

Planning and Finance Committee

Response to the Provost's Recommendations from the Academic Planning Process

April 10, 2015

Background

Recognizing that the responsibility for the budgetary and planning process rests with the Chancellor and administration, the Planning and Finance Committee has as part of its informational and advisory charge to assist in these areas by reviewing proposed plans that have an impact on the academic mission of the University, such as revenues and revenue projections, budgets and budget projections, and the relationship of academic and capital planning to finance and budget matters.

In that context the committee has been engaged throughout the academic year in meetings first with the Chancellor and subsequently with the Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs to gain an understanding of the current financial challenges facing the campus and to discuss appropriate ways for the committee to be responsive and timely in implementing its charge. The committee membership includes the Vice Chancellor for Finance and the Director of Budget who have graciously participated in the committee's discussions and assisted other committee members in understanding both the "big picture" financial challenges as well as some of the intricacies of budgeting and balancing accounts in the current year and in preparing a budget for the 2016 fiscal year.

Following the release of the Provost's Recommendations from the Academic Planning Process on March 6, 2015 the committee met several times during the month of March. In these meetings the committee agreed to a process for providing feedback, focusing primarily on the general recommendations and providing comments on college specific recommendations. To create the committee's response, members generated a snapshot assessment of the report's general recommendations by individually assigning an evaluative category to each recommendation. These categories, analogous to the dashboard concept, (group 1 suggesting agreement with little question, group 2 needing some additional clarification or adjustment and a third group that the committee believes warrants significant additional information or requires modification) Subsequently, through the use of a Google document, committee members responded to each of the report's twenty general recommendations. From these individual assessments and comments an initial draft report was developed and submitted to the Provost on April 3, 2015. This draft includes both a response to the Report's narrative and the committee's recommendation on each of the twenty general recommendations. Additional comments resulting from the committee's deliberations follow this section.

Committee response to General recommendations

Recommendation 1.0. Implement the UALR Faculty Instructional Load Policy 403.13 consistently across campus.

This policy was adopted in 1994. In the current situation with the enrollment-driven revenue

shortfall, this will mean full teaching loads of four three-hour sections for full-time faculty and two sections for school directors and department chairs. The policy provides for selected reassignments of time when appropriate and consistent with resources. Current reassignments are not consistent with resources. More teaching by full-time faculty will enable the departments to reduce lecturer expenses and also give students more exposure to full-time faculty. Any reassignments must be recommended by the department chair to the dean, and before approval by the dean, must be reviewed with the provost.

Response:

The **Faculty Instructional Load Policy (FILP)** (403.13), approved in 1994, is one of two policies related to faculty load. The second policy, Faculty Roles and Rewards I: Tenure Track (RR1), (403.20), was developed in 2006, more than a decade after 403.13 and was the policy that initiated the Faculty Senate's revision in the university level promotion and tenure guidelines, UALR Policy 403.15.

The FILP arose as a result of UALR moving from a 4-year teaching college to a masters comprehensive university with limited doctoral offerings. It's goal was to "*distribute responsibilities among faculty in a way that most equitably and efficiently advances this tripartite mission of teaching, research or creative activity, and service*" such that research and creative activity could play a bigger role in a faculty member's expected activities.

In order to fulfill this purpose, the FILP stated that "*the standard instructional load for full-time tenured and tenure-track faculty at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock is twelve instructional units (IUs) per semester*" and also indicates that "*faculty are expected to actively pursue research or creative activity to improve their instruction and extend their disciplinary knowledge; additionally, they are expected to engage in university, professional, and public service*" so that the instructional load of faculty is not the full time work load.

The FILP defined a list of equivalencies, which were appropriate in 1994 for a masters comprehensive university with limited doctoral offerings. These equivalencies allowed a more expansive definition of teaching activities than is captured in the Provost's statement, "*[implementation of Policy 403.13] will mean full teaching loads of four three-hour sections for full-time faculty.*" Such a statement neglects graduate teaching, laboratory teaching, dissertation direction, and the many reassignments for scholarly activity.

According to RR1, around 2000 "*the Carnegie Foundation classified UALR as a 'doctoral university' that is 'research intensive.'*" RR1 comments on the earlier FILP, "*UALR has operated with a standard teaching load of 12 hours per semester, This load is typical of two-year campuses or undergraduate institutions, but it is not consistent with other research intensive comprehensive universities.*"

RR1 further remarks that FILP "*is inadequate to the current needs of this institution. The institution must move toward a standard teaching load of nine hours per semester for tenure-track and tenured faculty who are productive scholars.*" "*Faculty members teaching at the new standard load will be expected to be productive in publishing articles, obtaining research grants, producing creative products, or in other measurable activities appropriate to their disciplines.*"

Under the influence of the Faculty Instructional Load and the Faculty Roles and Rewards I policies, UALR has been steadily making progress towards a unique identity in Arkansas that sets it apart from the institutions that cater to solely undergraduate populations. UALR has climbed into the doctoral intensive Carnegie classification and the SREB – 3 classification. This provides a unique niche where UALR can grow graduate offerings while maintaining a stable undergraduate population.

