

UNIVERSITY COUNCIL  
PLANNING AND PRIORITIES COMMITTEE  
REQUEST FOR DECISION

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**PRESENTED BY:** Bob Tyler, Chair, Planning and Priorities Committee

**DATE OF MEETING:** January 24, 2013

**SUBJECT:** **Program Prioritization**

**DECISION REQUESTED:**

*It is recommended:*

*That Council approve in principle the undertaking of a process for program prioritization.*

**PURPOSE:**

A priority ranking of all of its programs (academic and service/support) using defined criteria will enable the University to allocate its operating resources to its programs on the basis of priority and will facilitate the operating budget adjustments required over the next three years without invoking *across-the-board* reductions.

**CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND:**

In May 2012, the Board of Governors approved the Operating Budget Adjustments (OBA) Initiative as a means of achieving a \$44.5 million permanent reduction in the University's annual operating budget by 2015-16. The use of selective measures has been deemed preferable to across-the-board reductions in meeting this budget adjustment target, as across-the-board reductions tend to mediocrity for all programs.

Notwithstanding several antecedents for program prioritization at the University of Saskatchewan, including the President's Committee on Renewal (1991), the Program Audit Project (1995), A Framework for the Evaluation of Programs (1997), Systematic Program Review (1999-2005), the Priority Determination Process (1998-2002), Program Termination Procedures (2001) and the Viable Enrolments Policy (2007), the University has never ranked its programs on a priority basis. Without this knowledge, systematic allocation/reallocation of resources on the basis of priority is not possible.

The President announced on January 11, 2013 that the University will undertake a program prioritization process whereby “*every academic program and administrative service currently offered by our university will be examined simultaneously to assess its contributions to our overall success. This will be done in order to create a set of academic and administrative program and service priorities in which the university will invest greater resources, as well as academic and administrative program and service priorities from which resources will be withdrawn.*” As described by the President, the TransformUS project will be based on the methodology described by Robert C. Dickeson in *Prioritizing Academic Programs and Services: Reallocating Resources to Achieve Strategic Balance* (Jossey Bass, 1999, revised and updated 2010). Dickeson’s definition of a program “*is any activity or collection of activities of the institution that consumes resources.*” Accordingly, both academic and service/support programs will be subject to analysis and prioritization by task forces created for this purpose.

**SUMMARY:**

Council is asked to approve in principle the undertaking of a university-wide process for prioritization of service/support and academic programs, as Council will ultimately be asked to approve any forthcoming recommendations that affect academic programs. Requesting that Council at the outset provide its endorsement of program prioritization recognizes Council’s statutory authority for academic programs under the *University of Saskatchewan Act* and signals that Council’s engagement is essential to the success of the TransformUS initiative.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

1. Communication from President Busch-Vishniac to Members of the University of Saskatchewan Community dated January 11, 2013
2. *TransformUs* fact sheet

January 11, 2013

Fellow Members of the University of Saskatchewan Community:

You are aware that the University of Saskatchewan is facing a significant financial challenge between now and 2016. I am writing today to share with you some important steps we will take as a university community to ensure that the University of Saskatchewan will thrive and maintain its path as one of Canada's most distinguished universities. To do so, we need urgently to address our financial challenge so that we have the financial resources to achieve our goals sustainably in the future. While we have built a robust and effective planning and resource management process, the extent of our resources is not sufficient to maintain the breadth of our programming and activity. Everyone within our community—students, faculty, staff, board members, alumni, friends and community members—is affected by our current situation. I am signaling today that it is now time to undertake a comprehensive effort to examine the way in which our resources are being invested.

With the vision of continuing to be one of Canada's most distinguished universities, I have asked Brett Fairbairn, Provost and Vice-President Academic, and Greg Fowler, Acting Vice-President Finance and Resources, to serve as co-champions of a process through which every academic program and administrative service currently offered by our university will be examined simultaneously to assess its contributions to our overall success. This will be done in order to create a set of academic and administrative program and service priorities in which the university will invest greater resources, as well as academic and administrative program and service priorities from which resources will be withdrawn.

