Program Prioritization Task Force Final Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Provost Anthony K. Wutoh formed the Academic and Administrative Program Prioritization Task Force (Task Force) in February 2017. The Task Force was charged with developing and implementing a rigorous and inclusive evaluation process to review the University's entire span of programs and services in relation to how each aligns with the mission and positions Howard for growth. These efforts are part of a continual assessment process undertaken to ensure programs offered at Howard are of the highest academic quality and that its administrative programs operate effectively and efficiently for all stakeholders.

As part of the Provost's charge, the Task Force helped establish processes for academic program and administrative unit review, development of a robust methodology, and creation of data collection instruments, evaluation tools, and review criteria. The Task Force charge did not, however, include making recommendations or decisions regarding actions for current academic or administrative programs. Rather, its focus was on facilitation of processes designed to lead to good decision making; and it is anticipated that the analysis of the data emerging from the Academic and Administrative Program Prioritization process will (a) help ascertain institutional strengths, as well as weaknesses, (b) enable evidence-based decisions related to program development, continuation or discontinuance, and (c) support strategic planning.

A comprehensive campus engagement plan was developed and implemented by the Task Force to obtain feedback from all constituents on the data collection instruments and the evaluation tools. There was broad participation in these activities, including hundreds of members of the Howard community; faculty, staff, and students hailing from all 13 schools and colleges, representing academic departments and administrative units from across the university. Community engagement activities conducted by the Task Force addressed the concerns of stakeholders through all phases of program prioritization. The result of these activities was a clear, transparent, participatory, and balanced approach that yielded a higher level of respect and understanding among various units and programs.

Organizational units prepared self-studies in accordance with guidelines developed by the Task Force. These self-studies included a description of the unit and its role in fulfilling Howard University's mission; quantitative and qualitative information about the program's performance; evidence of the program's effectiveness; and answers to questions about resources, problems, challenges, and areas of improvement. Teams of peer evaluators performed site visits and scored the self-studies using rubrics that consisted of coherent sets of criteria to assess how well the units were performing, across a number of relevant evaluative dimensions identified in advance by the Task Force.

This report presents the evaluations of the 141 certificate and degree programs, 15 stand-alone minors, the first-year writing program, and 84 administrative units reviewed by the Task Force; and the Task Force's recommendations for process improvement in future iterations of this process. This initiative has enabled the University to self-reflect, with each evaluated program and unit asked to consider how they may improve individually and contribute to the University's overall improvement. Through this process, a useful set of resources was developed that will support a culture of continuous improvement and effectiveness, thereby advancing the University's mission.

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

The overall goal of the Academic and Administrative Program Prioritization Initiative was to position Howard University to maintain and elevate its status as a premier academic institution. This initiative allowed the University to capture a comprehensive view of its entire span of programs and services and assess how well they align with the University's mission. These efforts are part of a continual assessment to ensure programs offered at Howard are of the highest academic quality, providing contemporary and exceptional educational experiences to our students, and that its administrative programs operate effectively and efficiently for all stakeholders. The Task Force was created to facilitate this evaluative process.

Howard History and Mission

Howard University has a rich history of academic excellence. Established in 1867, Howard University was founded to support higher education for Black students. A cornerstone of higher education, and Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Howard University has awarded over 100,000 degrees in its more than 150-year history. Boasting 13 schools and colleges, Howard is one of the few universities in the United States to offer undergraduate, graduate, and professional degrees in arts and sciences, business, communication, dentistry, education, engineering and architecture, law, medicine, nursing and allied health, pharmacy, religion, and social work.

The mission of Howard University states:

> Howard University, a culturally diverse, comprehensive, research intensive, and historically Black private University, provides an educational experience of exceptional quality at the undergraduate, graduate, and professional levels to students of high academic standing and potential, with emphasis on educational opportunities for Black students. Moreover, the University is dedicated to attracting and sustaining a cadre of faculty who are, through their teaching, research, and service, committed to the development of distinguished, historically aware, and compassionate graduates and to the discovery of solutions to human problems in the United States and throughout the world. With an abiding interest in both domestic and international affairs, the University is committed to continuing to produce leaders for America and the global community.

Howard Today

Today, Howard University has an enrollment of more than 10,000 students. Its undergraduate, graduate, professional, and joint degree programs span more than 120 areas of study within 13 schools and colleges. With an R2 Carnegie classification, the University has four health science units including Colleges of Medicine, Nursing and Allied Health Sciences, Dentistry, and Pharmacy. The main campus sits on 256 acres, while the Schools of Law and Divinity are housed on Howard's West Campus. The University owns a hospital that partners with Howard University's medical school to provide optimum care in Washington, D.C.

Hierarchy of Authority (Board, President, Provost)

Howard University leadership rests with the Board of Trustees. The Board of Trustees guides the growth and perfects the promise of Howard University. Serving as the trustees' direct connection to the University, Dr. Wayne A. I. Frederick, the 17th President of Howard University, oversees operations and academics for the University. The University's Chief Academic Officer is Provost Anthony K. Wutoh.

Middle States and Program Review

Howard University is accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) and is undergoing a review for reaffirmation of accreditation this year. To maintain accreditation with MSCHE, its members are required to meet a rigorous set of standards and requirements of affiliation. In particular, Standard I requires all institutions to explain how their actions are upholding their missions and Standard VI requires that all institutions account for the responsible use of their resources. Specifically, Standard VI requires that the "Institution's planning processes, resources, and structures are aligned with each other and are sufficient to fulfill its mission and goals, to continuously assess and improve its programs and services, and to respond effectively to opportunities and challenges."

In accordance with MSCHE's standards and requirements for affiliation, the University has conducted an institution-wide self-study every 10 years since its original accreditation was granted by Middle States in 1921. Continual compliance with MSCHE allows for students to graduate from an accredited institution and to receive federal funding for their education. Accreditation also allows faculty to seek support through federal grants and contracts. Reaffirmations offer an opportunity for an institution to re-evaluate its ability to meet its mission, while at the same time creating time for self-study, reflection, and prioritization. An important part of these reaffirmation activities is the provision of sufficient evidence that institutions are actively improving programs, practices, and processes.

