**Academic Forum – Program Prioritization**

**October 10, 2012**

Dr. Brenton thanked the audience for coming today. The task force is just getting started so there is not a huge amount to share just yet. Vicki Szabo and Angi Brenton are co chairing. The task force members introduced themselves.

**Task Force selection process** – Dr. Brenton asked each dean to give her three names from their college/unit, and asked Faculty Senate and SGA for a list of names. She worked within those names to achieve a balance of people from different areas, individuals that will not consider themselves a representative of a narrow constituency but as broad and forward thinkers representing the university as a whole. This process will succeed as we take that larger vision.

**Overview of process (included in handout)** – Universities across the country are engaged in a similar process as well as four in our system. We are trying to draw on their experience. *Dean and Provost* conducted a survey regarding program prioritization. Out of 70 respondents 66 have started or have completed a process like this for differing reasons – imminent budget cuts, shrinking resources, state resources down, limited new funding resources, a need to work more within existing resources. The drivers of our efforts are: 1) 2020 vision; 2) our pursuit of excellence; 3) financial limitations; 4) funding based on state performance funding model; and 5) stewardship and accountability. We are not trying to meet an anticipated cut but are trying to position ourselves for an increasingly uncertain landscape – we need to be sustainable and efficient. We have been reactive to funding decisions in the past – that made us take opportunity cuts rather than strategic cuts. Going forward we need to be strategic in our decision making.

The task force has met twice. We want a very transparent process with lots of opportunity for input. We have set up an ambitious timetable to complete the process within a year but are flexible. At the end of this we will make several kinds of recommendations: 1) programs that make good investment opportunities; 2) programs that are doing well and should continue as they are; 3) programs that need modification (e.g., suffered enrollment decline but staffed at level of larger programs, right sizing); 4) programs that should be combined or are too broad and need to be more focused; and 5) programs that we will determine should be discontinued. Recommendations will be made to the Chancellor with the final decision being his.

**Q:** Could there be additional programs added at the end of this? **A:** Possibly – but that is not really our focus.

**Q:** What about those in the curriculum process that are waiting approval, will those be included? **A:** We are not sure we have an answer to that yet. There are programs that are very new for which we will not have the same data. We are looking at a five year history. Obviously if it is brand new we will have to modify. We are not to the stage yet that we know what criteria or metrics we will use.

**Q:** What relationship will this have to the general education proposed changes? **A:** In the best of all worlds we would not be doing these at the same time. The real urgency with both is to move through. The task force will be looking more at majors and academic programs than liberal studies program per se, even though there is some overlap. Each process will inform the other.

Vicki Szabo moved through the PowerPoint presentation – reviewing institutional comparisons. We are looking at several models. We have divided the task force into teams to talk with individuals at each of these institutions asking a pretty unified list of questions. The task force is awaiting assignments – we hope to complete this by the first of November. These are not all comparable institutions to ours but ones that have most recently completed this process.

Vicki reviewed the timeframe reviewed. Minutes are posted on the website on the Office of the Provost page. We have built forums into the timetable. We are trying to decide how much quantitative and qualitative data will go into this process, as well as honoring the processes undertaken before. Once we establish the criteria and metrics, we will likely do a pilot. We are not sure yet about the ranking or assessment process in the final stage. We are discussing how we will communicate to students.

**Q:** Will the report from Sacramento State be available so we can see their work? **A:** We can provide a link to it on the website. It had a high degree of self assessment along with weighing secondary criteria.

**Q:** What is the difference between programs and departments? **A:** We have not quite decided yet – right now we are conceding this is a program study. We can get departmental data – in some cases we cannot get program data. Departments can submit responses. We will try as much as possible to look at programs, not departments. Some data is simply not available by program.

**Q:** There are departments that are departments, they are not programs. There are departments that contribute heavily to general education or departments that don’t have a major. How do those figure in? Is a major a program? **A:** One of the first things we are going to have to assemble is an inventory of programs. Do we count minors, concentrations? We are not sure we will want to assess all of those, but in some cases we may need to. We still have to determine what will count as a program.

**Q:** Ignoring department program distinction – will IOPE assemble all data? **A:** In one model IOPE submitted data to the department that used it to assemble their data; in another model the task force received data from IOPE and then the department assembled the data. Departments will assemble data to submit to the task force and the task force will in turn develop a report. We will try to develop standardization, but some requested information will vary from program to program.

**Q:** Once the report is written and submitted in May, when will it be implemented – when will programs be eliminated? **A:** We don’t know that yet. Recommendations will go to the Chancellor in May. He may choose to take a month or two to assess and then issue a report or he may choose to wait until the faculty return in the fall, taking the summer to review. We do not know. It will be up to him.

