

University of Wisconsin Oshkosh
University Resource Alignment
Final Report of the Steering Committee
October 2019

The University Resource Alignment Steering Committee (URA-SC) was charged by Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Lane Earns in September 2016. His charge was as follows:

1. Design criteria and a continual process by which immediate and ongoing resource decisions will be made, thoroughly vetting the criteria and process with the campus community.
2. Build teams, led by faculty but with broad representation from all constituents, to execute this process.
3. Guide, monitor and communicate throughout the process to assure progress, transparency and inclusivity.
4. Make final resource recommendations based on the results of the process.
5. Evaluate the process and make recommendations for ongoing institutional program management.

Provost Earns (the Executive Sponsor) also charged Chief Information Officer Anne Milkovich to act as internal facilitator. The Steering Committee was formed with six faculty, two students, and one individual each representing: academic staff, university staff, student affairs, financial administration, and athletics. Jenny Hoerth was appointed to be our scribe. Her role was supported by Liz Bannenberg who provided technical support. Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs John Koker assumed the role of Executive Sponsor when Dr. Earns retired.

This report describes a chronological overview of the work of the Steering Committee and details of the process of evaluating programs. We also provide suggestions for how this process can be improved in future iterations.

Background Research

The URA-SC researched program prioritization processes as performed by 14 other colleges/universities. These included institutions that are very similar to UW Oshkosh (Carnegie classification of “Masters/Large”) and several that are very different (e.g., 2-year campuses, doctoral-granting institutions, etc.). These institutions are listed below:

- Indiana State University
- University of Alaska Anchorage
- Lehman College
- Washington State University
- Appalachian State University
- Great Falls College

- Western Carolina University
- Montana State University – Northern
- Snow College
- University of Alabama at Birmingham
- Boise State University
- Northern Illinois University
- University of Nebraska Omaha
- Idaho State University

After studying the materials available on their respective web pages, URA-SC members made follow-up phone calls to the responsible personnel to solicit detailed answers to our questions about their process. We asked for their opinions of what went well, and what did not. We also conducted two conference calls with individuals from Northern Illinois University.

We read and discussed Robert Dickeson’s book on program prioritization:

Dickeson, R.C. 2012. *Prioritizing Academic Programs and Services: Reallocating Resources to Achieve Strategic Balance*. John Wiley & Sons, Hoboken, NJ.

Additionally, we reviewed and discussed 10 articles which were then available on-line that critiqued various program prioritization processes:

- <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/08/16/how-can-increasingly-popular-academic-review-process-seem-more-meaningful-faculty>
- <http://www.pacific.edu/About-Pacific/AdministrationOffices/Office-of-the-President/University-Budget/University-Feedback.html>
- http://northernstar.info/campus/program-prioritization-criteria-revealed/article_2f8d1cdc-e984-11e4-9ed1-cb41ec5a6a92.html
- <http://www.newsobserver.com/opinion/op-ed/article23131362.html>
- <http://www.thewoodword.org/news/2015/10/18/a-closer-look-goldsteins-strategic-resource-allocation-process/>
- <https://president.boisestate.edu/prioritization/what-other-universities-have-done/>
- <http://higheredstrategy.com/better-thinking-about-program-prioritization/>
- https://www.cautbulletin.ca/en_article.asp?ArticleID=3784
- <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/education/no-department-is-safe-as-universities-employ-us-cost-cutting-strategy/article6711261/>
- <http://dfa.ns.ca/program-prioritization-flawed-theory-flawed-practice>

Initial Work of the Steering Committee

Our first task was to determine what to call ourselves and the process. Most universities refer to this process as “Academic Program Prioritization.” We were unique in that we were to evaluate administrative units in addition to academic units. Provost Earns first the process “Institutional Program Management.” We were not charged with prioritizing or managing programs, so those monikers did not fit. The Steering Committee settled on “University Resource Alignment.”

Our second task was to ask the question, “What is a program?” While this may seem straightforward, it was far more complicated than anyone anticipated. We met with personnel from Institutional Research to generate reports on student enrollment data in academic programs. We were constrained by the available data. Classes offered in most minors and some graduate programs are mostly subsumed by a major within an academic unit. Some students choose more than one minor which confounded headcounts. We also could not tease apart student credit hours in classes that serve more than one major. We settled on defined academic departments (or interdisciplinary units) as a “program.” The URA-SC also decided to not evaluate programs that are 100% cost-recovery since they are evaluated regularly based on their revenue generation. We solicited reports from 49 academic programs.