In keeping with the university's goal of continuous improvement, Howard has undertaken prioritization, strategic planning, and mission-alignment activities. Since the mid-1980s, institutional effectiveness has been the calling card of accountability and assessment activities in higher education.[1] An important part of institutional effectiveness is a responsible and periodic evaluation of resource allocation. This kind of specialized prioritization activity can take many forms and can be time-intensive based on the scope of the initiative. Though a heavy lift for any institution, prioritization processes are integral to university work as they encourage the strategic development and advancement of the University.[2]

[1] Cameron, K. (1985). Institutional Effectiveness in Higher Education: An Introduction. *The Review of Higher Education, 9*(1), 1-4.

[2] Dickeson, R. C. (1999). *Prioritizing Academic Programs and Services: Reallocating Resources to Achieve Strategic Balance.* Josset-Bass.

The Charge

The Task Force was established in February 2017 by the Office of the Provost and Chief Academic Officer with the official charge to conduct a systematic review of all academic and administrative programs across campus. Three major objectives were identified as central to the prioritization process: (a) to strengthen the University's overall academic portfolio; (b) to facilitate utilization of best practices in developing new offerings; and (c) to ensure effective alignment of resources with University initiatives. The anticipated outcomes were to (a) help ascertain institutional strengths and weaknesses; (b) enable evidence-based decisions; (c) support strategic planning; and (d) help prepare for Howard's 2020 MSCHE accreditation visit.

The Task Force was not tasked with making decisions or recommendations regarding closure, restructuring, or resource reallocation for any academic or administrative program or unit. Instead, the primary foci of the Task Force's activities were to consider factors associated with achieving and maintaining high quality degree programs and to examine the degree to which units provide contemporary and exceptional educational experiences to Howard students. The Task Force process was designed to be a continual, improvement-oriented process that provided an evidence-based foundation to support decision making and to enhance the effectiveness and excellence of the University. The Task Force process additionally contributed evidence to the MSCHE standards related to fiscal responsibility and continuous institutional improvement.

The Task Force

The Task Force is composed of faculty, students, and staff from all facets of the University. Faculty and staff either volunteered or were nominated by their deans, the Faculty Senate, or their supervisors. Student representatives were nominated by the student leaders of the Howard University Student Association (HUSA) or the Graduate Student Council (GSC).

The Task Force, co-chaired by Dr. Kimberly Jones and Professor Rhea Ballard-Thrower, initially included 56 faculty and University staff and 3 support staff. As the process developed, several new faculty, staff, and students joined the Task Force, while others left. The Task Force received administrative support from Mrs. Ruth Franks, Ms. Nevelda Dixon, Mr. Chieh Hsiung Chang, and Ms. Sloan Sanford. Institutional support was provided by Dr. Angela Cole Dixon, Dr. Michael Wallace, Dr. Daphne Bernard, Dr. Glenn Phillips, Mr. Vancito Wallace, Dr. Lu Qin, Ms. Yesenia Espinal, and Dr. Ping Harman. Provided below is a link to the list of Task Force members:

Program Prioritization Task Force Members

An Informed Process

Review of Literature and Best Practices

To prepare for such a large undertaking, the Task Force spent several weeks reviewing background literature related to program evaluation and assessment. The Task Force reviewed best practices, such as those by recognized experts Robert C. Dickeson (Dickeson model) [3], Jim Collins (Collins' Good to Great approach)[4], William F. Massy (Massy model)[5], Jamie Comstock and Cathy Booker (Quality, Potential, Cost model)[6] and other models, as well as literature from scholars in the field of prioritization. It reviewed practices of institutions that had recently engaged in prioritization, such as East Carolina University, Northern Illinois University, Indiana State University, the University of Wisconsin, and the University of Cincinnati. After completing its review, the Task Force discussed best practices, met with University administrators of institutions that had recently completed program evaluation activities, and discussed methodological approaches best suited for implementation at Howard University.

Based on best practices and availability of the most reliable data, the Task Force determined that a period of three years was an appropriate window for data collection. Therefore, the Task Force decided academic and administrative units would be asked to focus on data from the previous three years (i.e., 2015-2018) for this program prioritization process, and units not in existence during this period were to be excluded from this iteration of the process.

In addition, based on its literature review, the Task Force recognized the importance of first identifying those areas that are key to ensuring Howard University is positioned for a successful future, irrespective of whether one is looking at the academic programs or the administrative units. It simultaneously recognized it was critical to respect the very real differences that exist between the academic and administrative arms of the university. It formed two subcommittees: an academic subcommittee and an administrative subcommittee. These subcommittees were responsible for identifying the key areas on which the program prioritization process would focus and subsequently identifying separate sets of administrative and academic key performance indicators.

Previous Academic Renewal Activities at Howard

Howard University has engaged in periodic activities for academic renewal. These include Howard 2000 under the leadership of President Franklyn Jenifer and the Presidential Commission on Academic Renewal under the leadership of President Sidney Ribeau. These past efforts are part of Howard University's commitment to continuous improvement of the University's academic programs. In continuing the legacy of improvement, the Task Force, for the first time, included an

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[3] Dickeson, R. C. (2010). *Prioritizing Academic Programs and Services: Reallocating Resources to Achieve Strategic Balance.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass Publishers.

[4] Collins, J. C. (2001). *Good to great: Why some companies make the leap ... and others don't.* New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers Inc.

[5] Massy, W. F., Sullivan, T. A., & Mackie, C. (2013). Improving Measurement of Productivity in Higher Education. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, *45*(1), 15-23.

[6] Comstock, J. & Booker, K. (2009). Self-Study Leveraging: The QPC Model for Comprehensive Academic Program Review. *Accountability and Organizational Leadership, 1,* 70-72.

evaluation of administrative as well as academic programs, ensuring a more comprehensive and inclusive process.

Drawing on insights from these past activities, the Task Force agreed to operate by consensus, whereby all members would have an opportunity to weigh in on all draft documents. Moreover, the Task Force recognized the value of being informed not just by program evaluation and assessment experts and recent experiences of other institutions, but also on the experiential knowledge of the Howard University community responsible for ensuring our students' educational experiences are indeed exceptional.[7] In the academic departments, these individuals are the faculty responsible for designing the curriculum, conducting research, and teaching courses, as well as the faculty administrators who lead the departments in which the academic programs are housed. In the administrative units, these are the staff members responsible for providing support to the academic units. Likewise, the Task Force recognized the importance of being informed by the experiential knowledge of the students we serve. Therefore, it developed a process that involved significant faculty, staff, and student input.

