Purpose of Graduate Program Prioritization

Since 2003 part time enrollments have been declining, and for the past 3 years full time enrollments have fallen at SCSU. This is a trend seen across the ConnSCU system and the nation (Patton, 2012). With these downward trends in enrollment, schools have been faced with cutting costs. While there once was a time when programs could be left alone, even if they had become bloated with courses that were under-enrolled or under-performing, this is no longer the case. One way to address the reduction in student tuition dollars is to impose across the board cuts that are insensitive to the impacts the cuts will have. This sort of cut damages the school much like bloodletting; intended to improve the health of a patient, actually weakens.

The program prioritization process is a result of lower enrollments, but it also acknowledges that the graduate school has to remain responsive to the needs of students. Through program prioritization, every graduate program will be compared according to a set of criteria. This process can identify shining stars that need more resources and programs that may need more attention, but may not need the resources. By comparing programs across the graduate school, the administration and faculty bodies can make informed decisions. 

Overview of the process

The graduate program prioritization process is based on Dickeson’s (2010) *Prioritizing Academic Programs and Services*. This text was developed to be used with undergraduate programs and so a diverse committee sought to adapt this work to better meet the needs of SCSU’s School of Graduate Studies. Guided by the University mission and the mission of the Graduate School, the committee tailored Dickeson’s work to fit our program prioritization process.

Ultimately the goal of the process is to strengthen the graduate school overall by reallocating existing resources to improve the quality of SCSU graduate education overall and thereby strengthen our reputation.

This process started with establishing criteria, ranking those criteria and determining how the criteria would be measured. From this point, individual programs will create reports based on the criteria and the committee will evaluate the reports placing programs into mutually exclusive categories:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Added Descriptors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>~20% Candidates for enrichment</td>
<td>Expand/enhance program; increase levels of support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>~20% Retained at a higher level</td>
<td>Maintain program; increase levels of support</td>
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<td></td>
<td>of support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>~20% Retained at a neutral level</td>
<td>Maintain program; retain status quo of support</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>of support</td>
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<tr>
<td>~20% Retained at a lower level</td>
<td>Maintain program; reduce level of support</td>
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<td></td>
<td>of support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>~20% Candidates for reduction,</td>
<td>New/reorganized program without sufficient data for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phasing out, or consolidation</td>
<td>judgment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>? New or Substantially Reorganized Program</td>
<td>New/reorganized program without sufficient data for judgment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How is this different from a review?

Like the academic standards review, this process is focused on programs rather than departments as a whole. Unlike program review, this process is tied to resource allocation. The goal of program prioritization is to categorize all the programs across the graduate school at one time, with specific recommendations as to how resources should be greater, maintained, reduced or another strategy that may optimize a program.

Another striking difference between the prioritization process and the academic standards review is that reviews are conducted on a staggered schedule and assume continuance.

Who is on this committee?

The committee is comprised of faculty, administration, and critical support staff. Specifically, the committee is co-chaired by Gregory Paveza, Graduate Dean, and Christine Petto, Graduate Council Chair, included representatives from the four schools, and the university at large. Alphabetically:

**School of Arts & Sciences:**
- Alain D’Amour
- Steven Breese
- Susan Cusato
- Theresa Marchant-Shapiro

**School of Business:**
- Benjamin Abugri
- Samuel Andoh
- Ellen Durnin
- Robert Forbus

**School of Education:**
- Robert Axtell
- Jess Gregory
- Hak Joon Kim
- Deborah Newton

**School of Health and Human Services:**
- Suzanne Carroll
- Esther Howe
- James MacGregor
- Deborah Weiss

**University at-Large:**
- Michael Ben-Avie
- Lise Brule
- William Faroelas
- Tim Krauss
- Steve Larocco
- Richard Riccardi
Timeline

The process began with the selection of the committee membership and an initial meeting in November of 2012. Committee members received and read Dickeson’s (2010) *Prioritizing Academic Programs and Services*. Committee members were divided into three subcommittees to expedite the process of determining criteria and how they would be measured.

