

## **ACADEMIC PROGRAM QUALITY AND DELIVERY:**

### **CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

#### **University Resources Planning Committee Report, August 2009**

The historic and rapid economic decline of 2008-9 will affect the University of South Alabama for years to come. The record decrease in state funding and significant losses in endowment accounts are leading to record budget reductions across the University. In response to this economic challenge, we have taken several actions to control costs and replace lost revenues. Since the largest component of the University's budget consists of personnel costs, a major focus has been to reduce the university's payroll, including the size of the full time faculty. To date, we have been able to achieve these reductions through normal attrition as faculty members have resigned or retired. Given the size of the budget reductions, and the likely slow pace of economic recovery over the next several years, it is very likely that the ratio of students to full time faculty will increase over time.

USA thus faces the challenge of delivering quality academic programs to an increasing number of students with fewer resources. Over its history, USA has grown in complexity and mission, with increasing emphasis on graduate education, research and outreach. A major challenge for the next decade will be to continue to deliver high quality instruction to a growing student body, while advancing graduate education, research and service.

Across the nation, universities are recognizing the long term impact of the economic decline and the necessity of improving efficiency in the delivery of academic programs. Likewise, USA must develop more efficient strategies for the deployment of our instructional resources for the faculty to devote significant portions of time to research and service.

Another major change in higher education is also having a transformational effect on academic program delivery. The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) and the discipline accrediting associations have shifted from an input model to an output model as the basis for program assessment. For many decades, academic program quality was measured by the quality of inputs. Factors such as number of faculty, faculty qualifications, instructional resources, facilities, technology, and the quality of students admitted were examined to determine the overall quality of academic programs. Over the last decade, accrediting agencies began shifting to assessment of learning outcomes or competencies (outputs) as the major factor in evaluation of program quality. The major focus on assessment of learning has, and will continue to have, a major impact on the design and delivery of academic programs.

Addressing the impact of the combination of limited resources and the focus on learning outcomes will require transformational changes in the structure, delivery, and assessment

of academic programs. This is a daunting challenge but one that presents great opportunities for the University academic community to work together to develop systems that will continue to provide academic programs of high quality. Since its founding in 1963, USA has experienced substantial growth and improvements in quality due to the outstanding efforts of its faculty. It is important that we respond to current challenges creatively and intelligently, and that we maintain or enhance the quality of our work. It is important to address this challenge across the organization and establish sound principles to guide our planning and decision making as we develop, implement, test and refine new methods of delivering academic programs:

### Guiding Principles

1. Continuously improve the quality of academic programs;
2. To the extent possible, maintain the present proportion of effort devoted to teaching by the faculty so as to provide the necessary time for faculty research and service responsibilities;
3. Make changes incrementally with ongoing evaluation relative to academic quality and cost effectiveness;
4. Adopt new technology primarily in cases where program enrollment can be increased or program delivery costs can be reduced;
5. To the extent possible, standardize technology with respect to student use.