A Participatory Approach

The Task Force process was informed by a participatory action research model related to community-based participatory research. This kind of research approach places a researched population both in the view of the researcher and in the position of the researcher[8]. Specifically, the Task Force engaged in a systematic effort to incorporate community participation and incorporated community feedback during all phases of the prioritization process, from development of the evaluation process to data collection to program evaluation to post-evaluation recommendation development.

An advantage of using community-based participatory research to guide the Task Force's work is the added value of insights, expertise, and shared visions from the community. The Task Force benefitted from a chorus of voices to help establish processes for administrative and academic program review, to develop a robust methodology, to create data collection instruments, and to carry out the evaluation with the goal of facilitating good decision making.

After completing its review of literature and best practices, the Task Force identified mission, productivity, quality, demand (internal and external), and net revenue (a combined measure of revenue and costs) as the key areas that were most critical to evaluating the success of a particular unit--irrespective of whether that unit was academic or administrative. And for administrative units, efficiency was identified as a key area warranting consideration along with net revenue.

The academic and administrative subcommittees then formed teams, each with a charge of drafting key performance indicators (KPIs) to be used to evaluate each of these key areas. Each team

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[7] Liamputtong, P. (2014). Experiential knowing. In D. Coghlan & M. Brydon-Miller (Eds.), *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Action Research* (pp. 323-325).

[8] Wallerstein, N. B. & Duran, B. (2006). Using Community-Based Participatory Research to Address Health Disparities. *Health Promotion Practice, 7(3),* 312-323.

presented draft key performance indicators to their respective academic or administrative subcommittees for discussion. Following the discussion, the team revised their performance indicators based on feedback from the subcommittees. Both subcommittees agreed by consensus on recommended KPIs. Next, these recommendations were presented to the full Task Force, which, after discussion, also agreed by consensus to a final set of KPIs to be shared with the major constituent groups within the Howard community (i.e., students, faculty, and staff) for feedback. Finally, after a multi-month community feedback consideration and integration process, the Task Force agreed by consensus to a final set of KPIs that was ultimately included in the data collection instrument.

The Task Force decided academic programs and administrative units would complete a self-study and provide in it evidence and a short narrative related to each key area. The full self-study, a multi-page report of contextualizing information, would be entered into an online platform (Taskstream by Watermark) and submitted for review. Peer evaluators would then review each self-study and, after a site visit with the evaluated unit, score the unit on each key area using a rubric. These scores would then be shared in review panels, designed to help align and ensure consistency in scoring. Finally, in the interest of continuous improvement and looking ahead to future program prioritization efforts, a survey would be administered to capture faculty, staff, and student feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of the program prioritization process.

METHODOLOGY

Unit of Analysis

Academic Programs

For academic programs, all degree-granting programs (undergraduate and graduate) were required to complete a self-study. In addition, minors whose field did not also offer an undergraduate degree were evaluated. The following programs were either excluded from the process or evaluated under the structure of another program:

1. Minors that have an associated major (e.g., Mathematics, Physics, Accounting) were not evaluated. These programs operate with the same resources as their “holding” or “parent” degree, making an individual evaluation redundant.
2. Programs that were not in existence (i.e., new programs, and previously discontinued programs that were in the process of teaching out students) during the assessment period 2015-2018 were not evaluated.

Administrative Units

Administrative officers were tasked with identifying which units required individual reports and which units could be aggregated as one report. These decisions were largely based on unit mission and shared personnel. For administrative units, some subunits were excluded from providing an individual self-study report because they were included in the parent unit. As with academic programs, units that were not in existence during the assessment period 2015-2018 were not evaluated.

Key Area Definitions

Academic Programs

Mission. This key area is concerned with the extent to which (a) the program's activities are aligned with Howard University's mission, and (b) its goals are realistic, achievable, and consistent with the university's mission. Unit leaders were asked to describe the importance of the academic program to the fulfillment of Howard University's mission; provide a concise and clear description of how the program's activities advance the University's mission; provide evidence that demonstrates how the program's goals, outcomes, and activities consistently align with the University's mission; and provide evidence that demonstrates the program's ability to adapt to the changing needs of the University and its stakeholders.

Productivity. This key area seeks to capture the yield and performance of an academic program. Unit leaders were asked about indicators such as the number of degrees awarded; faculty research/scholarship, teaching, professional development, and service; and student publications and creative works.

Quality. This key area is concerned with merit or excellence, as determined by the discipline/field. Unit leaders were asked about indicators such as the credentials and accomplishments of their faculty and students, as well as program level quality indicators such as accreditation status, student retention, and student satisfaction.

Demand. This key area includes the internal and external market and attractiveness of an academic program. In short, how sought after is the program within Howard and outside of Howard? For internal demand, unit leaders were asked about indicators such as enrollment, cross-program collaborations, and importance of the program to other units on campus. For external demand, unit leaders were asked about indicators such as the number of applications, admissions rate, and labor market demand for the program.

Net Revenue. This key area combines costs and revenue associated with the program. Specifically, it seeks to capture the balance between how many resources (in dollars) the program produces and the total resources (in dollars) the program consumes. Unit leaders are asked about indicators of the amount of income generated by the program and the costs associated with delivering the program.

Administrative Units

Mission. As was the case with academic units, here again mission is concerned with the extent to which (a) the unit's activities are aligned with Howard University's mission, and (b) its goals are realistic, achievable, and consistent with the university's mission. Unit leaders were asked to describe the importance of the administrative unit to the fulfillment of Howard University's mission; to provide a concise and clear description of how the unit's activities advance the University's mission; to provide evidence that demonstrates how the unit's goals, outcomes, and activities consistently align with the University's mission; and to provide evidence that demonstrates the unit's ability to adapt to the changing needs of the University and its stakeholders.

Productivity. This key area seeks to capture (a) the yield and outcomes of an administrative unit, (b) the overall impact of the unit's work based upon a volume metric, and (c) unit performance relative to capacity and service goals. Unit leaders were asked to provide evidence the unit is measuring productivity and tracking it consistently, has a steady or increasing volume of work, is working efficiently, and is meeting or exceeding its self-identified productivity expectations.

