



Program Prioritization Task Force Background

In October 2020, Provost Austin Agho created the Program Prioritization Initiative Task Force and charged the group with reviewing academic and administrative programming in the Division of Academic Affairs. A detailed overview of the activities of the task force is available on the initiative website. Three aspects of the process are worth highlighting. First and foremost, the initiative is future-focused. Higher education scholars have identified a number of changes that need to be considered as institutions move into the future. Second, the process is meant to focus on the institution's strengths in order to make the entire community stronger. Honing in our strengths and opportunities can point to areas where future investments can be made. Third, recognizing that ODU is home to so many talented faculty, the process uses ODU faculty as experts to help chart the course of our academic and administrative support programs. Grounding the future-focused process in shared governance efforts will ultimately serve to make Old Dominion University even stronger in the years ahead.

Why Now?

Because the task force began its work during the pandemic, it was assumed that the initiative was driven by Covid-19. This is not the case. In fact, during previous strategic planning discussions, which were in fact interrupted by the pandemic, the need for an exhaustive review of academic and administrative programming was highlighted. Covid-19 was a clear reminder that external factors forcefully impact higher education. While solid financial planning, strong enrollment, and successful executive and budget leadership by President John R. Broderick have helped us avoid dramatic cuts during the pandemic, future fiscal challenges will surface. One of the clearest examples is what enrollment managers call the "enrollment cliff." Between 2025 and 2030, fewer individuals will be graduating from high school. This means fewer first-time-freshmen will be entering college.

Besides the enrollment cliff, several other interconnected factors warrant a close look at our academic and administrative programs. Technology has and will continue to change higher education and our workforce. Higher education institutions will continue to rely even more on tuition revenue and future funding models for public institutions will more favorably reward stronger institutions. At the same time, it is expected that a higher number of diverse and first-generation students will be attending college. While this final factor bodes well for ODU given our success in serving these types of students, we cannot wait for these external factors to occur to make changes that would better prepare us for the future of higher education. Putting it bluntly, if we know these changes are coming and we do nothing to prepare for them, we would be doing a huge
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disservice to our Monarch community. Just as those of us who live in flood-prone areas adjust to the rising waters in our community, as an academic enterprise we must also adjust to the social, political, economic, technological, and systemic changes that we know are coming our way.

Data Used

Multiple forms of data are being used by the task force as members review the academic and administrative programs. To gather feedback about the programs, surveys were sent to chairs, program directors, deans, and administrative unit directors. The surveys included questions about the units' mission, distinctiveness, relationship to other programs, opportunities, challenges, and experiences with administrative support units. A copy of the surveys sent to the different groups will be available on the task force website. A total of 160 academic leaders completed the surveys. The feedback provided by respondents has been valuable in helping the task force to understand the wide range of programs at the university.

In addition to collecting original data, other data the task force is reviewing includes the following: Bureau of Labor Statistics data, information from graduating student surveys, WEAVE assessment report data, enrollment data from institutional research, tuition revenue and expenditure data from Academic Affairs, research funding data from the Office of Research, and retention, progression, and graduation data from institutional research. While the data guides our discussions, the final recommendations will not be solely determined by specific numbers. The task force is considering the context and meaning surrounding data. For example, if a program has low enrollment, is it low because of a lack of resources? Would additional resources produce more graduates in an area of high demand? While it might seem like the numbers by themselves should lead to recommendations, there would be no need for a review if all decisions were driven purely by numbers. In fact, in a process driven only by numbers, the administration would make decisions solely by numbers with no consideration given to nuances or the context surrounding the data. Such a process would be problematic for many reasons.

Communicating with the Task Force

The task force welcomes any and all feedback. Several options exist for sharing information with the task force. If you would like to submit feedback anonymously, you can do so on the task force website. Comments will be shared with all members of the task force at their next meeting. If you have specific questions you want directly answered, feel free to reach out to one of the co-chairs – Brian Payne (bpayne@odu.edu) or Desh Ranjan (dranjan@odu.edu). As well, if you would like to schedule a time for the co-chairs to meet with you or members of your department, reach out to Mary Jo Karlis (mkarlis@odu.edu) to schedule a meeting.

