

To: Academic Council

From: Edward Balleisen, Academic Programs Committee Chair, 2014-15

Re: APC Activities, 2014-15

Date: April 13, 2015

Cc: Provost Sally Kornbluth; Vice-Provost for Academic Affairs Keith Whitfield;  
John Willis, APC Vice Chair and Incoming Chair

These reflections begin with an overview of APC's **purposes, organizational structure, and mode of operation**. Since every academic unit in the university eventually interacts with APC with regard to some issue or process, it seems useful to give interested Academic Council members an overview of the committee's charge and basic approach to its work. The document closes with brief reflections on APC's activities in 2014-15 and the impact of some adjustments to APC's structure this year, as well as a few suggested minor reforms.

## PURPOSES

The Academic Programs Committee (APC) has three basic functions, each of which involves the provision of advice to the Provost on pivotal matters relating to Duke's core academic mission:

- 1) Consideration of **external reviews of: units** (departments and university institutes), **newly adopted degree programs** (all such new degree programs now face a required probationary review, typically after the first three years of operation), and **joint doctoral programs** between units. (APC does not review certificate programs, nor the accreditation processes for professional schools as a whole).
- 2) Consideration of **proposals for new degree programs or the creation/contraction/termination/merger of major units** (such as departments or university-wide institutes).
- 3) Consideration of **major academic policy questions with salience for the entire campus** (these might involve such issues as the shifting landscape of online education at Duke and elsewhere; proposals for/reviews of major pedagogical experiments/innovations; assessments of signature Duke programs for undergraduates, masters' students, and/or doctoral students; the creation or reconsideration of major curricular frameworks; the academic dimensions of university-wide strategic planning; etc.).

## ORGANIZATION

In order to ensure that APC's deliberations incorporate faculty perspectives from across the university, the Provost and the Executive Committee of Academic Council (ECAC) collaborate in the selection of members from each of the professional schools, as well as a range of departments in each division of Arts & Sciences. The Graduate-Professional Student Council also has non-voting representation on APC. There are several *ex officio*, non-voting members from Duke's senior academic leadership.

Beginning in 2014-15, Provost Kornbluth expanded APC to 24 voting faculty members and 2 non-voting graduate student members. The Provost also instituted a new structure for APC, creating **two subcommittees of the whole**, each comprised of twelve faculty members, incorporating the same balance of schools and divisions, and one grad student representative. Each of the two subcommittees now meets once per month, and has the authority to act on behalf of APC as a whole. The full committee also now meets once a month.

Thus APC now meets three times a month during most months of the academic year, rather than every other week as in past years (though faculty members, aside from the Chair and Vice-Chair, still only have two meetings per month). The APC Chair now has an additional responsibility of ensuring comparable standards of evaluation across the two subcommittees.

The Provost typically appoints faculty members of APC to serve for three-year terms, with the Chair coming from the third-year cohort. When selecting an APC chair, the Provost again works with ECAC, and typically rotates the choice from among the broad divisions of intellectual inquiry in the university. One final adjustment in 2014-15 was the selection in January of a vice-chair (Professor John Willis of the Biology Department) from the second-year cohort. The Vice-Chair will become Chair the following year, and thus has an opportunity to observe the committee's work in preparation for taking on this role. She/he can also step in for the Chair in case of absence or conflict of interest. Our expectation is that this innovation will significantly reduce the steepness of the learning curve for new APC chairs each fall.

## MODE OF OPERATION

Typically, the two APC subcommittees now handle external reviews or new degree/unit proposals, while the full committee discusses broader policy questions. On occasion, however, scheduling difficulties have resulted in a subcommittee discussing a policy issue. The Provost also retains the discretion to ask the full committee to consider an external review or proposal for a new degree program or unit.

When undertaking the first two of its functions, APC receives the full documentary record concerning either the external review or the new proposal. These materials include the prior evaluation by the Executive Council of the Graduate Faculty (in the case of departments or joint

doctoral programs), or by the Masters' Advisory Council (in the case of professional degree programs.) The APC chair then appoints a "lead discussant." This faculty member reviews the materials especially closely and, in consultation with the APC chair, frames discussion questions for the head of the unit/program under review, or for the lead faculty members on a new program proposal. These queries furnish a starting point for the brief presentation by unit/program heads at APC, and subsequent interaction between the presenters and the committee.

During an APC meeting considering an external review or new proposal, the lead discussant is responsible for taking especially close notes. She/he then writes a draft resolution to the Provost, in consultation with the APC Chair, which encapsulates the views the committee. The committee has the opportunity to comment on the draft. After any further revisions, the committee votes on the final version of the resolution. These votes frequently take place electronically, though if several subcommittee members ask for an additional face-to-face discussion, the Chair will delay the vote until the next meeting of the subcommittee.

In the case of an external review, APC's resolution is provided to the unit/program concerned, and helps to inform any Memorandum of Understanding drafted by the Provost. In the case of a proposal for a new degree program or unit, the APC resolution, with the assent of the Provost, goes forward to the ECAC, for consideration by that body and then the full Academic Council, before final consideration by the Board of Trustees.

