



UALR Graduate Council

Wednesday, October 7, 2009

Dr. David Belcher
Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs

Dear Dr. Belcher:

On behalf of the UALR Graduate Council, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on your proposed process for implementing the new ADHE Program Viability Standards. We understand the importance of 'responding thoughtfully' to these guidelines.

We have discussed your letter dated September 10, 2009, about your proposed process and believe that it is an appropriate UALR response to these new guidelines. However, we do have a few comments about the potential impact of its implementation:

1. The viability of a number of graduate programs will be directly dependent upon the availability of financial and faculty resources to support them. While many may interpret these guidelines as being focused upon the ability of a program to recruit a sufficient number of students, there are probably many graduate programs which might be borderline viable, but could easily achieve viability given more resources. Within an environment of limited financial resources, this simply is an indication that discussions with the faculty and administrators of all programs should include developing realistic financial and staffing plans that assures future viability, or graceful termination, of the programs.
2. Similar concerns need to be taken into account when new graduate programs are proposed. Specifically, we believe that the UALR Graduate Council needs better assurances that new programs have sufficient funding to achieve viability – given that most proposed programs simply assert that 'no additional resources are required'; we all know that this typically does not reflect reality or is done by cannibalizing existing programs thereby jeopardizing their viability. One option may be to require more detailed financial analysis of the funding of these proposed programs with letters of specific commitment of resources from chairs and deans. However, given that determining financial viability of new programs may be outside of our ability to evaluate, we welcome discussions with you to

identify ways to address this concern. Another suggestion is to ask you, as Provost, to certify that you are satisfied with the level of funding of a proposed program prior to our consideration of the merits of its academic components.

3. We believe that maintaining program viability is closely affiliated with each graduate program's assessment activities and we would encourage each program – and your office – to support enhancing these assessment activities beyond the normal 'learning outcomes.'
4. We request that the Graduate Council be formally involved before termination plans are proposed for any graduate programs deemed to be unviable.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback. We look forward to being closely involved with you and your office in keeping UALR's graduate programs viable and relevant.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steve Jennings". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Steven F. Jennings, PhD
Chair, UALR Graduate Council