



Faculty Forum

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An Alternative to Program Deletion

As members of the University Strategic Planning Committee, my colleagues and I have been charged with the difficult and disheartening task of recommending certain degree programs for termination due to low enrollment. I have lost considerable sleep and spent much too much time wondering how we have come to this point.

If one questions administrative officers about the rationale behind this drastic measure we are basically told that the "bean counters in the legislature" have been instrumental in initiating these actions. One must then ask why state government has, after a hundred years of allowing universities considerable autonomy, suddenly become so interested in monitoring a traditionally independent university system? Why are we now hearing such catch phrases as "accountability" being routinely used and accepted by so many? The easy answer is that university "costs" have not been contained and that the university system has not done a particularly good job of maximizing its allocated funds. If we accept this answer the next question becomes "why"? The easiest answer is that there are certain programs not generating enough graduates, not interesting enough students, and, thus, for vibrant programs to grow, positions must come from the stagnant, nonproductive ones. But I have come to believe this is only a part of our problem. A more ominous and threatening variable has evolved that, in my opinion, has depleted the upper ranks of teaching faculty, increased bureaucracy, increased workload for everyone and driven the costs of education up to the point where legislatures refuse to pay the bills without more concrete notions of "accountability." This variable is administrative growth.

It is difficult to accurately document the exact nature and extent of this growth. While some administrative positions have been consolidated, expansion has occurred in other areas. Associate Vice Chancellor positions are now commonplace and Associate Dean positions are also an accepted part of our institutional landscape. Department Heads/Chairs are so overwhelmed by bureaucracy that they are leaving these positions in droves. The Administration building, which some believe was built with too many floors to begin with, has now overflowed across campus to several other locations. In my opinion this administrative growth has accomplished three things. It has:

1. Created an unprecedented expansion of bureaucracy and a deluge of trivial, never ending paperwork with every new administrator requiring surveys, assessments, or other elements of paper shuffling that inevitably make their way down to an already overwhelmed faculty who must respond in ways that distract from the mission of teaching. Obviously, we are mostly responding, either reactively or proactively, to dictates from the legislature, General Administration, or other external sources.
2. Depleted the upper ranks of faculty who, for whatever reason, have forsaken their chosen careers to become bureaucrats. One need only review the BD119 to be shocked by the number of \$80,000.00 salaries of former professors who are now occupants of the White House. While many of these faculty were replaced (usually by junior faculty), they now generate such excessive paperwork that they are stifling those who want to teach. This is a difficult observation to acknowledge as all the people I know in this

category are wonderful, hardworking professionals who have given significantly to this university for great portions of their professional lives.

3. Drastically driven up the cost of a university education without making a direct contribution to the central mission of teaching. If we have arrived at a point where reallocation of positions is the only way for thriving departments to grow, perhaps we need to look at other ways to generate teaching positions or at least increase the number of courses taught.

I thus submit that we should return administrators to the classroom. Every administrator with teaching credentials--from the Chancellor to the Deans--should teach at least one course per semester. Reallocating a portion of their administrative duties back to their departments could free up positions for reallocation to those departments in greatest need of enhancement, those with the greatest potential for growth. A by-product of this return to teaching would be administrators who would devote one third to one quarter of their time to teaching and would no longer have the time to create frivolous requests for sometimes meaningless information, a situation that would make everyone's life more pleasant. It might even result in department heads having the time to build or create cutting-edge departments that generate student numbers in new and vibrant ways rather than limiting them to responding to the overwhelming request for reports, surveys and other information. This suggestion is not without precedent. The State University of West Georgia has experienced continuous growth over the last several decades and their President teaches at least one course per year. Within the College of Applied Sciences Dean Depew has begun teaching this semester, showing that administrators can find the time for teaching if they have the desire, and Dean Vartabedian from the College of Arts and Sciences taught a class last semester. I thus call upon Chancellor Bardo and his exhaustingly long list of fellow administrators to return to the classroom if they are qualified and let's see the impact this has on our struggling system. In fact, return them all to liberal studies. After all, we have been told our brightest and most qualified should teach at this level. Imagine the impact on retention when a first semester freshman tells his/her mom and dad, "The Chancellor is teaching my first college course"!

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