

Academic Prioritization – Provost Report

October 27, 2011

Just over a year ago, Central Michigan University began laying the groundwork to focus on academic program prioritization and service unit evaluations to serve as a foundation for our strategic decisions and guiding our investments toward the future. The Academic Prioritization process is nearing its conclusion. I would like to thank everyone involved in the process – our faculty, deans and staff – for the tremendous efforts that went into getting this done. In this preliminary report, I will discuss why we engaged in academic prioritization, review the process up to now, present the preliminary results and then describe the additional steps that will be necessary as we move forward.

Purpose:

Central Michigan University has achieved tremendous growth in both size and stature over the years, and we are laying a strong foundation of excellence in how we prepare students academically for success at the University and beyond. CMU has a long and strong legacy regarding excellence with faculty research and student success in the classroom.

Yet, CMU, like other universities in Michigan, faces many challenges as we move forward into the future. Among these challenges are tighter state budgets and declining state appropriations, an expected reduction of potential in-state traditional-age students, demands for greater accountability from the legislature and the public, and increased expectations for universities to benefit the state.

CMU must make wise resource decisions given the changes facing higher education in general and more specifically changes impacting the University. We must invest our financial resources as well as our human resources in a manner that will advance the University in an increasingly competitive environment. American higher education scholar George Keller once noted that the universities that have shown dramatic improvements have done so by focusing on a limited number of programs in which they added substantial resources. Academic prioritization at Central Michigan University is a process that will help guide these allocation decisions. Prioritization lays a solid foundation for future evidence-based decision making and strategic investment in academic programs, infrastructure, and attracting and retaining high-quality faculty, students and staff.

Process:

The Academic Prioritization process at CMU examined more than 400 academic programs and included input through meetings with the Council of Chairs, the Academic Senate and through an open forum. Input also was obtained from senior leadership and the Council of Deans.

The process, as illustrated below, began with each department or interdisciplinary council conducting a self-study of their program. Data were provided for each program and included such information as the student demand for the program, quality of students in the program, diversity of the students in the program, number of graduates, and length of time to complete the program. The self-study also provided opportunities for the department or interdisciplinary council to discuss program quality, and information was available on teaching evaluations and publications. There also was a section where the program could provide a narrative about other aspects of the program.

Programs were evaluated on four dimensions:

- Importance of the program
- Quality of the program
- Opportunity for program improvements
- Opportunity for program growth

Based upon the self-study and the four dimensions noted above, each program was placed into one of five ranked categories:

- Priority 1: candidate for enhancement
- Priority 2: retained a somewhat higher level of support
- Priority 3: retained at a neutral level of support
- Priority 4: retained but at a lower level of support
- Priority 5: Candidate for reduction, phase out, or consolidation with another program

A flow chart outlining the steps throughout the academic prioritization process can be viewed at <http://provost.cmich.edu/>.

Preliminary Results:

The list of prioritized academic program recommendations is shown in a spreadsheet at <http://provost.cmich.edu/>. In addition, much of the data submitted by each of the programs can be viewed at <https://ssl.cmich.edu/programprioritization/results.asp>.

The programs are distributed as follows:

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| • Priority 1: candidate for enhancement | 34 | 8% |
| • Priority 2: retained a somewhat higher level of support | 87 | 22% |
| • Priority 3: retained at a neutral level of support | 149 | 37% |
| • Priority 4: retained but at a lower level of support | 67 | 17% |
| • Priority 5: Candidate for reduction, phase out or consolidation with another program | 64 | 16% |

In addition to these priority rankings, the report also proposes relocating twelve academic programs from one campus unit to another to better align related disciplines. In these recommendations, the teacher education programs in Physical Education and Sport in the College of Health Professions are to be moved to the Department of Teacher Education and Professional Development department in the College of Education and Human Services. The nutrition and dietetics programs in the Department of Human Environmental Studies are to be moved to the School of Health Sciences in the College of Health Professions. In addition the Gerontology minor an interdisciplinary program housed in the College of Education and Human Services is recommended to be moved to either the College of Health Professions or the College of Humanities and Social and Behavioral Sciences. Finally the Interdisciplinary major in actuarial sciences which is currently an interdisciplinary program is recommended to become part of the Math Department in the College of Science and Technology.

Next Steps process:

The prioritization process considered only existing programs. In addition to improving some current programs and eliminating others, the University **must introduce new programs, both on and off-campus**, that will serve the needs of future students and will lay a strong foundation of academic excellence. To that end, deans have been asked to submit to me a list of possible new programs that are to be considered for implementation in the near future.

Another result of the prioritization is that colleges, departments and interdisciplinary units are expected to take the appropriate curricular actions, especially for the programs that have been placed in Priority Category 5.

With the release of my recommendations, I intend to meet with various groups across campus to discuss the prioritization process and my recommended priority ratings, including scheduling and holding public meetings.

Appeals based on errors of fact should be directed to the college's academic dean for consideration.

Future Implementation:

The priority rankings that result from this process of academic prioritization are expected to guide future resource and programmatic decisions at Central Michigan University for the foreseeable future. It should also be recognized that these priority rankings were based upon the best current available information and these rankings will have to be periodically revisited when new information is available. It is expected that departments, deans and the University in general should use these rankings when decisions are made concerning tenure track lines, fixed-term faculty lines, equipment, supplies and equipment, as well as time and effort.

It should be noted that the resources possibly saved from elimination or downsizing low-priority programs may not provide all the resources that are needed to enhance high-priority programs. Many of the programs targeted for elimination have relatively little resources devoted to them because of very low student demand.

While there will be some additional resources provided centrally, much of the additional resources needed for high-priority programs will need to occur through reallocation in colleges and departments.

Let me be clear in emphasizing our steadfast commitment to ensuring enrolled students currently majoring or minoring in those programs targeted for elimination will graduate. Arrangements will be made to ensure completion of course work and graduation requirements for eliminated programs.

Conclusion:

The prioritization process took a lot of time and effort by all parties concerned. And to that end, I want to again thank all who participated and strongly encourage all faculty and staff to evaluate and implement the results. Doing so will strengthen the foundation of excellence that is Central Michigan University.