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- University of Regina and their experience with the PPP



Collective Agreement

Facts

Promotion

Members promoted to the next higher rank shall receive the following July a Promotion Increment equal to the grater greater of the difference between the Member's current salary and the salary floor for the rank into which they are being promoted and one Annual Career Increment

Reference: Article 53.5, 53.6, 53.10 and 53.17

The Academic Integrity Committee (AIC), created by the UGFA Executive to investigate and critique the Administration's Program Prioritization Process (PPP), has examined a similar process used at another Canadian university. The University of Regina's experience reveals that the PPP is not the only possible model for such a process, and thus qualifies the Administration's claim of following "best practices" in imposing the PPP here at Guelph. The serious concerns expressed by Regina's Faculty Members and Academic Staff at the end of the process, however, also shed light on the pitfalls of the program prioritization movement which Canadian universities like Guelph have imported from the United States.

The University of Regina launched an Academic Program Review (APR) as the outcome of its 2009 Strategic Plan. The Administration hired an outside consulting firm, Higher Education Strategy Associates (HESA), to conduct the APR. According to the University President's website, "The evaluation is based on the proven approach developed by Robert Dickeson in *Prioritizing Academic Programs and Services*. HESA, in consultation with the Evaluation Steering Committee, have customized Dickeson's approach to meet the needs of the University of Regina."

Although Dickeson's book inspired both processes, there are significant differences between Regina's APR and Guelph's PPP. A profound difference is that the APR does **not** compare academic programs to non-academic programs: the Physics major program was not compared to Parking Services at Regina. Given the example of Regina's APR, and the concerns of the UGFA that such comparisons cannot be made fairly or reasonably, the AIC wonders why the Administration has insisted that the PPP must lump academic and non-academic programs together?

The University of Regina's documents state that "extensive consultation across campus and throughout the community" was used in the configuration of the APR and that the evidence used by HESA included surveys of faculty members, alumni, advisors and students. Given this example, the AIC wonders why the Administration at Guelph did not survey past and present students, let alone consult with Faculty Members and Academic Staff, before imposing the PPP?

Regina's APR permitted academic programs to appeal their ranking at the end of the process. The UGFA continues to have substantial questions about the lack of any real appeal mechanism in the PPP. The Administration has responded to questions from UGFA Members with brief and unhelpful references to normal Senate processes and procedures. In similar fashion to our colleagues at the University of Regina, UGFA's Members wish to see good governance and due process applied in all matters: this is particularly true in matters which will affect academic programs and the careers of faculty, librarians and veterinarians on this campus.

Even if there are features of the APR which seem preferable to the PPP, the outcome of Regina's process has been grim. In December all academic units at the University of Regina were told to prepare for a 3% budget cut for the coming year, with the expectation that this will be followed by similar cuts over the next several years. The Administration at Guelph might respond that the PPP has been designed specifically to prevent such across-the-board cuts by initiating a ranking process to identify the bottom 20% of programs for possible elimination. This plan, which pits program against program in a struggle for survival, was characterized by James Bradshaw in his article in the *Globe & Mail* of December 26 as "Darwinian."

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/education/no-department-is-safe-as-universities-employ-us-cost-cutting-strategy/article6711261/>

A letter to the President of the University of Regina, dated November 27 and signed by more than 200 faculty and staff, indicates that processes such as the APR or PPP which have been inspired by the American program prioritization movement result in cuts to academic programs and faculty complement, **not** cuts to administrative excess:

"As faculty and staff of the University of Regina, we write to express our serious concern that the administration's pending budgetary decisions seriously threaten the academic mission of our university; ... we were surprised to learn that the academic units, which are the foundation of the university's academic mission, would be the first to be cut."

This letter concludes with four requests which identify superfluous administration as the primary source of the University of Regina's financial difficulties and offer an alternative strategy for alleviating them: 1. an immediate freeze of all administrative hiring; 2. the development of a 3-year plan for reducing the cost of university administration; 3. the development of a 3-year plan for restoring the university's academic mission; 4. the publication of an annual budget book.

Finally, in keeping with the conviction that the UGFA's Members will want to assess Dickeson's book in the context of a wider literature, the AIC respectfully suggests that they consider another recent publication:

James E. Côté & Anton L. Allahar, *Lowering Higher Education: The Rise of Corporate Universities and the Fall of Liberal Education*, (University of Toronto Press, 2011)

ISBN 978-1-4426-1121-4

The authors argue that the Canadian university system is in crisis which they define as the mission drift away from liberal education and towards forms of pseudo-vocationalism. This crisis is related to the increasing corporatization of universities in terms of their administrative outlook, their mandate and their funding model. According to Côté and Allahar, mission drift has undermined scholarly standards, brought academic disengagement, and produced a proliferation of dubious education technologies even as student-instructor ratios climb.

Members who have opinions or information to share regarding the PPP are invited to contact:

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