Faculty Comments on Program Prioritization Metrics

1. Nonalignment with Strategic Plan. Many faculty commented that the program prioritization (PP) metrics are not aligned with the priorities in the strategic plan. This disconnect arose in several specific contexts. First, as reflected below, faculty did not believe that the proposed metrics adequately valued research productivity across different disciplines. Faculty also commented that the ranking of individual programs might deter interdisciplinary work and be inconsistent with rebuilding the morale of faculty. They did not believe that outreach, extension and service were adequately measured in the proposed metrics.

2. Problems assessing research productivity and quality.
   • Many people point out that we need a more meaningful way to compare research productivity across very different disciplines.
   • The current metric measures only research expenditures which ignores other indicators of research/creative activity, which in particular will affect the arts and humanities.

   **Suggestion to IPEC/workgroups:** Split academic units up between STEM (COS, CALS, CNR, COEng) and non-STEM units, as this potentially would enable a fairer comparison.

   **Suggestion to IPEC/workgroups:** Create a system where each college does a study of research productivity of individual units using a standard method of study (perhaps counting number of publications/creative activities, quality, and impact factor where applicable). These studies can be evaluated by IPEC and used to factor into the PP process.

3. Concerns about the PP process’s effect on interdisciplinary work. Many comments point to the concern that this will pit departments (and even majors within departments) against each other; that this is a zero-sum exercise that will discourage collaboration and encourage hoarding of resources. For this reason act of ranking programs may itself deter interdisciplinary activities. In addition, the way that the metrics are laid out will further discourage interdisciplinary collaborations and thus damaging morale.

   **Suggestion to IPEC/workgroups:** Give appropriate credit to collaborating departments (e.g., count research funding with the unit where it is expended) but avoid double counting, i.e., do not count a $100,000 collaborative grant between department A and B, as $100,000 for Dept A and $100,000 for Dept B – in other words, give the fair share; funding just used as an example. This approach can apply to other quantifiable metrics.

4. Concerns about weighting.
   • Several metrics seem to reward the same activity, e.g., teaching and credit hours are counted multiple times, in criteria 1a, 2, and 3c, 3d, and 4b. This totals 30%. Similarly, several of the metrics in 5 could be lumped together into one essentiality metric and one impact metric.
   • A few faculty commented negatively on the “percent of faculty meeting expectation” metric as it might dis-incentivize unit administrators from assigning a “does not meet expectations” to marginally performing faculty members.
   • Research isn’t counted heavily enough (see above).
Essentiality/centrality should be weighted more heavily.

BLS Demand Data. Comment on this metric was particularly mixed. Some approved of the metric even advocating that it receive greater weight, others questions it (how will graduate school, med school & law school factor into this data; correlation between BLS demand data and student demand questioned).

5. Concern about using the “permanent faculty over temporary faculty” metric (3a). The following comments captured the issue:

- It is disrespectful to insinuate that instruction offered by TAs or adjuncts is inferior to instruction offered by permanent faculty (one possible interpretation of this metric). For example, lab courses in the sciences often utilize TAs who works under the supervision of a permanent faculty member. Unlike permanent faculty members, well-trained TAs typically are more skilled in the art given that they conduct experimental research as part of their graduate/undergraduate studies. For safety reasons, it is necessary to offer such courses with relatively low student: TA ratios. An alternative interpretation of this metric is to encourage units to transfer adjuncts to permanent faculty lines. As the UI aims to become an R1 institution, there will be an increased need to utilize available financial resources to advance research activities, e.g., by keeping down instruction costs, providing bridge and start-up funds, reduce teaching loads of permanent faculty members, etc... The use of some adjuncts and TAs likely is a necessary evil toward this end. It seems to me that inclusion of this metric in the PPP for this purpose is the wrong place to stage this ideological battle. Finally, the description of this metric is unclear – will the calculation only involve to responsible instructors on record, or also include course-helpers (TAs). There was a lot of confusion in my department regarding this metric.

- TAs teaching undergraduate classes should not automatically translate into 'poor quality' of the program, especially as we aim to give teaching experience to all of our PhD students, to make them more competitive on the job market

- I am concerned with the weighting for the permanent vs part time. My program depends on field based learning activities. We rely heavily on part-time faculty to work and observe students in the field.

