



# UNIVERSITY PRIORITIES COMMITTEE PLAN

## CHARGE TO THE UNIVERSITY PRIORITIES COMMITTEE

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Examine all areas of the university for potential cost savings and make recommendations to the president and provost as how to achieve savings. As a part of this charge, the committee will determine what the priorities of the university are in moving forward. Priorities are reflected in the funds allocated for degree programs and in funds for non-academic programs/services. Programs are defined as any part of the university supported from the university budget.

The proposal is a blueprint for how the University Priorities Committee (UPC) will approach evaluation of all funded areas of the university. As in construction, this blueprint will be subject to slight modifications by the UPC during the course of their work.

## PROPOSED UNIVERSITY PRIORITIES COMMITTEE PLAN

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### I. The need for a University Priorities Committee

The University of Southern Mississippi is in the midst of current and predicted budget reductions that mean we cannot function as in the past. It is expected that we must absorb about a \$12 million budget reduction for the FY 2011 budget (starting July 2010), an additional \$13 million reduction for the FY 2012 budget, and perhaps another \$10 million reduction by FY 2013. These are all losses in state appropriation to Southern Miss and can be reduced to a limited degree by increases in tuition dollars through raising tuition, increased retention and increased enrollments. Much of the budget reductions for FY 2011 have already been identified, yet the next two fiscal years are in question. In the sense that reductions appear to be extended over a long period, the university must look beyond quick fixes and instead rely on sound continued planning for what programs are required to meet our educational missions and what level of supporting services are needed for those programs. We need a University Priorities Committee to function in determining what programs and services are essential to the mission of The University of Southern Mississippi.

The provost requested that Faculty Senate recommend the function and the committee make up of a budget committee. This report responds to that request and names that committee the University Priorities Committee. This committee will have a profound influence on the direction the university will take over the next decade or longer. It is important that the mission of the university is clearly defined, understood by the entire university community, and used as a guiding principle for all evaluations.

### II. Foundation for action

#### A. Academic Planning Group (2009)

The most recent work at the university in evaluating programs was done by the Academic Planning Group (APG). This group of both academic and non-academic representatives in the 2008-09

academic year developed a numerical analysis of some attributes of all academic programs in the university. The APG was then expanded to include more representatives in Feb. 2009 with a new function of determining how to handle budget cuts for the FY 2010 and 2011. After 2010 cuts were achieved by Colleges, the APG then worked on the cuts for 2011 with a target of about \$8 million from the academic side of the university. The APG was then divided into academic APG and non-academic APG. Only the academic APG continued to meet.

Deans were asked to rate their colleges' programs into three groups: A. top 25 percent, B. middle 50 percent and C. bottom 25 percent. The APG then met with each dean to go over their bottom 25% and view possible savings. Also, support services that were in the budget stream from the provost were asked to describe their units. This did not produce much savings, so the APG asked the deans to go back and each present \$2 million in cuts in a priority list. Additionally, other academic services were asked to present up to 10 percent in cuts. Each dean and head of academic services then met with APG to describe their proposed cuts. The APG voted on the list of potential academic cuts. This vote was on a scale of one to five to put the cuts in rank order. After the ranked list was developed, the list was given to President Saunders for final decisions by the Executive Cabinet.

#### B. Data-based and practical models to facilitate program priority ranking processes

Across the nation many universities and colleges are faced with shrinking budgets and are now forced into developing plans for prioritization of programs. Robert Dickeson, a former higher education administrator at several universities and a widely demanded consultant, published *Prioritizing Academic Programs and Services* (1999) to assist universities in reallocation of resources. One successful example of his model can be found at Indiana State University. Most of the work was accomplished within a 12-month period.

[http://www.indstate.edu/academicaffairs/program\\_prioritization.htm](http://www.indstate.edu/academicaffairs/program_prioritization.htm)

Other recent prioritization processes can be found at Minnesota State – Moorhead:

[http://www.mnstate.edu/president/speeches/budget\\_and\\_planning\\_presentations/1\\_15\\_2009\\_reviewprogramservice.htm](http://www.mnstate.edu/president/speeches/budget_and_planning_presentations/1_15_2009_reviewprogramservice.htm)

Washington State University:

<http://academic-prioritization.wsu.edu/index.html>

University of Maine:

<http://www.umaine.edu/achievingustainability/process-and-timetable/>

University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire:

<https://www.uwec.edu/acadaff/PEEQ/PEEQArchive/PEEQArchive.htm>

Key points of this process include:

- 1) Identifying responsible leadership in a shared leadership model (pg. 27 Dickeson)
- 2) Reaffirming the institutional mission. Mission statements typically lack clarity to articulate to internal and external audiences understanding about the institution, its purposes or its future (pg. 29-42 Dickeson)
- 3) Defining what constitutes a program (not departments and not just degree programs)
- 4) Selecting appropriate criteria, designing additional data formats, deciding relative weights for each criteria, providing supportive data, making institution-wide perspective judgments. Alternative scenarios that allow the university to meet budget challenges should be investigated.

