

November 28, 2007

To: President McDavis, Academic Deans, and Executive Staff
From: Kathy A. Krendl, Executive Vice President and Provost
Re: Recommendations Relating to the Five-Year Academic Action Plan

INTRODUCTION

On November 15, 2007, the Five-Year Academic Action Plan Committee produced a summary report detailing the feedback they received during the course of a university-wide review of the draft Five-Year Academic Action Plan (FYAAP). In accordance with the charge given to the committee by President McDavis, this document presents recommendations for revising the plan.

I agree with the process and timeline recommended in the FYAAP report. That process and timeline consists of:

- The Executive Vice President and Provost submits recommendations, before November 28, in response to the FYAAP Committee report. The recommendations will be made available to the university community on the FYAAP Web site.
- The President and the Executive Vice President and Provost will work with the deans and executive staff to revise the plan by the first week in January.
- The revised plan will be submitted to a joint committee made up of the FYAAP Committee and the Vision Ohio Executive Steering Committee. That joint committee will review it and provide feedback by the end of January.

§1 FYAPP RECOMMENDATIONS

I. The three primary areas of concern raised by the FYAAP Committee report should be addressed:

- Questions and concerns about where the money would come from to fund the initiatives
- The difficulty of being able to discuss the relative strengths of the proposed initiatives without knowing more about the sources of the funding
- How and why athletics was included in the plan

The first two concerns are intertwined. The FYAAP committee report noted that many who commented on the plan “expressed general agreement that the goals, objectives, strategies, and outcomes of the plan were noble and worthy, but without a sense of the source of funding few were willing to fully endorse the plan.” Being specific and clear about sources of funding is important to the legitimacy and the efficacy of the plan. To that end, Vice President and Chief Financial Officer Bill Decatur and I will work to construct a process for developing a FYAAP financial implementation plan that will respond to the first two areas of concern.

The third area of concern, athletics and its inclusion in the FYAAP, requires some background. The Vision Ohio Academic Plan included specific comments on athletics in terms of the success of our student-athletes.¹ While the proposals concerning athletics should be subject to the same level of scrutiny as the other elements of the plan, it is clear that the members of the Task Force on the Future of Ohio University considered Intercollegiate Athletics' goals to improve student success as relevant to the academic plan.

II. The no-cost proposals that are currently contained in the plan should be implemented independently of the funded elements and progress made on them should be assessed according to the metrics identified in the FYAAP. In the revised plan, they should be listed in a separate section.

III. The FYAAP should address the mission of the university to the region. As one of the Faculty Senate's FYAAP sense of the senate resolutions states: "we must strive to employ technology and other instructional strategies to enhance program offerings by regional campuses in a manner that embraces high academic standards and enables students to complete their degrees at Ohio University." I have asked Executive Dean Dan Evans to work with the regional campus deans to prepare an addendum to the FYAAP for the regional campuses. The addendum will address the same goals as the original plan for the Athens campus.

IV. Because the general fund and general fee sources of revenue have distinctive purposes, expenditures for priorities in units that primarily rely on the general fee should be considered separately from priority expenditures tied to the general fund.

V. Two objectives--resource enhancement and resource efficiencies--along with related strategies and outcomes should be added under the Vision Ohio Goal of "Fortify Infrastructure."

VI. Every objective and strategy should be constructed as a shared responsibility between academic units and academic support units. Integration is essential to the quality, feasibility, and sustainability of the FYAAP.

¹ The Vision Ohio Academic Plan addresses Intercollegiate Athletics in the following way: "Develop strategies to enhance national prominence of the university through such activities as cultural events and competitive athletic programs that demonstrate the scholar/artist and scholar/athlete models.

- Monitor national recognition for outstanding cultural events involving Ohio University faculty, staff, and students
- Assess overall ratings of men's and women's athletic programs in the MidAmerican Conference (MAC) and meet the goal of being in the top two by 2010
- Assess graduation rates of student athletes and meet the goal of being in the top five national public universities annually."

Vision Ohio: An Academic Plan for the University, 27.

VII. A process for prioritization of objectives and strategies should be constructed for use in the December meetings held to redraft the plan. The proposed process is described in the next section.

§2 PROCESS FOR PRIORITIZATION

I have outlined below a proposed process to identify the most important objectives and the most effective strategies. This process attempts to address several limitations of the current FYAAP. First, several of the reports from the constituent senates noted that clear connections should be established between the specific strategies identified in the FYAAP and the goals of the Vision Ohio Academic Plan. Second, the current university budget picture and the uncertainties in how state funding for higher education will be allocated in the future, suggest that we must make choices about which objectives and strategies currently in the FYAAP should be given priority for investment.