Administrative programs were similarly complex (often more so). The Steering Committee decided to allow programs to define themselves. Some units (e.g., Facilities Management) chose to split themselves into several programs. Others (e.g., Intercollegiate Athletics) chose to be evaluated as a single program. Ultimately, there were 73 administrative programs.

We conducted two open fora in May 2017 to inform stakeholders of the process to date and to solicit feedback.

Data Collection and Evaluation Process

While the URA-SC worked on defining programs, we formed two subcommittees from campus volunteers who worked during the summer of 2017 to develop the broad criteria to evaluate programs. We wanted the processes of developing criteria and defining programs to be isolated to avoid bias (real or perceived) in either effort. One workgroup selected the appropriate criteria for Academic Programs and the second group developed criteria for Administrative Programs. Interestingly, both groups independently generated identical lists of criteria:

- Criterion 1:** Centrality to our Mission, Vision, and Goals
- Criterion 2:** Quality
- Criterion 3:** Demand
- Criterion 4:** Cost Effectiveness
- Criterion 5:** Opportunity Analysis

We soon realized we could NOT perform reviews of both academic and administrative programs simultaneously because of the burdensome workload. We agreed to collect and review the reports of the academic units first, but withhold our evaluations until the administrative reviews could be completed. The URA-SC spent several months developing the survey instruments to evaluate programs. We chose a Qualtrics platform with student data supplied from Institutional Research and financial information from Administrative Services. We developed the questions to be sent to unit heads (usually Department Chairs). We held two open fora during April 2018 to solicit feedback from academic units as they were writing their reports. The URA-SC collected reports from all academic programs (100% compliance).

We created rubrics that 20 volunteer *ad hoc* reviewers (none of whom were on the URA-SC) would use to evaluate programs; reviewers' names are listed at the end of this report. We employed a stratified review process whereby each reviewer examined one criterion (four reviewers per criterion) across all programs; reviewers did not evaluate their own program. All reviewers had access to the "Addition Information" provided in the reports, but this was not ranked. We drafted and sent a brief Code Book to reviewers to help them interpret data. Our rubric was a scale of 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest) but we constrained reviewers and only allowed them to choose 1, 4, 7, or 10. This created more separation among the rankings of the programs. We asked reviewers to type comments to justify their numerical ranking and to submit summary comments.

The arduous task of compiling and collating over 2,000 pages of information fell to our technical support assistant, Liz Bannenberg. Without Liz's substantial contribution, we could not have completed our charge. The Steering Committee members studied the original program reports and considered *ad hoc* reviewers' scores and comments. We held dozens of meetings (all open meetings, publicly announced). We only conducted business with a quorum of members present. We set a standard of a 75% consensus for our final rankings; we did not want any rankings to hinge on a single vote. Most of our votes were unanimous. We rated academic programs in two dimensions:

Program Quality

- A - Meaningfully Above Expectations
- B - Above Expectations
- C - At Expectations
- D - Below Expectations
- E - Meaningfully Below Expectations

Recommendation for Resources

- 1 - Recommend for additional
- 2 - Consider for additional
- 3 - Maintain existing
- 4 - Transform or Consider for reduction
- 5 - Review further or recommend for reduction

The above process (data collection and distribution, solicitation of reports, ad hoc reviews, URA-SC ratings) was repeated for the 73 administrative programs. Problems arose with some administrative programs because they chose to define themselves for the URA process in a way that did not track financial data. We dealt with these issues on an individual case-by-case basis, ultimately having to combine or split some programs to accurately reflect budget lines. We conducted two open fora for administrative units in August 2018.

Another major issue with the administrative programs was the lack of available benchmark data on the size (e.g., FTE) or budget of similar units at other academic institutions. We searched in vain for these data. We worked with the Education Advisory Board (EAB) to generate benchmarks for units, but EAB could only produce aggregate data or data for units that did not align with our administrative programs. We asked our administrative units to research similar programs at other institutions and provide that information in their reports; some programs provided these data, whereas some did not.

Five units failed to submit reports (Business Success Center, Faculty Development, Governance Units, Multicultural Education Center and Precolleges, Office of Student Affairs). We gave these the lowest rankings (E-5). We recognize that the Business Success Center was in a state of transition during the evaluation process and has since been eliminated (and replaced with a different program).