Dickeson suggests the following criteria: history, development and expectations of the program; external demand for the program; internal demand for the program; quality program outcomes; size, scope and productivity of the program; revenue and other resources generated by the program; costs and other expenses associated with the program; impact, justification and overall essentiality of the program; opportunity analysis of the program (pg. 55-58 Dickeson)

- 5) Using judgments of faculty leadership to drive program ratings ( pg. 88 Dickeson). All participants operate from the same mission statement, program criteria and weights.
- 6) Conducting a forthright, clearly communicated process with equitable representation of stakeholders linking program review with planning and budgeting (pg. 95 Dickeson)
- 7) Implementing program decisions based on the following data: enrichment or expansion of programs rating a high level of quality (quality of inputs and processes and costs/other expenses); addition of new programs (habit of successful organizations – pre-emerging or synergistic areas); reduction of programs; consolidation or restructuring programs; elimination of programs (legal considerations); accreditation issues (pg. 107-110 Dickeson); humane dimensions of reallocation (pg. 110-113 Dickeson)
- 8) Reducing the number of specialized services and administrative responsibilities (pg. 44 Dickeson; pg. 127, *Outsourcing Practices in Higher Education*; pg. 137, *Criteria for Measuring Administrative Programs*)

#### C. Currently available program assessment data

At The University of Southern Mississippi all degree programs and non-academic units conduct annual assessments and submit reports to the University Assessment Committee that can be used for evaluating programs. Additionally, each academic unit is subject to rotating program review by both academic and graduate councils. Results and data from these evaluations can be used, in addition to new data, to prepare program reports that will be required from all programs to address criteria determined by the academic or non-academic priorities committees.

### III. Inclusion of all stakeholders

#### A. Faculty, staff and students

Stakeholders directly affected by academic and non-academic program prioritization are the faculty who make up the majority of the university's budget, the staff of both academic and non-academic programs, and the students who pursue their education. As in other comprehensive research universities, we believe that the faculty should be the major driver of the academic-related priority committee with all stakeholders involved at differing points along the process (Dickeson, pg. 50).

#### B. Informed stakeholders

The prioritization process should be open. This means description of the process should be widely published, decisions made in meetings should be posted in a timely manner, observers to the process should be allowed as long as it is not disruptive to their proceedings, a Web hotline should be established for frequently asked questions, and local media outlets should be informed of our intentions and key decisions as progress is made toward prioritization (Dickeson, pg. 96). The local community, state and region are affected by the prioritization process in terms of program availability and potential loss of employees. It is important that these stakeholders are kept informed.

## IV. Committees for ongoing program review and budget recommendations

### A. University Priorities Committee (UPC)

The UPC will include two subcommittees, the academic priorities subcommittee and the non-academic priorities subcommittee. The University Priorities Committee chair will be selected from one of the academic priorities subcommittee co-chairs. The university through the provost and/or President's Office will provide support for these committees in terms of secretarial assistance, potential release time for committee chairs and members, and other resources, as needed. A faculty member with expertise in accounting should be granted reassigned time for participation. One faculty member of the UPC should serve as a liaison with the Responsibility-Centered Management Budget Committee.

The subcommittees will meet together monthly as the University Priorities Committee to monitor progress toward meeting their timelines and reaching their concluding recommendations (Dickeson, pg. 133). After each subcommittee obtains a draft of their separate recommendations, they will present them to the entire UPC. Each subcommittee will then consider potential modification of their recommendations. The UPC will then come together to prepare a joint recommendation report for potential implementation by the Executive Cabinet.

### B. Academic programs – academic priorities subcommittee (AP)

The AP will be composed of no more than 15 voting members. The committee will include the following representatives of stakeholders:

**Co-chairs** – The AP committee will be chaired by co-chairs, one selected by the provost and one selected by the AP committee.

**Representative faculty groups** – Faculty Senate, Academic Council, Graduate Council, University Research Council, Gulf Coast Faculty Council and Council of Chairs each choose one representative to the committee for a total of six representatives.

**Library faculty representative** – one representative selected by library faculty

**Staff Council** – The Staff Council will select one representative to the committee.

**Student representatives** – one undergraduate and one graduate student representative selected by their respective student government associations

**Provost choices** – two representatives selected by the provost, one appointed as co-chair of the committee, providing external resources and support for program prioritization processes (co-chair release time)

**Program representation** – up to three faculty representatives chosen by Faculty Senate Executive committee in consultation with college representatives to the senate to achieve approximately equal representation among the five colleges

**Ex-officio** – The committee will include one ex-officio non-voting representative from the Budget Office and one from Institutional Research. The six academic deans (including the dean of University Libraries) will be ex-officio non-voting members of the AP subcommittee.