The proposed series of questions outlined below is intended to establish the criteria for determining priorities. Steps 1 & 2 relate to the integration of the FYAAP with the Vision Ohio Academic Plan. Steps 3 & 4 concern the integration of the FYAAP into an institutional plan. An example of how the process might work is provided in an appendix.

When a set of prioritized objectives and strategies has been created, consideration should be given to the type of funding to be used. If it is possible to achieve an objective by funding its strategies using one-time-only money, reorganization of unit funds to achieve a match, or use of a phased implementation these courses will be encouraged. Base funding will only be provided to objectives and strategies that have a record of efficacy and the capacity for revenue generation.

Step 1: How is the proposed objective and strategy tied to a Vision Ohio implementation recommendation(s)?

The implementation phase of the Vision Ohio Academic Plan has been underway since 2006. In revising the plan it makes sense to link proposed strategies directly with implementation of the plan. Sources for implementation recommendations include the reports of the Vision Ohio implementation teams; the college Vision Ohio strategic plans; President McDavis' May 7th speech; and the 2006-2007 recommendations of the Vision Ohio Executive Steering Committee.

Step 2: What evidence is there to support the proposed objectives and strategies?

- How will the objective help to achieve a Vision Ohio goal or goals?
- Why is the proposed strategy, when compared to other potential strategies, the most effective to meet the objective? This assessment requires consideration of other relevant strategies, not only those identified in the draft FYAAP.

This process of linking strategies directly to Vision Ohio and to evidence of likely success should pinpoint the degree to which a specific strategy is likely to succeed given current and projected circumstances at the university.

As President McDavis has stated on a several occasions, all things in the current draft of the FYAAP are subject to change. Some objectives or strategies may need to be altered, some may need to be removed, and others may need to be added. One source to consult in reviewing objectives and strategies is the reports of the constituent senates included with the FYAAP report. Many of these reports contain commentary on specific objectives and strategies.

Step 3: Each objective and strategy should contribute in a documentable way to the goal of making the FYAAP an integrative plan through which all of the units work as partners rather than as separate entities.

As the Administrative Senate response to the FYAAP indicated, there is a pressing need “for planning units and individual departments to work towards joint success goals, requiring collaboration among units and employee groups rather than creating or reinforcing silos of effort and funding.” The redrafting of the plan presents us with an opportunity to begin working collaboratively on a scale that heretofore has been difficult to accomplish. Consequently, as we review objectives and strategies, we should be certain that they promote integration.

Step 4: Objectives should be aligned, to the extent possible, with the University System of Ohio Master Plan’s goals of educational attainment, quality, affordability, and economic leadership.

When the FYAAP was drafted little was known about the USO. Now that the Chancellor has begun to outline some of the major elements of the Master Plan, we should pay attention to the creation of strategic alignments between the FYAAP and the USO.

Appendix: Prioritization Example

Example: Consideration of the Objectives and Strategies Associated with the Vision Ohio Goal to Strengthen Undergraduate Education

STEP 1 How is the proposed objective and strategy tied to a Vision Ohio implementation recommendation(s)?

The objectives and associated strategies relating to the strengthening of undergraduate education in the draft FYAAP include:

- Objective: Improvement of the retention rate, engagement, and graduation rate of undergraduate students
 - Strategies
 - Expand availability of learning communities including the regional campuses
 - Improve academic advising
 - Improve faculty development
 - Increase undergraduate involvement in research and applied projects

The objective and its strategies align well with Vision Ohio implementation recommendations. Specific mention of elements of the objective and its strategies can be found in: the reports of the Undergraduate Priorities and the Faculty, Staff, and Student Quality and Diversity implementation teams; a substantial number of college Vision Ohio strategic plans; and the Vision Ohio Executive Steering Committee Draft Priority Recommendations for 2007-2008.

- Objective: Implementation of an assessment of general education
 - Strategies
 - Identify general education outcomes
 - Assess general education learning outcomes
 - Integrate outcomes assessment into program reviews

The objective and its strategies align with Vision Ohio implementation recommendations made in the reports of the Undergraduate Priorities and the Institutional Effectiveness and Accountability implementation teams, and the Vision Ohio Executive Steering Committee Draft Priority Recommendations for 2007-2008.