Our approach to this effort will be modeled on the process described in *Prioritizing Academic Programs and Services* (2010) by Robert C. Dickeson, and adapted to meet our university's specific needs. Copies of this book are available in the University Library or for purchase in the University Bookstore or online. Our university's prioritization process begins with this letter and with the establishment of two task forces described below, and will conclude with the submission of a report consisting of prioritization rankings from the two task forces by **November 30, 2013**.

Let me be clear from the outset: our primary motivation in introducing this new process is cost-cutting. This means that some valuable academic and support programs and administrative services will be lost through this initiative in order to ensure the university as a whole has the resources it needs to thrive and grow. In so doing, we will also need to sequester sufficient resources so that, over a multi-year period, we are able to shift resources toward academic programs, academic support programs and administrative services that are performing exceptionally well or that we must retain and that would perform significantly better with a modest infusion of resources. Our overall target for this exercise is \$20 – 25 million. Of this, we expect that a minimum of \$5 million will be available, following the ranking process, for new investments in the highest-ranking academic programs and administrative services. Flowing from the Dickeson model and adapted to our university, programs will be ranked in four or five categories, such as 'maintain with enhanced resources', 'maintain with existing resources', 'maintain with reduced resources',

‘transform with either increased or reduced resources’, or ‘eliminate, merge or close’. The task forces will provide the categorization and, informed by their work, we will utilize our existing governing bodies to make resulting decisions, both budgetary and academic. All of this will be essential if we are to ensure our ongoing financial sustainability.

The prioritization process, titled *TransformUS*, will be carried out by a broadly representative and diverse group of participants from throughout the University of Saskatchewan. Two task forces will be created: one to examine academic programs (Academic Program Transformation - APT) and another to examine administrative services and academic support programs (Support Service Transformation – SST). We are currently considering options regarding the nomination process to the task forces, including a model which has worked well at other universities and which provides for a broadly-based nomination process with selection by the President. I can confirm currently that the Academic Program Transformation Task Force will be comprised of esteemed members of our faculty drawn from University Council, its committees and faculty-at-large. The Support Service Transformation Task Force will be comprised of faculty and administrative managers and staff. While students will not be included as members of the task forces because of the amount of work entailed and the significant impact this activity would have on their studies, both task forces will be charged with devising appropriate and effective mechanisms for student input and participation in the prioritization process.

Although we will seek to ensure that the task force participants bring perspectives from all sectors of the institution, they will not be representing any individual unit or constituency. Instead, they will be asked to adopt a “university-wide perspective” and to focus on what is in the best interests of the whole university, not its individual constituent parts.

Both task forces will receive administrative and logistical support from the office of Institutional Planning and Assessment (IPA) as well as a support group staffed with representatives from IPA, Financial Services Division (FSD), Communications, Human Resources, and Information Strategy and Analytics (ISA). Additionally, they may obtain advice from external experts, such as Larry Goldstein, president of Campus Strategies, LLC, who may serve consultants to assist with this process.

Although the specific assessment criteria and weighting will be developed by the respective task forces, I will request that they adhere to two principles in carrying out their responsibilities.

1. *The criteria must be holistic* and take into consideration the full gamut of institutional assessment factors including qualitative and quantitative, financial and non-financial, and any other relevant measures of performance.
2. *The criteria must result in a fair assessment of all academic programs and administrative service and academic support programs* and their selection and weighting must ensure that no individual programs or services are unfairly treated in the process.

Once the criteria have been tentatively developed by the task forces, they will be shared broadly within the university community for comment and with University Council for endorsement.

It is important to note that both task forces are recommending rather than decision-making entities. They will prepare and submit a final report containing their rankings, which will be made publicly available upon its completion, to my office by November 30, 2013 at the very latest. I anticipate that the report will group all of the programs and services into categories whereby the highest-ranked programs will be eligible for increased investments expected to enhance their overall contributions to the University of Saskatchewan's stakeholders. Conversely, the lowest-ranked programs will be candidates for elimination or merger. Depending on the number of categories established by the task forces, other programs will be assigned to categories covering program transformation, continuation without significant change in resources, and continuation with reduced resources.