**Observers** – Additionally, observers will be invited as follows:

- A Faculty Senate Executive Committee member
- If no AAUP representative is a voting member, then AAUP will be granted representation through observer status.

- Other groups can petition the AP for observer status and, if approved by the committee, can observe the meetings.
- Observers must agree to respect the confidentiality of discussions that take place during meetings.

#### C. Non-academic programs – non-academic priorities subcommittee (NP)

The NP will be composed of no more than 15 voting members. The committee will potentially include the following representatives of stakeholders with a combination of administrators and staff from non-degree granting units:

**Committee chair** – appointed by the president

**President choices** – two representatives selected by the president, one of whom will chair the committee

**Staff Council** – Staff Council will choose a representative for this committee.

**Representative non-academic groups** – The NP committee chair, in consultation with President Saunders and the AP committee co-chairs, will select representatives from non-academic units not answering to the provost, such as Student Affairs, Admissions and Financial Aid, First Year Experience, Security, Entertainment and Athletics, Conference Center, Counseling, Custodial, Facilities, Human Resources, Legal Services, Physical Plant, University Communications, Student Financial Services, Student Health Services, Technology Services, Business Services, Career Services, Residence Life, Advancement, Sponsored Program Administration, Recreation/Payne Center and other non-degree granting units.

**Student representatives** – one undergraduate and one graduate student representative selected by their respective student government associations

**Faculty representative** – one voting representative selected by the subcommittee.

#### V. Program evaluation process

##### A. Program definition - any unit receiving budgetary support.

Programs will be defined and identified by the University Priorities Committee in consultation with the provost, vice president for Student Affairs, vice president for Research, CFO, and deans. This definition will allow the committee to identify what will be rated. Dickeson defines programs as any unit receiving budgetary support.

As a further example, Indiana State University describes academic programs as any academic program requiring six or more semester hours, including the following:

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

B. University mission statements need clarification for use as criteria

The UPC will meet to review university mission statements to clarify which sections of the mission statements are appropriate for use as criteria for program evaluation. The UPC may need to elaborate on the meaning of the university mission statements to provide guidance to units writing reports for program rating. They may seek assistance for this from the president, provost, Faculty Senate direction committee, Strategic Enrollment Planning committee and others. This task alone could take a year, so the committee must set limits on the time spent on this task.

C. Confirming criteria and weights for program ratings

Each priorities subcommittee will confirm criteria used in program evaluation. The academic priorities (AP) subcommittee will seek evaluation criteria from Academic Council, Graduate Council, Faculty Senate's university direction committee, and the six academic deans following the committee's review of criteria suggested in listed Section II.B.4 (10 academic) and III.A (13 non-academic) (Dickeson, pg. 50) and found in other university prioritization processes (Indiana State University, Minnesota State-Moorhead, Maine, Washington State). The non-academic priorities (NP) subcommittee will also examine the criteria used by Dickeson for non-academic programs (Dickeson, pg. 50) and view other university prioritization criteria and develop its set of criteria for evaluation.

The AP subcommittee will determine weights to apply to each criterion, seeking advice from Academic and Graduate Councils, Faculty Senate's university direction committee and deans prior to a decision on weights. The NP subcommittee will develop its weights to apply to each criterion in consultation with vice presidents and the CFO.

D. Programs will prepare reports requested by priorities subcommittees for rating the programs.

1. The priorities subcommittees will request that each program submit a 10-page (maximum) program prioritization report to answer a set of criteria determined by the priorities subcommittees. The subcommittees will give guidance as to what type of data should be included and what questions should be answered in the 10-page prioritization report. As an example, see Indiana State's Feb. 1, 2006, prioritization report. Programs will prepare the reports with data from existing resources such as Institutional Research, departmental records and external sources for committee review.
2. The subcommittees should request an additional action plan from each program that details how the program will function over the next three years with (a) a 5 percent increase in budget, (b) no budget change, (c) a 5 percent budget reduction, and (d) a 10 percent budget reduction. The action plan should be of enough detail to see what and how budgetary items will be modified. The action plan may be needed by the committee to identify additional savings beyond that found by program reviews.