Certificate Recommendations

The task force review found that of 54 certificate programs that have existed for five or more years at ODU, just 24 of them averaged one award a year over the past five years. The general consensus of the task force is that faculty and administrative costs dedicated to the under enrolled or dormant certificate program may not be justifiable. A recommendation that will be made in the task force report will be to close any certificate program that has existed for at least five years without producing more than two earned certificates over those five years. In addition, it was noted that some departments may wish to close certificate programs. The task force concurred that those departments wanting to close a certificate program should be able to do so. The task force also highlighted the need to reduce duplication between certificate programs.

During the review of certificate programs, the Program Prioritization Task Force identified glitches in the approval process for certificates. The task force submitted a faculty senate issue form recommending changes to the handbook that would involve the faculty senate in the approval of certificate programs offered for academic credit. Examples of requirements the task force asked the senate to consider included but were not limited to the following: (1) future certificates that go five years averaging less than one awarded certificate a year shall be terminated, (2) in seeking approval to create new certificates for academic credit, program proposers must ensure that there is no duplication, (3) program proposers must ensure that the certificate program is appropriately named to reflect the scope of the certificate and be commensurate with associated credit hours, (4) the proposal should identify how workload is addressed in the proposed certificate, and (5) certificate programs can be structured in different ways depending on the needs of students and market demand (e.g., as stand-alone certificates, certificates embedded in degree programs, and so on). The faculty senate has created a task force including members of existing senate committees to address these recommendations.

Administrative Unit Early Recommendations

The task force is also reviewing the administrative units in academic affairs. These include all of the support units reporting to the vice provosts and associate vice presidents. The aim of the review is to determine whether services are offered efficiently and at the level needed in a public research university. Factors being considered include efficiency, impact on students, cost justification, and spending. Two early recommendations have surfaced in the review of the administrative support units. First, the task force plans to recommend that service level agreements be developed so that academic departments and administrative units understand the specific types of services provided by support units. Second, a recommendation will focus on periodically evaluating service units and unit leaders the same way that department chairs and deans are reviewed. It is believed that these two recommendations will enhance communication between units and provide an even higher level of service delivery.

What about Research?

During the Program Prioritization Initiative Forum held on February 26th, an attendee asked why research productivity (in terms of grants received) was identified as having limited (e.g., 10%) significance to the prioritization efforts. Our limited focus given to research stems from the specific task we were assigned. The charge of the committee is to focus on administrative support programs and academic programs in the Division of Academic Affairs. The administrative support for research is done in the Office of Research and Old Dominion University Research Foundation, which are outside of the Division of Academic Affairs. As a dynamic public research institution, our aim is to ensure that the academic programs in Academic Affairs align with the characteristics of such an institution. With so many types of scholarship, and the need to embrace each of those forms of scholarship in our institution, our focus steers more towards the academic/instructional activities of public research institutions.

Indeed, for our purposes, the research productivity measure is only being included in the review to make sure that funds generated by faculty are counted in cost/revenue estimates. As we all know, scholarship at ODU is wide-ranging and funded research is but one component of the entire body of scholarship. In our analyses, we include research funding, not as a measure of research, but as a variable that helps us to more accurately measure the amount of revenue an academic unit generates.

While the focus is being given to the administrative and academic programs in academic affairs, it is important to draw attention to the scholarly achievements of the task force. The majority of the task force members are full professors who have demonstrated significant scholarly contributions in their disciplinary areas. Collectively, they have generated roughly \$30 million in external funding, published dozens of books, and authored or co-authored more than 600 scholarly works. While every discipline or type of scholarly activity is not represented, the committee has discussed the importance of research, scholarship, and creativity in a dynamic public research university. Certainly, strong academic programs are a necessary ingredient for strong research programs.

Revised Timeline

When the work of the task force began in October 2020, we ambitiously believed we could be done with our work by the end of March 2021. Several weeks ago, it became apparent that even with the long hours members were committing to the initiative, it would not be possible to produce our recommendations within that timeframe. Rather than rushing our recommendations, a decision was made to aim for producing a draft report in early to mid-May. The university community will be invited to review the draft and submit feedback by September 1. The task force will reconvene in September and review the feedback that has been received. The final report will be submitted to the provost, deans, and faculty senate by October 1.