- Objective: Enhancement of interdisciplinary programs
 - Strategies
 - Establish Interdisciplinary Council
 - Increase joint faculty appointments

The objective and its strategies align with Vision Ohio implementation recommendations made in the reports of the Interdisciplinary Initiatives and Faculty, Staff, and Student Quality and Diversity implementation teams.

STEP 2 What evidence is there to support the proposed objectives and strategies?

- **How will the objective help to achieve a Vision Ohio goal or goals?**
- **Why is the proposed strategy, when compared to other potential strategies, the most effective to meet the objective? This assessment requires consideration of other relevant strategies, not only those identified in the draft FYAAP.**

§1 Objectives and the Achievement of Vision Ohio Goals

The Vision Ohio goal in this section of the FYAAP is the strengthening of undergraduate education. According to the Vision Ohio Academic Plan undergraduate education is to be strengthened by:

- Establishing a common intellectual experience for all first-year students that leads to a common set of fundamental intellectual skills. This includes the creation of an inquiry-based core curriculum that serves as the foundation of the academic mission.
- Supporting high quality undergraduate programs that serve the needs of the region, state, and nation.
- Providing abundant opportunities for students to learn beyond the classroom and to develop the ability to work collaboratively.
- Inculcating among students a sense of personal responsibility, acquaint students with the values associated with the public good, and foster the acquisition of intercultural fluency.

The Vision Ohio Undergraduate Priorities Implementation team recommended an implementation strategy to achieve the strengthening of undergraduate education that consisted of the following:

- Use Learning Outcomes to Improve the Curriculum
- Expand Learning Beyond the Classroom
- Improve First-Year Student Engagement and Retention
- Firmly Establish Faculty Development

The first undergraduate FYAAP objective—improve the retention rate, engagement, and graduation rate—largely reflects the implementation team priorities with the exception of the graduation rate. Arguably an improved graduation rate should be a byproduct of increased retention and engagement. It can be used as an outcome, but should not be part of the objective.

The second undergraduate objective—implement general education assessment—relates directly to the implementation team’s recommendation of using learning outcomes to improve the

curriculum. The chief means by which we plan to implement the assessment of general education is through the use of learning outcomes.

The third objective—enhance interdisciplinary programs, while a Vision Ohio goal in its own right, is only tangentially related to the recommendations of the undergraduate implementation team. It should not be an objective in this section of the FYAAP. In its place, I recommend that the establishment of faculty development, a clear-cut recommendation of the implementation team, be changed from a strategy to an objective.

Revised Objectives for Vision Ohio Goal of Strengthening Undergraduate Education:

1. Improve Retention and Engagement
2. Implement General Education Assessment Through the Use of Learning Outcomes
3. Establish Faculty Development

§2 Examining the Effectiveness of Strategies²

Suggested strategies currently under the objective relating to retention and engagement are:

- Expand availability of learning communities including the regional campuses
- Improve academic advising
- Improve faculty development
- Increase undergraduate involvement in research and applied projects

Converting faculty development to an objective means that it can be removed as a strategy. As to the remaining strategies, **the question to ask is why is the proposed strategy, when compared to other potential strategies, the most effective to meet the objective? This assessment requires consideration of other relevant strategies, not only those identified in the draft FYAAP.**

Learning communities are a proven strategy both at Ohio University and nationally for helping with retention and engagement.³ Strong support for learning communities exists in all of the colleges and all of the campuses that offer undergraduate degrees. There is evidence to suggest that the availability of learning communities also plays an important role in recruitment and matriculation of undergraduates. Success in recruitment, matriculation, retention, and engagement not only strengthen undergraduate education, but are essential for the objective of resource enhancement.

Strong *academic advising* contributes significantly to the objective of retention and engagement. Exit surveys with graduating seniors and with students who leave Ohio University without completing a degree underscore the necessity of providing high quality advising during each

² For purposes of illustration, I have restricted my analysis of the strategies to just those associated with the first objective under the goal of strengthening undergraduate education.

³ The Office of Institutional Research reports that, in 2005-06, learning community participants' retention rate from freshman to sophomore year was 82 percent, compared to 79 percent for nonparticipants. Learning community members' accumulative adjusted GPAs averaged 2.93 compared to 2.84 for their nonmember peers.

quarter of enrollment. In contemplating the improvement of academic advising it is not only the technical aspects of advising that must be bettered, but as the work of Student Senate has pointed out on many occasions, the mentoring aspect of advising is equally important.⁴ As with learning communities, quality advising has the potential to assist with the objective of resource enhancement. It can also play an important role in the objective of improving the quality and diversity of students.

