

Annual Report from the Academic Program Review Committee to the University of Rhode Island Faculty Senate

April 23, 2008

According to legislation creating the Academic Program Review Committee (APRC) in 2006 (#05-06--22), its charge is as follows:

5.86.10 The Academic Program Review Committee (APRC) shall develop and maintain the academic program review instrument. The committee shall coordinate the administration of the review, oversee the collection of data, and compile and disseminate information resulting from the review as outlined in sections 8.86.10-14. When academic program reviews are conducted, the committee shall serve as a resource to departments and programs being reviewed. The committee shall receive and respond to comments regarding the program review process, including, but not limited to, the academic program review instrument.

During the 2007-08 academic year, members of the APRC are as follows: Prof. Marilyn Barbour, Pharm; Prof. Laura Beauvais, COBA; Dean Winfred Brownell, A&S; Prof. Stephan Grilli, OCE; Asst. Provost Clifford Katz; Prof. Celest Martin, CWP, Ann Morrissey, President's Office; Vice Provost Lynn Pasquerella; Prof. Michael Rice, FAVS; Prof. Susan Roush, PHT; and Prof. John Stevenson, PSY.

This is an initial report of the Academic Program Review Committee which was formed in spring 2007 with a charge by the Senate to review the Academic Investment and Improvement Model (AIIM) first administered in fall, 2005 and prepare for the next round of its administration. October of 2007, Asst. Provost Katz and the APRC Chairman Rice met with the Council of Deans in preparation for the next planned administration solicit their input as to their input as to the usefulness of the AIIM instrument as a management tool. Although the AIIM was designed and widely discussed as a simple weighted factor analysis rather than a statistically comparative model, many of the Deans did not find the AIIM instrument in its existent form to be very useful. They pointed out that the proprietary 'bubble model' used by the consultants to present our AIIM data was much too coarse for any valid inferences to be drawn. They also pointed out that in conforming to the requirements of the data reporting software, a number of 'shortcuts' in the AIIM questionnaire were made, including compound questions and an arguably invalid blending of quantitative, semi-quantitative and subjective data in the reporting model.

There are, however, three indicators that suggest that the AIIM instrument had some elements of usefulness associated with it. After the first administration of the AIIM in 2005, several departments around campus were able to use the "SGOR" (Strengths, Gaps, Opportunities, Risks) analysis of the AIIM data reporting in order to engage in self-improvement activities. A number of members of the campus community commented that the questions in the AIIM questionnaire did a good job of capturing the types of activities in which faculty members from a wide variety of disciplines engage, and there was a general consensus by the faculty that consideration of measures of academic quality in assessment was preferred over a strict financial analysis for assessing departments. Most recently, in the 3 April 2008 letter from the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) to President Carothers about our reaccreditation, they stated, "The Commission commends the University of Rhode Island for their development of the Academic Investment and Improvement Model (AIIM), a program review that was designed to overcome shortcomings in the institution's prior approach to the review of academic programs." The NEASC letter went on to urge the incorporation of an external perspective into the program review process.

Given the input by the Council of Deans, there was a decision to undertake a thorough revision of the AIIM prior to its next administration. In preparation to undertaking revisions, letters were sent in early December 2007 to the faculty (<http://www.uri.edu/facsen/AIIM-faculty.pdf>) and to the deans and academic department chairs (<http://www.uri.edu/facsen/AIIM-Chairs.pdf>) soliciting their input into the revision process.

In early January, 2008, the APRC met with Dr. Donald DeHayes to brief him about AIIM, to solicit his input into the proposed revisions and to inquire as to his primary interest in AIIM as a program assessment tool to inform budgeting decisions or conversely a tool for self-improvement of departments. At that time, his initial reaction was to lean toward AIIM being a self-improvement tool, but since he had not yet taken office as Provost and there was much more to study, he reserved the right to reconsider.

After an initial meeting of the full APRC, a subcommittee (Beauvais, Katz, Martin, Stevenson, & Rice) was charged with ‘deconstructing’ the AIIM questionnaire. The initial decision was to create an *a priori* structure reflecting elements of the University Mission. In addition, we decided to break apart the questions so that they fall into three major categories: 1) Quantitative data that are derived from the departmental budgets, workload statements, personnel databases, and the course registration data in e-Campus; 2) Objective and subjective academic quality data that are likely to be known best by department chairs and program leaders; and 3) Objective and subjective quality data that are best provided by the faculty at-large. Corresponding to these three major categories, the APRC subcommittee has begun breaking the AIIM instrument into three separate instruments. The first instrument is envisioned to be a set of tabular data and a net contribution model ranking departments against University-wide means in a number of categories derived from budget data, credit hour data, majors data and research awards. The second instrument is a survey for department chairs and program leaders that is designed to determine academic quality data about the departments that they are most likely to know (subcommittee members Stevenson and Rice have first-hand knowledge of chairs’ duties & responsibilities), and the third instrument is a questionnaire for the faculty at-large aimed at soliciting information about their own teaching, research, outreach, service activities, awards and honors, as well as their impressions about governance processes and the overall climate within their departments.

The process of reformulating the AIIM instrument has been ongoing since January and is expected to continue through the summer months. The next task to be undertaken by the APRC will be a complete reformulation of the data collection handling and analysis procedures now that our revised questionnaires are now incompatible with the ‘bubble model’ of our outside consultant, Thomas J. Murphy and Associates. We will also need to incorporate elements of external review as requested by NEASC. It is expected that the reformulated AIIM will be ready for review by the campus community in fall of 2008. As with the previous formulation of AIIM, it is expected that the APRC will be making visits to individual colleges and departments to explain the new AIIM program assessment instruments and data reporting system. The APRC strongly recommends a clear administrative statement about how AIIM data will be used in order to facilitate widespread acceptance and participation by the academic community.

Respectfully submitted:

Michael A. Rice, Chairman, APRC