Approved by FCAS on 01/08/16

FCAS ABB Recommendations & Rationale

"Fostering collaboration in the 21st century" is one of the central initiatives in the university's Sustainable Academic Business Plan.

On behalf of the Faculty council on Academic Standards (FCAS), the Activity-Based Budgeting (ABB) Review Ad Hoc Subcommittee has completed a review of the impact of ABB on the curriculum and pedagogy of the program on the Seattle campus of UW since ABB's implementation. While ABB-based funding allocation appears to work well as a means of budgetary allocation and reference, of particular concern was how it has impacted the status of collaboration across the campus. We were an ad hoc group that included faculty members from a variety of colleges and schools and staff from undergraduate academics and a student representative. We surveyed deans and chairs via a targeted email invitation to participate; responses from advisors were solicited via the advisor's listserve. Five (30%) deans and 30 (26%) departmental chairs or program directors responded; 41 advisors also responded to our survey. In addition a number of faculty contacted us directly to discuss their experience with the ABB program. Also, students came forward from three colleges/schools to give their impressions of the ways in which ABB-based funding allocation influenced curriculum.

The following summarizes our primary findings followed by our recommendations and our concerns. Our intention is to provide suggestions for refining the ABB program in order to build transparency in budget allocations and foster increased support for teaching and learning as well as collaboration, while productively addressing the negative impacts of implementation.

We hope the President and Provost as well as the Board of Deans and Chancellors will seriously consider our report as they refine ABB Phase II.

Summary of findings:

- ABB-based funding allocation appears to work well at the college or school level from the deans' perspectives as it is relatively transparent and can be reasonably tracked. Advantages and disadvantages of ABB emerge most clearly when it is applied at the department or program level. In extreme cases, ABB has been turned into a point system that penalizes faculty who teach small classes (for pedagogical or curriculum reasons). Additionally, ABB-based calculations can impact departments and programs even when not applied directly at that level in a number of ways as described below.
- We found far-reaching negative effects on curriculum and the undergraduate and graduate experience, particularly in the size of courses and curriculum content. One chair's comments summarized our overall findings: "The number of unique courses was reduced, and [we] now have more shared courses across specialties and more core courses that are now large lecture courses. " Even though it was not the intent, curricular change in response to ABB is the reality and the University must address these negative effects as they impact the quality and breadth of education offered.
- ABB currently encourages an atmosphere of territoriality to the detriment of collaboration. In implementation it discourages working across colleges, by discouraging faculty from offering joint and cross-discipline courses as well as students from taking courses outside their major department and/or across college/school. In practice, ABB discourages cross-listing and joint courses.
- ABB is not well understood by many chairs, directors, advisors and faculty members, and it is implemented in significantly different ways across the campus

Recommendations

1. Recommendation: ABB-distributed fund allocations should prioritize support for teaching and learning.

- Rationale: ABB funds do not appear to be appropriately supporting teaching and learning, as reflected in the number of large lecture courses without adequate teaching assistants, the increase in the student-to-TA ratio in writing courses, and the decrease in small seminar style courses.

2. Recommendation: Broader pedagogical activities not reflected in Student Credit Hours (SCH) should be recognized in ABB-based funding allocations to Colleges/Schools as well as Departments.

- Rationale: SCH do not measure the value and quality of teaching, and yet they are the dominant factor in directing funding at the undergraduate level.

3. Recommendation: Provost and President urge Deans/Directors/Chairs to not apportion funds based solely on ABB scores. ABB score should be one component that influences funding decisions within a College/School, but other aspects must be considered.

- Rationale: When funds are predominantly distributed by ABB score, there is an incentive to base curriculum decisions on funding rather than pedagogy/curriculum. Most programs need increased funding due to decreased budgets overall. Many programs have focused on increasing SCH and/or degrees for funding reasons as opposed to curriculum reasons.

  Though not intended, ABB scoring, as a system, encourages larger courses and more general course content as opposed to small discussions, seminars, and upper level directed courses.

3a. One approach might be to establish a minimum as well as a maximum percentage of departmental/program budget based on that department's ABB-score contribution and those funds should support quality in teaching and learning. (We suggest a minimum of at least 25% and a maximum no greater than 60%, but a separate faculty-led investigation should be initiated to determine the appropriate values.)

