

# **PRIORITIZING ACADEMIC PROGRAMS AND SERVICES**

## **INDIANA STATE UNIVERSITY**

**October 4, 2005**

The need for Indiana State University to be more aggressive in clarifying purposes, setting priorities, and allocating resources is accepted by most members of the University community. The Provost and his staff have been consistent in reaffirming the need and steadfast in suggesting that the campus must engage in a systematic process that focuses on prioritizing programs and services. This is the moment in time when we must initiate this process. This is the moment in time that presents us with the greatest opportunity to take control and chart our future.

The budget climate of the State of Indiana when paired with unique, institutional budget issues and an institutional history of attempting to “be everything to everyone,” presents Indiana State University with numerous challenges, but it also presents us with an opportunity to better achieve strategic balance and fiscal responsibility. Strategic balance and fiscal responsibility refers to identifying programs and services which are the most efficient, effective, and central to institutional mission and strategic plan and allocating resources to support these programs and services. There is no more difficult or more important job in higher education than clarifying purposes and setting priorities for colleges and universities. Accomplishing this task is vital because Indiana State University, like most institutions, does not have inexhaustible resources, and the link between academic quality and financial health of institutions is clear.

Like most American colleges and universities, ISU is under increasing internal and external pressures include improving or strengthening reputation and image, improving quality, reducing costs, increasing revenues, improving graduation rates, supporting economic development, and reducing the “brain drain” for the state.

These challenges are not unique to ISU. Most institutions in the country are faced with similar challenges. In the higher education community, our mode of responding has often been to ignore them and hope they will go away or to make the absolute minimum changes possible to pacify the immediate pressure.

Forces, both internal and external to Indiana State University, present a clear and compelling message: We must change how and what we do. We must accept the fact that failure to change will have a negative impact on ISU in the short term and a greater negative impact over time.

What does this mean to Indiana State University? We have talked about clarifying our mission, setting priorities, eliminating duplication, reducing or eliminating programs and services not central to our work, and focusing our efforts on our strategic goals. We have talked on this campus for more than twenty years about the need to evaluate the resources allocated to low enrolled programs. The Report of the NCA Comprehensive Visit to Indiana State University – March 2000 stated:

*The Indiana Commission of Higher Education has identified the need to evaluate the resources allocated to low enrolled programs at ISU. ....significant number of programs with low enrollment remains at ISU. NCA visiting teams in 1980 and 1990 made similar observations. In the judgment of the team (NCA Site Team), ISU must give the highest possible priority to the implementation of processes to redirect the use of resources historically allocated to low enrolled programs to support the achievement of high priority goals of the new strategic plan. ....there are too many programs for the size of the faculty and student body. It shall remain the opportunity for the NCA team that visits in ten years to determine the real effectiveness of the strategic planning process as measured by the resolution of the allocation of resources to low enrollment activities.*

ISU has been passive and reactive in addressing this problem. Even though we have implemented a program review process and also engaged in Program Array Review three years ago that examined low enrolled programs, our efforts have been minimal and have not enabled the reallocation of any significant resources to high priority needs. Our campus, like most, has resisted any major restructuring efforts. Despite all of the pressures, internal and external, and despite all of the new economic imperatives, and despite the pressure to improve quality we have resisted all serious efforts to restructure our academic enterprise.

We have developed and embraced a strategic vision for the University that will position us to be a University of choice for high achieving students as well as fulfill the mission of a state research university. We have been successful in securing funding from Lilly to initially help fund some portions of our strategic vision. However, this is only a short term solution. We must find other solutions to support the strategic initiatives and also support other high priority areas. In addition to pursuing external funding, we must work within our budget to find the resources to support much of the new work that we must do. How and where will we find those resources? We must take a serious look at what we do and be willing to make decisions about the importance of and quality of all that we do in the academic and non-academic areas. We must be willing to stop doing some things and to reallocate those resources to support other high needs and pursue new growth opportunities.

### **A Framework for Prioritizing Programs and Services**

The purpose of this paper is to present a framework that outlines a process for prioritizing academic programs which will enable the University to reallocate resources to address priorities. The support areas within the Division of Academic Affairs will undergo review and possible process redesign at a later date. A similar process under the leadership of Vice Presidents Floyd and Ramey has been initiated to review the non-academic components of the University. These sets of reviews will potentially touch every office on campus.

It is critical that the campus fully understand that this process will result in resources reallocated to support programs that are targeted as high priority while other programs will be reduced, phased out, or consolidated. This process must result in identifying significant resources that will allow us to reinvest and support programs of high priority.

### **Core Postulates**

A set of core postulates are being presented to the campus as a foundation to reaffirm the necessity for this work.

1. Greater focus will enable us improve what we do and enhance the work life of staff and faculty. In reality, we have an illness on this campus and it is called “runaway specialization.” In addition to adding programs that are designed to meet a specific need, we have added courses, programs, minors, and/or concentrations almost every time we hire a faculty member. We have never, or at least not in the recent past, seriously engaged in a process of questioning the value of all of this. We very seldom close anything down or stop doing something. All of these seemingly insignificant actions place additional burdens on budgets, facilities, staff, and faculty. The NCA team made a very relevant observation during their last visit, “It is relatively easy to appreciate that each section taught with a small number of students consumes at least as much preparation time and faculty salary as would be required if directed to a large enrollment course.”
2. Bringing programs and resources into balance promotes quality There is a growing incongruence between the plethora of academic programs and the resources needed to mount high quality programs. Most universities, including ISU, are over-programmed, spread resources too thin, and as a result of all of this, indirectly encourage mediocrity.
3. Collaboration and cooperation will benefit all. Courses are duplicated in departments in the same college and across the university. We design curricula that ensure that students take more courses from the “home department” and not similar or more appropriate courses in other departments because of the “grab” for student credit hours or some other internal reward. The faculty have developed a conceptually strong general education program that has evolved to the point that it is extremely difficult to manage and difficult for many students and advisors to understand and navigate.
4. Connecting our planning and embracing performance assessment provides clearer direction. Planning occurs at many different levels. We must ensure that all units within the University are in alignment with the University’s vision, mission, goals and strategic plan, “Fulfilling the Promise – The Path to Pre-Eminence.” We must also be willing to embrace performance assessment and be willing to compare ourselves against accepted benchmarks.
5. A more flexible and responsive Indiana State University will support needed change. Resistance to change on the part of administrators, faculty, and staff appears to be part of our culture. This postulate does not suggest change for the sake of change. Rather, it suggests that it is important to review all that we do to determine if it is efficient and appropriately serves the needs of the University. It also suggests that we must be flexible and responsive in these challenging times.

