TO: Dr. John Nolt, Faculty Senate President

FROM: Scott E. Simmons

RE: Program Closure Criteria

DATE: November 7, 2008

The purpose of this memorandum is to highlight the criteria various universities and colleges use to evaluate the prospect of closing an academic department. First, this memorandum looks specifically at a hypothetical case study published in the *Journal of Higher Education* documenting the criteria for closure at several institutions.[1] Secondly, several specific criteria used at peer institutions are also evaluated.

A.   Decision Rules Used in Academic Program Closure

Peter Eckel's 2002 case study of university behavior when determining the criteria to be evaluated for program closure provides an in-depth and specific analysis of how several universities made difficult decisions in light of budget cuts. More specifically, the article sought to provide a thorough answer to the following question: "When institutions have to make tough choices, prioritize among departments, and close academic programs, by what criteria do they make this decision?"[2]

In turn, Dr. Eckel evaluated the criteria used at several institutions, including (1) the University of Maryland at College Park, (2) Oregon State University, and (3) the University of Rochester.[3] Each of these three institutions had closed an academic program that had not been reinstated within the seven years prior to the study, and further, each university was classified as either a Research I or II University.[4] Each of these studies shall be studied in further detail below.

(1)   University of Maryland at College Park

The University of Maryland underwent significant program reduction in the years prior to the release of Dr. Eckel's article, including loss of the following academic units:

- Department of Agriculture & Extension Education
- Department of Housing & Design

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[1] Peter D. Eckel, *Decision Rules Used in Academic Program Closure*, JOURNAL OF HIGHER EDUCATION 237 (March/April 2002).
[2] *Id.* at 238.
[3] *Id.* at 241.
[4] *Id.*

- Department of Textiles & Consumer Economics
- Department of Urban Studies & Planning
- Department of Industrial, Technological, & Occupational Education
- Department of Radio, Television & Film
- Department of Recreation
- College of Human Ecology[5]

Like the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, Maryland's College Park campus serves as the land-grant, flagship institution of the state university system.[6] Further, in a similar manner to UTK, the university's mission statement indicates that its stated goal is to serve as a "public research university."[7]

The criteria used by the University of Maryland were created by the executive committee of the university senate, at the request of the provost, in a document called *Criteria for Planning*.[8] The report essentially provided the dean of each college a charge based upon two projected figures: a 5-percent budget cut and a 10-percent budget cut.[9] It is important to note, however, that relieving professors of their tenure was not an option available to the deans.[10]

The following general categories of criteria were thus evaluated by the executive committee: mission centrality, quality, cost, demand, uniqueness, and opportunity for distinction.[11] More specifically:

- *Mission Centrality*: is the program central in terms of growth, preservation and communication of knowledge, and instructional mission?

- *Quality*: what is the quality and reputation of the program and faculty?

- *Cost*: what are the costs of maintaining the program versus increasing its level versus the savings that would result from reduction of the program?

- *Demand*: what is the current and projected importance and demand for the program?

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[5] *Id.* at 259.
[6] The University of Maryland, http://www.umd.edu (last visited Nov. 9, 2008).
[7] *Missions and Goals Statement, University of Maryland, College Park* (Feb. 1, 2006), *available at* http://www.provost.umd.edu.
[8] Eckel, at 243.
[9] *Id.*
[10] *Id.*
[11] *Id.* at 245.

- *Uniqueness*: does the program duplicate work on the campus or within the system?

- *Opportunity for Distinction*: are there opportunities for comparative advantage because of time, location, or faculty talents?[12]

In its evaluation, the committee did not address any particular weight to any of the stated criteria.[13] In other words, no single criterion was given more importance than any other. Instead, the executive committee provided a more balanced scorecard by which deans could evaluate the programs under their control.