As the subcommittees and larger committee met, the initial, ambitious timeline was expanded. Over the course of the spring of 2013 five categories were developed, the ten criteria were ranked, and questions for the ten criteria were drafted.

During the late spring it was determined that the lists of questions for each of the criteria were expansive and further narrowing of focus would be required. An initial weighting system was also developed.

In the summer of 2013, Dickeson created and marketed a rubric to accompany his book. At the same time a private company was marketing a digital way of compiling program prioritization data.

Early in the fall 2013 semester, the whole committee evaluated how useful the digital the program would be for our needs and asked the developers some challenging questions. Based on the responses, the committee decided not to use the marketed program, but rather focus on the criteria and rubric we were developing in-house.

During the fall semester the criteria were further narrowed and the first program (history) piloted writing the report. This informed the committee to refine the data required and highlighted where the criteria questions and draft rubric were not yet aligned.

Two more programs (math and communication disorders) piloted writing the reports during the winter intersession and the committee met to finalize the criteria questions in January of 2014.

The rubric and weightings were finalized in February 2014. Programs will write their reports, and the committee will read them in the Spring 2014 semester.

Important Dates:

12 February 2014 – By 5pm all FAAR data to be included should be entered into DigitalMeasures (https://www.digitalmeasures.com/login/southernct/faculty)

13 February 2014 – All data (save productivity data) will be posted by mid-day for programs.

18 February 2014 – Productivity data posted.

1 April 2014 – Program Prioritization Reports Due.

April 2014 – The committee will read the reports, meet, deliberate and make recommendations.

Early May 2014 – the committee’s recommendations will be presented and given to the President.

Do I have to write a report?

According to Dickeson, a program is any activity or collection of activities that consumes resources (dollars, people, time, space, equipment). We have operationalized the list of programs based on the graduate catalog and the data that is recorded in the Banner Data Management System. While this is not as fine grained as Dickeson suggests, it is a better fit for our graduate program prioritization process. Note: concentrations, teacher certifications, and cross endorsements are included with the major degree or sixth-year certificate, unless otherwise described.

The 47 programs that will write reports are:

- Master of Science in Art Education
- Master of Science in Biology
- Master of Science in Chemistry
- Master of Arts in Romance Languages
- Master of Science in TESOL
- Master of Arts or Science in History
- Master of Science in Mathematical Education
- Master of Science in Applied Physics
- Master of Arts in Psychology
- Master of Science in Sociology
- Master of Arts in Women’s Studies
  - Advanced Certificate in Women’s Studies
  - Graduate Certificate in Women’s Studies
- Master of Business Administration
- Master of Science in Computer Science
- Master of Library Science - General, School Media, or Teacher Cert
- 6th Year Professional Diploma – Specialization in Information Studies
- Master of Science in Counseling – Clinical Mental Health or Community Counseling
- Master of Science in Counseling – School Counseling
- Master of Science in School Psychology
- 6th Year Professional Diploma – Clinical Mental Health or School Counseling
- 6th Year Professional Diploma – School Psychology
- Master of Science in Education
- 6th Year Professional Diploma – Classroom Teacher Specialist
- Master of Science in Special Education
- 6th Year Professional Diploma – Educational Coach
- 6th Year Professional Diploma – Concentration in an Area of Special Education
- Master of Science in Reading - General, Remedial, Consultant, Teacher Cert, or Cross Endrsmnt
- 6th Year Professional Diploma – Reading
- Master of Marriage and Family Therapy (MFT)
- Clinical Nurse Leader Certificate Program
- Nurse Educator Certificate Program
- Family Nurse Practitioner Certificate Program
- Doctorate in Education – Nursing Education (Ed.D.)
- Master of Science in Nursing
- Master of Science in Recreation and Leisure Studies - General, Park & Rec Mgmt, or Therapeutic Rec
- Master of Social Work (MSW)
- Master of Arts or Science in English
- Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing
- Master of Political Science – General, International, or Policy & Admin
- 6th Year Professional Diploma – Educational Leadership
- Doctorate in Educational Leadership (Ed.D.)
- Master of Science in Exercise Science - Human Performance, Sports Psych, or Teacher Ed
- Master of Science in School Health Education
- Master of Science in Communication Disorders
- Master of Public Health (MPH)
- Master of Science in Environmental Education
- Master of Science in Science Education - General or Teacher Cert
- 6th Year Professional Diploma – Science Education