### **Criteria for Program Prioritizing**

As one of the first steps, the campus must identify a set of criteria that we agree upon to base our decisions. Robert Dickeson (1999) has proposed the following criteria for consideration in the review of academic programs. I am presenting these criteria to the campus as a beginning point and will ask that the Task Force either affirm or modify these criteria.

1. **History, development, and expectations for the program**
2. **External demand for the program**
3. **Internal demand for the program**
4. **Quality of program inputs and processes**
5. **Quality of program outputs**

6. **Size, scope, and productivity of program**
7. **Revenue and other resources generated by the program**
8. **Cost and other expenses related to the program**
9. **Impact, justification, and overall essentiality or value of the program – What happens if the program disappears, is cut back, is merged, etc.?**
10. **Opportunity analysis of the program – What is the future?**

These criteria, with modifications to fit the campus culture, have been used by several universities including Middle Tennessee State University and the University of Nebraska-Kearney. As much as possible, existing data sources should be used and data needed to address the criteria will be provided to departments. In addition, so faculty and departments are not overburdened, our ongoing program review process has been suspended this year.

### **Decisions and Targets for Savings**

Every academic program on the campus must be reviewed and informed judgments must be made at multiple levels within the campus. Recommended decisions (program support, consolidation, reduction, elimination) will eventually be made by the Provost after the process is completed. The recommendations will be forwarded to the President who will make a final recommendation to the Indiana State University Board of Trustees. Only the Board of Trustees has the final authority to eliminate programs.

Considering the large number of programs on our campus to be reviewed, it is suggested that our rankings be placed in categories. Dickeson recommends one of two approaches:

- **By Thirds** – Each program would be placed in one of the three categories; an equal number in each category. The top category would be those programs considered for enrichment, the middle category would be retained at current level of support, and the lower category would be for programs to be reduced, phased out, or consolidated.
- **By Quintiles** – Each program would be ranked in one of five categories. Twenty percent of the programs would be placed in each category. The upper 20% would be for programs that are candidates for enrichment. The next 20% are programs retained at some higher level of support. The next 20% or middle category is for programs to be retained at a neutral level of support. The next 20% are programs to be retained at lower level of support. The final 20% are programs that are candidates for phasing out, reduction, or consolidation.

In order to provide sufficient resources to invest in programs identified as central to our future, this process is charged to identify **two million dollars** for reinvestment. It is understood that the University will not be able recover these funds in one year. With each decision that we make, actual resources savings must be identified. Depending upon the programs and the nature of the final decisions, it may take two to three years to recover the targeted amounts. The goal of this process is to identify resources to reinvest in academic programs.

## **Related Initiatives**

Program prioritization complements several other initiatives: distinctive programs, promising scholars (both funded by Lilly), and potential college restructuring. The first call for applications for distinctive program status will be made this fall. In combination, the distinctive programs and program prioritization processes will lead to programs that bring recognition and reward to all at ISU. The promising scholar's initiative will assist ISU with attracting and retaining high-quality faculty. Program prioritization and discussions on academic reorganization will proceed on somewhat parallel paths. This may be a challenge, but our time is short and our work cannot wait.

## **Benefits**

The entire ISU community will benefit by the resources made available to support high priority goals that will improve the University, by commitment to focus and strengthening of a culture of improvement and excellence, and by coming together to address this challenge as a community. Program consolidation is likely to lead to new, multidisciplinary departmental configurations, which can better address societal problems, engage in leading-edge research and creative activities, and educate students to be productive citizens in the twenty-first century. Selected resources will be become available to invest in possible new and innovative programs that meet state needs and would have substantial student enrollment. ISU will become better known and recognized for programs that are state-of-the-art and of high quality. This will attract more high-achieving faculty, staff, and students and increased support from alumni and external funding sources.

## **Task Force on Prioritization of Academic Programs**

The Provost will appoint the **Task Force on Prioritization of Academic Programs**. The Task Force will make recommendations to the Provost for consideration and implementation in the process of prioritizing academic programs. The specific charge to the Task Force shall include:

- Develop processes in sufficient clarity for the campus to implement. The processes must provide opportunities for input at the department, college, and university levels.
- Recommend Criteria for decision making
- Ensure the alignment of all processes and criteria with University Mission and Strategic Plan.

## **Timeline**

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| • Program announcement   | October 4, 2005   |
| • First reports recommending processes and criteria to Provost | November 10, 2005 |
| • Final processes, criteria, and timeline to campus.           | December 1, 2005  |
| • Final recommendations on programs to Provost                 | May 15, 2006      |
| • Final Recommendations to Board of Trustees                   | August 2006       |

Robert C. Dickeson, *Prioritizing Academic Programs and Services: Reallocating Resources to Achieve Strategic Balance*. Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco. 1999.