Quality. This key area is defined in terms of how services are measured to confirm completion, delivery, and satisfaction; staff qualifications, experience, and access to professional development; and the unit's access to current technology and other resources. Unit leaders were asked to provide evidence that (a) it conducts regular and systematic assessment (including assessment of customer satisfaction) in a comprehensive way; (b) it uses assessment results for continuous improvement and to inform decision making; (c) it uses current technology to its fullest potential and all staff are trained for its use; and (d) its staff are sufficiently qualified with sufficient experience, and have access to professional development as budget allows.

Demand. This key area seeks to assess the level to which an administrative unit's services are needed by other programs or functions within the University system (internal demand), as well as the needs of entities outside the University system (external demand). Unit leaders were asked to provide evidence of: (a) internal demand (e.g., requests received from other HU units); (b) external demand (e.g., requests received from outside entities); and (c) the unit's capacity for growth and enhancement.

Net revenue. This key area combines costs and revenue associated with the unit. Specifically, interest is in whether the costs associated with delivering the unit's services are less than the income generated by the unit, whether the costs associated with delivering the unit's services are in line with comparable industry standards, and whether cost saving measures are put in place where available. Unit leaders were asked to provide evidence of and any contextual information necessary to enable the evaluators to properly assess each unit's net revenue

Efficiency. This key area concerns the degree to which human and technological resources are used by the unit to efficiently meet its goals. Unit leaders were asked to provide evidence of and any contextual information necessary to enable the evaluators to properly assess each unit's efficiency.

Data Collection Instrument

Organization

The data collection instrument was a self-study template, divided into four sections:

1. Section I provided instructions for completing the academic or administrative unit's self-study report.

2. In Section II, academic and administrative unit leaders described the unit and provided additional pertinent background information necessary to properly contextualize the unit during the evaluation process. For the academic units, this section also captured a complete list of the

department’s program offerings and concentrations, a narrative describing the academic program, and any additional background information on the program that authors thought evaluators might need to properly contextualize the program as they were evaluating it. All unit leaders were asked to provide detailed information on the makeup of the unit, which included the number of administrators, administrative staffers, and, for academic programs, a breakdown of the faculty by rank and type of appointment. This background was requested because it provides insight into the unit’s human resources and whether there exists the support needed to manage the program or provide administrative functions. In the case of academic units, it additionally provides insight into whether there exists the support needed to educate the students enrolled.

3. In Section III, Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) were organized within the five aforementioned key areas: mission, productivity, quality, demand (internal and external), and net revenue (costs/expenses associated with the unit; revenue/resources generated by the unit). For administrative units, efficiency was also assessed. Some of the KPIs were centrally collected by data stewards at the university and were provided to unit leaders, along with sources of that data. Other KPIs had to be provided by the unit leaders themselves, along with clear descriptions of data sources.

4. Finally, in Section IV, unit leaders completed a SWOT analysis. Typically, program prioritization analyses--whether quantitative or qualitative--are historic by nature. However, opportunity analysis includes a vision for the future, asking how the unit might be repurposed or reconfigured to achieve higher levels of productivity, quality, demand, and/or net revenue. Thus, in this section, space was provided for units to weigh in and provide a realistic statement of potential unit adaptation. Units were advised the intent was for them to: identify their own strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats; describe problems, challenges, and areas of improvement; and address adequacy of resources available to carry out activities to meet objectives and achieve goals. Further, units were asked to discuss potential benefits from program consolidation or new partnerships (on or off campus) that they recognized as opportunities.

Narratives

The Task Force recognized that quantitative data alone would not facilitate accurate program evaluation; therefore, opportunities to provide qualitative narratives were included in the data collection instrument. It was important that each program and unit was afforded the opportunity to provide contextual information on each key area and on overall program or unit administration. Additionally, each unit lead was asked to define disciplinary benchmarks for each performance indicator. Disciplinary-specific benchmarks were important for several reasons. First, faculty or unit leaders in each unit are the experts in determining discipline-specific or function-specific expectations, so they should have the opportunity to define benchmarks. Second, the self-study reports were to be reviewed by a team of evaluators from different academic or administrative units (i.e., faculty and staff evaluators could not review their own departments/units) to eliminate potential conflicts of interest, so the contextual statements and self-defined benchmarks were important in ensuring an accurate evaluation of the unit.

Inclusion of contextualizing statements and benchmarks afforded increased opportunity for program faculty and unit leaders to provide information to evaluators and was a unique part of the process. In many of the processes reviewed by the Task Force, quantitative data alone was used for program evaluation. However, the Task Force felt that quantitative and qualitative data were both critical, and that Howard University units should have a strong voice in defining the benchmarks by which their unit would be evaluated.

Software Platform

Taskstream by Watermark was selected to support the evaluation exercise. Already used by some units at Howard, Taskstream is one of the premier assessment tools on the market. The AMS version of Taskstream was selected because of its ability to host a workspace (template), be applied to multiple units and sub-units, and be limited to specific users for different areas. Taskstream was used in the following ways: (1) documenting/capturing units to be reviewed hierarchically; (2) mapping specific users onto those units, so that they could author or collaborate in the authorship of self-study reports; (3) entering data into the self-study template; and (4) using the Taskstream review feature that allows reviewers to evaluate self-studies against a rubric.

Process

Data Collection Plan & Instrument Development

Based on the findings in the review of literature, best practices, and our past similar efforts, the Task Force decided to use a design that would include program completion of a self-study, followed by peer evaluation of the programs. The Task Force was committed to designing the process rigorously and inclusively, with significant attention to engaging multiple stakeholder groups throughout the process.

Based on the charge, the Task Force identified which units to assess and which person within the unit to be held responsible for coordinating and submitting the unit response. Based on much discussion and subcommittee work, the Task Force identified the key areas on which to focus and the key performance indicators to be assessed, as well as how to structure and organize the instrument to be used for data collection (i.e., the self-study report template).

Rubric Creation

In addition to the data collection plan and instrument, the Task Force developed rubrics that could be used to quantify evaluations (i.e., assign scores to units) in each of the different key areas and to provide quantitative feedback on the SWOT. The rubrics were developed within Task Force subcommittees and then shared with the larger campus community. Some critical areas were evaluated with up to four dimensions, while others were only evaluated with one or two dimensions.