**The criteria and rankings**

The ten criteria were ranked by each individual of the full committee and the subcommittee compiled the results. The highest ranked criteria was External demand for the program followed by Quality of program outcomes; Impact, justification, and overall essentiality of the program; Quality of program inputs and processes; Size, scope and productivity of the program; Internal demand for the program; Revenue and other resources generated by the program; Opportunity analysis of the program; Costs and other expenses associated with the program; and finally History, development and expectations of the program.

**Writing the report**

While the criteria are ranked and these ranks are used in the evaluation of the reports, the order of the criteria for the report match the organization in the Dickeson book. If there is a reason that an element of a criterion is not applicable, explain why that is in the section. The committee will consider the explanations, and recognizes that even with best efforts, this is not a one-size fits all format. The same is true of the data provided. If there is a reason you think the data are inaccurate, explain that in the narrative section. Do not try to collect additional data.

The word limits for each section are **hard limits**. Any words beyond the stated word limit will be cut from the submitted report, so take care to adhere to the word limits for each section.
Accessing program data

Data are available through MySCSU. Open the graduate office tab and then a list of departments will be available.

The program level data are grouped by department in the excel file, but are clearly labeled within the excel spreadsheet. For most of the criteria, the data are disaggregated by program and labeled. To enter the data into a report the program data may just be copied and pasted into the report directly. Note that for some criteria the data were not able to be disaggregated. This is a special challenge for the committee reading the reports. Please copy and paste the data provided and in the narrative space indicate somewhere that the data are aggregate data for N programs. Please do not adjust the data from the spreadsheets. If there are discrepancies, please use the narrative portion of the response to identify them and the possible implications.

1. History, development and expectations of the program

The first criterion is History, development and expectations of the program. This criterion has two parts:

a. Provide, to the best of your ability, a brief description of the program’s history including the evolution of the program over the years. Describe specific changes that have been made to the program curriculum, changes to student demographics and the impact of these changes on the program, and efforts to recruit students to the program. If this is a new program, describe efforts to build the program and the progress of these efforts to date. (550 words)

b. Is there anything else you would like us to know? (Issues you might choose to discuss could include visibility of the program, relationships the program has external to the university, changes in the economic support for the program, staffing, etc.) (150 words)

Some things to consider when writing this section is how have students’ needs changed? How does the program respond to changes in student needs? How have external factors been driving changes in the program?

2. External Demand for the Program

a. Using the data provided, review and explain the relationship between the program and external factors that impact the:

i. number of applicants and percentage of applicants accepted

ii. 5-year enrollment trends (450 words)

b. Which employers, institutions and/or communities benefit from this program? Describe how the program meets the needs of the state (e.g., economic, cultural, civic, etc.)? (150 words)

c. Is there anything else you would like us to know? (Issues you might choose to discuss could include competition from local, regional, and other institutions.) (100 words)

This section contains two tables; to create these tables, please directly copy and paste from the spreadsheet downloaded from the “Program Prioritization Spreadsheets” for your department. Note that there is a spreadsheet for each department and within that spreadsheet there are data for each individual program for each required table. When writing this section, focus on how sustainable the demand is for the program, and what sort of need(s)
does the program fulfill. Is there a special niche that the program is positioned to fill that promises continuing demand?