Both policies 403.13 and 403.20 point to the need to manage faculty resources effectively so as to balance the teaching, research, and service needs of the university. The budget crisis is laying bare some mismanagement of faculty load and unit resources that are not apparent when enrollment and budgets are growing. Potential growth areas may be understaffed and therefore slow to grow. Some units might have gotten out-of-balance by over-emphasizing research over teaching to the point that they may not be cost-effective. Specific imbalances should be addressed through strategic reassignment of resources, whether this is replacement of lecturers with full-time faculty or increase of class sizes where appropriate.

Moving to a one-size-fits-all load of four undergraduate lecture courses per semester will effectively reverse course on the past 30 years of progress and return UALR to a four-year teaching institution. Such a short term response to a budget shortfall may have long term consequences as UALR sheds the capability to emerge from this crisis with capability to return to a trajectory of being a community-engaged, research institution. Robust strategies to right-size units and colleges need to be employed, rather than a simplistic “everyone teaches more” strategy.

In fact, this strategy will likely make the situation worse, rather than better, as the current faculty is sized to the mission. Increasing teaching loads will not bring in more students. Rather, existing students will be spread over more courses and sections that will result in an increase in low-enrollment courses, which clashes with the recommendation to increase course caps.

Young productive scholars, who are developing towards tenure under the expectations of the university tenure guidelines (Policy 403.15), may not be able to achieve tenure if they do not have sufficient release time to pursue scholarly activities. The equivalencies in Faculty Instructional Load (Policy 403.13) do not provide sufficient allocation of time to achieve the results expected by the university tenure guidelines (Policy 403.15). Mature productive scholars will not be able to continue the trajectory towards international recognition that is stipulated in the promotion requirements of university tenure guidelines (Policy 403.15), likely resulting in longer time in rank before promotion or a failure to achieve promotion.

Recommend:

Revise the commentary on Provost’s recommendation 1 “*full teaching loads of four three-hour sections for full-time faculty*” to conform to the language of the recommendation that instructional assignments for faculty are built on “instructional units (IU)” and not on “courses”.

Adopt the 9 IU for productive scholars from Policy 403.20 into Policy 403.13, as was intended a decade ago.

Apply FILP (403.13) consistently, including accountability, equivalency, banking and proper management of work force at the college level.

Update equivalencies to include new activities, such as on-line course development, community engaged activities, and other scholarly pursuits outlined in Faculty Roles and Rewards I (Policy 403.20).

Develop a plan to bring out-of-balance departments in line with mission and current resources. This includes increasing staff in departments where the IU allocation routinely exceeds the 9/12 IU load or reducing/reallocating resources in units where the IU allocation falls below the 9/12 IU load.

Identify both qualitative and quantitative measurements to ascertain what constitutes “out-of-balance” departments allowing a process of validation of criteria and creation of additional data as necessary and / or appropriate.

Establish a collaborative environment challenging and incentivizing departments to move toward needed balance.

Recommendation 1.1 Reduce UALR lecturer budget by 46 percent.

This will save a total of \$ 705,563 per fiscal year.

Response:

While this recommendation appears to be a one time cut that will produce a recurring reduction in instructional costs from the lecturer budget, there must be a careful cost/benefit analysis for this decision. Like the instructional load issue discussed above, a simple reduction in the lecturer budget in whatever dollar amount is not a solution that will work if adopted across the board. For example, the Chancellor has spoken about research reassignments. That is not the only type of appropriate reassignment that may generate a need for support from the lecturer budget. Faculty receive reassignments for many different activities that provide significant service and value to the institution and to the community as a whole. Those reassignments in many cases enable UALR to be a “student-centered, community-engaged” institution.

Some instructors funded through the lecturer budget have professional credentials and expertise and teach one or two courses, often upper-level courses, in their area of expertise to make up for gaps in the expertise of the full-time faculty. This is very different from hiring a lecturer to teach lower level introductory courses or core courses that could be taught by the full-time faculty. Adjunct instructors who fill gaps in expertise must continue to be funded until full-time faculty members can be hired to fill the gaps in expertise that exist.

In addition, this reduction could have significant impacts on not only graduate student but also undergraduate enrollment and retention. In CALS, for example, lecturer funds are used to support graduate students on teaching assistantships. In the sciences, these students often teach laboratories associated with large lecture courses. Without these students, the enrollment in these lecture courses would need to be reduced. In other departments graduate students teach courses

that were previously taught by faculty who have not been replaced. Without these TA positions, many graduate students would not continue in their graduate programs.

Recommend:

Lecturer budgets will be cut as much as possible in the near term (up to 46%) where minimizing the impact to UALR's core mission is stressed. Such cuts must be strategic and not across the board since in many situations the use of lecturers enhances the quality and quantity of instruction available to students and is revenue positive.

A process of continuous reevaluation of full-time faculty reassignments and replacement of that time by lecturers will be undertaken within each college to maximize contribution to the mission and minimization of costs.

Recommendation 2. Increase course caps.

The cap of each course should be established as the current cap plus the number of students that drop the course between the 11th day and the end of the semester.

Response:

As is true with others of these recommendations, this is not a one size fits all solution. Course caps need to make instructional sense as well as respond to our enrollment needs and to state funding formula disincentives for DFWs. Course caps can be set in order to anticipate the number of students likely to drop the class after the 11th day headcount. Since the state funding formula factors in DFW rates, courses that routinely have high DFW rates can have higher start of semester caps. At the same time, however, Chairs and Deans also need to factor into the cap calculation the specific conditions related to any specific class, whether these be lab space and safety requirements, room size and availability of seats and other required instructional resources, class size limits mandated by accreditation agencies, and/or instructional practices related to that class.

