

Ad Hoc Committee on Yardley Research Group Draft Report

Report to the Faculty Senate
January 30, 2007

Preamble:

On November 7, 2006 the faculty Senate passed a resolution to have Professor Mark Taggart, Chair the Faculty, appoint an ad hoc committee to review the Yardley Research Group Draft Report and issue a report on their findings to the Faculty Senate. In response to that motion, Professor Taggart appointed a committee formed by Edson Justiniano (Thomas Harriot College of Arts and Sciences), chair, Martha Alligood (School of Nursing), Charles Coddington (College of Technology and Computer Science), Thomas Huener (School of Music), Dan Schisler (School of Business), and Nancy Zeller (College of Education).

The committee met several times both synchronously, in face-to-face meetings, and asynchronously, by e-mail. Further, the committee received input, both verbally and in writing, from several members of the faculty. This document summarizes the findings of the committee.

Introduction:

The Yardley Research Group Draft Report (Yardley Report) was produced in fulfillment of a March 2006 contract with the Vice Chancellor for Research and Graduate Studies at East Carolina University. The purpose of the work was to conduct a strategic assessment of the University's doctoral programs.

Two members of the Yardley Research Group visited East Carolina University during the week of April 2, 2006, when they conducted interviews with administrators and faculty. Faculty input for the Yardley Report was limited to interviews with chairpersons and directors of graduate studies of the 18 programs participating in the study. The interviewees were instructed to bring to their interview a short questionnaire providing background data on their program (see Yardley Report pages 83, 84). Additional data was gathered from ECU institutional sources and in many cases these were used rather than those provided by the deans or directors responsible for the programs.

The Yardley Research Group issued their 217-page report on November 5, 2006. In addition, they visited ECU on November 16/17, 2006, to meet with administrators and faculty.

Findings:

In the view of this committee, the Yardley Report is deeply flawed. Although, it offers a handful of useful insights in ways to enhance the effectiveness of current doctoral programs as well as to ensure the orderly growth of future programs, it grossly misrepresents the achievements and potentials of our current programs.

Certainly, one issue on which this committee is in full agreement with the Yardley Group is in its identification of the very negative impact that the statewide prohibition of duplicating programs causes to relatively young and fast developing universities such as East Carolina University. We also share with them the concern over the imbalance between program development and availability of financial and infrastructure resources at East Carolina University. The Yardley Group suggests that East Carolina University is positioned to be the driving force behind the economic development of eastern North Carolina and our committee full heartedly endorses this concept.

Where, in our view, the Yardley Group "got it wrong," and to some extent very wrong, was in their evaluation of our current graduate programs. Several factors might have contributed to this coming to be the case. The committee was very concerned by the fact that, at least at the program level, there was no self-study evaluation taking place in advance of the Yardley Group review. Lacking a self-study, and given the paucity of program data gathered by the Yardley Group in their questionnaire, the reviewers did not have a comprehensive enough vision of each individual program to reliably place them in an appropriate context within the comparative cohorts. Even the identification of the comparative cohorts became in several cases at best questionable, in others totally inappropriate. A self-study would have guided the process by identifying areas that could benefit from an external review and the appropriate quantifiable data that should have been used in the comparative metrics.

Another factor that contributed greatly to the discomfort felt by the East Carolina University faculty in general, and this committee in particular, in regards to the Yardley Report was our perception that the reviewers overstepped their boundaries of expertise. One would probably be justified in finding somewhat presumptuous the detailed advice given in the report regarding specific research areas that individual programs should target for development. It is the opinion of this committee that the reviewers lacked not only discipline specific knowledge that could inform their suggestions but also a practical understanding of the academic environment.

Along the same lines, we fail to see a justification for some of the recommendations in the report regarding the area of program funding. Also needed is an analysis of the consequences that would result from these recommendations. For example, our committee is concerned with proposals in the report that would lead to eliminating graduate assistantships from professional programs as we fear that this could prove fatal to their ability to attract qualified students. Furthermore, graduate assistantships, even in professional master's programs provide very important, affordable support for the faculty in fulfilling the university missions of teaching and research. Although, in general terms,

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we fully endorse a more strategic approach to funding, we remain cautious toward what is suggested in the Yardley Report. The model proposed in the report could easily become too skewed towards a top-down approach to planning. It is, in our view, very important that a vigorous bottom-up participation must also be encouraged and that the recommendations arising from this process should be given considerable weight in the further stages of the overall planning progression. In other words, the faculty and administration working together must arrive at the optimal balance between strategic and programmatic needs that will ensure the sustainable growth of graduate programs at East Carolina University both in quantity and, most importantly, in quality.

Conclusion:

In the view of this committee, the Yardley Report is too flawed to be of much use informing any of the many strategic choices that are needed to guarantee the continued growth, in both quantity and quality, of graduate education and research at East Carolina University. Although it is undeniable that graduate programs at ECU are being negatively affected by an insufficient level of institutional resources assigned to their support, we do not believe that the recommendations found in the Yardley Report provide the needed roadmap to the solution of this problem.