Following receipt of the report from the task forces, there will be a formal process for the review of the final report. This process will involve University Council and the Board of Governors who will both receive the report. On behalf of the university's leadership, the Provost's Committee on Integrated Planning (PCIP) will develop an action plan and the development of an implementation timetable. All laws, contracts, collective agreements and University of Saskatchewan policies will be adhered to during the implementation phase following the completion of the assessment process.

I want to assure you that, although this is the first official communication on this subject, it will not be the last. I will rely on the co-champions to keep *TransformUS* in the forefront of the University of Saskatchewan community via regular updates and periodic Q&A sessions. It is my expectation that this process will be undertaken in an open and transparent manner. This means that, with the exception of the deliberations regarding individual programs and the other inner workings of the task forces, all facets of the process will be shared widely and updated regularly.

Finally, I appreciate that this is a major undertaking of our university at a time when it is critically important that we make choices. Because of the significant time invested by the university community in this process, it will be important to curtail some initiatives and activities which may distract from this purpose. I thank all of you for your time and your cooperation as we implement this important process at the University of Saskatchewan.

Sincerely,



Ilene Busch-Vishniac  
President



## TransformUS: Reallocating resources for future success

In 2013, the University of Saskatchewan, at the direction of the president, will be undertaking a program prioritization initiative entitled, TransformUS, as part of the operating budget adjustments initiative. Strategic decisions regarding our programs will better position the university to reach our vision to become one of the most distinguished universities in Canada and the world.

### What is program prioritization?

Program prioritization, a method formulated by higher education consultant and president emeritus of the University of Northern Colorado, Robert C. Dickeson, is a proven process for reallocating resources in tough times. Program prioritization reviews all academic and administrative programs supported by the operating budget simultaneously and equally against stated criteria. Based on results, decisions may be made to invest resources, make no changes, or eliminate or reduce programs or activities which rank as having lower priority according to these criteria.

Dickeson bases his case for reform on seven assumptions:

1. Academic programs constitute the real drivers of cost for the entire enterprise, academic and non-academic.
2. Academic programs have been permitted to grow, and ... calcify on the institutional body without critical regard to their relative worth.
3. Most institutions are unrealistically striving to be all things to all people in their quest for students, reputation and support, rather than focusing their resources on the mission and programs that they can accomplish with distinction.
4. There is a growing incongruence between the academic programs offered and the resources required to mount them with quality, and most institutions are over-programmed for their available resources.
5. Traditional approaches, like across-the-board cuts, tend toward mediocrity for all programs.
6. The most likely source for needed resources is reallocation of existing resources from weakest to strongest programs.
7. Reallocation cannot be accomplished without rigorous, effective and academically responsible prioritization.

Typical steps in the program prioritization process include:

- Selecting the task force members and leadership for the initiative
- Reviewing the institutional mission
- Defining what constitutes a program - According to the Dickeson model, a program is "any activity or collection of activities of the institution that consumes resources (dollars, people, space, equipment, time)." Programs are not departments and are narrower in terms of their focus. For example, a program



would be an area of focus within a specific academic or administrative department, such as a major, minor, program option or co-op option. (Dickeson, 2010)

- Selecting appropriate criteria. Criteria described in the book are:
  - History, development and expectations of the program
  - External demand for the program
  - Internal demand for the program
  - Quality of program inputs and processes
  - Quality of program outcomes
  - Size, scope and productivity of the program
  - Revenue and other resources generated by the program
  - Costs and other expenses associated with the program
  - Impact, justification and overall essentiality of the program
  - Opportunity analysis of the program
- Measuring, analyzing, prioritizing. Decisions regarding retention or elimination of programs are made by the highest authority within the university, and within the university's existing governance structure.
- Implementing program decisions

**The process followed is open and transparent** and is supported by a comprehensive communications strategy, addressing, among other things, process issues at the outset. The overall outcome of the process should provide for increased understanding of the various programs and services and their roles and functions within the university.

## What is TransformUS?

TransformUS will be the University of Saskatchewan program prioritization process, modeled on the process developed by Robert C. Dickeson, and adapted to meet our university's specific needs.

