Seattle University is undertaking a comprehensive review of its programs and operations. This review is part of a set of activities are intended to position the university for continued academic excellence and financial sustainability within a changing and challenging environment. Other activities include the development of new academic programs, finding ways to increase non-tuition revenue, and developing stronger financial planning and management tools.

Preparatory work in summer 2015 included a Council of Deans (COD) review of models for academic program review in higher education. The Council discussed two well-known processes for academic program review in higher education:

- The “Dickeson Program Prioritization Model” – a process of measuring academic programs against a broad set of criteria, quantifying those results within an “omnibus metric” then using the results of that process to place programs into categories determining whether the program would be grown, maintained, reduced or eliminated.
- A process designed by the Education Advisory Board (EAB) and outlined in an article entitled “Breaking the Tradeoff between Cost and Quality: Sustaining Mission in an Era of Constrained Resources.” This approach focuses as much on activities as programs, and is intended “to enhance quality by reallocating resources from lower impact activities to higher-impact mission aligned priorities”. This work includes reviews of five instructional cost drivers: section fill rates, course enrollment, course completion rates, curricular complexity, and faculty course load.

The Council of Deans (COD) determined that the EAB model appears a to be better fit for the Division of Academic Affairs at Seattle University, and that it holds greater potential to identify resources within the division to reallocate in support of strengthening the academic quality of the university and support its strategic aims. The COD came to agreement to move forward on a model that both incorporates the EAB analysis and systematically assesses operational performance at the college, school and university levels. The COD agreed to call this process an “Academic Affairs Operations and Portfolio Review,” a moniker intended to capture the comprehensive nature of this endeavor.

In October 2015, the Provost charged a Planning and Design Committee (PDC) to design a process that responds to direction from the Board of Trustees, respects the time invested by stakeholders, ensures careful consideration is given to the information coming from all participants, and reflects the fact that academic excellence is and will remain the most essential component of our success as a university.

(See appendix for the Message from the Provost and list of PDC members.)

The PDC recommended a process to the Division of Academic Affairs in late February and requested feedback by March 18, 2016. There are a few key points that the PDC made stakeholders aware of as they reviewed the proposed documents and templates.
• This process differs from the EAB model in that EAB looks exclusively at factors driving faculty instructional workload. Our process broadens that approach by addressing scholarship, creative work, and service. Our process also examines staff workload and includes those offices, departments, centers and institutes that are part of Academic Affairs but do not offer academic programs.

• The process recommended by the PDC has multiple phases, beginning with a school/college level analysis of operations and workload. Information from this analysis informs subsequent parts of the process, including scenario planning, an academic program portfolio review, and the full divisional review. This creates a longer process but allows for the work to be done in ways that are appropriately sequenced and allow for thoughtful review at all stages.

• As this review process developed, it became clear that most of the analysis will be done at the school/college and university levels. This is in part because the analysis involves comparison of workload and resources across different units. It is also in part because differences in the organization and culture of the nine schools and colleges makes it more difficult to apply the same review process at the department/program level across campus.

• Because of the above, the PDC believes the program/department template needs to accomplish two things. First, surface any information relating to faculty and staff workload that is not produced through central sources (the most obvious example is that the university has better data regarding faculty instructional workload than workload relating to scholarship and service). Second, provide an opportunity for the department/program to express anything it believes to be material to this review, including any particular challenges it faces and particular or unique contributions it makes to the mission and operations of the university.

• This review has to be informed by both the data and information relating to the operations of the Division of Academic Affairs, and by an understanding of the limitations of this data and information. An important aspect of this process will be an ongoing dialogue among the producers, the consumers and the subjects of any data used in this process, with the intent of: 1) finding ways to clean and improve data where possible, and 2) developing a stronger shared understanding of both the value and the limitations of our data. Part of this work will be to identify where data should be customized to make the review work more effectively for each school and college.

• One important consideration in this review is what information – both data and completed reports and templates – should remain confidential and what should be made available to faculty and staff. The PDC endeavored to strike the appropriate balance such that this process is transparent while allowing for a rigorous and candid process that it does not put any stakeholders in unfair or untenable position.
Colleagues:

Many of you are aware that, at the direction of our Board of Trustees, Seattle University is currently conducting a comprehensive review of all non-academic departments and offices, and that we intend to undertake a comparable process across our academic areas over the course of this academic year.