(2)   Oregon State University

Like its East-coast counterpart, Oregon State University was faced with heavy program reductions after state-funded appropriations dried up during the 1990s.[14] A 1990 constitutional ballot initiative in Oregon limited the amount of property tax that could be charged to state residents, placing severe pressure on the state's ability to provide higher-education funding.[15] As a result of these cuts, Oregon State lost several programs, including elimination of:

- College of Education
- Department of Religious Studies
- Department of Journalism
- Department of General Sciences
- Department of Management Science
- Degree Programs in Poultry Science, Soil Science, and Hotel, Restaurant, & Tourism Management

Though not a state flagship university, Oregon State is a research-focused land-grant university with nearly 20,000 students.[16] The university is, however, a part of the state system, and it performed more than $194 million in funded research in 2007, holding the Carnegie Foundation's designation as a university with "very high research activity."[17]

When faced with budget cuts, campus administrators relied upon a document called *Guidelines for Program Reduction*, which had been created by a committee of deans and had been subsequently approved by the faculty senate.[18] Like Maryland,

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[12] *Id.*

[13] *Id.* at 246.

[14] *Property Tax Limit forces Cuts in Oregon*, EDUCATION WEEK (Mar. 25, 1992)

[15] *See id.*

[16] Oregon State University, http://www.oregonstate.edu (last visited Nov. 9, 2008).

[17] About OSU, http://www.oregonstate.edu/about (last visited Nov. 9, 2008).

[18] Eckel, at 244.

criteria were not rank-ordered; instead, several criteria were generated based on "things we thought were important, without specifically identifying any programs."[19] As a result, the following categories – some of which duplicate of Maryland's criteria – were determined as necessary for consideration:

- *Mission Centrality*: is this a program that would be essential for every university to have?

- *Quality*: does the program have a national or international reputation?

- *Cost*: is the cost of running the program minimal relative to the tuition or income it generates?

- *Contribution to Region*: is the university better equipped than other organizations to provide this service? Would elimination of the program cause a substantial negative impact on education and issues in this state?

- *Legislative Mandate*: does this program exist because of a legislative statute?

- *Uniqueness*: is this a program that is the only one of its kind within the state?

- *Revenue Generation*: would elimination of this program result in a substantial loss of revenue?

- *Past Investment*: does this program represent a substantial capital investment?

- *Affirmative Action (Underrepresented Groups)*: is this program staffed by members of groups protected by affirmative action?[20]

(3)   University of Rochester

The University of Rochester is a private, research-oriented institution with just over 8,000 students.[21] Though much smaller than the University of Maryland or Oregon State University, Rochester prides itself as a top research institution, even boasting the world's most powerful ultraviolet laser.[22]

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[19] *Id.*

[20] *Id.* at 245-46.

[21] University of Rochester, http://www.rochester.edu (last visited Nov. 9, 2008).

[22] *Id.*

Unlike the program closures at other universities, Rochester unveiled its criteria for closure simultaneous with the announcement of the program closures.[23] The programs that were either "suspended" or eliminated included:

- Doctoral programs in Chemical Engineering, Mathematics, Linguistics, and Comparative Literature
- One year earlier, the doctoral program in Anthropology was closed.[24]

At the time of the announcement of program closures, a document entitled *Rationale for the Restructuring Plan*, which featured a statement from the leader of the program-closure committee, noting that "the importance of these factors must be combined with an overall sense of what is best and most feasible given the limited resources for the College as a whole."[25] The factors mentioned included:

- *Mission Centrality*: how central is this discipline, and how important is this program – either currently or projected – to the undergraduate population?

- *Quality*: what is the quality of the faculty and the graduate students?

- *Cost*: what are the costs of supporting this program to the extent of fulfilling the research/scholarly mission of the program?

- *Opportunity for Distinction*: which disciplines are distinctive, or could be with a modest investment?

- *Impact on Instruction & Scholarship*: what is the role of graduate students in the delivery of undergraduate instruction and in the conduct of faculty research and scholarship?

- *Dependence of Programs*: are there critical linkages that exist (or should exist) between scholarly or instructional programs across departments?[26]

(4)   Distinction & Analysis

All three of the aforementioned institutions included several common criteria: cost, quality and mission centrality. Maryland and Oregon State shared one additional criterion (uniqueness of the program), while Maryland and Rochester additionally had one criterion in common (opportunity for program distinction).

