

UNIVERSITY CRITERIA FOR ACADEMIC AND OTHER PROGRAM REVIEWSⁱ

INTRODUCTION

*“Founded in faith that men are ennobled by understanding
Dedicated to the advancement of learning and the search for truth
Devoted to the instruction of youth and the welfare of the state.”*

These words, composed by Hartley Burr Alexander and adopted by the Board of Regents of the University of Minnesota in 1936, are inscribed over the door to Northrop Auditorium on the Twin Cities Campus. The University of Minnesota remains committed to these noble purposes in the context of the 21st Century.

According to University President Robert Bruininks, “Our challenge today is to move ahead, to set high academic aspirations--to ensure the excellence, strength, and vitality of the University for our students and for the people of Minnesota in a time of fiscal austerity. We must continue our legacy of advancing knowledge while serving as a partner for the public good.”

Today the University of Minnesota is one of the nation’s best public research and land grant universities. The University brings the state a distinct national and international advantage through its flagship research campus, its excellent coordinate campuses, and a network of statewide research and outreach centers.

The University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, is in the forefront as a research university that excels in research and discovery, education, and its public mission. It is the state’s only research University and one of the great research universities in the nation. The University of Minnesota’s flagship campus is among the nation’s most comprehensive institutions, one of only four campuses nationally that have agricultural programs as well as an academic health center with a major medical school. As a comprehensive, world-class research university with a strong commitment to excellence in research and education, the University provides students with a unique and exceptionally strong student experience. The University attracts students and prepares graduates who play a unique role in keeping Minnesota competitive and connected in our increasingly knowledge-based economy and global society.

The University of Minnesota, Duluth, is a medium-sized university with a strong commitment to excellence. At UMD, a firm liberal arts foundation anchors a variety of traditional degree programs, outreach offerings, and selected professional and graduate studies. The campus contributes to meeting the cultural needs of the region and serves as a central resource point for the economic development of the region. Unique programs of outstanding quality, such as graphic design and freshwater research, enhance the international stature of the University of Minnesota system.

The University of Minnesota, Morris, is recognized as one of the best public liberal arts colleges in the nation. As a small undergraduate residential liberal arts college, the Morris campus offers instructional excellence in a personal and vibrant student-centered liberal arts environment. The campus also serves as an educational resource and cultural center for citizens of west central Minnesota.

The University of Minnesota, Crookston, established in 1965 on the foundation of the Northwest School of Agriculture, is a technology-rich educational environment, responsive to the demands of contemporary society. The campus's academic programs balance theory and application to prepare its graduates for 21st century careers.

The University of Minnesota, Rochester serves the higher education needs of Southeastern Minnesota through relationships with other universities and colleges to provide and promote academic programming, research and outreach. In a unique collaboration with the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system, the University of Minnesota, Rochester provides leadership for coordination of upper division undergraduate and post-baccalaureate programs within the University's tradition of excellence.

MISSION

Adopted by the University of Minnesota Board of Regents, January 14, 1994.

Philosophy. The University of Minnesota, founded in the belief that all people are enriched by understanding, is dedicated to the advancement of learning and the search for truth; to the sharing of this knowledge through education for a diverse community; and to the application of this knowledge to benefit the people of the state, the nation, and the world.

The University's mission, carried out on multiple campuses and throughout the state, is threefold:

- Research and Discovery: To generate and preserve knowledge, understanding, and creativity by conducting high-quality research, scholarship, and artistic activity that benefit students, scholars, and communities across the state, the nation, and the world.
- Teaching and Learning: To share that knowledge, understanding, and creativity by providing a broad range of educational programs in a strong and diverse community of learners and teachers, and prepare graduate, professional, and undergraduate students, as well as non-degree-seeking students interested in continuing education and lifelong learning, for active roles in a multiracial and multicultural world.
- Outreach and Public Service: To extend, apply, and exchange knowledge between the University and society by applying scholarly expertise to community problems, by helping organizations and individuals respond to their changing environments, and by making the knowledge and resources created and preserved at the University accessible to the citizens of the state, the nation, and the world.