Community Feedback

Community engagement was central to obtaining feedback on the measures that were proposed by the Task Force for use in evaluating how well University programs and services were performing.

The Task Force created multiple spaces and mechanisms for campus community engagement, input, and feedback. Input from students and faculty within academic units, department chairs, deans, and staff within administrative units was critical to help uncover potential opportunities for improvement. Collaboration and engagement among various units and bodies proved invaluable for refining guiding inquiries and developing ways to evaluate data. This included input from student, faculty, and staff focus groups; town-hall style meetings and presentations; meetings with the Howard University Student Association (HUSA), the Howard University Staff Organization (HUSO), and the Faculty Senate; as well as a dedicated email that served as a centralized repository for comments and questions. All of this feedback enabled the Task Force to refine the instruments, metrics, and process. Moreover, the feedback enabled a balanced, inclusive process. Indeed, because of feedback, the Task Force moved from a program view to a wider view of academic and administrative excellence and University excellence.

Self-Study Completion

Once the data collection instrument and rubrics were finalized, each academic and administrative unit compiled a self-study report that addressed the effectiveness of its programs and units. Specifically, on October 1, 2018, the Provost announced the launch of the academic self-study completion process; and, on November 1, 2018, the Provost announced the launch of the administrative self-study completion process.

Unit leaders were told to submit their completed program/unit self-study reports to their respective faculty/staff for review at the end of fall 2018. Additionally, they were informed that following final submission, the report would be evaluated by a team of peer evaluators. Further, they were told evaluators would use rubrics to assess performance across a number of evaluative dimensions identified in advance by the Task Force.

The self-study reports were required by January 31, 2019. Following submission, the process allowed for a question and comment period--essentially aimed toward quality assurance/quality control--which allowed for discussion and clarifications. Those programs and units that were contacted were also given a chance to remedy any delay in submitting the report.

Engaging Unit leaders

Unit leaders were informed of their responsibilities in the Task Force process through email, college- and school-wide meetings, as well as monthly meetings with Department Chairs, Associate Deans, and the Council of Deans. The Task Force leadership team attended faculty meetings for all colleges and schools explaining the process and expectations related to the Task Force. For administrative units, the Task Force leadership team hosted an Administrative Program Prioritization Information Session to explain the process and expectations; and this information was subsequently disseminated by supervising administrators to their staff members.

In addition to receiving information on the process, unit leaders were also introduced to the Taskstream by Watermark software platform. In collaboration with CETLA, the Task Force leadership sponsored training workshops for all chairs and unit leaders. The training was reinforced by both video and printable training resources, available on the Provost’s website.

Completing and Distributing Data Sets

Though most of the data needed for the self-study was internal, some academic units required data that was captured through Enrollment Management, Institutional Research and Assessment, Human Resources, Development and Alumni Relations, and the Office of the Vice President of Research. This data was collected through a collaborative process between all offices and distributed to all academic units.

Where available, academic departments were provided data. This data included enrollment, salary, grant activity, and student-level data including incoming grades and SAT scores. Program and unit leaders were responsible for contextualizing all evidence, confirming the veracity of received data, and explaining how the evidence provided contributed to the program's or unit's ability to meet the spirit of each criterion.

Supporting Leads

In addition to online references and scheduled workshops, the Task Force offered round-the-clock support through email (taskstream@howard.edu and prioritization@howard.edu). Also, staff members made themselves available at all hours of the day to support any technical or content-related issues.

Submitting the Self-Study Reports

Self-study reports were submitted in the Taskstream system by unit leaders according to a schedule set by Task Force leadership. To make the process more seamless, word forms were created that mirrored the Taskstream template. Unit leads could collaborate with colleagues while writing their self-studies and then input the information in its final form. Once completed, the self-study reports were submitted for review.

Program Evaluation

For the final phase of the process, the Program Prioritization Task Force Evaluation Committee was formed to review and score self-study reports. The Committee consisted of two subcommittees: Academic and Administrative. Altogether, more than 50 volunteer staff members and over 100 volunteer faculty members hailing from all 13 schools and colleges served on the Task Force Evaluation Committee. More than 50 academic departments and over 40 administrative units were represented in this process.

The evaluation process was designed to incorporate numerous faculty and staff voices from across the campus, while efficiently reviewing all submitted self-studies. The process identified reviewers, matched reviewers to self-studies, and then established timelines and expectations.

Evaluation Committee

Evaluators were recruited from the Task Force, as well as faculty and staff who showed interest in being part of the evaluation process. Volunteers represented all colleges and schools and came from a variety of areas within the administrative units. Volunteers were invited via email and at various campus engagement activities. In total, 104 faculty and 53 staff volunteers agreed to review self-study reports against the accompanying rubric.

Evaluators were randomly assigned to three-person teams, each of which was tasked with evaluating randomly assigned academic or administrative units. Evaluators with faculty positions were assigned to academic units; evaluators with staff positions and faculty administrators were assigned to administrative units. Each team was then assigned to a set of units to be evaluated. Conflicts of interest were eliminated in the assignment of evaluators to units. Specifically, team and unit assignments were reviewed and adjusted where necessary to ensure that team members were not assigned to their own academic or administrative units.

Finally, evaluators were trained to review and score self-study reports against the rubric developed by the Task Force using benchmarks defined by the unit being evaluated. Specifically, each evaluator participated in a training session either in person or via zoom. The training was designed to explain the evaluation process, scoring rubric, and platform (Taskstream) for entering scores. Additional training material was made available online to support evaluators as they engaged in the review process. The Taskstream system afforded evaluators the opportunity to view all self-study reports online and log their reviews at their convenience. A helpline and dedicated email address were set up to support all faculty and staff evaluators through the process.

Review Process

When evaluators logged in to the Taskstream system, the self-study reports for their assigned units were made available for evaluation. All evaluators were encouraged to review self-study reports upon receipt to identify any areas of concern or need for clarification. By reading through the self-study report and giving initial scores, the evaluators could then more systematically identify self-study sections that deserved closer scrutiny or required additional evidence.

Evaluators were then asked to schedule site visits with each of the units. Prior to site visits, teams were encouraged to submit to unit leads the specific questions they wished to discuss during the visit. The questions were related to the narrative or evidence provided in the self-study. Unit leaders were expected to consider and prepare responses to team questions in advance of the team's site visit.