Clearly, decision-making must reflect an understanding of the unique ecosystem of the unit. Sometimes departments are offering too many electives, causing courses to become under-enrolled while in other departments curriculum design, course sequencing, and scheduling may impact course under-enrollment.

We have been told this recommendation derives from the concern about the high attrition rate in online classes, for which there is a high demand. If that's the primary problem to be addressed, then an across-the-board cap raising for both online and f2f is not a workable solution. Moreover, raising the caps in online courses is not likely to solve the retention problem in the online classes since it is clear that a variety of factors are causing students to drop from online sections. Additionally, there are significant consequences to this recommendation. Unless the university is recruiting more students, this is a zero sum game. Raising caps in some courses just shifts students there from somewhere else. So raising the caps in online courses may reduce

enrollment in the f2f courses--courses that many of the more marginal students would be better served to enroll in.

Recommend:

Address the retention issues in online courses and redesign courses to maximize retention.

Increase course caps that are “artificial” and where course content and space availability make increased class size reasonable.

Recommendation 3: Build class schedules based on student needs and with the goal of maximizing the use of resources.

A high percentage of UALR students are working professionals and therefore a course offered at 9:00 a.m. may not serve their needs. Factors like this must be considered when building the schedule of classes. On the other hand, the UALR traditional student population is increasing. Therefore, the challenge is to schedule classes to serve both student populations while minimizing the use of resources.

Response:

While this recommendation is logical, it is not easy to follow in practice. Some colleges and departments have collected data on student scheduling preferences, yet many others have not and student preferences change regularly.

Some departments use a carousel-style plan for scheduling upper-level courses required for majors to minimize obstacles to graduation. Needs of majors as well as students in general are ongoing targets that need to be identified and considered in scheduling decisions.

Resources available to departments significantly limit course offerings and scheduling options. Many courses are not offered in the evening because traditional students hate evening classes and offering courses at multiple times may result in more courses that do not meet the minimum enrollment requirements.

Recommend:

At the university level design and regularly administer a survey to students seeking scheduling needs and preferences, and then provide disaggregated, timely data to departments to use to plan schedules.

Recommendation 4. Streamline and integrate course offerings within colleges and among colleges.

For example, almost every UALR academic department offers a course in research methods and another in statistics. With students’ increasing interest in multiple disciplines simultaneously, it is time for UALR faculty to rethink these courses in such a way that they serve multiple academic programs. With this approach, the educational experience of the student will be enriched while the cost of offering the courses is contained.

Another instance of course integration is writing courses that can serve multiple programs and reduce duplicate course offerings.

Response:

The idea of revisiting course offerings in view of having multiple departments relying on a “service course” such as this example illustrates can save instructional costs. Students in one department should be able to take (and count toward a degree requirement) a pre-approved service course taught by another department. Similarly, departments offering a common service course should be able to plan a carousel in which each one offers the course in different semesters, freeing each department to offer other courses when it is not their turn in the carousel. Such practices will probably be more feasible for lower-level courses than for upper-level courses.

Coordinating certain courses across disciplines (for example, the scheduling of general science core courses in one semester or over several semesters) could allow departments to reduce the number of their sections offered each semester. This could result in a reduced need for adjunct faculty, or could free up full-time faculty for teaching upper level courses and could allow for more frequent scheduling of majors courses.

In terms of identifying duplicate/similar courses and basic “service” courses, an inventory is needed for a group to review and recommend logical target courses to streamline and integrate. A consultative process among departments for course sharing needs to be discussed.

Streamlining is related to course scheduling. For some departments and majors, streamlining would adjust a multi-year plan for course offerings according to pre-requisites and a sequencing model relevant to that discipline. For other departments, streamlining may require a carousel of regularly offered required courses and occasionally offered electives. The objective would be similar for both: for departments to offer what any year’s cohort of students need to move through the major; for advisers and students to compose and adhere to a stable degree plan; and for chairs and deans to plan multi-year schedules. Such multi-year plans would need to be coordinated among departments to avoid scheduling conflicts and to respond to students’ needs.

Cross-listing courses should also be part of this discussion.

There are several practical hurdles to implementing or creating incentives to encourage such curricular integration. When courses are cross-listed or scheduled in order to facilitate enrollment from students in more than one department, one department gets credit for the SSCH being taught and the other department gets credit only for the students enrolled in that department’s section. So, the department SSCH and headcounts do not reflect the actual faculty involvement.

Recommend:

Identify duplicate/similar courses and basic “service” courses for a group to review and then recommend logical target courses to streamline and integrate.

Analyze demand for and scheduling of core courses and service courses in order to provide timely evidence of possibilities for streamlined course scheduling.

Establish a consultative process among departments for course sharing that provides incentives for integrated course offerings, distributing SSCH appropriately and recognizing actual faculty involvement

Recommendation 5. Consolidate student service resources at the college level and explore the possibility of leveraging resources from multiple colleges.