Before moving to generate a resolution, APC may ask for additional information from unit heads/lead proposers. In the case of new proposals, APC may also ask for minor revisions to the formal proposal, or send the proposal back for more substantive reconsideration and reframing.

APC also receives visitors to frame its policy meetings of the full committee. The Provost, Vice-Provost for Academic Affairs, and the APC Chair work together to set the broad agenda for these discussions. The Chair then works with the invited members of the university community to identify appropriate background reading materials and structure brief presentations to set up discussion. Typically the chair takes notes on these meetings, and where appropriate, solicits additional feedback from committee members. After the meeting, the chair often submits a memorandum to the Provost and the heads of relevant university units/programs, summarizing the views expressed/suggestions furnished by APC members and offering additional commentary, where appropriate.

## APC'S ACTIVITIES DURING 2014-15

In the current academic year, APC has considered (or will still consider) the following external reviews:

- The **Joint Doctoral Program in Religion** between the Divinity School and the Religion Department
- The **Duke Institute for Brain Sciences (DIBS)**
- The **Kenan Institute for Ethics (KIE)**
- The **Masters in Engineering Management (MEM)** in the Engineering School

APC also considered the following new proposals:

- The creation of a new **Department of Neurosurgery** in the Medical School
- A new **Masters in Quantitative Financial Economics**, from the Economics Department
- A new **Masters in Biomedical Sciences**, from the Medical School
- A new **Masters in Analytical Political Economy**, joint from Economics and Political Science
- A new **Masters in Environmental Policy**, offered at Duke Kunshan University

Policy discussions included (or will include):

- The unfolding **strategic planning process** for Duke as a whole (twice)
- The reconsideration of the basic framework for the **Duke undergraduate curriculum**
- Discussions for the creation of a basic **curricular framework for an undergraduate college at DKU**
- Developments in **online education** at Duke and elsewhere, including emerging approaches to “flipped classrooms” in STEM subjects
- The **Directors of Academic Engagement (DAE)** advising program for undergraduates
- Developments, challenges, and opportunities with **DukeEngage**
- An early assessment of **DukeImmerse**
- The evolution of the **Focus Program** for first-year students
- The Graduate School’s report on **Masters programs** at Duke
- Curricular and co-curricular dimensions of preparing **doctoral students for non-academic careers**
- The ongoing assessment of **Bass Connections**
- The ongoing assessment of **Humanities Labs**

One significant advantage of the new organizational structure for APC involves planning the committee’s policy-related agenda. Since the full committee meetings are now set well in advance, the Provost, Vice-Provost, and APC Chair have more of an opportunity to identify and prioritize a related-set of issues for the committee’s consideration, with sufficient time to navigate the challenges of scheduling visits from campus leaders.

For 2014-15, APC’s central policy concern has been to review various “signature” (or potentially “signature”) academic programs at Duke. A pivotal concern for the committee has been to explore how these programs relate to one another as well as Duke’s core missions. Our discussions have produced a wide array of suggestions to program directors and the Provost about how to further strengthen these programs and more effectively build linkages among

them. One issue that emerged across essentially all of the signature programs concerned the challenges of communication to key constituencies such as faculty and students in a world of information overload. A second overarching issue has been the case for incorporating graduate students more substantially into several of the university's signature programs.

The new subcommittee structure does place a significantly heavier workload on the committee chair and requires even closer coordination of scheduling with ECGF, MAC, and Academic Council. Because subcommittees meet only once a month, moreover, there is the ironic possibility that the new system could introduce new elements of delay, should a proposal require more than one committee discussion. On the whole, however, this organizational framework has operated well in its first year, allowing the committee more effectively to manage multiple issues under review at the same time, without sacrificing time for reflection, requests for additional information, or deliberation.

One important implication for APC process emerged from our discussion of the Graduate School's Report on Masters' Programs at Duke. In evaluating proposals for new Masters' programs, this year's chair recommends that APC consistently:

- encourage the proposers to lay out their specific understandings of what success for the new programs would entail, for inclusion in any APC resolution; and
- identify issues that the program administrators should monitor, and the sort of data that they should collect with regard to program outcomes – each specified, where appropriate, in any APC resolution.

This mode of proceeding would assist units in preparing for third-year reviews of new degree programs and longer-term reviews of new doctoral programs.

In the committee's discussions of graduate education at Duke this year, we have had occasion to note the quite different perspectives of doctoral students, on the one hand, and graduate/professional students, on the other. At present, the two graduate student representatives on APC are both doctoral students. The committee chair would like to recommend the addition of at least one non-voting graduate student member who would be pursuing a professional degree and would be at least in the second year of study.

The expansion of APC this year has resulted in an unusually large 1<sup>st</sup> year cohort (13 of 24 members). In subsequent years, as some members take sabbaticals in the midst of 3-year terms, this year's APC chairs suggests that the Provost should look to bring the three cohorts into numerical balance.