The quality of the administrative reports varied greatly. In an effort to provide constructive feedback to unit heads/directors, we gave a color rating: green = report adequate, yellow = report less than adequate, and red = report insufficient.

A histogram summarizing the final rankings of all academic programs is shown in **Fig. 1**; the rankings of administrative programs are shown in **Fig. 2**.

Figure 1. Histograms of rankings of Academic Programs, for program quality (a) and recommendation for resources (b).

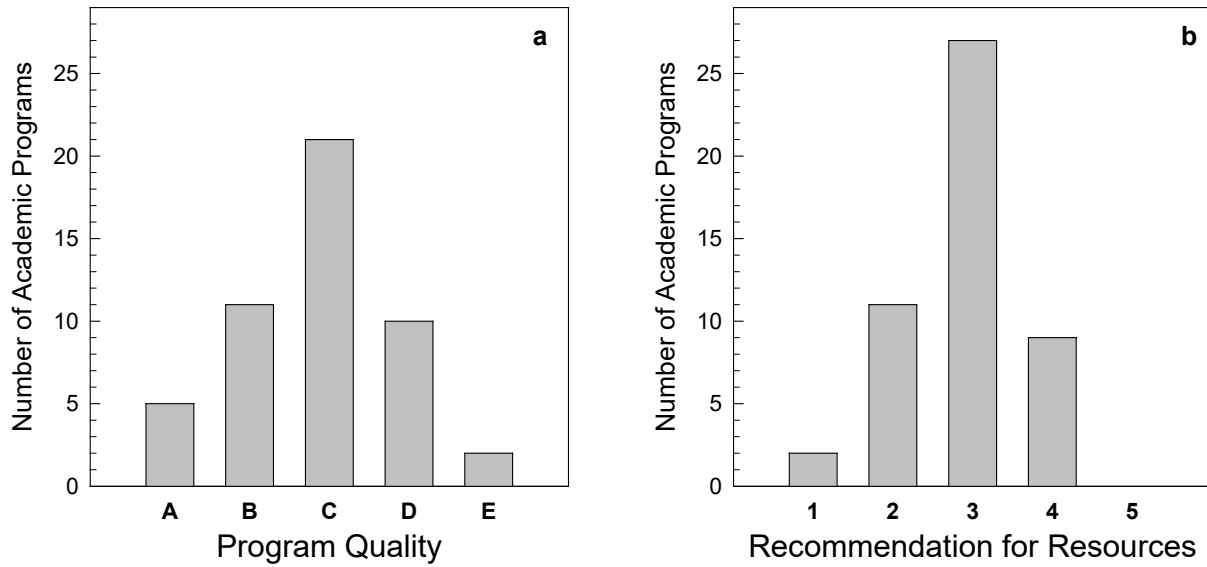
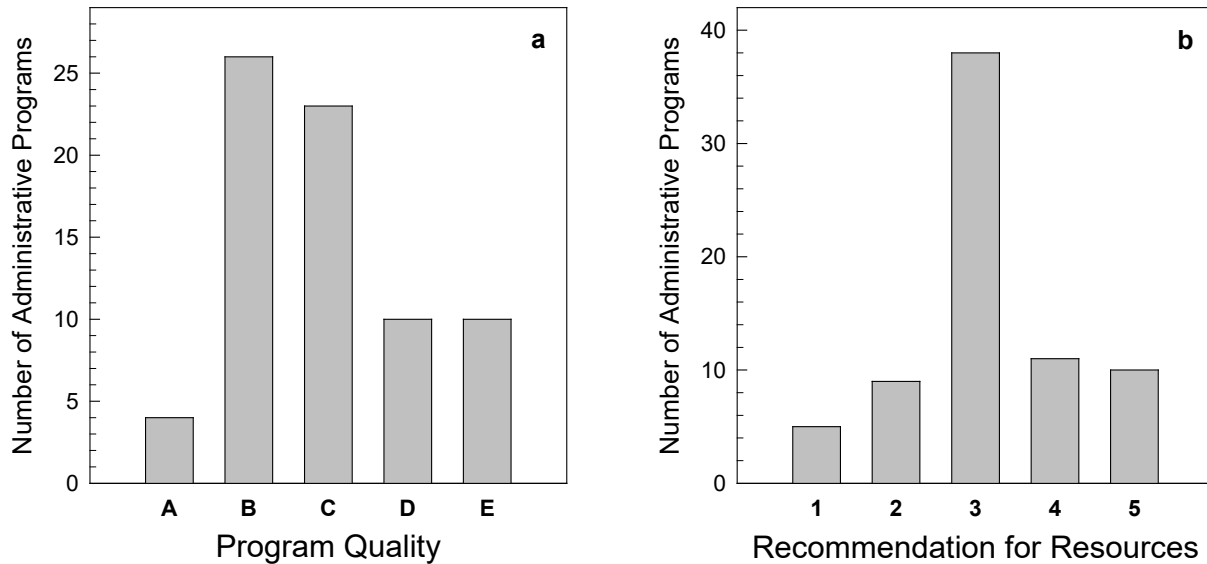