Currently, a number of departments have personnel dedicated to student support and advising. There is ample evidence that shows the need for better and more efficient coordination and use of these resources. It is recommended that every college consolidate these resources at the college level and determine if additional resources are needed to serve all the programs and students in the college. It is strongly encouraged that the Colleges of Arts, Letters, and Sciences, Education and Health Professions, and Social Sciences and Communication explore the possibility of leveraging and sharing resources.

Response:

The idea of sharing “operational services” is more and more relevant to universities, both for having functional-specific training for staff and for sharing (rather than duplicating) expert staff among constituent units. All of the relevant reports and recommendations from the past few years should inform this process. Most faculty understand student-advising needs; the subject of “student support” may need more elaboration and discussion. Advising remains more appropriately established at the department and college level since some areas have more similar requirements than do others and the decisions for, whereas student support seems to be more of a central administrative Student Services function.

It’s most helpful for students when the advisor actually knows the content of the various courses. Very few students are able to follow an eight-semester plan rigidly; so detailed knowledge of the curriculum is required to make appropriate decisions for those students who are taking courses out of the normal sequence. In addition, ABET requires all deviations from prerequisites and all course substitutions to be evaluated and documented.

Recommend:

Assure there is a shared definition of “student service.”

While some “advising” in terms of checking off boxes for degree plans could be consolidated across units or colleges (much is already automated but not consistent or dependably accurate), students will not be well served if disciplinary advising and professional advice does not reside in the academic unit. Both institutional experience and external studies support the importance of faculty responsibility in academic advising.

6. Expand the offering of online and hybrid programs and courses.

Academic programs such as the Bachelor of Applied Science, Construction Management, French, Bachelor of Professional Studies with a concentration in Information Assurance, and

Educational Leadership, among others have a significant market potential. (See Prioritization of Academic Programs for more on this.)

Response:

While this may be a good idea, the feasibility study of 15 programs was a poorly done study that should not be used as the basis for deciding which programs to develop.

This will have to be a long-term strategy as each on-line course is going to require resources for development. At a time when resources are dwindling, UALR must make effective decisions in implementing those programs that can generate immediate “bang-for-the-buck.” Otherwise, this becomes a “hail mary pass” to try to get back on a solid footing. More likely, such a strategy ends up in an interception or a dropped pass than a touchdown.

In the context of eVersity, there is an extra layer, where the System may block such efforts as duplicative if they fall into territory that eVersity wants to claim. UALR may be maneuvered into a position where it has to partner with eVersity on new programs. This may give UALR access to development resources, however, that it currently lacks. Moving existing programs on-line will have a lower start-up cost. New programs will also incur faculty resources in the approval process.

On each of the new programs, faculty must be willing to buy into the programs. Were the programs initiated at the faculty level or the dean level? Are there going to be professional development resources to train faculty in on-line tools? Otherwise, faculty who have not taught in an on-line environment may become frustrated with the new medium resulting in negative outcomes.

For example, it seems premature to even discuss an online or hybrid engineering program. The first step would be to make sure that there are online math, chemistry, physics, and earth science courses available. If UALR does not have enough faculty to teach requisite online math courses and does not have any current plan to offer online chemistry and physics courses, this problem needs to be solved first. [Without these required components easily accessible to potential students](#), it is difficult to envision a strong demand for online engineering courses.

One specific example offered: The U. of North Dakota (UND) offers the only ABET-accredited online civil engineering program in the U.S. However, the UND program is really a hybrid program, not an online program. UND requires students to take several weeks of on-campus lab courses during the summers, so that program is definitely not 100% online. However, it is certainly easier to imagine online labs for programs in electrical, computer, and software engineering than in civil and mechanical engineering. The civil engineering program at UND has not grown at all over the last four years, in spite of having a monopoly position in the marketplace for online civil engineering programs.

What makes us think we would do any better than UND at attracting online engineering students?

Recommend:

Recognize that this is a short-term and long-term issue, opportunity and challenge requiring both a short and a long-term strategy.

Approach faculty in the areas identified to consider viable options with respect to those disciplines. As with other recommendations, the faculty engagement is a critical component to the success of such initiatives.

Recommendation 7. Combine and share teaching laboratories.

A significant investment is required to keep up-to-date Information Technology (IT) based laboratories, as well as science and engineering laboratories. Furthermore, utilization is frequently low in these laboratories. It is recommended that UALR start an effort to combine as many of the IT-based laboratories as possible, with the objective of providing the students state of the art facilities and maximizing the use of these facilities. The same type of effort should be implemented for the science and engineering laboratories.

Response:

While such sharing may make sense in some areas, care must be given to resource needs. In some instances it may be more cost efficient, for example, to limit the number of software licenses for laboratories. As a result, separate labs may be more “student friendly” and cost efficient.

Recommend:

As efforts to be both cost efficient and student-need oriented are undertaken, it is important to assure that academic units are involved in decisions regarding current and future laboratory / software needs so as to assure access for students to required materials for programs at all levels.

Recommendation 8. Use the dashboards for academic departments as continuous improvement tools.

The dashboard for every academic college and department is included in Appendix III and has been shared with deans and department chairs. Academic departments should work collaboratively with the dean, the provost, and enrollment management to turn as many dots as possible in the dashboard to green. Special attention should be given to the Strategic Direction, Student Success Efforts, and Recruitment Efforts indicators. It is highly probable that most of the other indicators in a dashboard will turn to green once these three are green.

