

Scenario 1: Valuing the Graduate School and Its Mission

In February the School of Graduate Studies at Morgan State University was asked to lead a “deep dive” into a variety of issues that appeared to constrain the School and create barriers to our success. In a meeting to be attended by representatives of all the major divisions of the University, the Dean was to lead a discussion, assisted by the President, of the major issues and potential solutions to these problems. During the planning stages, the Provost and the Dean’s Council identified critical areas of concern and developed a two page list of topics. The Deans Council refined the items into four agenda topics. They were as follows: 1) Admissions Processing; 2) Funding: Financial Support of Graduate Students; 3) Teaching Assistantships and Graduate Assistantships; and 4) Graduate Community and University Engagement.

A morning session was scheduled and more than 100 key individuals attended, including deans, chairs coordinators vice presidents, and other stakeholders. A comprehensive overview of the School occupied 25 minutes and covered staffing, organization, responsibilities, enrollment trends, graduation trends, and so forth. Details of the admissions process occupied half of the remaining time; and the funding discussion occupied the other half. Long prior to this deep dive, we had been reconfiguring both the admissions process and funding allocation method, so the deep dive provided an opportunity to introduce these new structures in the guise of problem solving. The new admissions procedures had already been implemented with the Spring admissions cycle (i.e., the previous Fall), and a new versus old comparison could be illustrated. The major issues experienced in the previous method had been addressed by the new model.

In the funding phase of the discussion, we unveiled the new funding process. Previously, we carefully parsed our rather limited funds and assistantships based on program requests, with an eye toward equitable distribution. Unfortunately, this totally opaque approach had been impossible to illustrate. We had been accused of being inequitable, playing favorites, slowness, convoluted, and so on. We also had numerous direct requests from students, faculty, and other divisions. The new model explicitly requires the deans to assign assistantships and tuition funds on a roster and submit the roster to the Graduate School. Now Deans would know the exact number of assistantships and number of available funded credit hours is allocated to the schools. Each dean has the direct responsibility for assigning awards. There now seems to be a heightened urgency to secure more external funding that includes graduate RA support and to devise more TA opportunities.

Needless to say, the other two topics were not addressed in the deep dive. However, the synergy from the event has led to high level discussions of the structure of assistantships. We also have a much improved reputation. In the six months prior to the event, more than half my time was devoted to these two major processes.

Scenario 1 Focus Questions for Discussion:

1. The opportunity to make a presentation to a large audience of University Administrators, Staff, and Faculty is quite unusual, but it had a significant impact. How might this opportunity be created without Presidential directive?
2. The agenda was ambitious, and it was critical to start with the most challenging. However, the issues of assistantships and, especially, community stature of graduate programming need serious attention. What approach could be taken to keep the conversation moving forward?
3. What other topics have university-wide appeal? Would a similar venue work as well in addressing them?

Scenario 4: Managing Policies

The following policy/procedure has been the source of much aggravation due to some vague language and an appeal path that is different from the undergraduate norm.

11. APPEALS

Appeals concerning academic progress such as academic sanctions or academic dismissal, must be addressed in writing to the Chairperson of the department of the degree program (i.e., according to the lines of authority, typically department chair or comparable unit head) who, in consultation with the Graduate Coordinator/director (i.e., appropriate unit head), and/or program committee will review the appeal and prepare a report and written recommendation for review by the College/School Dean. The College/School Dean shall submit a written recommendation along with the report and recommendation of the Chairperson to the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies who shall make the final decision regarding a student's appeal. Appeals must occur within one (1) year of the effective date of the dismissal or sanction. Appeals concerning the imposition of a penalty for academic dishonesty (Section V, below) are to be made in accordance with the procedures described above.

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This Catalog statement has been used to appeal an array of sanctions and program decisions including: language requirements, comprehensive examinations, failure of a dissertation defense, charges of academic dishonesty, program dismissal, grade disputes, and so on.

Rarely do the various stakeholders follow the path and prescriptions it requires.

Scenario 4 Focus Questions for Discussion:

1. Does the existing statement outline a procedure that ensures due process?
2. What is needed to make the process more specific and less vague?
3. Should the statement clarify what can be appealed (for instance, can the Graduate Dean alone review an academic judgment or evaluation?)