

Harriot College Committee on Resource Review

Final Report

AY 2021-2022

Recommendations for Resource Allocation

March 4, 2022

Submitted by

Cheryl Dudasik-Wiggs, Teaching Assistant Professor, English

Adriana Heimann-Rios, Associate Professor, Geological Sciences

Nathan Hudson, Assistant Professor, Physics

Donna Kain, Associate Professor, English

Nick Rupp, Professor, Economics

Ryan Schacht, Assistant Professor, Anthropology

Olga Smirnova, Associate Professor,
Master of Public Administration Program, Political Science

David Smith, Associate Professor, Foreign Languages and Literatures

Peng Xiao, Associate Professor, Mathematics

Executive Summary

This document is a follow-up to “Initial Recommendation Report: Addressing a Potential 3% Budget Cut,” which was presented to Allison Danell, Dean of the Harriot College of Arts and Sciences, on January 11, 2022. Our previous report focused on recommendations for addressing potential budget cuts. In this report, we provide additional perspectives on resource allocation going forward with decreasing resources to meet increasing needs. Although the previous report emphasized faculty lines, this report identifies areas of concern that should be considered in future decisions about resources. Recommendations include right-sizing unit budgets; investing in faculty in ways that are not all directly monetary; and managing academic challenges, such as DFW rates, that strain resources. We recognize that the pandemic has placed additional burdens on faculty, staff, and students that exacerbate problems and stretch resources precariously.

Background

At the November 2, 2021, meeting of Faculty Senate, Vice Chancellor for Administration and Finance Stephanie Coleman charged deans with gathering faculty input on University funding in the face of a potential 3% cut to the 2022-2023 budget. In response, Dean Danell created the HCAS Committee on Resource Review.

The ten-person Committee—which included faculty at all ranks and from various disciplinary areas of the College—considered strategies for meeting the potential 3% budget cut from the College. Todd Berry, HCAS Associate Dean for Resource Management, chaired the Committee.

The Committee was provided with documents and information about the College budget and funding models. The initial report was provided to the Dean on January 11, 2021; and the team was then charged with recommending specific resource allocation strategies for an adjusted potential 2% budget cut.

Process

After the Dean accepted the Committee’s initial report, Academic Council met with University deans and asked that they prepare a 2% budget cut model by February 18, 2022. This lower target would allow for saving 3.5 EHRA positions and 1 SHRA targeted for cuts in the Committee’s initial report.

The following documents and data were reviewed: HCAS annual reports for 2019-2020 and 2020-2021; enrollments by majors and minors; grant data 2017-2021; Enrollment Growth Funding Model; HCAS EHRA Vacancies as of November 23, 2021; SCH/FTE per unit (2016/2017-2020/2021); and Unit operating funds. The IPAR Business Intelligence Dashboard was consulted for additional information about DFW rates, and Associate Dean for Planning Eduardo Leorri provided suggestions and insights about concerns affecting productivity and budgets.

The Committee’s request to HCAS Chairs for specific information or individual departmental annual reports was withdrawn and ultimately deemed unnecessary.

Limitations

In the past year, the University has seen a seismic shift in leadership with the hiring of Chancellor Philip Rogers and Interim Provost Grant Hayes. In addition, the following retirements have been recently announced: Ron Mitchelson, former Chancellor and Interim Vice Chancellor for Health Sciences; Michael Van Scott, Interim Vice Chancellor for Research, Economic Development, and Engagement; and Virginia Hardy, Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs. Dr. Robin N. Coger will join ECU in July 2022 as its new permanent provost.

A 2022-2027 strategic plan has not yet been released by ECU leadership. Consequently, the Committee relied on the current plan known as “Capture Your Horizon” and the 2020-21 College Annual Report, the latter of which discusses overall College achievements, challenges, and ongoing plans to meet current goals.