E. Program rating by priorities subcommittees, deans and college committees

1. The University Priorities Committee will review programs through its two subcommittees; the academic priorities committee and the non-academic priorities committee. Both committees will function separately in rating their respective programs and compiling the results of ratings.
2. For academic programs, each criterion addressed in the program prioritization report for each program will then be rated on a scale of 1-10 by each AP committee member, the dean of each college and a college committee of representative faculty from each college. The deans and college

committees will only rate programs from their college. The AP committee will collect these ratings and compare them with the committee's own. A composite score on each criterion will be multiplied by its weighting factor to get a combined rating for each program and an overall score as the sum of the criterion times weight scores for each criterion. The college committees could be college curriculum committees if these are representative faculty, or it could be College Advisory Committees (CAC's) which are representative faculty groups, or they may need to be formed in some colleges.

3. For non-academic programs, their program prioritization reports will be rated by the non-academic priorities committee.
4. A final report by the University Priorities Committee will include a prioritized ranking of each program including budget recommendations.

F. Analysis of program ratings for program ranking

1. The AP subcommittee will rank all academic programs, using approved criteria and weightings in categories of priority 1 to priority 5.
2. The NP subcommittee will rank non-academic administrative programs following guidelines provided by Dickeson (pg. 137-138).
3. The UPC will review rankings provided by the subcommittees, providing an overall ranking for academic and non-academic programs.
4. The rankings will be published to all university stakeholders.

G. Academic program stakeholders can make recommendations to the subcommittee after initial rankings are published. Similarly for non-academic programs, units can make similar recommendations to the NP subcommittee. Stakeholders could make recommendations to the UPC suggesting such actions like program consolidation, reorganization, suspension or elimination.

H. Program appeals process to be determined by the UPC

The UPC must decide when program appeals will occur for its consideration before its final recommendations are sent to the provost and president.

I. The UPC prepares recommendations for the provost and president.

The UPC subcommittees will review the rankings, program reports, program action plans and recommendations from colleges or non-academic units and will make recommendations as to program enhancement, reorganization, reduction, suspension or elimination. It is possible that the UPC will conduct hearings on the published recommendations and receive input and suggestions for improving and refining ratings and recommendations from colleges or deans. The recommendations will include costs of program enhancement or money savings from program reduction or elimination.

## VI. Provost and vice president analysis

The provost and vice presidents will review rankings provided by the University Priorities Committee rendering independent judgments on a comparative basis. These rankings will be published campus-wide using the approved criteria and weightings along the quintiles or percentages identified. Additionally the provost and vice presidents will recommend efficiencies that may be gained by cooperative and collaborative efforts within the institution.

## **VII. Administrative actions – suggestions to consider**

### **A. President and Executive Cabinet evaluates UPC recommendations.**

During the final analysis stage the president and Executive Cabinet will render their judgment of the UPC's recommendations. A consultant may also review the recommendations and render an independent, third-party judgment on a comparative basis for all programs of the university.

### **B. UPC consulted again**

After the Executive Cabinet reviews the UPC recommendations they will communicate their intentions for action to the UPC. The UPC will be given an opportunity to voice possible refinement of the recommendations.

### **C. Using multiple templates**

During an integration and synthesis stage the president and UPC will integrate and synthesize the results of the program prioritization process with those relevant portions of past strategic plans, including the Strategic Enrollment Plan, and other relevant information available. All recommendations from the president and the UPC will conform to MS IHL approved statements of role, scope, mission, vision, goals and values. This synthesized report will constitute the Master Strategic Plan of the university and will be forwarded to the MS IHL for approval.

During the final decision stage the MS IHL will review the Master Strategic Plan and will approve the final plan and implementation schedule.

### **D. Final recommendations to joint Faculty Senate, Academic Council, Graduate Council for advice**

As the three elected representative faculty governance bodies, the Faculty Senate, Academic Council and Graduate Council will be consulted before any recommendation is taken to the IHL board. All these bodies are advisory, and this would be the last opportunity for the bodies to advise the president and provost about proposed actions.

## **VIII. Ongoing renewal of program prioritization**

The UPC will continue into the next years with continued analysis of program priorities. The UPC will determine the mechanism for program updating and replacing committee members. All data generated in the development of the program prioritization process will be electronically stored and periodically updated for use in maintaining an ongoing database for continuing program analysis.

## **IX. Timeline**

### **November 2009**

Committees formed, mission statement clarified

### **December 2009**

Determine criteria and weights for evaluations

### **January 2009**

Report guidelines published to units

### **February 2010**

Units complete and submit 10-page reports and action plans

### **March 2010**

College faculty committees, deans and the Academic Priorities Committee rate academic programs;  
Non-academic priorities subcommittee rate non-academic programs/services

### **April 2010**

Program rating and quintile/percentage publication and appellate process begins

### **May 2010**

Appeal process

### **June 2010**

UPC recommendations submitted to provost and president

### **July 2010**

Executive Cabinet submits recommendations to joint Faculty Senate, Academic Council,  
Graduate Council

### **August 2010**

Programs notified of any final programmatic changes