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[23] Eckel, at 247.
[24] *Id.* at 260.
[25] *Id.* at 246.
[26] *Id.* at 245-46.

Much of the feedback from the participants in the case study was enlightening, including several anonymous informants within various departments at the respective universities. More specifically, one participant at the University of Maryland, noted, with respect to the quality of the program, that:

> If you were to do a poll on campus: Name the 10 likely departments that you think will be hit. I would bet that the seven that were closed would have appeared on 80% of the lists of people who named them. I think this is because anyone who sits in their college knows who the strong units are and who the weak units are.[27]

As a result, when focusing on quality, this oft-identified criterion was used not to specify particular programs for closure, but rather to limit the range of choices to be considered.[28]

B.   Additional Criteria Models

Other universities, especially during times of economic uncertainty, have been faced with the difficult but sometimes necessary process of addressing program closures. This section attempts to provide an outline of additional criteria models universities have used when faced with such decisions.

(1)   Indiana State University

In a letter to his faculty in October 2005, Indiana State University president Lloyd Benjamin set forth several criteria to be considered as part of an initiative to make the campus a more efficiently run unit.[29] The letter itself did not seek to close specific programs as part of its charge; rather, President Benjamin had appointed a committee on effectiveness with the authority to recommend program closures to the Board of Trustees if such conclusions were deemed in the best interest of the university.[30]

With this goal in mind, President Benjamin devoted part of his letter to the possibility of program closure, and he noted 10 specific criteria to be evaluated, noting that similar factors had been used by both Middle Tennessee State University and the University of Nebraska-Kearney when evaluating the possibility of program closure.[31] These criteria included:

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[27] *Id.* at 254.
[28] *Id.* at 256.
[29] Lloyd Benjamin, *Prioritizing Academic Programs and Services* (Oct. 4, 2005), *available at* http://www.humboldt.edu/~aavp/Prioritization%20Resources/prioritizing_acad_programs%20Oct%204%202005.pdf.
[30] *Id.* at 5.
[31] *Id.* at 3-4.

- What is the history of, development of, and expectations for the program?

- How much external demand is there for the program?

- How much internal demand is there for the program?

- What is the quality of the program's inputs and processes?

- What is the quality of the program's outputs?

- What are the size, scope, and productivity of the program?

- How much revenue and other resources are generated by the program?

- What costs and other expenses are related to the program?

- How essential is the program? What happens if the programs disappears, is cut back, or is merged?

- What is the future, based upon an opportunity analysis, of the program?

(2)   The College of New Jersey

Though not currently in the process of closing any academic programs, the College of New Jersey, a 7,000-student, public liberal arts college, has set forth specific criteria in its Policy Manual.[32] The entire text of the provision, in pertinent part, is printed below:

Criteria for the Closure of Academic Programs

Because of the potentially serious impact of closing an academic program, academic center or a nonacademic program on employees of The College of New Jersey (TCNJ) as well as on students, the decision to take any such actions must be done in a deliberate manner. This document is intended to insure that all critical factors are considered when the process of closing a program is initiated. Librarians are considered to be faculty in this document.

I.   Academic Programs

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[32] TNCJ Policy Manual: Program Closure, http://www.tcnj.edu/~academic/policy/programclosure.html (last visited Nov. 9, 2008).

For the purpose of this document, academic programs are defined as majors, minors, course sets, interdisciplinary or disciplinary concentrations, certificate programs or college services whose expressed primary function is to deliver instruction or directly enhance or mentor student academic growth. The latter would include library services aimed at student learning and specific academic enhancement programs such as EOF or the Honors program.