SETTING PRIORITIES AND EVALUATING PROGRAMS AND SUPPORT SERVICES

“If we wish to be an exceptional institution of higher education, we need to define carefully the central mission of the University through each of its colleges and departments. We need to ask what the essential support for that core needs to be, what activities we can continue in terms of public service and outreach that are related to our teaching and research mission, and we need to be honest about which programs do not fit within our goals and reasonable expectations. For each decision, we should ask how the decision will move us closer to building excellence through quality. If this standard is not met, perhaps we should not engage or continue to engage in the task. We also should ask what our comparative advantages are in continuing or expanding in certain areas. In building excellence toward being one of America’s premier research universities, we should accept no less as we seek to advance the frontiers of knowledge in addressing our most significant needs and in helping to solve pressing problems in society.”ⁱⁱ

In order for the University of Minnesota to stay strong and vibrant, thoughtful reviews, based on well-established criteria are critical. The following criteria have been established over the past twenty years in conversation with a number of important constituencies. It is important to apply these criteria as an overall evaluation system that relies on the refinement of useful measures to assess, improve, and restructure the University and the exercise of careful judgments in setting University-wide priorities. No single criterion should be used in isolation.

The key questions are: **Should programs or services be expanded, maintained at current levels, reduced, or eliminated? If they are to be expanded or maintained, can they be strengthened or improved?**

Criteria for Setting Priorities and Evaluating Programs and Support Services

1. **Centrality to Mission:** Programs and services are more highly valued if they contribute significantly to the core mission of the University of Minnesota.

Each program or service should be evaluated in terms of its contribution to the tripartite core mission of the University of Minnesota. Centrality is understood as proximity to the core mission. Centrality is measured by the degree to which a program contributes to the University’s core mission. Within programs:

- **Research** and creative work should contribute significantly to the overall research profile of the University in creating and advancing knowledge and helping to stimulate and sustain related work elsewhere in the University.
- **Instruction** should be an essential component of a high quality, holistic undergraduate education or a high quality graduate/professional education focused on deepening and broadening knowledge for the welfare of society.
- **Outreach** should relate to the teaching and research missions of the University and make significant connections between the needs of Minnesota, its citizens, the nation, and the world, and the knowledge-based resources of the University.

Funding of programs critical to the mission of the University should be a priority, with cross-subsidization if necessary.

The key questions are: To what degree is the substance of the activity pertinent to agreed-upon program needs, goals, and mission? How essential is the program or activity to the core mission of the University?

2. **Quality, Productivity and Impact:** Programs and services should meet objective and judgmental standards of high quality, productivity, and impact.

Traditional measures for evaluating programs in higher education should be rigorously applied. For example, the quality, productivity, and impact of the faculty and staff can be measured by peer national ratings, publications, outside funding, surveys, competitive awards, and other indices that describe important results and impact. The University also must more fully develop its own benchmarks (through the University Plan, Performance, and Accountability Report) for measuring quality, productivity, and impact.

The key questions are: What are the most appropriate measures to apply to a given program or service? Are measures being applied consistently and transparently? With respect to **quality**, how do we measure the excellence of a program or service? With respect to **productivity**, how do we measure output, taking into account a blend of qualitative and quantitative assessments? With respect to **impact**, how significant is the contribution? How far does it reach?

3. **Uniqueness and Comparative Advantage:** Programs should be evaluated based on exceptional characteristics that make the program a strength for this University compared to other programs in Minnesota or at other peer institutions.

The University is committed to maintaining the areas of distinctive strength that colleges and departments have built over the years while recognizing new areas of potential advantage. This criterion is focused on high quality foundational programs that build on the needs and resources of Minnesota and the University as well as areas where further investment will yield significant return in intellectual quality and capital.

The key questions are: What is the rationale for the program at the University of Minnesota? Is the program a strength of the University in comparison to peer institutions? Does the program contribute to the comparative economic or cultural advantages of Minnesota? Is the program an essential component to a unique synergy of ideas and activities? What would the loss, reduction, addition, or expansion of the program mean to the University, the State, and the region?