3. Internal Demand for the Program

a. Using the data provided, please describe how courses in your program serve students in other programs. What percentage of students in your courses come from other programs? Please provide enrollment data for graduate courses offered by your department that are required for other graduate programs. (Some of your discussion in this section may be repetitive, but is important in understanding the internal demand for the program.) (100 words)

b. How is enrollment for your graduate program influenced by enrollment in your undergraduate program? Is there potential for a formal pathway between the two programs? (100 words)

c. How reliant are you on non-program students taking your courses? (100 words)

d. Does the program produce services needed by other parts of the campus (e.g. clinics, testing services)? (100 words)

e. Is there anything else you would like us to know? (100 words)

Different programs are going to have very different responses in the prompts. Some programs that are wholly independent will have very little to say in 3a and 3c. Programs that only serve graduate students will have little for 3b.

If the program is developing a pathway like a 4+1, include that in this section. Programs may also wish to include any courses that students tend to take as electives that enrich their experience, even if they are not required. Please provide any examples of how the program serves other parts of the campus and the positive contributions that service makes.

4. Quality of Program Inputs and Processes

a. Please provide a narrative of how the qualifications and assignments of your full- and part-time faculty align with and support the program. Please include a discussion of the challenges and successes the department faces in providing qualified faculty to meet the needs of the program. In those programs where it is appropriate, please discuss the integration of adjuncts into the program’s curriculum. (450 words)

b. Briefly describe the merits and logic of your curriculum. (250 words)

c. How dynamic is your program? Please identify and describe what procedures are in place to provide continued, regular evaluation and review (include formal and informal activities). Describe the impact of the review on the program and curriculum (e.g., FAAR data may be used as evidence, as well as other documentation of changes to the curriculum). (300 words)

d. Is there anything else you would like us to know? (Issues you might discuss could include the quality of your incoming students, or a comparison of your curriculum, courses, assessments, experiences to similar programs. How does your program better serve students than similar programs offered elsewhere?) (200 words)

This response asks the indelicate question about the quality of faculty teaching in the program. There are a multitude of ways to answer this, the key is to provide evidence of the quality of both full time and adjunct faculty. If the program uses adjunct faculty to meet the teaching demands, include a commentary on how adjuncts are integrated into the program. Maybe the program has a great way to ensure the quality of the taught curriculum, or uses data to inform curricular change (4c), this is the section to highlight this.

This section also provides an opportunity for programs to feature the quality of their curriculum compared to other similar programs, or the type of accolades that a program may have earned from accrediting bodies. These would be framed in section 4b and 4d.

5. Quality of Program Outcomes

a. How does your program use assessment data to ensure quality of student outcomes? Describe the quality of your
program outcomes. (e.g., G.P.A., Student Opinion Surveys, course evaluations, alumni surveys, professional assessment/evaluation, other assessments, participation in groups or organizations that focus on pedagogy or andragogy. Insert a table listing your program outcomes. Note that the table does not count in the word limit). (900 words)

b. Is there anything else you would like us to know? (Issues you may choose to discuss could include preparing your students for employment or further scholarly pursuits. Where possible provide data driven examples, e.g., number of students who pass the licensing exam). (300 words)

One key thing to remember in this section is that the program outcomes, listed in a table, are not counted as a part of the word count. That said, please don’t add additional tables. How does the program use the information (see some ideas in the parentheses in 5a) to monitor/ensure high quality program outcomes? How well (how consistently) do students achieve the desired outcomes, and how does the program know?

While the first part of number 5 is quite lengthy, the second part of this criterion encourages a further expansion of what students in the program have done after they finish the program. What sort of things have students done after completion that reflect on the quality of the program? Examples of this may be the relative number that have passed high stakes exams, gone on to further academic programs, earned promotions, or perhaps had creative or scholarly work published or presented.