7. Outreach undervalued. A number of people expressed concerns about lack of focus on/credit given for outreach and extension (and, conversely, concerns that colleges like CALS that have a lot of faculty dedicated to extension would be disadvantaged). This ties back to issue #1 – the criteria don’t connect to the Strategic Plan.

8. Small vs. Large and History. A number of comments focused on how the size of a program would affect the metrics. These people tended to suggest that the metrics be scaled by faculty FTE. Similar comments also were made that the ranking process will disadvantage historically under-resourced departments.

**Suggestion to IPEC/Workgroups:** Adopt a Carnegie-like hybrid approach for certain quantifiable metrics. Ultimately, Carnegie assigns an absolute value and a “per capita value” for key metrics such as research expenditures in STEM and research expenditures in non-STEM. See the presentation from meeting #5 in the Faculty Compensation Task
A hybrid approach would reward two aspects that the institution strives for, large size (research expenditures, number of student credit hours, etc…) and efficiency (per FTE basis).

8. Overall concern about position control – as someone pointed out, every department should have to justify refilling positions. In addition, however, a number of people expressed concerns with how position control would work on a continuing basis. They were not clear on how lower quintile programs could change their situation. They also were concerned that over time good programs would fall into the bottom quintiles. Many faculty were concerned about the message that it sends to label the bottom two quintiles, i.e., 40% of all units, as being in a precarious situation. One comment described it as being forced to give 20% of all students in an honor class A’s, B’s, C’s, D’s, and F’s.

Suggestion to IPEC/workgroups: We do not have a normal distribution of performance among the academic units. Instead their performance is likely described by a power law function, i.e., a couple of units are hyper (good) performers, as much as 80% are solid performers, and only a small proportion of units fall short of meeting expectations. Perhaps it is worthwhile to rethink the whole quintile approach, and instead move to a slightly different model that falls more in line with a power law function, i.e., a 3-tier position control system: Tier A (top 10%) where resources return to the unit, Tier B (middle 80%) where resources return to the Dean (and Provost?), and Tier C (bottom 10%) where funds move to UBFC for re-allocation.

9. One Size Fits All. Many people were uncomfortable with the “one size fits all” aspect of the proposed metrics. They were concerned particularly about how this approach would work when comparing STEM fields with arts and humanities (see comments above regarding evaluating research productivity or outreach).

10. Morale. Many people expressed concerns that the ranking of departments/programs would damage morale at the institution.

   • Metrics were too qualitative – could lead to uninformative results
   • External demand did not seem like an appropriate measure for internal support units.
   • Efficiency and demand measures might be skewed for Moscow vs. non-Moscow departments.

12. Departments with multiple programs. One particular comment cogently explained the problems with averaging the scores for multiple programs in a single banner department:
    My first comment is not about weights, it is about the statement in the video that each program in a dept will be evaluated separately and then averaged in order to get an overall dept ranking. I appreciate that we are seeking an improvement over prior processes by attempting to do an overall ranking for depts. as opposed to solely looking at individual programs. However, doing a simple average is not the right way to this. Consider this case: Dept A and Dept B have identical dept-wide metrics (i.e., same...
number of faculty serving the same number of students, same revenue in, same costs in salaries, etc). However, Dept A has 2 programs with 25 students each. Dept B has 5 programs with 10 students each. By the current plan to average ratings for individual programs across a dept, Dept A will receive a higher rating than Dept B. Is this really what we want? Consider this: the programs in Dept B might be unique and the UI would not have those students enrolled without those programs in place. Getting rid of those programs will cause overall enrollment at the UI to drop. If Dept B has figured out how to deliver 5 programs in an economical fashion (this usually happens when there is a lot of common coursework among the 5 programs) and are filling student needs that would otherwise go unmet, why should that dept be disadvantaged in this rating process? Again, I applaud the effort to synthesize across a dept, but we need something summative as oppose to a simple average.

13. **Suggestion for IPEC/Workgroups:** Another way to balance the metrics to reflect the different work of different departments is to weigh the metrics according to the teaching/research/outreach/service FTE (or PD) allocation of each unit should be taken into consideration;