4. **Enhancement of Academic Synergies:** Programs should be organized in a way that facilitates intellectual synergies, creating new efficiencies and improvements.

A successful restructuring should leverage and create new academic synergies and do so in a cost efficient manner. Done well, restructuring can result in additional resources for

the highest-priority activities while creating efficiencies to maintain core academic programs at a lower overall cost. Achieving this result requires careful, strategic combinations of resources that enhance natural connections.

The key questions are: Will the restructuring add value to the intellectual climate of the program or programs as well as creating cost savings? Will the restructuring better serve students, staff, and/or faculty?

5. **Demand and Resources:** Evaluation of programs should consider current and projected demand and the potential and real availability of resources for funding program costs.

Evaluation should include projections of change in demand for each program in both the short and long term. Other indicators might include important demographic and financial trends, number of applications, quality of acceptances, services performed in support of other programs, degrees awarded, instruction of students or research undertaken for the solution of pressing problems of society. Programs should also be evaluated based on a reasonable generation of resources to support academic programs and meet costs.

The key questions are: Do accurate measures project a rise or fall in demand for this program over the long term? Considering the University's core mission, is there a need for the program, as distinct from a simple measure of demand for the program? Does the program have sufficient resources to support it?

6. **Efficiency and Effectiveness:** Programs should be evaluated based on their effectiveness and how efficiently they operate.

Programs, services and functions should be implemented in economical and efficient ways. The restructuring of programs should improve the use of fiscal, human, and other resources. We should continually strive to make essential operations as efficient as possible. At times, these efficiencies will be achieved through combining services across traditional organizational lines, and often can result in increased effectiveness and expertise along with cost savings. Core competencies should be taken into account. Consideration should be given to whether existing administrative functions and responsibilities could operate more efficiently and effectively through shared resources (e.g., student service at multiple levels, business processes, etc.). Consideration also should be given to the leveraging of human capital, to tap into and most effectively utilize special talents and expertise of faculty and staff, including during any reorganization. A critical aspect in evaluating programs is whether they achieve valued results and impact, in mission-related activities, in relationship to their costs.

The key questions are: What is the rationale for a unique organizational structure within the University? Can valued functions be performed at less cost within a different organizational structure? Will functions be performed more efficiently and effectively at the unit level, with shared coordination among units, or system-wide? What outcomes of what quality for what costs? What is the next best alternative use of the resources? Does

the program have a clear business plan and a balanced budget? Does it deliver service to those served at the right level and at the right cost? Are we identifying core competencies and assigning responsibilities and designing structure based on them? Are decisions being made at a level where there is expertise, experience, and information?

7. **Development and Leveraging of Resources:** Both new and existing programs should be evaluated on their potential to develop new resources and leverage existing resources.

Resources needed to support academic research, education, and outreach are derived from a wide range of public and private sources, and may include more than monetary resources. Ongoing evaluation of priorities, and related, internal shifts of resources to areas of higher priority from areas of lesser priority may be required.

The key questions are: Will new programs or revisions of current programs, expand the application of existing resources and create new opportunities to expand the quality and contributions of the University? Is the program strongly connected to other academic units in a manner that expands resources and opportunities for research, education and connection of the University to public needs? Are there opportunities for additional resource growth and leveraging that we are not taking advantage of? Are revenues placed in the most appropriate organizational setting to achieve desired results?

ⁱ Many of these criteria have been used in University-wide planning efforts since the mid-1980s (see, for example, "A Strategy for Focus: Guidelines to the College," Office of the Provost, November 1986); they were subsequently modified in October 1990 as part of the "Strategy to Improve the Quality of the University, 1991-96." The criteria were substantially modified and expanded by central officers in 1998, 2000, and August 2004.

ⁱⁱ From "Building Excellence Through a Coherent Vision," E. Thomas Sullivan, Senior Vice President and Provost.