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**PPP and the future of the
University of Guelph**



Program Prioritization Process

And the future of the University of Guelph

COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT

PROCEDURES FOR ASSIGNING WORKLOAD

18.19 In recommending/determining a Member's teaching workload, the Chair and Dean shall use a fair, equitable, and transparent method. A Faculty Member's teaching assignments may vary from year to year in recognition

of the needs of the University and when possible to reflect the interest and teaching strengths of the Faculty Member. These variations will be taken into account by the Dean when approving teaching assignments. The Dean will ensure that the teaching assignments of Faculty Members are as fair and equitable as is reasonably possible, both within the academic unit and across the College.

The Academic Integrity Committee (AIC), created by the UGFA Executive to investigate and critique the Administration's Program Prioritization Process (PPP), asks Members to consider the following questions. What kind of institution will the University of Guelph be in five years? Will it continue to be a comprehensive university, dedicated to academic excellence and offering students a wide choice of degree programs in a broad range of disciplines, or will it become a different kind of institution which emphasizes revenue generation and offers only credentials in a limited selection of job-ready specializations?

The PPP Task Force has already begun to rank the Program Information Request (PIR) forms submitted by academic and non-academic units across campus. At the same time, a search committee for the university's next president has been struck. What kind of president will be sought and what will be his or her priorities? In short, the University of Guelph is at a crossroads. The stakes for Faculty, Librarians and Veterinarians are high.

The Administration has presented the PPP as an objective process, and as the necessary and inevitable response to financial pressure. There is no doubt, however, that the ranking and costing of programs will entail value judgements and will dictate choices concerning the university's future. But what are the priorities on which these judgements and choices will be based? According to its Strategic Mandate Agreement, the University of Guelph must "make informed, evidence-based decisions about what to stop doing." The stated purpose of the PPP is to ensure that university resources are funnelled to programs that are "mission critical." What is that mission and how will budget cuts resulting from the PPP reflect it? The interests and values driving the PPP deserve scrutiny.

According to Robert Dickeson's *Prioritizing Academic Programs and Services*, which has been the inspiration for Guelph's PPP, programs must meet performance benchmarks that move away from the traditional approach to program decision-making. Dickeson characterizes this approach as outdated and unduly solicitous of faculty members' interests and specializations and of their claim to having a unique understanding of their programs' needs and goals. Dickeson touts his approach as strictly data-driven and according to which all programs can be assessed on objective, non-specialist driven criteria. Yet this so-called "evidence-based" approach carries with it assumptions about the value of certain kinds of research and education, and it carries specific visions of the university as an institution. It places a premium on financial factors determining academic priorities.

According to its home page, "The University of Guelph is ranked as one of Canada's top comprehensive universities because of our commitment to student learning and innovative research." *Comprehensive* suggests choice not only of degree programs, and of students' majors and specializations, but also of opportunities to acquire diverse knowledge, gain a global perspective, and develop character. With reliable instruction, mentorship and guidance from faculty who are actively engaged in their disciplines, students can also pursue interests beyond declared majors. A comprehensive university is an institution in which students can obtain not only a credential linked to employment, but also a broad and rich education which will make them critical-thinkers and socially-responsible citizens of Canada and the world. According to its Mission Statement, the University of Guelph is dedicated to "meeting the needs of all learners in a purposefully diverse community" and "to a curriculum that fosters creativity, skill development, critical inquiry, and active learning." Are such a community and such a curriculum, which are hallmarks of a comprehensive university, compatible with the ranking of academic programs according to cost and revenue generation?

A specific example of the potential threat to Guelph's continuation as a comprehensive university and to its academic mission can be perceived in the changed orientation of the Ontario Veterinary College (OVC). Faculty and Veterinarians still believe that their mission, and that of their college, is the education of students to become outstanding veterinarians, contributors to the profession, and life-long-learners. Members fear, however, that a new administrative vision for the OVC is undermining the quality of this education and insisting that the priority of Veterinarians, Faculty and staff in the OVC must be the generation of profit.

UGFA Members have contributed enormously to Guelph's past and present success as a comprehensive university, and to its national and international reputation. They must have a major say in determining its future. That future is neither clear nor inevitable. It will depend not only on the external decisions of governments, but on the selection of the next president and on the choices made by Departmental curriculum committees, Dean's Councils, Senate and the PPP Task Force. The stakes are high. You, as the Faculty and Academic Staff of this university, have the ability and the choice to advocate and pressure for change, and to help shape the future of the institution. The UGFA will continue to stand up as a voice for your interests.

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

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