I recognize there is significant interest and curiosity regarding this upcoming activity. The purpose of this message is to provide you with some general information regarding the purpose and process of this work. At the close of this message, you will also find an invitation to an open forum at which I, and members of the committee planning and designing this process, will be available to share additional information and discuss any questions or recommendations you may have.

The most significant work done to date to prepare for this process took place at the Council of Deans (CoD) retreat this August. At this retreat, the CoD discussed two models for academic program review in higher education:

- The “Dickeson Program Prioritization Model” – a process for measuring academic programs against a broad set of criteria, quantifying those results within an omnibus metric, then using the results of that process to place programs into categories determining whether the program would be grown, maintained, reduced or eliminated.
- A process designed by the Education Advisory Board (EAB) that is intended “to enhance quality by reallocating resources from lower impact activities to higher-impact mission aligned priorities.” This work includes reviews of five “instructional cost drivers”: section fill rates, course enrollment, course completion rates, curricular complexity, and faculty course load, and focuses as much on expenses across programs as those within programs.

The CoD determined that the EAB model appears to be a better fit for the Division of Academic Affairs at Seattle University, and that it holds greater potential to identify resources within the division to reallocate in support of strengthening the academic quality of the university and support its strategic aims. The CoD came to agreement to move forward on a model that both incorporates the EAB analysis and systematically assesses operational performance at the college, school and university levels. The
CoD agreed to call this process an “Academic Affairs Operations and Portfolio Review” – a moniker intended to capture the comprehensive nature of the review.

Following on this work by the CoD, I have appointed a team charged with building on the general EAB model to develop specific processes, timelines and templates. The members of this team are listed below.

While specific timelines have yet to be developed by this planning team, I expect an overall framework that includes planning/design through fall quarter, any work done within departments and programs to take place winter quarter, and summary reports from deans to be developed in the spring. While this work is underway, a parallel process will take place across those areas outside of the schools/colleges but within the Division of Academic Affairs. The University Library, Advising Units, Centers and Institutes, the Office of the Provost and those offices reporting to it will participate in this comprehensive review. I have committed to provide to the president my recommendations in time for the results of this work to be presented to the Board of Trustees in May.

Why has the Board of Trustees directed the university to undertake this work? In brief, Seattle University – like higher education more broadly - is in an environment that is changing with increasing speed. These changes present challenges; including demographic and economic factors that constrain enrollment and tuition growth, and changes in technology and the market that increase the cost of maintaining an effective infrastructure to support teaching and learning. They also include opportunities, such as growth in demand in new fields of study and new populations of students who seek to access a Seattle University education. This work is part of a broader set of activities, including development of new academic programs, finding ways to increase non-tuition revenue, and stronger financial planning and management, intended to position the university for continued academic excellence and financial sustainability in this changing context.

I want to thank you in advance for engaging thoughtfully in this important work. I commit to you that we will endeavor to develop a process that is respectful of the time we ask from you, that gives careful thought and consideration to the information and ideas that you put forth, and that makes use of this information in a manner consistent with my belief that academic excellence will continue to be the most essential component of our success as a university.

As the design and planning team moves forward in its work, it will inform the university community in greater detail regarding processes and timelines. As we move into implementation, the Deans will play a key role in planning for and communicating with each school or college. If you are interested in the opportunity to hear more, and comment on, this upcoming process, I invite you to join me and the members of the planning and design committee at a forum on Monday, November 9, 2015 from 2:00 – 3:00 p.m. in PIGT 101.

Sincerely,

Isiaah Crawford, Ph.D.
Provost
Members of the Planning and Design Committee:

David Madsen  
Associate Professor, History

Deanna Sands  
Dean and Professor, College of Education

DiDi Galligar  
Assistant Provost for Business & Faculty Administration

Heather Geiger  
Director of IT Finance & Accreditation Officer

Michael Huggins  
Associate Professor, Nursing

Robert Dullea  
Vice President for University Planning / Vice Provost

Robert Duniway  
Director of Institutional Research

Roshanak Roshandel  
Associate Professor, Computer Science & Software Engineering

Susan Weihrich  
Associate Dean and Associate Professor, Albers School of Business & Economics