Response:

Something like the dashboard concept may be useful. However, the dashboards used this spring were an example of how *not* to move toward data-informed decision-making and continuous improvement. The dashboards may have set the institution back, and they certainly contributed to the morale problem. The criteria and definitions were undefined. The metrics selected often

failed to capture meaningful information, each metric is being examined in a vacuum, and nothing was done to establish credibility of the data.

The qualitative measures, “Centrality to UALR’s mission,” “Strategic Direction,” “Student Success Measures,” and “Recruitment Efforts,” all indicated they were developed “based on meetings with departments” or based on “feedback from Academic Leadership.” In the document that was further provided about the evaluation process, details were provided about the development of these judgments, but apparently there was never an attempt to establish criteria. Nor is it clear who was involved in most of these evaluations. As an institution of higher education where we teach qualitative research strategies, it is astounding we would fail to follow even basic principles in qualitative research design.

As a result, faculty distrust the judgments reflected in the dashboards, since, along with the fact there were no shared, articulated criteria used in making these judgments, there is also no shared, articulated agreement on UALR’s mission and direction, and many of the people apparently involved in these evaluations are new to the campus or new to the positions they held as the dashboard were created and wouldn’t have the information necessary to make these judgments.

The absence of clearly stated, objective criteria on the qualitative measures is not just a trust problem; it also creates a practical problem: without knowing the criteria, it is impossible for a unit to try to use such measures for quality improvement. How does a unit “turn . . . dots to green” when there’s no clearly articulated rationale for why a dot was yellow or red in the first place?

While the Planning and Finance committee members gained some insights when questions about the dashboards were posed, the quantitative measures also have problems. The dashboards themselves did not clearly establish definitions. Three of the metrics relate to enrollment and retention: “Semester-to- Semester Retention,” “SSCH Trend,” and “Headcount Trend.”

Most of the dots on those three columns are red and yellow--which is exactly what we would expect since the University’s overall retention, SSCH, and headcount, are all trending downward. The non-concurrent enrollment at UALR has dropped from roughly 12,000 to 8000 students over the last decade. Of course the numbers of each unit are dropping as well. Attacking individual units for not stopping the trend is both inhumane and fruitless. Moreover, unless there are more students overall at UALR, increases in one unit are going to be offset by decreases in others. These metrics could be informative to show shifts in student interest and demand for different programs. But they should not be used to evaluate actions by the individual unit. There may in fact be little an individual unit can do to change these trends because there are so many factors at play, including national trends for disciplines. The 2012 NCES Digest of Education Statistics reports a 4.3 percent drop in English majors between 2005-6 and 2010-11 (Table 353), and at the same time a 55.9 percent increase in health-related majors (Table 357). Likewise the *Baccalaureate and Beyond* report, also by NCES reports a big shift away from social science majors. [Note that NCES doesn’t include psychology or criminal justice in the category of social science majors because those two areas are so large and reflect different trends than history, economics, political science, sociology, and anthropology.]

The point here is that looking at each unit in isolation--in isolation from others at UALR and in isolation from other variables locally and nationally--gives an incomplete picture and represents the most basic of causality errors in statistical research.

An additional problem with most of the metrics is that frequently the numbers hide more than they inform. The metric related to students per faculty is based on a calculation of student load for full-time faculty during a semester. It excludes lecturers, it excludes individualized instruction, it excludes concurrent enrollment. There is no way from this metric to evaluate the situation in any given department because there are so many different reasons why a faculty member may have fewer students than the standard that has been set. The courses may be writing-intensive, the courses may be graduate-level, the courses may be extremely difficult, the faculty may have reassignments. Some of those reassignments may be legitimate, while some of them may not. There may be good reasons the classes are small and the faculty teach fewer of them, and there may be bad reasons. But this is not the way to find out.

Moreover, the standard that was set for class size--the break-even point--has no academic basis. Salaries are market-driven. Class size and faculty load should not be. Rather there needs to be a legitimate method of determining appropriate class size and load. The method needs to be discipline-specific, for example like the ratios set by the state by CIP code. The method needs to consider the entire ecosystem of the unit, and the method needs to be able to capture the diversity of units.

The data in the dashboards, while interesting and offering potential starting points for discussions, they are not appropriate for making high-stakes decisions and evaluations.

The university began a “Quality Initiative” for HLC accreditation in 2013-14, which was intended to move UALR toward a data-informed culture. It is unfortunate that project was halted in 2014-15 because we need the more robust approach to metrics, reporting, and analysis reflected in that project. Additionally, we must move as an institution toward solving data quality issues (i.e., adopt a warehouse and data governance) so that everyone involved trusts the results.

Recommend:

Provide each department with access to the data used to develop the quantitative evaluations in the evaluations as a first step toward restoring some level of trust in the dashboard concept.

Invite departments to assist in validating any data that are to be used as improvement tools.

Continue the previous initiative to solve data quality issues by establishing a warehouse and data governance in order to assure reliability and establish trust.

Recommendation 9. Define roles and responsibilities of academic program coordinators.

Colleges need to clearly define the roles and responsibilities, including workload, of academic program coordinators.