Over the course of 2013, two task forces will be responsible for leading this initiative. The **Academic Program Transformation Task Force** will set criteria and review all academic programs offered through the university. The **Support Service Transformation Task Force** will set criteria and review the administrative support programs both within the academic units and administrative units.

The Academic Program Transformation Task Force will be comprised of members of our faculty. The Support Service Transformation Task Force will be comprised of faculty and administrative managers and staff. While students will not be included as members of the task forces because of the amount of work entailed and the significant impact this activity would have on their studies, both task forces will be charged with devising appropriate and effective mechanisms for student input and participation in the prioritization process.



The role of the two task forces is to:

- 1) **Develop criteria** for ranking programs. These criteria, to be endorsed by University Council, will be consistent across all programs, with one set of criteria for Academic Program Transformation and one set of criteria for Support Service Transformation.
- 2) **Develop the rankings system** for determining outcomes.
- 3) **Collect data** from all programs to complete the ranking recommendations. The review process will use information that is currently available and will not generally be looking for new information.
- 4) **Complete a report** with recommendations on the outcomes for consideration of the president and provost by November 30, 2013, grouping programs and activities in four or five categories, such as 'maintain with enhanced resources', 'maintain with existing resources', 'maintain with reduced resources', 'transform with either increased or reduced resources', 'eliminate, merge or close'.

Members of the campus community will be given opportunities for input at each milestone in the process.

The task forces will receive information and support from a support team consisting of the IPA, ISA, Financial Services, Human Resources and Communications. The first requirement of this support team will be the collection of data from central sources to support the work of the task forces.

At a high level, our process will consist of the following elements:

- 1) An announcement from the president indicating the University of Saskatchewan will embark on a program prioritization process and naming the provost and the vice-president finance and resources as the leads for TransformUs within the university.
- 2) Selection of the task force members and chairs through an open, institution-wide nomination process. Members will be selected by the president, provost and vice-president finance and resources, with a view to a broadly representative set of members and with representation from Council evident.
- 3) A set of criteria will be developed for this process and shared with University Council and the Board of Governors for input/advice.
- 4) All programs and services to which operating budget resources are allocated, will be reviewed.
- 5) The rankings from the two task forces will be the output of the task forces work. These will be received by the president and considered by the Board of Governors, University Council and the Provost's Committee on Integrated Planning (PCIP) to inform subsequent decisions, and PCIP in particular will develop an action plan based on the rankings.
- 6) The normal processes for program termination will be followed. University Council and its committees will be actively involved in changes to academic programs and in their final approval. The Board of Governors will be fully informed of administrative and service changes with budgetary implications.

University Council will be invited to endorse program prioritization, to review and endorse the criteria, and to participate on the task forces. University Council will also receive the reports of the task forces and







recommendations on implementation from the president and provost. In addition, attention will be paid to the existing/past processes to ensure congruence with institutional planning and policies.

There are a number of past processes undertaken at the University of Saskatchewan which have some linkages to this proposed methodology. These include:

- *The President's Committee on Renewal (PCR) 1991*
- *The Program Audit Project (1995)*
- *Systematic Program Review (1999)*
- *Priority Determination Process (1998-2002)*
- *Program Termination Procedures (2001)*
- *Viable Enrolments Policy (2007)*
- *Service Process Enhancement Project (SPEP)*

Information regarding these past initiatives will be available more broadly in the near future.

## ❏ What principles will influence the criteria against which all programs are ranked?

The specific assessment criteria and weighting will be developed by the respective task forces, and will adhere to two principles:

1. **The criteria must be holistic** and take into consideration the full gamut of institutional assessment factors including qualitative and quantitative, financial and non-financial, and any other relevant measures of performance.
2. **The criteria must result in a fair assessment of all academic programs and administrative service and academic support programs** ensuring that no individual programs or services are unfairly treated in the process. Once the criteria have been tentatively developed by the task forces, they will be shared broadly within the university community for comment.

## ❏ What are the timelines that will be followed?

### January 2013

- On January 13, 2013, TransformUS is initiated with a letter from the president. This letter outlined the purposes of TransformUS and the general principles to govern the process. Please see attachment.
- The Planning and Priorities Committee (PPC) of council endorses program prioritization as a methodology for the University of Saskatchewan and presents a motion to University Council at its January 24, 2013 meeting for approval.
- Nominations to the task forces will begin following the University Council meeting on January 24, 2013



**February 2013**

- Nominations conclude for both task forces by February 15, 2013.