6. Size, scope and productivity of the program

a. How many credit hours does the program generate? (table generated by OMIR)

b. What degrees or certificates are awarded? (This is a simple list of degrees and will list only one degree or certificate unless you are one of the programs approved to report your data in combination)(in table form with item c)

c. How many degrees or certificates have been awarded (five year data)?

d. Using the data provided, present and discuss the record of the graduate faculty in research/creative activity. (200 words)

e. What types of student or student/faculty research or creative activity have been developed and or produced (e.g., include theses, dissertations, special projects)? (100 words)

f. In your narrative discuss how all these data impact or have impacted the size, scope or productivity of your program. (200 words)

g. Is there anything else you would like us to know (this might include a discussion of equipment purchased solely for the purposes of the graduate program). (100 words)

Criterion six has many sub sections, but several are covered in a table that will be generated for the program. One feature of this section is the data generated by the FAAR. If you are uncomfortable with the FAAR data for any reason, please don’t change the provided data, rather use some of the narrative to explain any possible discrepancies. Were there faculty that have left or retired that may not have entered data into DigitalMeasures (6d)? Use the narrative to comment on trends in the size, scope and productivity. Were all faculty members included in the number of publications (6d)? Are there other forms of creative activity or productivity that may not be represented in the FAAR data that are relevant (6d)? Try to comment on to what degree faculty are engaged in creative activity that is presented to a public forum (not limited to scholarly work).

The word limits will limit the number of dissertation, theses, and special project titles that can be included. Rather than providing a comprehensive list, describe any trends and provide example titles (6e). This section is looking for how students are engaged in creative activities that are presented to audiences beyond the program.

If your program has responded to lower enrollments in a creative way, through course rotation, special offerings, summer/winter session courses,
off campus or online activities/courses, include the impact the responses have had. How has supervising/collaborating with students on projects impacted the program? Consider any ways that the scope of your program may be impacting the program as a whole (6f).

The final section is again that catch all place. If there is anything that is relevant to further the readers’ understanding or how the program is growing or can’t grow because it is constrained in some way, make it clear here.

7. Revenue and other resources generated by the program

a. What are the sources and how much revenue does the program generate through student enrollments?

b. What are the sources and how much additional revenue does the program generate through fees such as laboratory or special user fees? (50 words)

c. What are the sources and how much revenue does the program generate by services (e.g., external or to other programs)? (50 words)

d. In the narrative on this section discuss how the revenues and other resources impact the size, scope and productivity of your program? (100 words)

e. Is there anything else you need us to know? (You may wish to discuss grant activity, gifts to the University, etc.) (100 words)

The revenue data are prorated on the number of billing credit hours. Like section 5, this section has elements that don’t require additional narrative. The parts that provide an opportunity for narrative are brief and center on to what degree the program generates revenue for the university. There may be sections here where programs simply list “none,” particularly when a department offers services to the community for free, like mentoring. If there were proposed sources of revenue that were not approved, a program may wish to include that information in this section.

The larger item in this section, 5d, is an opportunity to explain how resource constraints have impacted the program. If the program has had an influx of resources, how has that impacted the program?

The last section may include grants that are internal, within SCSU or ConnSCU, or external. Perhaps students in the program have earned grants or scholarships that have impacted the program, if so this is a good place to address what, if any, influence they have had.

8. Costs and other expenses

a. What are the total costs of the program? (table)

b. What is the ratio of costs to revenues? (table)

c. What investment in new resources does the program require? (200 words)

d. What demonstrable efficiencies exist in the way the program is operated (e.g., summer courses; cross-listed courses, etc.)? (100 words)

The data for the tables for 8a and 8b are provided for each program. The second two parts of this element are the opportunities for the program to highlight what additional resources the program requires, and possibly what impact that these resources may have. Finally, how does the program seek to make the most of the resources it does have?

While the rubric is focused on the ratio of costs to revenue (8b), the committee has discretion to adjust the holistic rating for the section based on the narratives the program provides.

