

ACADEMIC AFFAIRS APASP RECOMMENDATIONS PRESENTATION

Presented by Beverly Edmond

Good morning President Stearns and colleagues. I am here this morning to present my recommendations for the prioritization of academic programs and administrative services within the academic affairs sector of the University of Montana. These recommendations are based on the culmination of months, weeks and hours of extensive and complex analysis and debate. Before I delve into my recommendations in these 2 areas, I would like to provide some important introductory commentary for which I would be remiss if I neglected to share.

While it was my pleasure to serve as chair of the APASP TF, I must once again go on record in saying that all credit for completing this work has to be given to the members of the APASP TF and to those staff who served as ex officio. Despite the imperfections noted even by the APASP TF members the process, analysis, and direction embedded in this will be of benefit to this University for decades to come. It would not have been possible if the 18 members of the TF and 9 ex officio members who pushed forward to ensure that this prioritization process was both completed but more importantly done with integrity, commitment to excellence and fairness. I have read and heard some question the value of this process and the validity of the outcomes and even more sadly the motives of some of us in pushing for this process. I think about the void in such comprehensive and purposeful analysis I found here when I arrived and the richness of the data, information, criteria, metrics and analysis this campus has engaged in and easily conclude that those who see no value in this work are simply shortsighted. And I am on record as commending the work that the Task Force has done to get us to this point.

I have mentioned the imperfection in this process and I need to add some context to that observation. As many of you know my academic discipline is Public Administration and it has served me well in the nuts and bolts of decision making in public service organizations such as a University of Montana. PA is both art and science, it is both theory and practice. It provides scientifically proven theories which must be applied and adapted to a particular decision making process. Herbert A Simon, the distinguished Nobel prize winner and administrative theorist introduced in 1947 in his work on Administrative Behavior a theoretical concept of decision making he termed satisficing. To satisfice in decision making means you take all of the available information you are able to obtain and you make the best decision you can. He makes the point that particularly in public sector decision making rarely do you have all of the data and information you might like to have, but this does not invalidate the decisions reached. You, as Simon, puts it can be legitimately satisfied with a decision if you have used all of the available information you have. I share this

with you only to point out while it is fine to want more information, more time, more analysis it is perfectly fine to engage in what Simon refers to as “bounded rationality” in public sector decision making. The APASP process epitomizes this theory.

I offer no criticism of the approach taken by the APASP TF in how they concluded they would handle the 4 prioritization categories, but I have chosen to go a bit further than their comfort allowed. To be clear and to counter any contention that this process did not involve an extensive review, please know I have been reading, reviewing and learning as much as I can about these services and programs. I have had ongoing conversations as well with the deans, directors and others about their units, their programs, their services, their challenges and what they would like to accomplish. Not only in my exploration for APASP but as my regular interaction with my direct reports. I read Unit of Analysis reports, deans and report writer’s feedback, TF members’ comments and suggestions. I have looked at performance data trends and other metrics. In the end, while it was not possible for me to examine the tons of information available I have done my best to do so. I have also had the advantage of knowledge of higher education best practices, benchmarks and standard operating procedures. My point, here is to lay clear that to the extent possible my review was comprehensive and as Simon would suggest I satisfied.

As you will see in my recommendations, I have gone beyond the limits of Category III. This was important to me and to this process. I know full well that the many skeptics believed and indeed said this prioritization was simply a mask for cutting academic programs and administrative services. I made clear that this was not and could not be the sole outcome of this extensive process. The goal remains to see how UM can place its academic programs and administrative services portfolio in a queue where we can determine the relative level of importance each has to our future and helps us decide how to allocate resources more effectively. It is for this reason and others that I respectfully declined the suggestion that the outcomes of this process should be delayed, postponed or redone. Not only did I see sufficient information to begin the journey of filling these queues, we face a reality that time is not our friend. The delay we have had in getting this process in place has cost this institution dearly in both resources but more obviously in opportunity. To be blunt, which I am known to be, UM has limited time to align itself with standards long practiced by other institutions of higher education. As the saying goes the journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step and APASP is that in our journey towards the future.

One additional contextual point I will make has to do with my approach to recommendations in Category I. In the preamble to this section I suggest an important distinction must be made between the purpose of strategic investment for growth and development and the need to establish an equitable budget reallocation model. I contend that the two are not interchangeable but can be done concurrently as long as their different purposes are understood. It is foolish to use strategic investment to reconcile years of improper budget modeling. Progressive

organizations build sustainable programs and services by applying a data informed resource allocation process where dollars are shifted based on agreed performance indicators. This is an equitable process because it shifts resources in a logical and transparent manner. It also has a built in incentive for productivity as one knows that resources will be gained or loss based on objective analysis of their performance. Strategic investments are used in addition to rather than in place of a data informed resource allocation model. As such when strategic investments are shifted or unavailable this does not destabilize the units' ability to carry out its core functions. I offer this as explanation for why I chose this approach rather than the one reflected in the APASP TF assignment of academic programs and administrative services in Category I.

It is important to keep in mind the goal of sustainability. The issue for UM for at least the next several years will be how to sustain the academic programs and administrative services on the resources we have available. This is very different from saying one program or service has more or less value than another. It is in some ways mathematical in that it asks do our resources match those needed to sustain the programs and services we offer. I will return to this at the end of my presentation. Let me now move to a summary of the recommendations offered. I will first start with Administrative Services in Academic Affairs and then move to the academic programs. I will discuss these by Category but not touch on all of these as you may read them for yourselves.

Administrative Services:

Category I

In this section I recommend collaborative broad based areas which I see as important for UM's future. As examples I propose investment and development in administrative services used to support student success. I recommend investment in faculty professional development.