**March 2013**

- The task forces will be constituted by March 3, 2013.
- The first meeting of the task forces with the consultant is anticipated for the week of March 18-22. This first meeting will focus on team orientation to the issues and the development of a tentative set of criteria. Documentation on University of Saskatchewan criteria will be provided to this meeting along with the list of programs and services which has been developed by the IPA.

**April 2013**

- University Council and the Board of Governors will be invited to comment on the criteria to be utilized by the task forces. In the case of University Council, it is anticipated that Council will endorse the criteria at their April 18, 2013 meeting.
- The task forces will create a template for information collection from the campus community to be completed by department heads and unit leaders. This will be distributed by late April with an anticipated turn around date of early fall when the information will be utilized by the task forces to make their rankings.

**Summer 2013**

- Departments and units will complete their program review template.

**Summer/Fall 2013**

- The task forces will review all programs based on information received against the criteria.

**November 2013**

- A report on the rankings of each program will be provided to the president by November 30, 2013.

**December 2013 and beyond**

- Following receipt of the rankings report from the task forces, there will be a formal process for its review by University Council and the Board of Governors. Based on these rankings, the Provost's Committee on Integrated Planning (PCIP), on behalf of the university's leadership, will develop an action plan and implementation timetable.

**What role will students play?**

We understand the interest of students in getting involved in this project. Students will be given opportunities to get involved at key milestones in the process and can ensure their voices are heard by completing surveys where requested giving their opinions on our existing programs (for example, SEEQ course evaluations), participating in





college and program discussions when programs are their template, and by their participation on governing bodies where decisions are made.

We have made the decision to not involve students in the role of the task force for the following reasons:

1. Participation will require a significant time investment that could significantly affect their studies.
2. The project will span two academic years and presumably two different sets of leaders in USSU and GSA.
3. Students have a built-in conflict of interest in looking at programs in which they are enrolled.
4. Students are less likely to know the university as thoroughly as employees would.

This process will be led openly and transparently and students will be able to access information throughout the process. The task forces will be seeking regular input from the campus community, including input from students, at key milestones.

### **What happens when the rankings report is complete?**

Following receipt of the rankings report from the task forces, there will be a formal process for its review by University Council and the Board of Governors. Based on these rankings, the Provost's Committee on Integrated Planning (PCIP), on behalf of the university's leadership, will develop an action plan and implementation timetable.

The university will ensure all students currently enrolled in programs are given the opportunity to complete these programs within a reasonable time frame. As well, when staff are affected, all laws, contracts, collective agreements and University of Saskatchewan policies will be adhered to during the implementation phase following the completion of the assessment process.

### **Why are we doing this?**

We are doing this because the competition for budget resources is an internal process. This means that all existing programs and services need to be reviewed against each other to confirm their ongoing support/call on the university's operating budget. Through the operating budget process ideas generation process, the campus community has questioned whether some programs or units should continue to exist. For example, many questions have arisen about whether there should be two colleges of education in Saskatchewan or whether certain programs, such as the humanities and fine arts, should continue to exist. In addition, the university has determined that it will follow a deliberative approach to budget adjustments and that it will not do across-the-board cuts (which many other universities are and have been doing) or use tuition to balance our operating budget.

In making this decision, the university looked for other methodologies to assess its current programs. The Dickeson approach emphasizes openness, transparency and participation, all of which are important considerations based on recent experiences (College of Medicine). Finally, the Dickeson approach represents a resource reallocation process, which is one of the final elements of a robust integrated planning initiative.





## How can I learn more?

Robert C. Dickeson's book, **Prioritizing Academic Programs and Services: Reallocating Resources to Achieve Strategic Balance** (revised and updated, 2010), is available at the University Library or can be purchased in the University Bookstore. E-reader versions are also available online. You will also find resources and updates specific to TransformUS at [www.usask.ca/finances](http://www.usask.ca/finances).