9. Impact, justification, and overall essentiality of the program

a. How does this program connect to the University’s mission statement and/or the Graduate School’s mission statement? (100 words)

b. How does this program respond to societal needs that the institution values? (e.g., producing a critical thinking, educated citizenry; improving the state’s workforce; meeting health care needs of the community, etc.)? (100 words)

c. To what extent does this program help the institution differentiate itself from similar programs at peer institutions? (100 words)

d. Is there anything else you would like us to know? (100 words)
While building the narrative for this section, the program will provide evidence that it connects to the university (http://www.southernct.edu/about/scsu-info/mission.html) or Graduate School (https://www.southernct.edu/academics/graduate/) mission.

Another feature of this element is the uniqueness of each program. How does the program differentiate itself from other similar or local programs? Is there something special about the program or a feature of the program that addresses a societal or other need? Highlight program attributes that help SCSU and the Graduate School fulfill their respective missions.

10. Opportunity analysis of the program

a. Describe the external opportunities for strengthening your program. (300 words)

b. Describe the internal opportunities for strengthening your program. (300 words)

How has your program identified opportunities for the growth of the program? What sort of opportunities exist? Describe how the program may already be positioned to take advantage of opportunities. Some opportunities may seem too big, but if they aren’t included how can a program aim for them? Nothing is off the table.

Is there evidence that some of these opportunities are more ripe than others? Highlight any low hanging fruit even if it is small. By carefully identifying all the possible opportunities the program positions itself to capitalize on them.

How will these be evaluated?

After the full committee read the Dickeson book, the subcommittee charged with ranking the criteria polled the group and compiled the rankings. These data were also used to determine the relative weights of the criteria.

If you are not interested in how the actual weightings were calculated, feel free to skip this paragraph. In the interest of transparency the process was as follows. The individual rankings were flipped because the committee members ranked the criteria from 1 to 10 with 1 being the most important. To assign the highest weight to the most important category, these had to be flipped. The average rank and standard deviation for each of the criteria were calculated and these were used to determine a factor score. This factor was determined by dividing the criterion average score by the sum of the average scores. These factor scores add up to 1.00 and were converted to percentages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. External demand for the program</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Quality of program outcomes</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Impact, justification, and overall essentiality of the program</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Quality of program inputs and processes</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Size, scope and productivity of the program</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Internal demand for the program</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Revenue and other resources generated by the program</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Opportunity analysis of the program</td>
<td>7.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Costs and other expenses associated with the program</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. History, development and expectations of the program</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These weights will be applied to the scores generated by the rubric (appendix a). You will notice that there are spaces for comments by the report readers. The rubric was designed to permit note taking so that when the committee meets as a group they have a record of their thoughts as they read individual reports. While each criterion will eventually be distilled to a single number, the process is still subjective. Individual readers will apply the rubric and then the group will deliberate each programs report.

It is important to note that the report is the only evidence that will be used in the scoring of the rubric and in the deliberations, so it is important to include information that you may think, “everyone knows that.” Please include it!

What if I need more help?

This document was designed to provide the basic guidance needed to complete the report. The committee deliberated on the wording of the prompts within the criteria and the rubric to achieve clarity. That being said, sometimes it is just better to see an example.

The programs that have piloted the process have reports posted that you can access through MySCSU. Once you log into MySCSU, click on the “Graduate Office” tab.
Once you have entered that link, you will see the links to a template that includes the Criteria and Questions, the presentations from the town hall meetings and links to the sample reports.

If you are writing your report and have a question regarding the data or you would like to request additional data, those requests will go through Dean Paveza, paveza@southernct.edu. Other questions on the process should also be directed to Dean Paveza. Once you have written your report, if there are specific sections on which you would like feedback or if you are unsure of whether you have addressed a prompt, you can set up a time to discuss it with Christine Petto, pettoc1@southernct.edu.

Throughout the graduate program prioritization process the committee has aimed for transparency. Now that programs are writing their reports that goal has not changed. There are 50 reports being written around campus, together we can support each other and achieve our goal of an even stronger graduate school.

Jess L. Gregory compiled this advice document.