Response:

As has been true with other recommendations there is obvious logic to support this recommendation. However, it is important to keep in mind that roles and responsibilities will vary across programs and well may vary widely within a college. If the intent of this recommendation is to provide savings to the institution, then as with other recommendations, it is important to consider the cost vs. the benefit, recognizing yet again that one “size” does not fit all. Because of the variety of programs housed within one academic unit, the academic program coordinators serve a valuable function and may be the most cost effective way to assure quality. In some departments the duties and responsibilities of coordinators are already defined in the department governance document and the load is carefully negotiated and evaluated. On the other hand, there are clearly inequities from program to program and college to college.

Recommend:

As a part of the process of defining roles and responsibilities for academic program coordinators, identify models for consideration by units that reflect both the needs of the students and of the institution. Just as not all academic departments are the same size and yet department chairs have a number of responsibilities in common, it is important to recall that the programs with an academic coordinator provide needed services to students and to the program faculty although not all are the same size or have the same coordination needs.

Assure that any reassigned time or added compensation is justified by workload

Recommendation 10. Leverage resources from multiple colleges and create synergies.

UALR has faculty with expertise in the area of statistics in every college, except the Law School. It makes sense to leverage all of these resources to offer academic programs in this area and to provide students an option to strengthen their analytical skills and satisfy market needs. Furthermore, there are a number of areas with potential to create synergies and offer unique academic programs to our students. Examples of these areas include: 1) Communication Sciences and Disorders, and Special Education, and 2) Business, Law, and Social Sciences.

Response:

As an abstraction this makes sense. The devil is in the details. The ability to offer a unique program does not necessarily mean that it will be attractive to students or sustainable if the faculty engaged in its development retire or leave the university.

Recommend:

Provide incentives to encourage synergies at the same time assuring that any such partnerships or sharing of resources not only makes sense in the short term for cost savings but is also of value on a longer term so that any benefits derived may prove sustainable both in terms of student demand and faculty engagement.

11. Expand collaborations with two-year institutions.

The Provost Office and the five UALR colleges must continue to actively pursue and implement 2+2 agreements with the University of Arkansas (UA) two-year institutions. Special attention and additional efforts will be required to expand the course and program offerings at the UALR Center located on the UA Community College at Hope (UACCH)-Texarkana campus. UALR's collaboration with UACC at Batesville should be another area of focus and priority. Agreements with other institutions like Pulaski Technical College (PTC) and Arkansas State University-Beebe, among others, must be expanded.

Response:

The faculty continue to support this effort. In order to expand collaborations, however, we need to first know with which schools we currently have collaborations, what officially constitutes “collaboration” and whether “collaboration” is consistent between UALR and each two-year institution. Additionally, it would be helpful to know under whose auspices it is considered appropriate to initiate potential collaborations. This would help programs strategically look for opportunities at these other campuses.

Clearly, streamlined articulation of academic programs (one potential benefit of such collaborations) is easier in some disciplines than in others. In general, the degrees that are more prescriptive and sequential in their eight-semester plan are more difficult to articulate with two-year institutions.

For example, two-year institutions in Arkansas do not offer for engineering students all of the necessary freshman level courses, such as calculus 1 and calculus 2, calculus-based physics, and general chemistry. Obviously, most community colleges also do not offer sophomore level circuits or statics courses. So, a pre-engineering program needs to be created that would allow community college students from all over the state to prepare for transferring to an engineering program for the junior and senior years. However, it will be difficult to get 22 community colleges to create and teach these courses because few of their students will be prepared to take them and few of their faculty members will be qualified to teach them.

Recommend:

Provide access to specific information regarding existing partnerships, perhaps on a password-protected webpage, so that faculty can be encouraged to think and plan creatively toward enhancing existing partnerships.

Establish a streamlined environment through which academic units may propose and promote events and activities that may attract students at two-year institutions to consider UALR programs.

Clearly identify the process for approaching and / or developing new collaborative ventures.

Consider opportunities for recruiting students at two-year institutions to enroll concurrently at UALR so as to minimize time to degree and enrollment in courses that do not satisfy degree requirements.

12. Expand the offering of concurrent courses.

By expanding the offerings of concurrent courses, UALR would have access to a larger pipeline of high school students familiar with the institution from which to recruit from. Departments offering concurrent courses should develop and implement plans to cultivate a stronger relationship between the high school students in their courses and the campus department.

Response:

It is a good idea to increase both the number of schools with which UALR has a partnership in concurrent enrollment as well as the number of courses available to students at the partner schools. However, these decisions are not within UALR's realm to assert much control. The greatest single impediment to significant increases in the number of available courses offered for concurrent credit is the lack of teachers at the schools with appropriate qualifications to teach courses for concurrent credit. Some institutions of higher education are able to compete more effectively in offering classes because they have faculty willing and able to teach on the high school campus. Such availability is significantly limited and is costly at UALR. Additionally, public schools in Little Rock have scheduling challenges that make it very difficult for all students who may wish to enroll for concurrent credit to have access to the courses. It is an ongoing challenge to encourage schools and parents to value the opportunity that concurrent enrollment offers to qualified high school students.

It is important to recognize as well that offering concurrent courses requires review and monitoring at the department level that adds to faculty workload and often means reassignment time.

