

# **2022-23 Annual Report to the Faculty Senate from the Academic Program Review and Curricular Adjustment Committee (APRCA)**

## **Committee Charge**

Faculty Senate created the Ad-hoc Committee on Academic Program Reduction and Curricular Adjustments in October 2020 with the following charge:

- Focus holistically on PSU's collective future
- Ensure faculty participation in meaningful, inclusive, and formative discussions of curricular adjustments related to budget reduction
- Recommend principles and priorities based on PSU's values and mission, with an emphasis on applying a diversity, equity, and inclusion lens, and share these with OAA to guide decision-making
- Plan and implement transparent communications, including but not limited to periodic town hall forums on budget information, regular campus-wide emails, and a website or Google Drive for material, including data on which decisions about reorganizing or eliminating programs are based
- Solicit input and feedback from faculty, including but not limited to implementing surveys and arranging other forums for gathering input and suggestions. Ensure input and involvement from Deans and Chairs/department heads. Facilitate communication with and incorporate input from students, staff, and other stakeholders
- Plan and implement meetings and interactions (preferably with professional mediation), including but not limited to meetings of Colleges/Schools
- Assist, if requested by OAA or AAUP, in contractually mandated retrenchment hearings arising from elimination of positions as per Article 22 of the PSU-AAUP Collective Bargaining Agreement

In April 2021, Faculty Senate extended the charge of the committee to June 2022. In May 2022, Faculty Senate further extended the charge of the committee to June 2023.

## **APRCA Guiding Principles and Priorities**

In February 2021, as part of Phase 1 of the Program Review/Reduction Process (PRRP), the APRCA Committee crafted a set of Guiding Principles and Priorities (GPP) to complement the driver and value metrics formulated by the Provost's Program Reduction Working Group. Among other things, the GPP outlines the importance of communication, transparency, and consulting with stakeholders before making decisions.

1. Equitable and meaningful engagement of all stakeholders
2. Focus on student access, quality learning experiences, and completion
3. Our work will change; let's make it for the better
4. Research and data informed decision making
5. Seek feedback prior to decision making
6. Devote resources to the ReImagining process
7. Transparent process and open communication with all stakeholders

## **Committee Membership**

In 2022-2023, the committee had designees representing five key Constitutional committees, including Vicki Reitenauer (Steering), Mitch Cruzan (Budget), Peter Chaille (Undergraduate Curriculum Committee), Natalie Vasey (Graduate Council), and Joan Petit (Educational Policy Committee). The

committee also included five members appointed by the Committee on Committees: Jones Estes, Kellie Gallagher, Theresa McCormick, Michelle Swinehart (diversity advocate), and Derek Tretheway. In addition, four consultants were appointed by OAA: Sy Adler (through Winter term 2023), Vanelda Hopes, Amy Mulkerin, and Jeff Robinson (through Winter term 2023). J.R "Jones" Estes and Vicki Reitenauer co-chaired the Committee.

## **Committee Activities in AY23**

### **Recording PRRP Failures to Follow APRCA Guiding Principles through Faculty Senate Resolutions**

APRCA began the academic year following up on the June 13, 2022 motion submitted to, and overwhelmingly passed in, the Faculty Senate. Finding that OAA had not been upholding the Guiding Principles and Priorities in Phase II of PRRP, this motion, "[Foregrounding the APRCA Guiding Principles and Priorities for Program Review/Reduction Process](#)," requested a written response from OAA by September 16, 2022, identifying a detailed plan for how the Guiding Principles and Priorities would be upheld during Phase III of the PRRP. This motion also asked OAA to pause PRRP until APRCA and the Steering Committee could review, and the Faculty Senate approve, the OAA plan for incorporating the APRCA Guiding Principles and Priorities.

OAA made some adjustments to the PRRP timeline based on the passage of this Resolution but did not pause PRRP in order for Faculty Senate review or to approve its plan for the incorporation of the APRCA Guiding Principles and Priorities in Phase III. The plan was submitted to the Faculty Senate on September 30, 2022. Finding that OAA's plan for Phase III insufficiently responded to the June 13 resolution, APRCA, along with the Faculty Senate Steering Committee, submitted the motion "[Responding to the Provost's Program Review and Reduction Process Phase III Report and Calling for a Strategic Budget Process](#)." Senators overwhelmingly passed this motion on December 5, 2022. Specifically, Provost Jeffords' Phase III plan neglected to answer central questions, such as the range of options being considered by the deans and OAA for the five units under scrutiny; the process for decision making, including the benchmarks for successful proposals; and how such decisions will have moved PSU forward strategically in resourcing our faculty and academic staff to serve our students. Notably, as of this writing, neither Provost Jeffords nor President Percy has provided the information requested through this Resolution, despite the President's commitment to do so made during his regular report to Faculty Senate immediately following the passage of this Resolution.