Increasing *undergraduate involvement in research and applied projects*, as confirmed by the most recent NSEE results, is becoming an ever more critical avenue for assuring retention and engagement. Students who become involved in the creation and application of knowledge do better in their academic work and have enhanced opportunities for professional and graduate education. Participation in research and applied projects also translates into a greater persistence in degree completion with concomitant implications for budgets and resources. Undergraduate involvement in research and applied projects augments the objective of enhancing positive student engagement in campus and community life as well as contributing to the goal of enhancing national prominence.

Learning communities, strong academic advising, and undergraduate research and applied projects are all proven strategies for reaching the objective of improving retention and engagement. Over the course of the past two years, we have expanded our capacity to serve students in all of these areas. Using one-time-only money to fund faculty stipends, the university has gone from 38 to 115 learning communities. 1,975 freshmen participated in learning communities this fall. The Provost Undergraduate Research Fund received 139 applications this year up from 83 the previous year. One-time-only funding was used to help insure that all deserving projects were funded. The Allen Student Help Center, which supplements academic advising in the colleges, worked with 1297 students during Fall Quarter. Given the high and consistent level of commitment that each of the deans and a significant number of faculty and staff have exhibited for these strategies I am confident that they can continue to be successful during the span of the FYAAP.

Nevertheless, there are other possible strategies that could be considered. For example, in their response to the FYAAP, Faculty Senate questions whether the retention and engagement objective is the best course for strengthening undergraduate education. It labels the strategies used to pursue this objective as “peripheral expenditures.” Instead Faculty Senate suggests that focusing on “academic investments such as increasing faculty size . . . are most likely to strengthen undergraduate education.”

I do not share the view of learning communities, strong academic advising, and undergraduate research and applied projects as peripheral expenditures. Our NSEE data tell us that our students are less invested in their academic work and less engaged in the learning process during their

⁴ For detailed information about student perceptions of the importance of advising to retention, see the January 11, 2007 report produced by Student Senate entitled “Students Talking to Students: A Forum on Diversity and Retention”

<http://www.ohio.edu/provost/upload/Student%20Diversity%20and%20Retention%20White%20Paper.pdf>

first two years than their peers nationally. The Vision Ohio Undergraduate Priorities Implementation team believed that dealing with this state of affairs was key to strengthening undergraduate education and made recommendations to that effect.

While the Vision Ohio Undergraduate Priorities Implementation team did not make growth of the faculty one of its recommendations, engagement and retention are heavily faculty dependent. Consequently there is a case to be made that having more faculty might make the pursuit of this objective more effective as well as assisting with the pursuit of objectives and strategies connected to graduate and professional education and research.

The issue arises, however, that despite the advantages of having more faculty it is the most costly strategy that can be pursued on the academic side. To understand the degree to which investment in new faculty would be a better strategy than those currently proposed it would be necessary to determine to what extent current faculty in each of the colleges are directly involved in retention and engagement activities and then to calculate how much each additional faculty line would discernibly influence undergraduate engagement and retention.

STEP 3 Each objective and strategy should contribute in a documentable way to the goal of making the FYAAP an integrative plan through which all of the units work as partners rather than as separate entities.

The objective of strengthening undergraduate education relates to the objectives of improving faculty, staff, and student quality and diversity; enhancing positive student engagement in campus and community life; fostering leadership development of students; instilling among students a sense of personal and civic responsibility as well as being vital to the Vision Ohio goal of enhancing national prominence.

Strategies for the strengthening of undergraduate education--learning communities, academic advising, and opportunities for research and applied project work--require active and committed partnerships among all of the colleges and campuses and a number of departments in Finance and Administration, Student Affairs, Research, Information Technology, Advancement, and University Communications and Marketing. The quality of undergraduate education depends on the type of learning environment we build by collaborating across units. Collectively, all units have a role to play in ensuring that prospective students become matriculates and that matriculates become graduates.

STEP 4 Thought should be given to the alignment of objectives with the University System of Ohio Master Plan's goals of educational attainment, quality, affordability, and economic leadership.

The objective of improving retention and engagement relates directly to issues that are surfacing in the discussions over the USO Master plan such as number of degrees earned; graduation rate compared to expected graduation rate; number of students in the top 20% of their high school graduating classes; number of degrees awarded to first generation college students, etc. Strong

retention and engagement strategies aid in recruitment and in graduation. Their importance to Ohio University's future under the USO cannot be overstated.