

FAQ's: Academic Program Prioritization

Gallaudet University is assessing its academic programs to refine a core set of undergraduate and graduate programs that are aligned with the institutional mission and vision, leverage Gallaudet's many strengths, and best position students for career success. We are identifying areas of programming for strategic investment and identifying areas to de-emphasize. The Board of Trustees, President, and Provost have asked that the University complete this important process at an accelerated pace in Spring, 2009.

What is program prioritization?

Program prioritization is a fairly common practice at many universities. Typically the Provost provides a Program Prioritization Committee (PPC) with a proposed set of criteria that are in keeping with standard practice in higher education (and based on a seminal text by Dickeson, 1999). The PPC makes a decision about the final set of criteria adapted from this list.

Departments and Programs, with the input of OIR, are then asked to prepare review documents that provide evidence on those criteria over a 3-4 week period.

Academic program documents are sent to a committee to make initial recommendations (the composition of that committee depends on the model chosen by the institution). That committee makes recommendations for each academic program. Often a second committee (representing a different perspective) review the initial recommendations and decide to either support or not support the recommendations. Questions about data and criteria may be discussed with programs, and with the initial review committee. Recommendations are sent to the President and Provost who make final recommendations to the Board of Trustees.

As part of Gallaudet's Strategic Plan, the Program Prioritization Committee will also develop criteria for annual assessment of program viability and set baseline metrics that would trigger review and action plan for growth, and a process for analyzing the viability and cost/benefit of new programs targeted at previously-untapped markets, particularly high-growth professions, deaf-service professions, and/or those that utilize acute visual, spatial, and kinesthetic aptitudes

Why are we doing Academic Program Prioritization?

Program prioritization supports Gallaudet's vision for 2015 as described in the Long Range Strategic Plan (LRSP). Under LRSP Goal D (Program Refinement) of the Long Range Strategic Plan, Objective 1 (Strategies D.1.1-D.1.4) focus on program prioritization as a key strategy for refining academic programs. Five strategies under Goal C -Resource Development- C.2.5, C.4.1, C.4.4, & C.4.5) and one in Goal A -Enrollment- A.1.5, are also dependant on program prioritization.

Why is program prioritization a key strategy in the Long Range Strategic Plan?

As part of the development of the LRSP a variety of data was reviewed. Review of this data repeatedly highlighted the need to improve the focus and robustness of Gallaudet's academic programs ¹

What data related to academic program refinement were analyzed as part of the LRSP planning process?

LRSP planning involved analysis of data provided by the Office of Institutional Research (from PeopleSoft), focus group and campus interviews, and the GU Alumni Survey.

What did the strategic planning analysis of data on academic programs show?

- Several undergraduate majors and graduate degree programs are undersubscribed, with consistently low numbers of graduates and small class sizes
 - About half of the 33 undergraduate majors have had fewer than 20 graduates each over the past six years; eight have had less than 10 graduates each over the past six years (< 1 per year)
 - Over half of the graduate school programs are declining in size, with 13 programs each having fewer than 10 graduates total over the past four years
 - Average class sizes are <10 students for 10 undergraduate programs, and <5 students for 3 graduate departments
- Many majors and degrees do not adequately prepare students for career success and are not aligned with market and/or student demand
 - Many interviewees called for streamlining the academic majors to focus on fields that are most desired by students and future employers and that are aligned with Gallaudet's strengths
 - Interviews emphasized the need to equip students with practical skills and industry knowledge needed for employment
 - In Gallaudet's own 2006 Alumni Survey, only 28% of Gallaudet Bachelor's degree recipients reported working in fields highly related to their majors, and only 32% would select the same major again
 - 16% of the undergraduate Class of 2007 were neither employed nor pursuing higher degrees within a year of graduation

What is the timeline for program prioritization?

Program prioritization is beginning in December, 2009, with recommendations for programs presented to the Board of Trustees in May, 2010.

¹ From "Discussion document: Gallaudet University Strategic Plan Objective & Strategy Development"; March 10, 2009

Who will be involved in making recommendations for program prioritization?

Administrative, faculty, and staff representatives, will all be involved in developing and reviewing recommendations. The President and Provost will make the final decisions on program prioritization.

How often will program prioritization occur?

Program prioritization typically occurs during a major transformation of a university. Therefore it is unlikely that another PP process would take place within this decade. However, Strategic Plan Goal D, asks that the PPTF also develop criteria for an annual review of Program Viability. An annual Program Viability review would identify programs with a trend of non-productivity over a three year period. If a program was identified as having problems with viability, the program would be asked to implement an action plan for revitalization. Action program review, for program quality improvement, is intended to take place once every seven years.

What types of criteria might be used for prioritizing programs?

The chart below summarizes and compares typical criteria used for program prioritization at other universities.

CRITERIA	GU CUE Proposed APR criteria	California State - Pomona	University of Idaho	Indiana State University	Washington State University
Centrality to Mission		X	X		X
Quality Outcomes	Student Faculty	X	X	X	X
Consistency with University Mission, Values,				X	
Cost Effectiveness				X	X
Demand –External		X	X	X	X
Demand-Internal	FTE's for other units	X	X	X	X
Impact	Graduate viability		X		X
Productivity	Enrollment, retention, graduation		X	X	X
Efficiency		X			
Size			X		X
Synergies			X		
Strategic Focus		X			
Future Potential of the Program		X		X	

Last year CUE and CGE studied criteria for Academic Program Review. How is the criteria for program prioritization different from the criteria for APR?

The purpose and intentions program prioritization and academic program review are very different. While PP is a strategic, short-term process to refine programs institution-wide, APR, conducted once every seven years, is intended for continuous improvement of each program. PP and APR both look at quantitative and qualitative data. However, with PP the emphasis is on program productivity and viability, especially as compared to the full set of programs within the institution. PP criteria tend to focus on inputs, such as FTE, class sizes, number of majors. APR looks at program quality through program outcomes, both student learning and program effectiveness outcomes.



How does program prioritization relate to the Reinventing Academic Affairs Task Force that recently completed work?

Program prioritization focuses on refinement of academic program while the Reinventing Academic Affairs Task Force focused on improving the administrative structure for academic programs.

If a program is recommended for closure, what will happen to current students enrolled in that program?

Currently enrolled students will have the option to complete the program through a “teach-out” option developed with program advisors.

Is the University closing programs to save money?

Not specifically. Other processes are underway to address the ongoing issues refining programs to best fit Gallaudet’s mission, as well as the need to reduce Gallaudet’s cost per graduate. But we do expect one major end result of academic program prioritization to be efficiencies in costs, faculty time, and other resources.

Will program prioritization result in faculty or staff layoffs?

There has been no discussion of any plans or intent to reduce staff and/or faculty as a result of program prioritization. Gallaudet University has a long history of consideration for the university workforce and have allowed natural attrition to keep headcounts at manageable levels.