### **Supporting Phase III Programs**

APRCA provided support to the five Phase III units as they wrote their Phase III reports and waited for decisions from Provost Jeffords by meeting collectively and individually with departments; inviting departments to express their concerns at monthly Faculty Senate meetings; pushing for transparency regarding decision-making; and pushing back on inconsistencies between the administration's rhetoric and actions.

### **Providing a Platform for OAA to Report on PRRP**

Provost Jeffords met with APRCA several times in AY23 to update the Committee on the PRRP and, in March, to report broadly on the outcomes of the Process for four out of the five units subjected to Phase III.

## Advocating for Long-term Budget Planning

APRCA continued the collaboration with the Faculty Senate Budget Committee that began in AY 2021-2022. Fluctuations in how the administration discussed PRRP, sometimes describing it as curricular reform (as reflected in APRCA's charge) and other times as a budgetary exercise (reflected in both oral and written communications from the Provost) are reflective of the challenges to faculty governance created by a fundamentally opaque budget model and an absence of meaningful and reliable transparency on the part of the administration.

## Participating in Renewed Efforts towards Shared Governance

In February, APRCA participated in the Faculty Senate Committee Conversations, hosting two conversations for Committee members and collecting members' comments through the survey developed by the Faculty Senate Steering Committee and officially reporting members' insights back to Steering.

## Critical Reflection towards Future Action (AY 2021-2023)

Near the end of Phase III of the PRRP (note: as of this writing, the outcome of Phase III for one of the scrutinized units, Conflict Resolution, has not been shared with APRCA nor made public), APRCA administered a survey to past and current Committee members, as well as a related survey to unit heads and faculty members of the 18 units targeted in Phase II and/or III of the PRRP, in order to surface insights and learning towards potential future activities focusing on curricular adjustments, program review, and/or program reduction. In all, nine past and current members of APRCA responded to the survey questions, either by completing the original Google form or providing comments directly in email form to the Committee chairs. Eight of these responses came from members appointed by the Committee on Committees, and one came from a consultant to the Committee from OAA. In terms of timing and length of Committee service, note the following:

- Two responses came from members who have served across all three years of APRCA's existence (i.e., AY21-23)
- One came from a member who served in AY21 and AY22
- Two came from members who served in AY22 and AY23
- One came a member who served in AY22 only
- Three came from members who have been serving in AY23 only

Of the 15 surveys returned by unit heads and faculty members, six of the respondents came from units subjected to only Phase II of the PRRP, with nine respondents representing units subjected to Phases II and III. Overall, eight respondents are faculty members, and seven are unit heads. From the units subjected to Phase II only, four of the respondents are unit heads, and two are faculty members; from the units subjected to Phases II and III, three are unit heads and six are faculty members.

Following the submission of feedback via the surveys and direct emails, the Committee chairs analyzed the data for themes. The full Committee met to discuss and confirm the themes and to make the recommendations included at the end of this report.

Among the themes that emerged across the groups are the following:

1. **Failure of the PRRP to adhere to the rationale put forth by OAA and to guiding principles set forth by APRCA.** In articulating her vision for the PRRP toward garnering the involvement of faculty through Faculty Senate, Provost Jeffords asserted that the purpose of this curricular adjustment effort was to stimulate and incentivize collaboration within and among units (including units from Colleges and Schools across campus), and that faculty involvement in that process

would be a key driver of the process. Not only was there a failure to facilitate collaboration across units, but the competition at the heart of the process as designed and executed by OAA set individual faculty within at least some units against each other (reported in a number of cases and ways) and set several units against other units across campus with which they hoped to innovate. This competition has been described as a form of “divide and conquer” that appeared to be fundamental to the administration of the PRRP.

2. **Deepening demoralization among faculty**, made progressively worse for the five units targeted in Phase III, and generalized beyond the additional units subjected to Phase II only. This demoralization has continued to erode trust among faculty in the administration, reflected in the cynicism lacing many of the comments, especially those from unit heads and faculty subjected to PRRP. Several respondents noted that PRRP will contribute to long-term faculty disengagement from which, they worry, the institution cannot recover.
3. **Wasted time, energy, money and goodwill**, with no virtually no material benefit identified as attributable directly to PRRP and much relational loss to show for it, including the loss of at least one faculty member who cited the stressors related to being in a Phase III-targeted unit as a key factor in their decision to renounce their tenure and leave the University.<sup>1</sup> In the view of respondents, the negative outcomes of the process far outweigh any positive impacts. Among these negative outcomes are the lost scholarship and focus on teaching that faculty in scrutinized units experienced as they necessarily turned their attention to saving their unit, a heretofore invisibilized cost named by several heads of scrutinized units. In other words, grant proposals and articles went unwritten and students were unrecruited or not retained, in addition to the sheer cost of the labor of faculty, staff, and administrators dedicated to this Process.