Categories II and III

In addressing Categories II and III, I chose to again not limit my recommendations as the APASP TF felt compelled to do to only Category III. My reasoning was quite frankly based on the APASP observation that some in Category II could easily have been placed in Category I or III. It seemed to be a missed opportunity to not offer some pathway for action for these services and so I chose to combine the recommendations to address programs in both. I looked at the Unit Analysis reports, reviewers' comments, available data, other feedback and TF analysis. It should be noted that because these are services within the AA sector I had the advantage of input from the leadership of these areas through our regular meetings but I also relied on my own perspective.

These recommendations include such actions as administrative realignments, restructuring of services and prioritization for enhancement. In some instances the recommendations align with those of the TF or an academic dean. As I said, you can read these for yourself.

All services in each of these Categories will be expected to develop a post APASP implementation plan. The administrative heads of these units will be responsible for developing these and for ensuring involvement by all necessary stakeholders in this process. In instances where an administrative service is not expressly noted the applicable recommendation provided is that using all of the available data from this process, especially the Unit of Analysis reports, the head of the unit will also be asked to develop a post-APASP plan.

Academic Programs

Category I

Recommendations in Category I were approached with the same philosophy and rationale previously mentioned. In addition these included feedback from deans on areas primed for growth. Some recommendations are also based on the use of more collaborative broad-based approaches rather than single program investments. Consideration for the academic programs the APASP TF placed in Category I was also utilized. For example, the APASP TF listed several individual biology programs for priority growth. One of the recommendations I make is to broaden this to develop a strategy for investment in the biological sciences. A total of four recommendations are offered all with a similar theme.

Category II and III

The recommendations contained here combine the two categories and the range of potential actions APASP identified for each. The bases for this approach is the same as mentioned before. The range of options remain as identified by the APASP Task Force and include providing additional resources, development of an improvement plan restructuring, investment, consolidations, reinvention, modifications, disinvestment, moratorium, or discontinuance among other possibilities. With the exception of two specific actions, the overarching recommendations for the remaining 37 programs are that the deans develop post-APASP implementation plans engaging the appropriate stakeholders (faculty, chairs, students, staff, etc.) and based on the data, analysis, comments and feedback determine the most appropriate APASP potential action. Therefore, you will not see one of the options above specifically linked to a particular program here. Rather the recommendation is that such an alignment will be done under the stewardship of deans and in collaboration with the unit noted. There are two exceptions to this.

The two exceptions are the specific recommendations to realign the MPA program and the restructuring in the CVPA. These emanated from recommendations of the unit and/or a dean. I concur with these and recommend that they move forward.

With respect to the other 35 program areas included here, the expectation of aligning an appropriate action and plan based on the analysis of data and other relevant information is key. The approach used in identifying the specific programs, while not limited to, includes suggestions by the deans, comments from the APASP TF process, as well as my own review/analysis of information and data.

How should this work? As example, my review identified multiple graduate masters level programs which based on the 5-year average data have low levels of completers. The feasibility of sustaining these programs needs to be given strong consideration especially in light of other masters' level programs with significantly higher averages. Deans should work with the appropriate programs to determine what action is needed and a plan developed to this end.

To again be blunt, if there are programs in our academic portfolios with few students and few graduates the question of sustaining these must be addressed or others not so configured will have fewer resources. Not wise, not sustainable.

Another example is in the Women and Gender Studies program. An analysis of the potential of this program is promising but constrained by developmental and infrastructure issues. The Dean should work with this unit to propose appropriate modifications to address this. If or what exactly this should be will be determined in a post -APASP plan of implementation.

In reviewing these 35 program areas, questions of sustainability, practicality and rationality emerge. For example, why have three separate programs focusing on Asian Studies with low numbers of completers? Yes we have a strong connection to this area of the world but is this the best structure for this? These questions must be addressed.

In some of our 2-year programs embedded in these are options and certificates requiring hours to complete which may need to be revisited. Do we serve our students well with so many language options and with some showing very few student completers?

Are all of the minors and concentrations serving us well in some of our strong majors and where are these options for change? Questions like these get at the heart of prioritization and require UM's attention and action. These are recommended for such attention and action under the leadership of the Deans and in concert with faculty, staff, students, and chairs.

Often the immediate response is “we could fix these issues if we had more resources”. Perhaps that has some merit but it is not always necessarily the answer, and more bluntly, the reality is that such resources are not coming soon or quickly. These will come but will UM be sustainable until this occurs? Those sitting in this room will need to answer these critical questions.

Several deans offered recommendations to take specific actions and APASP concurred with some of these. Post-APASP implementation plans should be developed by the deans to affect these recommended actions.

Also included is an overarching recommendation to conduct an in-depth analysis of the effectiveness of our current academic structure and components. This recommendation was supported by comments and suggestions received from the deans and premised on the belief that it is an opportune time to look comprehensively at UM’s academic administrative configuration.

Similarly as noted for administrative services, any academic programs not specifically mentioned here will be asked to develop a post-APASP implementation plan using all available information and focusing on addressing its strengths and weaknesses.

In summary, the range of options should be applied by the deans as they develop post-APASP implementation plans. These should involve the units and other appropriate stakeholders. As well, any proposed actions must include adherence to all contractual and policy requirements. Specific components for these plans will be forthcoming with the expectation that a general outline with target dates of accomplishment other key benchmarks will be available for President Bodnar in January followed by full development of these plans in early spring.

The challenge to this approach is to prevent inaction and loss of the momentum gained from the APASP process. To do so will run the risk of continued sustainability for UM. Either we take what we now know as a pretty good analysis of our strengths and weakness and move to align appropriate actions with these or we continue old patterns of across the board reductions, inadequate funding and limited progress forward.