As a recruitment strategy, however, concurrent enrollment is likely to provide only limited benefits. By the time students who qualify for concurrent credit have reached the 11th grade when most concurrent courses are offered, they have already made a decision about where they intend to enroll in college.

Recommend:

Continue to work aggressively with all schools in the surrounding area to maximize availability of courses.

Develop strategies to market UALR and recruit potential students at partner high schools well before they are eligible for enrollment in concurrent courses (9th and 10th grade students in particular).

Seek ways /funding to provide faculty and graduate students to teach in partner schools as a means to increase the availability of course offerings and assure quality instruction in niche programs (i.e. engineering).

13. Create an Advisory Board for every academic unit.

An Advisory Board can inform the faculty about what body of knowledge and competencies will make the graduates more competitive in the job market or better prepared for graduate studies, thereby contributing to the development of more relevant academic programs. Further, getting individuals involved as members of a board is a strategy to cultivate potential donors and supporters for the program.

Response:

Advisory boards cost money and may not result in benefits for all departments. While involving community members with academic units is a good strategy to cultivate potential donors and supporters, an advisory board may not be the best mechanism in each academic area. If there is not a clear task to be performed on an ongoing basis, Advisory Board members may not feel that their time is well spent. In addition, some individuals may be asked to serve on a board in more than one area resulting in the unintended consequence of asking a potential member to choose one unit over another.

Recommend:

Prior to considering the creation of an advisory board for each academic unit, a cost-benefit analysis should be done.

As benefits are identified where Advisory Boards exist and are successful, those benefits should be stated and each academic unit then challenged to devise the most effective mechanism for that unit to gain these benefits whether it be an Advisory Board or other community-connected venture.

Recommendation 14. Establish a flat rate for online programs.

A flat rate for online programs will make UALR more competitive in the online education market nationwide. There could be some exceptions to the flat rate for very specialized programs.

Response:

It is our understanding that this recommendation has already been approved and is being implemented.

Recommend:

Notify stakeholders of the opportunity to utilize the flat rate in program marketing.

Recommendation 15. Launch a marketing campaign for niche academic programs.

UALR offers very unique academic programs, such as the Bachelor of Fine Arts in Dance Performance, the Bachelor of Science in Construction Management, the Master of Science in Information Quality, the Ph.D. in Information Quality, the Graduate Certificate in Orientation and Mobility of the Blind, the Master of Arts in Rehabilitation of the Blind, and the Ph.D. in Criminal Justice, among others, that should be marketed nationally and internationally. The marketing of these niche programs could attract students that would otherwise not consider UALR.

Response:

Clearly, this is a good idea, but it is critical to work with faculty on the selection of these programs as well as on identifying what may qualify as “niche”. As mentioned regarding adding new online programs, faculty investment is a precondition for success and the faculty offering the programs need to be on the ground floor of marketing considerations. The programs listed do not all satisfy the faculty’s understanding of “niche” and some that may have a strong case to be considered “niche” are not listed. This fact leads committee members to question the basis on which the specific list was developed.

Recommend:

Prior to beginning any marketing plan, verify with faculty that the plan for marketing the academic program is based on accurate information.

Offer ongoing incentives for academic programs to demonstrate ways in which their program may satisfy a particular need and thereby qualify for niche marketing.

Recommendation 16. Integrate more technology in the learning process.

Increasing the use of technology in the classroom and as a support tool in the learning process will reduce the cost of printed materials while enriching the educational experiences of the students.

Response:

This recommendation implies limited efforts to integrate technology at the current time. Often limitations are caused by a lack of available technology that works dependably. Many classrooms are still not “smart” or tech enhanced. In some instances existing technology is not well maintained. Much of the budgeting for technology in academic areas appears to have been decentralized and as a result is not consistently available in classrooms and labs across campus. Technology is costly. Whoever is responsible for this must be budgeted for it.

(In the big scheme of things more technology may not be as important to educating our students as reading books and articles, and writing a lot in class and out of class).

Recommend:

Continue to encourage appropriate usage of technology for academic purposes.

Provide opportunities for faculty enrichment on usage of technology to facilitate learning.

Since technology is costly and students pay a technology fee, assure that resources are applied to real as opposed to perceived need for tech enhancements. Funds for routine maintenance and replacement of technology in general usage classrooms must be provided.

Recommendation 17. Increase offerings of non-for-credit courses.

A new financial model should be implemented to reward entrepreneurial faculty, department chairs, and deans who develop and offer short courses, workshops, and seminars to satisfy professional development needs of the public and private employers in Little Rock and Central Arkansas. Some areas with potential for this new model are: IT, languages, conflict management and resolution, data analytics, and technical writing.

Response:

This is a good idea. UALR has had such course offerings in the past.

Recommend:

In the consideration and potential creation of a new financial model as proposed, efforts must be made to allow for ranges of success and failure such that entrepreneurial faculty have the opportunity to develop and modify projects and programs leading to long-term success. The potential programs identified as well as other such projects take time to develop and establish. All too often in previous cycles, UALR has been unwilling to allow an incubation period or provide ongoing incentives to faculty and units who have engaged in such initiatives. Being “nimble” in these areas is important.

Recommendation 18. Streamline the curriculum for all programs.

Every academic program should consider the number of options, areas of emphasis, or tracks offered and determine whether they are still viable and relevant. The strategy of cross listing courses within and across colleges should open opportunities for students, without requiring the offering of additional courses.

