Responsibility Centered Management
Academic Quality Indicators

Guiding Principles

The institution’s values as expressed in the academic plan should inform and drive budgetary decisions. While the RCM budget model will link resources with revenue generating activity and total costs, it is simply a tool for the allocation of limited resources in a way that serves and supports the academic mission of the University. Different programs require different levels of resources and resource allocation decisions must be made to maintain academic quality, while enforcing fiscal responsibility.

In addition, the academic leadership of the university should regularly coordinate and share information about planned changes related to credit/degree production and resource allocation since the activity of units is interrelated and can influence resources in other units.

Faculty, departments/schools, colleges and the central administration should regularly review key quantitative and qualitative academic quality indicators using both standardized processes and periodic monitoring.

Academic Quality Indicators

Maintenance of Appropriate Mix of Full-Time Faculty
With stable enrollments, the ratio of the total number of full-time faculty to students across the university should remain stable. Distributions of type (tenure-track, professional, clinical, instructor) of full-time faculty across units will vary depending on the level of program (undergraduate, masters, doctoral) and discipline standards. In addition, the number of full-time faculty may need to fluctuate when programs grow or shrink but the faculty-student ratio should remain stable. There may be short-term declines when faculty retire or resign and are temporarily replaced with part-time or visiting faculty while a search is conducted. When the mix of faculty in a unit is expected to be permanently reduced, that decision should be reviewed to ensure that the reduction is related to decreases in program demand and will not affect academic quality.

Maintenance of Tenure-Track Faculty Workload
Since the model could encourage maximization of credit hour production, the balance between teaching, research and service should be maintained. The number of courses assigned to a tenure-track faculty member should remain stable so that faculty will continue to fulfill service obligations and maintain engagement with students outside class.

Maintenance of Research and Creative Activity Production
Colleges should maintain or increase the quantity and quality of research and creative activity using metrics that are appropriate to the particular discipline. Decreases in productivity should be reviewed to ensure that they do not affect academic quality.
Course Duplication and Hoarding
When new courses are approved by the University Curriculum Council, there should continue to be a comprehensive review of existing courses to ensure that units do not create duplicate courses simply for purposes of revenue generation. This review should recognize that some content areas may be related to multiple disciplines and that some courses may appear to be duplications but are actually coverage of the same content area from a different discipline perspective. Some duplication may also be justified if a unit with the existing course is unable to meet demand. Similarly, units should not alter requirements to shift student demand from courses outside the college to courses inside the college. Requests for program changes should be reviewed and the elimination of requirements and electives outside the college should be reviewed to ensure there are sound reasons for the change as opposed to simply trying to capture more credit hours.

Section size
The interaction between the average section size of a course and factors such as discipline, pedagogy and course level should be monitored and reviewed. While there will be differences in section size across courses, the average section size for a course should remain fairly stable over the long term. Programs or courses that experience increasing section sizes should be reviewed to ensure that any increases are consistent with the discipline, course pedagogy and course level, and will not affect academic quality.

Time to Graduation
The average time to graduation should be monitored and reviewed to ensure that any increases are due to specific programmatic requirements or student decisions as opposed to units trying to increase tuition revenues by extending the number of terms students continue to take courses.

Grade Inflation
Grade distributions for courses and programs should be reviewed to ensure that there are no drastic shifts superimposed on any existing trends in grade distribution during the period before the implementation of the budget model.

Incoming Student Profile
The quality and diversity of the entering Freshman class should continue to be monitored to ensure that units are not lower standards simply to increase enrollments. This review should also consider national and state trends in student profile as well as changes in the distribution of students across programs.

Program Accreditation
External accreditations should be monitored as a measure of academic quality. It is expected that programs with external accreditation would maintain that status.
Support for Honors Programs
Academic units will be expected to maintain current levels of honors program activities (number of students, credit hour production, etc). Any decrease within a unit should be reviewed to determine if there are valid reasons for the change beyond simple financial considerations.

Interdisciplinary Programs
Barriers to the creation of interdisciplinary programs have always existed and are often not related to financial consideration (e.g. T&P policies). The number of interdisciplinary programs and certificates should be monitored and any elimination of interdisciplinary programs should be reviewed to ensure that there are valid reasons beyond simple financial considerations. In addition the number of faculty affiliations with interdisciplinary program and then number of courses being taught across discipline should be monitored to ensure there is not a decline.

Review Processes and Periodic Monitoring
Each of the program indicators calls for a review to ensure that changes occur for valid reasons beyond simple financial considerations. This review can occur at multiple levels and should become part of formal review processes as well as periodic monitoring.

Formal review processes that should play a role in the assessment of the interaction between the budget model and academic quality include:

- University Curriculum Council review of course and program proposals and changes should monitor course duplication issues and curricular hoarding
- The 7-year Program Review process should be include a review of the performance indicators
- A formal review of the RCM model should be done every five years and should include an assessment of the interaction between the budget model and these quality indicators.

Periodic monitoring of quality indicators should be an ongoing activity at multiple levels:

- Departments/Schools should monitor these indicators and be able to explain changes to their college.
- Colleges should monitor these indicators and be able to explain changes to the provost during the annual budget process.
- The provost should monitor these indicators at the institution level.