For each unit, the team of evaluators then performed a site visit. The site visit allowed the evaluators to view the unit's space and meet the unit leader (e.g., for academic units, the unit leader was the department chair, assistant dean, associate dean, or dean) in person to address any outstanding questions or concerns about the self-study report. Additionally, unit leaders were encouraged, where they saw fit, to introduce the evaluators to members of the unit's faculty, staff, and/or student body during site visits. Site visits were not meant to provide completely new information, but to clarify and contextualize information that was in the self-study report. The site visits also gave campus community members an opportunity to meet and learn about a unit, which they may not have engaged with before that point.

Consensus Team Summary Development

Following the site visit, team members updated their scores as they saw fit in accordance with what they learned during the site visit, and then scheduled a team meeting to prepare a consensus team summary statement explaining the basis for their scores. As the final scores for the unit in each of the key areas were averages of the individual evaluators' scores, there was no pressure to change a score or adapt a score to the consensus. The team summary was, in some cases, an alignment of both score and opinion. However, the team summary method allowed for contrasting opinions to be shared.

Review Panels and Submission of Scores

These draft team summaries formed the basis for a review panel process that put evaluation teams in a shared space to discuss their reviewed units and the scores that they assigned. The review panel was meant to allow evaluators to understand the way that other evaluation teams valued different forms of evidence. While not a traditional calibration process, the review helped to align evaluation teams with one another to ensure consistency in scoring. The discussion of the team summary during the review panel meeting served as an opportunity to speak across teams as to what evidence prompted individual scores. After the peer review process, evaluation teams had the opportunity to adjust their scores and their narratives.

Final Submission of Scores

After the review panel process, scores were finalized by evaluators and team summaries were submitted. The process gave evaluators an opportunity to give initial scores upon receipt of their assigned self-study and then modify those scores based on their site visits, team meetings and consensus statement drafts, and review panels. The process afforded an opportunity for evaluators to be reflective and reactive to new or clarifying information.

Task Force leadership was able to generate score submission reports within the Taskstream system in order to identify and send reminders to evaluators who did not finalize their scores within the system timely. Evaluators were contacted and reminded to finalize their scores in advance of the final submission deadline. These final scores were then averaged and reported to individual units, and their respective deans or cabinet members, along with each unit's accompanying consensus team summary statement.

Survey

At the end of the evaluation phase, an anonymous survey was distributed to capture feedback from stakeholders on the strengths and weaknesses of the program prioritization process, as well as to garner recommendations for future program prioritization efforts.

The survey was distributed to the following four key stakeholder groups: (1) faculty participating in the program prioritization process as academic peer evaluators; (2) faculty administrators, administrators, and/or staff participating in the program prioritization process as administrative peer evaluators; (3) unit leaders (e.g., department chairs, directors, associate deans, and faculty administrators serving as departmental chairs or directors) who were responsible for developing and submitting the self-studies; and (4) Howard University students, alumni, faculty, and staff. Survey questions included the following:

1. *Which of the following best describes your role(s) in the Prioritization process?*
2. *What do you see as the strengths of the Prioritization process?*
3. *What do you see as the weaknesses of the Prioritization process?*
4. *Finally, what are your recommendations for future Prioritization processes?*

The Task Force staff communicated the availability of the survey by sending targeted emails containing a live link to the survey informing key stakeholders about the survey. In addition, participation was encouraged via official HU Communications' electronic newsletters that were emailed to the entire Howard University community. In the official communications, live links to the survey were included as well.

The Task Force received a total of 133 responses to the survey. This included 46 academic peer evaluator responses; 35 administrative peer evaluator responses; 30 self-study author responses; and 22 responses from the broader Howard University community.

SCORES

Provided below are links to tables containing average evaluation team scores for each evaluated administrative and academic unit, as well as the evaluation rubrics:

Academic Program Scores and Rubrics
Administrative Unit Scores and Rubrics

In the tables, evaluated units are organized alphabetically and in ascending order. Specifically, academic programs are sorted first by college alphabetically, then by department within college alphabetically, and finally by degree program in ascending order. Administrative units are sorted alphabetically.

The names of the units are listed in the first column of the tables. Each evaluated unit's row contains the scores for each of the key areas, as well as for the SWOT. For academic programs, this includes scores for mission, productivity, quality, demand, net revenue, and the SWOT. For administrative units, this includes scores for mission, productivity, quality, demand, efficiency/net revenue, and the SWOT. Individual evaluators' scores are not presented; rather, the team average is given.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Academic and Administrative Program Prioritization process developed by the Task Force was designed to be implemented every few years. Following this inaugural process, recommendations were developed in order to inform future iterations. These recommendations are derived from two sources: 1) Task Force members, and 2) results from the aforementioned survey regarding the process.

Following full implementation of the process, the Task Force met to discuss the final report and to discuss recommendations for future iterations. Additionally, the Task Force reviewed the data from the post-process survey sent to stakeholders; 133 respondents gave feedback. The survey included questions related to a traditional SWOT analysis, thereby providing a long list of strengths and weaknesses related to the process. After coding the data gathered, the survey information was used to complete a TOWS analysis, which leveraged the SWOT data into actionable recommendations.

Recommendations related to the Academic and Administrative Program Prioritization process were organized into seven major areas. These include staffing and resources, organizational structure, campus engagement, data, instrument, technology, and timeline.

Staffing and Resources

Gathering a team that fully represents the University is a time-consuming task. The current process leaned heavily on voluntary hours of staff members not associated with the process to schedule meetings, manage communication, and support the process in an administrative role. Additionally, training unit leaders and reviewers on the Taskstream system and the instrument was a labor-intensive process done external to institutional job responsibilities. In the survey, faculty members indicated, that, because of slimmed or non-existent administrative staff, they struggled to collect and enter the information requested in the time that was given. Many faculty members discussed spending nights and weekends working on their self-study or series of self-studies because their day was filled with the normal duties of a department chair.

Recommendation: Consider hiring full-time and part-time support staff to support this continual improvement-oriented process.

