

■ **In this issue:**
Similar PPP processes at other institutions



Collective Agreement

Preamble

Article 1.2 – The relationship between the University and its various employee groups is intended to be one of respect, integrity, and fairness, characterized by transparent decision and policy making, regard for principles of due process and natural justice, and a recognition that both parties share the same goal: to contribute to the continuing success of the University.

The Academic Integrity Committee (AIC), created by the UGFA Executive to investigate and critique the Administration's Program Prioritization Process (PPP), has examined a similar process currently underway at Wilfrid Laurier University. This example, like that at the University of Regina, qualifies the Administration's claim of following "best practices" with the PPP at Guelph. Moreover, concerns raised by faculty at Wilfrid Laurier University speak to the problematic ways in which program prioritization inspired by Robert Dickeson's book is being imposed in Canadian universities and to its worrying implications.

The Integrated Planning and Resource Management (IPRM) process at Wilfrid Laurier University was announced in April 2012. According to the website of the Office of the Vice-President, Finance and Administration, the IPRM initiative "will ultimately identify the academic and administrative priorities of the university and determine how to operationalize and fund these priorities - within our existing resources - to position Laurier for future success." Arising from previous planning exercises, the IPRM "operates on the principle that no university can be exceptional in all areas: the university needs to identify the areas that will allow Laurier to thrive, and then fund these areas appropriately." Like the PPP, therefore, the IPRM process entails assigning or ranking programs at Laurier into categories: those to be enhanced, those to be maintained, those to be transformed, and those to be phased out.

In significant ways, however, the IPRM process differs from the PPP. A Planning Task Force (PTF) was created to establish criteria by which programs will be evaluated, but academic and administrative programs are to be assessed separately using different templates. Separate committees evaluate these templates: an Academic Priorities Team (AcPT) evaluates academic programs and recommends academic priorities to the PTF; an Administrative Priorities Team (AdminPT) evaluates administrative programs and recommends administrative priorities to the PTF; while a third committee, the Resource Management Team (RMT), recommends a resource allocation model, based on input and evidence from the Laurier community, to the PTF. The PTF will ultimately assess these committees' recommendations and integrate them into a final document which it will submit directly to Laurier's Senate and Board of Governors, without modification by the university's president or vice-presidents. The IPRM thus differs strikingly from Guelph's PPP, in which the PPP Task Force reports to the President who decides whether to accept / modify / reject Task Force proposals, and how they will affect the budget process, before any recommendations go to Senate.

Wilfred Laurier IPRM: https://www.wlu.ca/page.php?grp_id=13117&p=22051

From the Administration's announcement of the PPP at Guelph in September 2012, UGFA Members have questioned the wisdom and fairness of ranking academic and non-academic programs against each other. Given the example of the IPRM process at Wilfrid Laurier University, an institution similar in size as well as geographically near to Guelph, the AIC wonders why the Administration has insisted that academic and non-academic programs must be evaluated according to the same criteria and using the same templates?

From the perspective of faculty, of course, the make-up of the IPRM committees is vitally important. On 5 October 2012 the Wilfrid Laurier Faculty Association (WLUFAs) passed a motion urging the university's Senators to vote against giving a mandate to the IPRM process and urging WLUFAs Members not to participate in the process:

"It is WLUFAs's position that Senate is the sole decision-making body regarding academic matters at the University. Furthermore, in keeping with the principle governing composition of Senate, it is the position of the Association that committees with input into academic decisions must be comprised of a majority of faculty and academic librarians, freely nominated and freely and democratically elected. The IPRM process, as currently proposed by the Administration, does not satisfy these conditions."

At the second of two meetings devoted to discussing the IPRM, Laurier's Senate passed the Administration's IPRM initiative on 26 November. A faculty Senator, however, succeeded in getting a motion passed to increase the proportion of elected members to two-thirds of all IPRM committees. Given concerns regarding the legality of the IPRM under the terms of the WLU Act of 1973, another Senator proposed a motion to seek outside legal counsel to provide clarification. This led President Max Blouw to express great dissatisfaction with faculty members' "lack of faith" in the senior administration. As with the PPP at Guelph, it appears that Laurier's faculty were supposed to accept a process imposed from above without questioning it. WLUFAs has sought its own legal opinion on whether the IPRM violates the WLU Act and faculty at Laurier remain deeply concerned by the IPRM's potential implications and consequences for the quality and integrity of academic programs and pedagogy.

Finally, in keeping with the conviction that UGFA's Members will want to assess Dickeson's book in the context of a wider literature, the AIC respectfully suggests that they consider the following recent publication:

Jennifer Washburn, *University, Inc.: The Corporate Corruption of Higher Education*. (Basic Books, 2006) ISBN -13 978-0465090525

Washburn looks at the growing trend towards privatization and corporate funding in North American universities. This trend, which includes an increasing focus on job training and credentialing in the service of market demands, has blurred the distinction between 'for profit' and public institutions. This has led to increasingly contentious debates in the sciences regarding ownership of research which have compromised scholarly independence. The humanities are being neglected and downsized unless they can prove viability as profit-generating disciplines. While not recommending that universities be closed off entirely from commercial interests, Washburn argues that universities must be able to share knowledge with industry in ways that do not threaten their autonomy or values: otherwise, she warns, they will become no more than tools in the service of short-term, bottom-line corporate interests.

Members who have opinions or information to share regarding the PPP are invited to contact:

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