Figure 2. Histograms of rankings of Administrative Programs, for program quality (a) and recommendation for resources (b).



Program Quality

- A - Meaningfully Above Expectations
- B - Above Expectations
- C - At Expectations
- D - Below Expectations
- E - Meaningfully Below Expectations

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- 1 - Recommend for additional
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Observations and General Comments

For all four College Deans' Offices, the *ad hoc* reviewers tended to comment on their perceived quality of the academic programs within that College, rather than on the administrative aspects of the office. Perhaps our instructions to the ad hoc reviewers were not clear. The URA-SC made our evaluations accordingly, since the academic programs were reviewed separately.

We noted some administrative areas with potential overlap. For example, student services may be able to identify efficiencies (financial and/or service-related) with more thoughtful coordination of the various programs. We believe the same is true of the varied sustainability programs on campus.

Suggestions for Future Iterations of URA

The original charge from Provost Earns was that URA was to be an ongoing process. This endeavor will be revisited in future years. We offer the following suggestions for improvement.

- The entire process needs to be shortened. In our conversations with other academic institutions who had gone through a program prioritization process some felt they had rushed the process, whereas others thought it dragged on too long. We are clearly in the latter group. The “sweet spot” seemed to be two years from start to finish. Institutions who completed their tasks in only a year felt they were not able to dig sufficiently deep to make the process worthwhile. Institutions who took longer than two years lost momentum (as we did).
- Questions for report writers need to be clearer regarding the type of answer we want. We need to ask specifically for data (satisfaction surveys, FTE benchmarks, etc.), and not just if the data exist. We suggest the implementation of training sessions for report writers, perhaps providing examples of excellent reports.
- Many programs questioned the accuracy of the budget data provided to them. It appears that fringe benefit funds were included in payroll data, which artificially inflated some budgets.
- Standardized benchmark data for programs need to be identified.
- Finally, we recognize that UW Oshkosh is a new University now with three campuses. Nearly every unit on campus (academic and administrative) has changed as a result of restructuring. We began this enterprise before the restructuring was announced, and then continued after the merger began, realizing that many programs have changed substantially. We suggest waiting until after campus budgets are combined to perform the next iteration of University Resource Alignment.

Ad-hoc Reviewers (in alphabetical order):

S. Bernander
J. Bohr
J. Bonack
J. Buelow Fischer
M. Clark
K. Corley
L. Dorn
J. Feldman
D. Gilboa
S. Hamze
O. Hauser
J. Herman
M. Hostetler
E. Jager
J. Jalovec
M. Jasinski
A. Jenner
S. Johnson
J. Kahrs
J. Karsten
J. Krueger
M. Kuhl
J. Kwaterski
A. Liddle
M. Marine
R. Marshall
E. Morrell
K. Mosley
M. Mouton
K. Nicolini
J. Palmer
G. Potratz
S. Rensing
R. Sipes
J. Stevens
A. Subulwa
M. Suwalski
C. Toll

Current and past members of the URA-SC (in alphabetical order):

T. Ambrosius (student)
M. Angwall
L. Bannenberg (non-voting)
C. Bauder
S. Bentivenga
J. Borgmann
C. Cotti
M. Coulibaly
L. Gustavo Caputo Spim (student)
D. Hones
S. Jaeke
K. Loewenstein
A. Milkovich (non-voting)
B. Nickasch
J. Page-Stadler
C. Roth
M. Rutz
J. Westphal