A permanent position, or set of positions, focused on prioritization activities would help to ensure the process is well-orchestrated and does not siphon too much time from administrators engaged in its development or implementation. For example, this might involve creation of a permanent prioritization staff, or program manager position, responsible for shepherding the entire process--including participant recruitment, final report preparation, monitoring the implementation, assessing the process, and preparing for the next cycle. Additionally, a full-time hire would help to institutionalize the prioritization process. This permanent hire and additional support positions as needed could also help to ease the burden of the process for overextended chairs and program leads.

Organizational Structure

Task Force leadership suggested reconsidering the structure of the leadership team, including inviting additional members of the campus community to the earliest steps in the process. Having both administrative and academic leadership in the process was considered a strength of this process, and the diversity of the Task Force with regards to institutional role and discipline proved to be a great advantage.

Recommendation: Include a member of Office of Institutional Research and Assessment to act as an early liaison to the process.

Bringing both methodological expertise and an understanding of how an assessment and evaluative process can work into the larger culture and narrative of continuous improvement can make the process more balanced and productive. The Director of Institutional Research and the Director of Assessment can offer insight on data resources at the university and current trends in assessment and evaluation.

Campus Engagement

Survey respondents and Task Force leadership both commented that they were pleased with the level of campus-wide engagement that occurred during the process. Representatives from each college and school and the staff members from all major areas of campus contributed to the instrument creation and the evaluation process. The ubiquity of the process across campus was a strong indication of the institution's commitment to prudent use of resources and campus-wide involvement.

While students were included on the Task Force later in the process, some respondents suggested that more students should have had an earlier and more significant role in shaping the process. Additionally, students were not invited to serve as reviewers, but this decision may be reconsidered by later prioritization activities.

Recommendation: Provide earlier and deeper student engagement in the process.

Institutional support and communication were offered at each step of the process, which helped to make those reviewing and those reviewed feel more comfortable with the process. Additionally, the information provided on the Provost's website kept the University informed. However, a dedicated website designed to keep the entire campus community updated on prioritization and to organize and make accessible information regarding the process would be an even better tool for helping keep campus community members informed.

Recommendation: Implement and manage a dedicated interactive, dynamic website for the process.

While the Office of the Provost's website was a useful place to keep relevant information, the information was displayed alongside the other pages housed therein. Moving forward, a dedicated website should be created and managed that is linked to the Office of the Provost's website.

Data

Before the Task Force began their work, the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment did not exist as the center point for institutional research at the University. Centralized data was held and managed in a variety of departments and shared by request through a variety of data stewards with different levels of familiarity with best practices in institutional research. When data was provided to faculty members, many complained that the data was incomplete or incompatible with their internal numbers. A nascent Office of Institutional Research and Assessment was asked to aggregate and provide data packages from a variety of data points rather than from a single system that housed consistent and complete data.

Recommendation: University-housed data should be disseminated to unit leaders after completeness, consistency and reliability checks.

The Director of Institutional Research and their staff have created institutional dashboards and annual data packages that give department chairs immediate access to census day data. While there is still some work to do in cleaning data entry processes for data stewards across campus, the work of the Director of Institutional Research has already done much to satisfy this concern.

Instrument

Instruments used for activities like prioritization often suffer a series of challenges. First, an instrument-by-committee gives a variety of stakeholders a role in the instrument creation. Pet questions and individual preferences will often stretch the instrument into a larger instrument than is needed. However, an instrument created to serve all academic units or all administrative units must be necessarily large to cover the myriad idiosyncrasies of the units. Because of this, those completing the instrument may often feel that a question cannot or should not be answered by their unit. Frustration with these questions, even after being advised to leave them blank, left some respondents feeling that the survey itself was not a proper evaluation of the specific charge/mission of their unit or program. Additionally, the data-collection instrument was made more unappealing as it was nested in a technology many respondents and participants did not find highly user-friendly or intuitive. Finally, for academic units, chairs were asked to complete a self-study for each academic program (degree). For many programs, the data points regarding mission, productivity, quality, revenue, and SWOT were similar across programs. They felt the multiple self-studies were repetitive and a poor use of their time.

Recommendation: Future iterations should consider ways to evaluate an entire department, inclusive of its many programs, and to differentiate between departmental programs in a more effective manner.

Continual review of the program inventory and administrative organizational charts will ensure that this process can be equitably but efficiently applied to all units, minimizing repetition and maximizing data for improvement.

Technology

All technology can be challenging when first being onboarded. This is even more likely if the users do not want or have time to complete the task tied to the technology in the first place. The Task Force was relatively unfamiliar with the functionality of the Taskstream AMS system as it was used for the prioritization process. Respondents suggested that the technology was too confusing or bulky to use. In response to this early criticism, the Task Force created fillable Microsoft documents that could be used as a worksheet. Unfortunately, this attempt at easing the technology barrier created additional work for staff members who were then tasked with entering data on behalf of unit leaders who did not learn the technology.

The review mechanism in Taskstream did, however, create the opportunity for team reviews to occur in a systematic way that may not have been possible with other platforms.

Recommendation: University leaders should identify, purchase, and integrate the technology to be used far before the unit leaders are engaged in the process.

Participants suggested considering a technology platform that better meets the needs of the process. While Taskstream can be, and in fact was, used to complete this process, prioritization activities are not its primary function. It is primarily an assessment software platform. Additionally, this technology-heavy prioritization activity was the first at Howard that relied so heavily on a platform. Future processes should consider switching to a platform that is dedicated solely to prioritization and train administrators and users long before implementation.

Timeline

The most frequently discussed issue regarding the prioritization process was time. Survey respondents and those engaged in the process at every level suggested that both the amount of time given for tasks and the timeline itself (i.e., timing of deadlines) were problematic. While staff members were quicker to suggest that more time was needed to create a thorough self-study, faculty members suggested that the greatest challenge was working on aspects of the prioritization process at times that conflicted with University responsibilities. As many faculty members are on nine-month contracts, it can often be difficult to schedule a multi-month process that does not begin in the summer but does not end during a graduation or vacation period.

Recommendation: Consider careful planning so that deadlines do not interfere with major University events (e.g., graduation, final exams*).*

An important caveat to this is that after the timeline is established, all participants must be accountable to complete the process on time (e.g., unit leaders, evaluators). In the case of this process, the timeline shifted throughout the process to accommodate faculty and staff complaints that not enough time was given to complete the requests. This shift, however, pushed the process into busy faculty and staff seasons. A suggested timeline for future iterations follows.