**Q:** I strongly encourage him not sit on it for the summer in order to allow faculty to apply for other positions and plan for their future. Is there an appeal process to be built in? Can we appeal to the Chancellor? **A:** Yes. If you look at the timeline, in early April we will publish recommendations. There will time between early April and May for any program that wants to appeal or submit additional data to do so. The task force can also reconsider before it goes to Chancellor.

**Criteria –** ECU had three broad criteria with a number of metrics for each criterion: quality; centrality; and productivity. Task force members shared their thoughts from this discussion:

* Too much data can be a bad thing, we need to pare down to grasp the comprehensive nature of our university, not just pure data, how to involve qualitative data.
* The need for broad consensus; we did not want 120 data points for each program.
* In reading the literature and samples, one book came up repeatedly – *Prioritizing Academic Programs and Services* by Robert C. Dickeson – a great book. The task force is reading it – it provides a broad sense. Copies are available at the Coulter Faculty Commons and in the library.
* Sacramento State – they started with their values which were mostly instructionally oriented, and associated criteria with those. This would be a good place to start from as we move toward the future. A major part of the criteria has to be very student focused – this is where we need to begin. We are sensitive to the last program review data collection process.
* As we set up rubrics, the metrics will not be set in stone till we determine they will work.

**Q:** How will graduate vs. undergraduate vs. certificate programs be addressed? **A:** We will look at all those things. Different campuses have done different things with different metrics for each of these. We are not sure that we will do that. We do not plan to just count numbers. We will look at trends in enrollment, etc. We believe we can look at them with some of the same criteria.

**Q:** Within a given criterion you will have many metrics. Do you envision metrics so broad that each department or program can answer each one or will there be some that do not apply? If that is the case then how do you compare? **A:** In our research, one model had categories that departments can fill in because this research may look different, thus allowing opportunities to set up a place to share even though they are not the same.

**Q:** Regarding a pilot program – will you try to pilot using a program from the last program prioritization process or pick a program to go through early? **A:** We have looked at some of those programs but do not plan to follow the same format; after we develop criteria and a sample rubric, we will choose some of the different program profiles, go through a trial rating to see how the instrument we are using works and assess before we use it more broadly. This gives us an opportunity for mid course corrections.

**Q:** Given you want to use a five year history – are we taking into account we have gone through the most significant financial upheaval in history? **A:** We have chosen this time period because this is when we converted to Banner. Results prior to that will be difficult to get. The last five years have been tough on all, not to the same extent on every program. There will be opportunities for programs to provide context for their results. We will compare to peers for same time period. This has to come into our assessment.

Committee shared possible criteria:

* QEP and how programs used this opportunity that was available. We are really at the beginning stage. No criterion has been adopted.
* Performance vs. potential – ECU which we like a good deal, had the category of ‘opportunity.’ Looking at adding to programs, we want to allow for programs to show room for growth and investment, narrative criteria.

**Q:** With classroom sizes being full and Asheville full, how are you going to balance this with student demands to get into classes? **A:** The reasons why students can’t get in to classes is that our faculty growth has not kept up with student growth. We don’t have the faculty resources. This process is designed to address that very issue. Instead of continuing growth on the backs of our faculty and staff, we need to fund programs according to their actual needs. The reality is if you end a program, it is going to temporarily take a dip. Students may choose another major or transfer, so you are betting on the future.

**Q:** In looking at retention and graduation rates – specifically STEM areas, we may have low retention because it is taking longer to graduate because many students cannot make it through there. The 2020 Vision wants to strengthen STEM. These could be at cross purposes. The future will not be exactly like last five years. Programs that suffered dramatically in the past five years may not suffer as we move into the future. We need to account for the future changes as well. **A:** Those things are true. Some disciplines are going to have lower retention rates than others; peer comparison will help us there. We are not going to make major decisions on any single criteria, but look at a pattern of criteria across different things. We will see a constellation of factors that will give us information.

**Q:** Will the size of savings factor into the weighing of these programs? **A:** We don’t think so. The real benefit of this process is that we will find small incremental savings in a lot of places that will add up to significant savings. Some members of the task force are very concerned about framing this through a financial lens.

**Q:** A possible vector for analysis is possible comparison to peer input as well. We learn a lot anecdotally from our peers. **A:** We probably will be considering both qualitative and quantitative peer data. Both will be indicators.

If you have suggestions for this process, we welcome those.

