unnecessary. In the following we analyze the APR systematically, in terms of its implications for graduate education on campus.

## **II. THE APR AND CAMPUS STRATEGIC GOALS RELATIVE TO GRADUATE EDUCATION**

While the APR systematically assigns grades to the academic programs on campus, it does not develop any long range strategic goals or explicitly apply the goals developed in the Strategic Planning Process. The central strategic goals vis-à-vis graduate education are not mentioned: improving of the land grant research university status, obtaining AAU standing, and maintaining the flagship campus role. Instead the strategic goals that guide this report are to maximize the scores of academic programs on the four grading criteria mandated by the Trustees. In that way, the APR does a serious disservice to graduate education on campus and contradicts the campus' long range goals vis-à-vis graduate education.

## **III. THE APR, GRADUATE EDUCATION, AND ADMINISTRATIVE ADVOCACY**

When it comes to the campus' long term strategic goals relative to graduate education, the APR exudes renunciation and resignation: "While we need not have, and could not possibly afford, the complete set of academic programs appropriate to a Land Grant research university..." exemplifies this tone. The report raises serious doubt in the reader's mind about the commitment of this campus to its own strategic goals.

When the campus does not actively promote its unique missions within the five campus system at every opportunity, the President's Office and the Trustees will not fill that void. The APR needs to be pro-active: enunciating commitment, vision, advocacy and promotion relative to our strategic long range goals, and reinforcing and enhancing graduate education. Otherwise, the campus' sense of resignation will shape the Trustees' long range plans for the campus.

#### **IV. THE APR'S EVALUATION CRITERIA AND GRADUATE EDUCATION**

The evaluation criteria of cost, demand, centrality, and quality mandated by the Trustees are most appropriate for assessing undergraduate programs (the majority of programs at the five campuses of the university). Their relevance for graduate programs not having been justified, it is probable that the criteria systematically deflect from the strengths of graduate programs. This has the effect of producing disproportionately low scores and, thus, generating a disproportionately high negative impact upon graduate programs in general, and this campus' graduate mission in particular.

For example, the "centrality" of graduate programs on campus is irrelevant to graduate program applicants, to the effectiveness of graduate school faculty, and the employability of graduate students. Conceivably, the "centrality" of its undergraduate program could even be a hindrance to a high quality graduate program.

While cost and demand considerations are relevant to graduate and undergraduate programs, undergraduate and graduate values cannot be directly compared. In addition, the figures at the graduate level make sense only in comparison with the same programs at peer institutions, not across campus. Program quality at the graduate level similarly is irrelevant, if it is compared solely to other programs on campus rather than to peer programs at peer institutions. The pull of a graduate program, the productivity of its faculty, and the employability of its graduates are defined in comparison with programs of its kind elsewhere, not with different programs on campus. To reward graduate programs that have the highest values for centrality, cost, demand, and quality on campus will be deleterious to the strategic long range plans that relate to graduate education on campus.

#### **V. THE DISTRIBUTION OF APR GRADES RELATIVE TO GRADUATE EDUCATION**

There are three times as many undergraduate students as graduate students on campus. Yet, the APR recommends more graduate programs than undergraduate programs for discontinuation. Virtually no undergraduate program is slated for discontinuation, where a graduate program exists. The conclusion is unavoidable that the report strategically targets graduate education for downsizing. These recommendations are offered by the Provost at a time when the campus makes serious efforts to achieve AAU standing, to revive the flagship campus concept, and take seriously its research Land Grant university obligations. This APR contradicts and does disservice to these long range plans.

#### **VI. UNIQUE CAMPUS RESOURCES, GRADUATE EDUCATION, AND THE APR**

In its short and long term implications, the APR could offer an opportunity to help profile and put into sharper focus the strengths of this campus within the five campus university. On this basis, the APR has serious shortcomings. Several recommendations undermine the unique missions of this campus and make this campus take on the characteristics of its peer campuses within the university.

##### **A) Distancing of Graduate Education and Research from Undergraduate Education**

Graduate education and research are critical resources that inform the quality of undergraduate education. The strongest predictor of quality for undergraduate education is a high quality graduate program. Graduate faculty and graduate students constitute an important component of undergraduate education in all of its guises. Moreover, graduate programs are a major incentive for attracting cutting edge faculty and are vital to their retention.