Note: Campus engagement, training and communications are recommended to begin three semesters prior to evaluations.

Fall Semester (1 year prior to evaluations)

- (August/September): University Academic and Administrative Prioritization committee is appointed and begins to work with Office of the Provost to initiate process
- (October/November): Unit leaders (chairs, directors) are notified of evaluation timeline and provided a template for self-study report
  - University email blast
  - Email to deans, chairs and unit leaders

        - Announcements in appropriate meetings

Spring Semester

- (February): University communication
- (March): IRA provides preliminary University data (3-year retrospective data) to chairs and unit leaders.
- (April/May): Targeted workshop/training with chairs and unit leaders
- (April/May): Begin recruiting evaluators
- (May): Chairs are notified of due date for self-study reports (Dec 1)

Fall Semester (AAPP year)

- University engagement continues
- Email blast/reminders
- Training for new chairs (possibly covered in new chairs training)
- (October): Finalize evaluators, conduct evaluator training sessions (2 – 3 sessions)
- (November): Assign Review Teams
- (December 1): Self-Study Reports Due
- (December 1 – 15): Quality Assurance/Quality Control by Program Manager/Admin
    - Notify chairs/unit leaders of missing or incomplete information
    - Communicate to parent unit (deans, VPs) regarding missing reports

Spring Semester

- (January 2 – 15): Quality Assurance/Quality Control by Program Manager/Admin continues
- (January 15 – March 15): Site visits and Panel Reviews
- (March – April 15): Quality Assurance/Quality Control on Reviews and Scores
- (April 30): Final scores compiled
- (May): Final evaluation reports sent to Provost to be sent to deans/unit leaders

In considering timing of future iterations, members of the Task Force felt that programs should give an update on activities three years after scores are published, and that the first steps of the next iteration should begin (e.g., campus engagement activities, vetting of University-housed data).

CONCLUSIONS

The Academic and Administrative Program Prioritization Process improved on its predecessors by including an administrative component and purposefully engaging in a transparent and inclusive process. The purpose of this report was to capture the charge and process of the Task Force activities so that the scores assigned to units during this process can be contextualized and so that future iterations of a similar process can be improved.

The results of this process will be used as one piece of evidence in the University’s continued effort to be good stewards of resources, stay true to Howard University’s mission, and responsibly review program impact. This document and information herein will also be used to support accreditation efforts and provide evidence that the institution is periodically evaluating how its resources and academic/administrative portfolio reflect the mission and goals of the institution.

Middle States Commission on Higher Education

The Task Force effort and this document will support administrative actions that ensure the academic portfolio of the University is consistent with Howard University's mission and resources. Accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, Howard University has the responsibility to provide students with an exceptional learning environment. A hallmark of this objective environment is the regular and periodic evaluation of an institution's resources against its mission and considering its place in the larger landscape of higher education. The Task Force process engaged the University in a systematic and inclusive process by which Howard University evaluated itself against a set of dimensions determined by faculty, staff, and students.

The Task Force provides evidence to the MSCHE, discipline accrediting bodies like ABET and AACSB, the campus community, and external stakeholders that Howard University is invested in being a good steward of its resources and that reallocation activities are done in concert with campus-wide, mission-driven activities. The final Task Force document and subsequent administrative resource allocation activities that draw upon the information herein will be used as evidence for MSCHE Standard VI. Standard VI expects all institutions to provide evidence that the "institution's planning processes, resources, and structures are aligned with each other and are sufficient to fulfill its mission and goals, to continuously assess and improve its programs and services, and to respond effectively to opportunities and challenges" (MSCHE, 2020). While a variety of activities at Howard University contribute to the University's abilities to meet this responsibility, the process developed by the Task Force offers proof that the institution is both evaluating the use of its resources to meet its mission and goals and also engaging with the wider Howard University community to do so.

Contributing to a Culture of Data-Informed Decision Making

Engagement in the Task Force was a heavy lift for the faculty, staff and students involved. Inclusive and fully transparent activities often are. As instruments the Task Force developed were completed, two important things happened. First, the University recognized and responded to an immediate need for clean and reliable data. Secondly, the reflective nature of the Task Force process gave units the opportunity to think about their missions and goals and the way that they measure their ability to meet those missions and goals. These activities are at the heart of a productive culture of assessment.

For academic programs, the Task Force document required data that was not readily available to faculty. Information on student quality (GPA entrance exam), enrollment, graduation rates, etc. was not systematically and reliably sent to department leadership prior to the Task Force process. Ad hoc requests for those programs with discipline-specific accreditation and internal documents comprised most of what was known about student outcomes. On the eve of the Task Force process, Howard created the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment. The institutional research arm of this office provided much of the student level data needed for the Task Force. While not fully realized in time for this process, the momentum created from "data packages" has translated into an annual report for chairs that includes data similar to what was requested by the Task Force and has helped to fuel the student outcome dashboard now available on the ira.howard.edu website.

Second, the Task Force process helped all units (academic and administrative) to think about how evidence contributes to goal setting and measurement. While the Task Force did not focus on student learning outcomes specifically, academic departments were asked to think about the quantitative data for their unit, make sense of it in the context of their discipline, make sense of it in the context of their college or school, and make sense of it in the context of Howard University. These important steps are the hallmark of a productive assessment culture that redirects inquiry to improvement. Administrative units also were asked to wrestle with the applicability of notions like demand, quality, and productivity in their individual areas. For many administrative units, the Task Force exercise gave them the language needed to start reflecting on how to show that their units are efficient, effective, and mission aligned.

In Spring 2018, while the initial self-studies were being evaluated, the assessment arm of the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment implemented an institution-wide assessment process called the Howard Annual Assessment Process (HAAP). On what some may have considered the data-heavy heels of the Task Force process, the HAAP gave unit leaders the opportunity to design their own assessment, self-evaluate, and consider improvements based on that data. The prioritization process gave administrative unit leaders, in particular, a better sense of what kinds of data could be gathered and assessed in the HAAP.

In the larger context of Howard University's strategic plan, this process and its future iterations will greatly contribute to the ability of the University to enhance academic excellence, improve efficiency and effectiveness, and achieve financial sustainability.