In terms of time, the University has squandered three years that could have been used in the generative and collaborative Process that was promised to the Faculty by OAA. The lack of a vision or strategic plan to guide PRRP from the beginning ensured that the outcomes would also lack vision and strategy, resulting in a lost opportunity to address the University's fiscal challenges in a strategic and comprehensive manner. Overall PSU is significantly *worse off* due to the random loss of faculty through retirements and resignations as well as the lack of any kind of strategic plan to revitalize the curriculum, with numerous academic programs (both those subjected to Phases II and III of the PRRP and not) hanging in the balance.

4. **The role of APRCA** has been complex, but there is a shared sense that APRCA was not able to fulfill its Faculty Senate charge as originally imagined. Instead, respondents from both groups commented that, at best, APRCA in its first year provided a platform for the Article 22 proceedings involving the Intensive English Language Program and generated a robust and aspirational set of Guiding Principles and Priorities. Beyond the first year, APRCA at best provided triage and sincere efforts at harm reduction for the various impacts of administrative decisions and, at worst, provided cover to the administration for a process that largely circumvented principles of shared governance.

### Themes Specific to Departments/Programs

1. Projected negative impacts on future enrollment, in part due to lost opportunities to pursue student recruitment by focusing critical attention on PRRP.
2. In some cases, APRCA helped Phase II and III units process and think through their reports.

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<sup>1</sup> During discussions about this report, an APRCA member noted that, as far as we know, no faculty members have been directly separated from the University due to administrative decision-making.

3. Trauma experienced individually and collectively, including but not limited to units subjected to Phases II and III
4. Exploitation of faculty labor, as faculty back-burnered scholarly projects and focus on teaching to respond to the demands of PRRP
5. Unit heads and faculty members identified that inconsistent and disingenuous application of dashboard criteria from Phase I (e.g., inclusion of revenue-generating units and exclusion of deficit-generating units from Phase II; utilizing non-weighted averages to calculate department/program metrics) contributed to the lack of trust and outright cynicism (expressed by both unit heads and faculty and members of APRCA).
6. Benefits to individual units: While the majority of comments from respondents of scrutinized units aligned with the themes identified above, there were a few comments that pointed toward limited benefits:
  - a. Several respondents from scrutinized units reported that being subjected to PRRP brought faculty together in strategic conversation and planning in ways that have led to positive outcomes in their units, including new curricular possibilities.
  - b. One department chair noted that their unit, which had recently completed a “regular” program review at the start of the PRRP, was able to use that review as the basis for their PRRP report, minimizing the labor required to respond.
  - c. While not reported in the surveys, APRCA learned that OAA "Re-Imagine funds" were helpful to some scrutinized units.

### **Themes Specific to APRCA Committee Members**

1. It has become clear to Committee members that, from the very beginning, APRCA was never in a position to meet its charge. In the absence of a formal strategic plan (or even a clear and collective strategic vision) to which curricular decisions could be (and should have been) tethered, there was no way APRCA could “focus holistically on PSU’s collective future” or “recommend principles and priorities based on PSU’s values and mission,” as two elements of APRCA’s charge read. Without a strategic vision, there could be no clear objectives for the PRRP, leading to an incoherent and inconsistent process.

APRCA also lacked the institutional standing to “ensure faculty participation in meaningful, inclusive, and formative discussions of curricular adjustments related to budget reduction.” In order to meet this aspect of its charge, APRCA (and the PSU Faculty) necessarily relied on OAA to create the conditions for this sort of faculty engagement, which never happened.

2. Loss of impact from APRCA in/on the PRRP in each successive year: After the creation of the APRCA Vision and Guiding Principles and Priorities, it became increasingly clear that what the statements called for would not happen. For example, APRCA repeatedly implored the administration to create the conditions for collaboration to occur across academic units and to facilitate campus-wide conversations as one aspect of these conditions, which never came to pass.
3. APRCA did continue to push for transparency and more reasonable timelines throughout the process.
4. Early APRCA work, such as the Guiding Principles and Priorities and the idea for early retirement options, were co-opted by OAA but never consequentially applied during the PRRP.