Challenges and Recommendations

The Committee considered a variety of data in developing its recommendations. Members discussed at length the importance of considering units’ student credit-hour production, grant funding awarded, available F&A, and other factors. In the end, it became clear that the differences in disciplines reflected in types of research, teaching loads, course sizes, numbers of majors, General Education courses, and writing intensive courses taught make department comparisons untenable for purposes of allocating resources. How effectively departments perform their responsibilities, achieve the goals they set, and innovate in their collective work is a more realistic yardstick for determining resource allocation. The following recommendations are the result of our observations and discussions.

Ensure Sufficient Department Operating Budgets

The Committee suggests the College ensure that all departments can meet their basic needs. Some departments do not currently have resources to fund professional development for faculty, and resource allocations can be an important component of retention. Providing start-up funds for new faculty is also an important consideration as we seek to hire excellent colleagues. While some departments are more successful than others in generating grant funding, department and PI F&A allocations should not be part of determining department operating budgets.

Support EHRA and SHRA Personnel

The Committee is not making recommendations for specific faculty allocations. As noted in the initial report, we suggest that as much as possible, funding for personnel should be allocated for EHRA tenure-line positions. To meet the College’s goals, tenure-line faculty are essential for growing productive graduate programs, generating and increasing grant expenditures, and leading change in undergraduate curricula in line with the College’s and University’s strategic goals. (See HCAS 2020-2021 Annual Report)

The Committee was united in recommending that Unit Administrators, who know best their staffing and budgetary needs, meet collectively with the Dean to discuss allocation of faculty

lines. Unit administrators can then confer to also suggest strategic hires, such as the current search for an interdisciplinary one in Sociology and African and African American Studies.

The Committee further recommends that discussions of teaching loads and course enrollments continue at the department and the college levels. Departments should consider implementing or reviewing differential teaching loads and the related issue of course enrollments. Low-enrolled courses may be necessary when majors need specific courses to complete degrees. However, low-enrolled courses may also under-utilize faculty depending on those educators' other job responsibilities and teaching assignments.

Use of contingent faculty

The Committee is concerned about the College's increasing reliance on temporary instructors to combat course bottlenecks. While occasionally needed to fill unexpected "holes" brought about by the sudden departures of tenure-stream faculty, buyouts, or other unforeseen needs, short-term appointments bring with them a set of potential problems.

Teachers hired for one or two classes may lack commitment to the University, as these professionals often need to supplement their incomes by carrying a high teaching load at multiple locations. These instructors may also feel disconnected from their colleagues, lack access to affordable healthcare and retirement, and be unfamiliar with assistance available to students and employees.

The majority of fixed-term faculty, professionals who have been with the University for many years, do not have job security. Many do not have multi-year contracts, and all contracts contain the following language:

Notwithstanding any other provision of this agreement, if at any time during the term of your appointment funds are unavailable to the Department for any reason...your appointment may be terminated by ECU immediately, and upon such termination ECU has no obligation to make any further payment to you. In addition, in lieu of termination, the University may elect to reduce your assigned FTE (a reduction in work hours) with corresponding reduction in pay, if any of the above-referenced contingencies result in the elimination or curtailment of your assigned teaching duties following course(s) cancellation(s).

Faculty governance and academic freedom are weakened when a high number of instructors lack the protection of tenure and a voice in their own professional futures.

Committee members recommend providing increased job security for non-tenured faculty by awarding additional competitive multi-year contracts and paying a living wage. Job stability improves program effectiveness, which can lead to an improvement in student retention and "finish in 4" graduation rates, two metrics critical for state funding models.

The current teaching load for full-time, fixed-term appointments is 4/4. Offering each high-quality instructor, the option of teaching one additional course for additional pay would help relieve the bottleneck for general education courses without increasing the University's reliance on temporary faculty.