Response:

This appears to be a good, logical suggestion and has similar components to those in recommendation 4.

Recommend:

Provide some questions for programs to consider in this process.

Establish a consultative process among departments for course sharing that provides incentives for integrated and cross-listed course offerings.

Recommendation 19. Fill most faculty positions that become vacant at the assistant professor level.

At least for the next two years, most faculty hires should be at the assistant professor level, unless there is external funding to cover at least a portion of the salary. By implementing this recommendation, UALR could save between 20 to 25 percent per vacant position.

Response:

It is our general understanding that hiring new faculty at the assistant professor level has been institutional policy for some time unless there was a search for a dean, director or department chair. Therefore, it is unclear how such savings would accrue differently than has been true in most instances in the recent past. It may also be true that a department's instructional needs are best served by hiring an instructor.

The number of vacated positions in academic units is significant and since there has been an extended semi-hard hiring freeze, many if not most faculty positions that have become vacant in the last two years have not been filled at all. At this point it is not clear what orderly process is in place or what timing is appropriate to request replacement positions. This lack of clear definition of process and timing coupled with newly formed colleges and new leadership has exacerbated frustrations among faculty as decisions regarding instructional load, potential reallocation of resources and increased online offerings occur. As some positions are selected for search / hiring and not others, there is no confidence that the process leading to the selection of positions to recommend has been done based on accurate data or stated priorities.

Recommend:

Clearly indicate both a process and a time frame for departments to "make their case" for new hires (monthly, quarterly, annually, etc.), and document that the rank recommended be clearly justified based on the unit's identified needs.

Additional committee comments

Comment 1. Summer school course offerings and faculty compensation

In the committee's meetings with the Provost prior to the distribution of this report committee members discussed a memo regarding establishment of a summer school salary break-even for faculty compensation including fringes. At that time the Provost agreed that the break-even point would be averaged across departments and not individuals. Such averaging is important to assuring reasonable variety of course offerings for students during the summer, particularly for those needing specific courses to make progress toward timely degree completion.

Recommend:

Implement for summer 2015 and continue a policy whereby a summer school salary break-

even for faculty compensation including fringes is averaged across all faculty members in a department teaching a summer course. The determination should not be made on a course-by-course basis.

Comment 2: College specific recommendations

There are a number of specific recommendations in the Provost's Academic Planning Process report regarding both curricular changes and budget reductions for each Academic College. In the background narrative this report states that a resource alignment process that included an academic planning process was undertaken in the fall semester. "The new organizational structure for academic colleges...which was in place for nearly four months, provided the right environment for an analysis".

Additionally, the report states that the goals of the process were to 1) determine viability of academic programs, and 2) identify academic programs with growth and revenue enhancement potential.

The committee discussed the recommendations for each college at length and during several meetings. In the course of these discussions it was evident that the implementation of the academic planning process as described was not uniform across departments and colleges, that new leadership in some colleges and departments resulted in very different interpretations of and communication about the intent of the process and that the timeline for departmental responses in some colleges was so short that it was difficult to ascertain any level of meaningful engagement by faculty. Moreover, several faculty voiced concerns that they were not engaged at all in a planning process, but rather were informed that decisions were being made about their programs at higher levels of administration than at the unit level. Whether or not the dashboards referenced earlier in this report were utilized in the development of the college specific recommendations, they appear to have resulted in noteworthy challenges as well. The manner in which they were or in many cases were not shared with all parties effected, coupled with clear evidence that some of the data is problematic, that the basis for assignment of "color" to categories within units is not clear, and that opportunities to challenge the accuracy of the dashboards were not given has resulted in significant problems in a number of units. This widespread lack of confidence in the process has also contributed to an overall decline in morale among faculty.

If the announced goal of determining viability and identifying growth potential for academic programs is to be successful, committee members believe that accurate data is crucial. Therefore, opportunities to study, validate and where appropriate modify data are essential.

Developing new academic programs and modifying existing ones is an expensive endeavor in both faculty and administrative time. Failed endeavors require additional resources to remove them and often result in cascading, unanticipated consequences. The process on UALR's campus has consistently involved early discussions between and among faculty, chairs, deans, provosts, and chancellor, with refinements in proposals being made throughout the discussions. Such a process increases buy-in from the faculty implementers of curriculum and the administrative and external investors in the program. Without this shared engagement again becoming the norm, a shared vision and clear institutional and academic goals cannot be achieved. The goal of building a strong metropolitan university with a common purpose and a set of core values that will continue to be viable in central Arkansas will not be achieved.

Recommend:

As previously discussed create an accurate, nimble and accessible data warehouse which may be used to inform decision making and academic planning.

Re-establish and invigorate the shared process for developing and modifying academic programs (described above) to assure buy-in / ownership / engagement from the faculty implementers of curriculum and the administrative and external investors in the program.

The experience of committee members in the academic planning process at the unit level this academic year has been clearly inconsistent, and on more than one occasion information disseminated through the administrative lines of responsibility has been widely divergent. Therefore, the committee encourages senior administrators to establish a regular process wherein faculty are engaged directly by the Provost or Chancellor on academic planning and curricular matters in order to restore confidence and encourage faculty to engage in developing a shared vision for UALR's future.