5. Questions remain about who was responsible for PRRP decisions. In APRCA meetings, Provost Jeffords frequently said that decision making was “up to the deans,” yet in campus-wide communications indicated that it was up to the Provost’s Office. The deans were largely silent in public settings about their role in the Process. APRCA members remain unsure of exactly where, how, when, why, and by whom decisions related to PRRP were made.

## Recommendations

After the significant and strong work done by the 2020 Summer APRCA Research Committee and the creation and adoption of the Guiding Principles and Priorities in 2021, APRCA’s role was limited to reacting to mitigate the damage of initiatives, processes, and timelines brought by OAA. In the words of a member of APRCA serving as a consultant appointed by OAA, “While there is often alignment on our challenges, there are differences in how to address them. More work could be done to have a joint vision on how to engage to address our challenges.”

Given that a regular program review process for all academic units was in place before APRCA and is apparently being revised, and given the continuing financial challenges facing the University, APRCA recommends the following:

- Even though the PRRP as advanced in these past several years nears its conclusion, we implore the administration to follow APRCA’s Guiding Principles and Priorities when engaging with units around budget cuts outside the PRRP (or any administrative budget-cutting initiative that impacts curriculum). Indeed, at the time of this writing, APRCA and Steering have learned of programs of study in danger of de facto elimination due to budget cuts, in what appears to be, in effect, a shadow PRRP.
  - To underscore our call to administration to suspend this practice, we have co-sponsored the “Resolution Urging the Administration to Join the PSU Faculty to Protect Students’ Pathways to Degree Completion” with Faculty Senate Steering Committee<sup>2</sup>, to be taken up by the Faculty Senate at its June 2023 meeting.
- We refer to Faculty Senate the following possibilities, relative to the role APRCA has played as an ad hoc committee with essential tasks that should be embedded and sustained elsewhere:
  - Adjust the charges of EPC, BC, UCC, GC, and any other relevant constitutional committees to operationalize elements of APRCA’s charge.
  - Create one or more constitutional committees (or other entities) to initiate an integrated approach to curricular changes, particularly when these are driven by budgetary constraints.
- We recognize a deep need for equity relative to where and how decisions are made in different colleges and schools. That is, PRRP has exposed the opacity around decision-making authority and whether that authority resides with (one or more) deans or with the Provost. As noted above, there have been discrepancies in the statements made publicly and privately by the Provost about this issue, and some of the deans, while not commenting publicly, have indicated in private conversations that this is a key issue for them, as well. Additionally, APRCA has observed that different colleges and schools are treated differently by OAA with regard to decision-making authority, which is clearly a violation of University and APRCA principles related to equity and fairness.
- We urge the Faculty Senate, through its constitutional committees and in its own and/or specially called meetings, to provide a platform for ongoing conversations about how review processes

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<sup>2</sup> As of this writing, the members of the Budget Committee, the Educational Policy Committee, Graduate Council, and the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee are considering co-sponsoring this Resolution.

necessarily impact curriculum and, thus, must be meaningfully considered and voted on by Senate bodies.

- One member of APRCA eloquently offered the insight that we need to develop mechanisms to share what we've learned from these processes and to intentionally build future plans from that learning. Using, in her words, "systematic foresight," we might not *only* critique and note the failures of processes like the PRRP, but also have a platform to celebrate the successes units realize from curricular revitalization that is fully grounded in shared governance. The Committee reminds Senate and the Faculty at large of the words of one of APRCA's first co-chairs, Rachel Cunliffe, who, during a Faculty Senate panel discussion about shared governance, noted that we have, at our peril, restricted shared governance to mean, at most, some shared input into solving problems – but that true shared governance requires shared power to name the problems in the first place. Through "systematic foresight" and other approaches based in systems and futures thinking, we may yet shift away from a reactive, conservative, begrudging interpretation of shared governance to a truly generative and promising one.

Finally, despite what we hope to be the impending conclusion of the PRRP, the Committee suggests that the Faculty Senate not sunset APRCA this academic year, given the continuing and contested curricular changes emerging through the current budgeting process. We urge Senate to extend the life of the Committee as, at the very least, a symbolic safeguard against further de facto curricular adjustments outside of shared governance processes, in hopes that future institutional changes, including the development of a strategic plan and the implementation of the recommendations above, will put PSU on a path of genuine shared governance going forward.

Respectfully submitted,  
J.R. "Jones" Estes & Vicki Reitenauer, Co-chairs  
19 May 2023