

News & Views

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Academic Integrity Committee and Program Prioritization Process

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Program Prioritization
Process

The Academic Integrity Committee (AIC), created by the UGFA Executive to investigate and critique the Administration's Program Prioritization Process (PPP), has heard a variety of concerns from UGFA Members regarding this process. These include objections to the fact that enormous amounts of Members' time and energy are being spent in the preparation of Program Information Request (PIR) templates which, according to some Members, will be of dubious value in assessing academic units and their activities given the problematic definition of "programs" under the PPP. Some Members have noted that the time required to work on the PIRs inevitably means they have less time for teaching preparation, research programs and established service activities, and worry that this will be held against them in the next round of T&P assessment. The AIC regards these as very valid concerns.

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This initiative raises serious concerns regarding the quality of education at the University of Guelph, regarding faculty workload, and regarding Academic Freedom. While individual Members certainly have the right to explore new ways of offering courses, the AIC wonders if the Administration plans to impose the NCAT model on all Faculty teaching first-year courses? In particular, the AIC wonders if units whose budgets are slashed as a result of the PPP will be pressured to adopt this model as the only acceptable way of continuing to offer their programs. This raises the question of how, exactly, the NCAT model will “achieve cost savings”? If a Faculty Member teaches a course using this model, and thus has only one hour of contact with students instead of two or three, will the Administration argue that this no longer counts as one full course in his or her teaching load? Moreover, if one Faculty Member in a unit redesigns a first-year course using this model, will the Administration pressure others in the same unit to conform to this model?

It is not only UGFA Members who have expressed grave concerns regarding the PPP. In January the AIC met with representatives of the Central Students’ Association (CSA) who informed us that the Administration has never consulted with students on the nature or objectives of this process or contacted them regarding its possible impacts on them. The one student “representative” on the PPP Task Force was neither elected by Guelph students nor nominated by the CSA, but chosen by the Administration who have provided a course credit or pay as an “internship” for this participation. Beyond their frustration at the lack of representation or consultation, these students also told the AIC that they are very worried at the possible consequences of the PPP for the diversity and quality of education at the University of Guelph.

Finally, the AIC would like to propose that UGFA Members consider yet another book which represents an alternate philosophy of higher education to that informing Robert Dickeson’s book:

Stefan Colini, *What are Universities For?* (Penguin Books, 2012)

ISBN 978-1-846-12282-0

Colini argues that university administrators in North America, who once espoused the social benefits of university education, have become increasingly obsessed with funding, access and economic impact. At the same time, government policies toward higher education have compromised the importance of extending knowledge and deepening understanding through disciplined scientific inquiry, while abandoning progressive values. A “pathology of systematic commercialization” has emerged. By imposing ranking and costing exercises on academic programs, in keeping with corporate principles, Colini argues that university administrators are undermining the inherent social and cultural value that institutions of higher learning were intended to provide.

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

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