A.   Closure Criteria: The following should be taken into consideration before initiating the process of closing an academic program:

1.   Level of conformity with the mission, goals and character of the college.

2.   Level of demand for services.

3.   Degree to which services are being provided as efficiently as possible.

4.   Level of ability to attract qualified personnel to staff the program.

5.   Changes in external accreditation or credentialing requirements.

6.   Impact of closure on tenured faculty and long-time employees.

7.   Ramifications for external constituents (alumni, state decision-makers, etc.) of program closure.

8.   Impact of closure on the stature of the college.[33]

(3)   College of St. Benedict / St. John's University

In a similar manner to the College of New Jersey, the College of St. Benedict / St. John's University has set forth explicit criteria to be examined when considering closure of an academic program. Though technically two separate entities (St. Benedict is an all-female school, while St. John's is an all-male institution), St. Benedict and St. John's

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[33] *Id.*

share one academic program.[34] Students at the two institutions attend classes together in a Catholic liberal-arts environment.[35]

When considering a program reduction or closure, the *Faculty Handbook* provides clear instructions as to what criteria must first be considered, which are set forth below in pertinent part:

> At the time of the declaration, and to the extent feasible, the provost will provide to the faculty information on academic programs under review, with comparisons to other College of St. Benedict / St. John's University academic programs, including:
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> *1.)   An analysis of "program centrality" to the academic mission, including*:
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> a.   History of the program at these institutions;
> b.   Program's place within the coordinate and institutional mission statements;
> c.   Program's place within the current strategic plan;
> d.   Relationship to the Catholic, Benedictine and liberal arts traditions of the institutions;
> e.   Other aspects pertinent to the program's fit within the academic mission.
>
> *2.)   The following data on academic programs:*
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> a.   Number of majors awarded;
> b.   Number of majors per faculty member;
> c.   Student credit hours per faculty member;
> d.   Faculty compensation program costs per student credit hour;
> e.   Departmental non-compensation and support and administrative compensation costs per student credit hour;
> f.   Capital or extraordinary program costs per student credit hour.

(4)   *University of Florida*

Although it does not have a specific set of guidelines to be followed when determining the need for program closure, the university's Board of Governors has set forth several pre-approved reasons for possible closure of a program.[36] With this in

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[34] About CSB and SJU: Who We Are, http://www. csbsju.edu/about (last visited Nov. 9, 2008).
[35] *Id.*
[36] Closure of Academic Programs, http://www.aa.ufl.edu/approval/closure (last visited Nov. 9, 2008).

mind, regulation 6C-8.012 (Academic Program Termination) lists three potential reasons for program termination, though the regulation clearly denotes that other reasons may be plausible, as well.[37] Such authorized reasons include:

- An enrollment no longer sufficient to justify the cost of instruction, facilities, and equipment; or the program duplicates other offerings at the university.

- The program is no longer aligned with the mission or strategic goals of the university, or is no longer aligned with strategic goals of the Board of Governors.

- The program no longer meets the needs of the citizens of Florida in providing a viable education or occupational objective.[38]

Though not specific criteria to be considered, the University of Florida is considered a peer institution to the University of Tennessee, and thus such data is relevant. Additionally, a "Program Termination Form" must be filled out and passed through both the Board of Trustees and the Board of Governors of the University.[39] This form must include several pertinent pieces of information, including:

- A narrative rational for the request to terminate the program.

- An indication of which campuses within the system offer the program and, to what extent the proposed termination will have on enrollment, enrollment planning, and/or the reallocation of resources.

- An explanation of the manner in which the University intends to accommodate any students or faculty who are currently active in the program, including what steps have been taken to inform students and faculty of the intent to terminate the program.

- Data on the gender and racial distribution of students and faculty within the program.

- Data on the rank and tenure status of all affected faculty.

- The identification of any potential negative impact on the current representation of females, minorities, faculty, and students.[40]

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[37] Florida BOG Reg. 6C-8.012 (Academic Program Termination), *available at* http://academic.fiu.edu/docs/4-12-07-Academic-Program-Termination-Regulartions.pdf.
[38] *Id.*
[39] Program Termination Form, http://www.aa.ufl.edu/approval/resources/forms/ BOGProgramTermination.pdf (last visited Nov. 9, 2008).
[40] *Id.*