**Comment:** Regarding cost benefit analysis – no one likes to look at this, but sometimes we may have programs that we don’t consider strong, but if we cut it, it costs us more than we save in the long run.

**Success of the Process –** In our first meeting we went through an exercise looking at what the task force would define as success of this process. Do you have items to add?

* We hope that from this, we come out with an emphasis on inter disciplinary sharing rather than becoming more siloed.

**Q:** Many years ago when Dr. Coulter was Chancellor, we had an outside agency come in and look at WUC strengths and weaknesses. One of the strengths identified was the culture. We don’t hear that very often internally. How often do we reach out to the local community for their buy in? **A:** We talked about criteria looking outward. Like centrality – if we abolish a program what would be the impact on our community? We feel this is important. The regional implications are also articulated in 2020 plan which is part of our guiding plan.

**Q:** Will there be things geared towards student in particular? **A:** Our students on the task force have been very vocal and are very keen on communication specific to students. They have asked for specific student forums.

**Q:** Is one of the students a graduate student? **A:** No, both are undergraduate students. We will follow up on having a graduate student join the task force.

**Concerns about the Process** **–** Do individuals have concerns about the process to add to those listed by the task force?

* If a program was to be eliminated, we would provide notice to faculty and use the process of discernment so we are faithful to the promises we have made to our faculty and students.

**Q:** Will there be forum opportunities for Biltmore Park? **A:** We have discussed having a forum at Biltmore Park.

**Q:** It is great to have students involved. But we need to give voice to students in departments that are impacted. **A:** It is important. Once recommendations are made, it is important to meet with those departments specifically.

**Q:** Regarding distance students and programs – how do they participate in this process? This could be a hurdle. **A:** In addition to forums, we have a feedback mechanism on the website for those not physically present on campus.

**Q:** In previous reports from intuitions, is there any consistency of the programs that come up? Do you see the results? **A:** We have not looked at it through that lens. Some of the reports will indicate a number of programs eliminated. If you look at the program, it may have eliminated a couple of degrees without eliminating a program. So it may be program, but not necessarily personnel.

**Hurdles for this Process** **–** What hurdles do we have to overcome to be successful? We discussed the challenges with available data. SCH’s are attached to faculty, not to departments or programs. The timeframe is pretty aggressive. Do individuals have anything to add?

**Q:** Is it necessary to have conversations with faculty and students as to how we conduct ourselves through this process? We want to illicit feedback, but a program may want to promote their program, encouraging students to rally when we don’t know the outcome; or a program that thinks they may be a target may choose to get alumni involved and cause hurt feelings, creating silos. Is it necessary to provide some guidelines or at least a discussion as to how we might want to conduct ourselves? **A:** In a year where our theme is citizenship and civility, this is a really great idea. We have seen where program faculty and students have written senators and brought a lot of attention to their program. They can end up being hurt by doing that. We may want to have a forum to create some guiding standards.

**Q:** Isn’t that the nature of this task force? Someone entrusted the individuals on this task force to carry out this process. Is there not the belief to give the task force a chance to tease this out, a commitment to ride this out and see what happens? **A:** The task force takes this very seriously; we do not take this process lightly. We have a great deal of respect for one another and the depth of our discussions and wish for your faith in us in this undertaking.

**Q:** Will program review data be used? **A:** We have seen a few of these. Of those Dr. Brenton has reviewed, they have been a bit more self promotional than objective and did not have common criteria. We don’t think it has the same purpose or process, so likely will not use that as our analysis.

**Q:** Should we be rethinking about how we do this? Then we can use the common data elements that can be useful to the departments? **A:** The last process was useful; it just wasn’t constructed in such a way to meet our objective. We would like this to be ongoing – an iterative process. We would like to capture different kinds of data.

**Q:** Do you have a long term goal for the kind of measurement you wish to attain? **A:** We will look at what will better serve our students and the region in the long term. There has been some discussion about a numerical target. This is not about meeting a numerical target – it is about being the most sustainable university in the future – how can we make decisions in the best interest of our students in the future.

**Q:** Regarding the consistency of categorizing students in Banner, some are pre- majors. Some programs include these, some do not. How will that be made consistent since you will be pulling data from Banner? **A:** We don’t know. We have discussed this. Sometimes even programs want to use different measures for different purposes. We may look at both. Melissa Wargo is helping us to figure out how to capture the data we need.

**Q:** Regarding conducting a pilot – how do you then evaluate the criteria without it implicating the outcome? **A:** We don’t know yet. We have discussed developing rubrics, but we don’t know. If we developed a rubric we would try it and see what problems we ran into with it before we go into full production mode. We don’t know yet.