Reduce Bottlenecks and DFWs

Students experience some delays in their progress toward degrees when they run into bottlenecks in sequential courses, in required courses, and in "preferred/popular" courses. In General Education courses at the 1000- and 2000-levels, the number of sections is often insufficient for broadly required courses, such as MATH 1050 and 1065, ENGL 1100 and 2201, and entry-level Foreign Language courses. Enough sections of lower division General Education courses required for large numbers of first-year students should be provided so they are able to enroll. Course sequences in these and other areas are similarly impacted. Courses that are popular choices to fulfill the variety of GE requirements—particularly in Sociology, Psychology, and Biology—often have waiting lists for multiple sections, and more sections cannot be offered because faculty are not available.

Faculty attrition reduces the number of instructors available to teach courses.

Available lines are used to hire temporary and/or fixed-term faculty, but some units are still not able to offer sufficient sections of high-demand courses.

DFW grades are a strain on the system

DFW grades are problematic not only because they affect individual students adversely. They create a strain on the system by increasing the need for seats in classes when students must retake them; they increase students' time to graduation, and increase students' need for additional academic support. According to the HCAS 2020-21 Annual Report, from 2017-18 to 2020-21 "DFW rates at 1000 and 2000 level courses dropped from the low 20% range to the low to mid-10% range." However, DFW rates across the college increased sharply to 25.2% in fall 2021, though rates are not consistent across all units/courses. For example, DFW rates for 1000-level MATH courses (42.6% for MATH 1050, 54.8% for MATH 1065), ENGL 1100, and 1000-level language courses are higher than the College average (data from [IPAR Business Intelligence Dashboard](#)). The 2020-21 academic year was the height of the pandemic, and students were opting for Pass/Fail grades that would have artificially adjusted the DF rates. From 2020 to 2022, the pandemic has had a significant negative impact on learning and consequently DFW rates. One result of the uptick in DFW rates will be more students needing to retake courses in the short run.

However, the DFW problem can't be solved in the long run by adding fixed-term and/or temporary faculty only. The following should be considered:

- Ensure that instructional resources and support are available.
- Ensure that dedicated facilities such as the CAVE and the Writing Center are functioning efficiently, served by effective leadership, and addressing the most important needs of the College and its students.
- Promote and better advertise these resources to students, advisors, and faculty.
- Request that advisors suggest alternatives, when appropriate, for GEN ED courses that fill quickly, particularly when another choice might serve a student equally well or better. For example, MATH 1050 or PHIL 1500 may be better choices than MATH 1065 for students whose majors do not require MATH 1065. Advisors could actively steer

students into open sections of social science, science, and humanities courses instead of adding students to waiting lists for “popular” courses.

Invest in Employee Morale

In this committee’s many conversations with faculty and staff during the resource review process, we found it increasingly clear that employee satisfaction within THCAS and across ECU is low. Reported sources of frustration include increased workloads due to staffing reductions, limited and infrequent raises, uneven workloads, and unequal access to resources across departments. The committee recommends that the College strategically allocate some resources to increase employee morale and retention.

- Recognize service more appropriately. Service is an area in which work is not always balanced but for which the tasks continue to become more complex and time-consuming. The college should re-evaluate the ways service is valued and should be recognized in the Tenure and Promotion process.
- Personalize career paths for each employee. Considering existing skills and interests would help clarify expectations, provide a sense of direction, and ensure appropriate career progression.
- Award additional support for teaching and research/creative activity, such as those for course redesigns or research achievements, that help faculty further the University’s mission driven goals.
- Provide resources such as professional development funding and/or opportunities for faculty and staff, making sure they are available in all departments.
- Providing resources to avoid salary compression so tenured and promoted faculty are compensated at higher levels than newly hired assistant professors.

Increase Diversity to Address the University’s Goals

Diversity, equity, and belonging are increasingly important and part of every conversation about student recruitment, retention, mentoring, and success. Accordingly, increasing the diversity of ECU’s faculty is fundamental to attracting students from groups that are underrepresented in the student population compared with the population of the state and our region. Increasing the diversity of our faculty is also consistent with The University’s mission “To be a national model for student success, public service and regional transformation.” Recruiting faculty and staff that reflect the diversity of North Carolina will enhance students’ sense of community on campus and help students succeed in their degree programs and in a multicultural society.