A number of the proposals, such as those related to Statistics and Foreign Language instruction, explicitly remove undergraduate teaching from the departments that do research and graduate education in those topics. This shift applies the model of the Commonwealth's community and four year-colleges to this campus' undergraduate programs. It, in fact, removes the special attributes of this campus and makes our undergraduate programs indistinguishable from those at the other campuses of the university. The recommendation would generate a glaring contradiction on campus: between strategic long range plans (that talk of the advantages of

integrating research and advanced knowledge into education at all levels), and administrative practice as expressed in the APR (which assumes the opposite).

The same kinds of changes that are recommended for foreign languages and statistics could be instituted in many other programs: lower paid non-research instructors could teach the first two years, students could be admitted only after the first two years, and all teaching at that level could be carried out by community colleges or continuing education. The strategic utility of doing this at all is not justified. Specifically, why this modularization of undergraduate teaching should begin with Foreign Languages and Statistics (where no real savings are foreseen), rather than in some other unit of the university (where the per unit cost of instruction is significantly higher) is not made clear.

## **B) Diversity of Education and Multicultural Issues**

Currently, the university is one of the leaders in training PhDs from a number of disadvantaged communities, and the multicultural university is one of the strategic visions of this campus. Yet, at the graduate level, the suggested changes are disproportionate and severe in their impact upon programs which have important multicultural dimensions. This is apparent in the foreign language reductions, and in the recommendations related to Judaic Studies and Labor Relations. The APR contradicts and takes away from the long range planning goals in this direction.

## **C) The APR and the Uniqueness of the Amherst Campus Graduate Programs**

This campus houses a number of graduate programs that are unique in the nation, in the region, in the Commonwealth, or in the university. In order to lay claim, in long range strategic planning, to a well defined niche that this campus can and does fill, particular attention needs to be paid to these unique programs. Where these programs are strong, they need to be brought to the attention of the Commonwealth and the central administration of the University. In this direction, for example, the recommendations relative to the Foreign Language graduate programs and the Labor Studies Center, need to be seriously reconsidered. In particular, the closed-system approach of the APR needs to be replaced. These programs are unique in the university, in the region, and, in the case of the Labor Center, in the nation. In order to position the campus programs relative to its long range goals, unique programs need to be aggressively championed and where necessary improved.

The conclusion is all the more pertinent, given the inordinate difficulty of establishing new graduate programs in the Commonwealth. Discontinuation needs to be carefully weighed against retooling existing programs. What is gone cannot be easily revived. Moreover, as demonstrated by the just completed NAS/NRC evaluations, old programs receive significantly better evaluations than new programs in outside evaluations, and a sizeable proportion of the program ranking is accounted for by nothing but program age. Shifting resources from old programs to new ones in the present climate guarantees programs that will receive low scores by outside evaluators and peers.

## **VII. INTERRELATEDNESS OF PROGRAMS AND THE APR**

In a number of cases the APR chastises departments for not interdigitating sufficiently with others. On the other hand, where graduate programs are recommended for discontinuation or reduction in scope, the impact of that reduction on other programs is not evaluated. It is obvious that social science departments will suffer when the language in which central aspects of recent social theory are published, loses its doctoral program. If Plant Pathology ceases to exist, a whole series of life science students loses an important avenue for study and specialization. This synergism of graduate programs exacerbates the severe reductions in individual graduate programs: the cuts in programs marked for reduction are bound to have significant deleterious effects also on programs singled out to receive additional resources or stay at level funding.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. A number of the APR recommendations that impact graduate education have been presented as "consensual." In principle, Faculty Senate should support and endorse these recommendations. Many of these recommendations are well under way toward implementation, although a number of them have not benefited from Campus Governance input yet. It is vital that these programmatic changes also are submitted to Campus Governance review at the earliest convenience. When they are on the table, the "consensual" nature of the changes needs to be carefully assessed before they are instituted.

2. Graduate Council recommends governance review of the APR for its impact on the campus' position relative to the other campuses of the university, and for the impact of the proposed changes in each program upon the other programs on campus.
3. In terms of graduate education, the APR needs to more clearly enunciate the long range strategic goals of this campus toward AAU status, familiarize the Commonwealth with the benefits of a Land Grant research university, and champion the unique missions of the flag ship campus.

**Moved:** That the Faculty Senate forward to the Administration the above recommendations as guidelines  
**35-96** to be used if planning efforts such as the Academic Program Review are undertaken in the future,  
as presented in Sen. Doc. No. 96-029A.