> Department and programs that received 0% ABB-score-based budget allocations were not always adequately supported for their teaching activities. There are numerous instances of faculty in departments experiencing larger class sizes without seeing any direct benefit to the Department from this extra work. Having some amount of "ABB-related pass-through" will encourage faculty teaching efforts by demonstrating a reward for that effort. This should have a positive effect on faculty teaching performance and morale.
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> Those departments/programs with 100% ABB-score-based budget allocations were concerned that factors other SCH and degrees were not being accounted for nor valued. These departments/programs were, consequently, making curriculum decisions based on SCH and degrees rather than pedagogy. This is particularly evident in the fact that ABB score calculations do not account for resource-intensive courses such as laboratories and W-courses.

3b. Another approach might be to refine ABB to take into account parameters other than SCH and majors/degrees and/or create a system that does not rely on a single ABB-score. (See #3

below.) While we understand that simplicity in how the ABB-score is determined is useful, a single score can lead to "gaming" the system. We suggest that a faculty-led team investigate this possibility further.

3c. Also, to address the delayed response in ABB-based allocations (an increase in this year's SCH and degrees increases ABB funds next year), retaining some funding at the College level for distribution at the Dean's discretion would allow the Dean to respond to short-term needs, such as higher than normal enrollment in a course, by providing additional teaching support such as TAs or graders.

4. Recommendation: ABB credit should always be allocated to the department that provides the course instructor without regard for which unit is mapped as the "owner" of the course or with which unit it is jointly or collaboratively managed.

- Rationale: When ABB-based funds are allocated based on course mapping rather than on the instructor, there is disincentive to collaborate across departments or to share teaching across disciplines.

5. Recommendation: ABB-based fund allocations should prioritize support for teaching assistants. Guidelines for when TAs are appropriate, given class size and format, should be determined at the college/school level through discussions with college councils, curriculum committees and chairs/directors.

- Rationale: Some large lecture classes do not get appropriate TA support**.** Funding TAs improves teaching and learning for undergraduate students in larger courses and supports mentoring of graduate students as teachers.

6. Recommendation: Large courses offered by a department that (combined) generate half or more of the department's SCH's should be regularly reviewed by an appropriate body at the college level (possibly the college/school's curriculum committee). This review should consider such information as level of support (students per faculty and/or students per TA), course ratings and "challenge and engagement index" (from the course evaluation results).

- Rationale: Larger courses are an inevitable side-effect of ABB, especially larger courses offered at the lower division and for non-majors. While increasing enrollments in specific courses is not necessarily bad, increased enrollments that are not accompanied by increased support/resources (TAs, graders, etc.) can lead to a decrease in the quality of the course (as evidenced by such metrics as course evaluation ratings and the "challenge and engagement index"). This possibility is a problem that needs to be addressed in order to maintain the academic value of the course(s).

7. Recommendation: College/School councils should regularly and systematically monitor and assess ABB allocations. SCPB should review the allocations and applications on an annual basis.

- Rationale: ABB can serve as a more stable and predictable source of income and resources; however, this is only true if there is clear and consistent data and analysis. This approach would encourage faculty on College councils to better understand ABB and budget allocations.

8. Recommendation: Central funding should be available to directly support interdisciplinary and dual degree programs as well as collaborative courses to encourage cross-disciplinary programs and courses.

- Rationale: ABB-based allocations, as currently implemented, discourage collaboration across colleges and encourage an atmosphere of territoriality. This creates a disincentive for dual and interdisciplinary degrees due to the complexities of sharing resources.

Concerns

With new scheduling guidelines that will place some courses into less optimal time periods, the SCH of some units may drop due to formerly large courses being scheduled outside of times considered "ideal" by students. Data should be collected on the effects of the expanded "prime time" and how it impacts ABB scores.

There appears to be an increase in number of programs, particularly in professional schools, offering undergraduate majors that overlap/compete with existing programs. ABB effectively encourages schools and colleges to create new stand-alone degree programs that compete with existing programs elsewhere, rather than collaborative programs. (See Recommendation #8.) A world-class university should encourage collaboration across disciplines as reflected in the following statement: "Fostering collaboration in the 21st century" is one of the central initiatives in the university's Sustainable Academic Business Plan.

The weighting factors for ABB calculations may not be optimal at the current 60%/40% (SCH/degrees) for the undergraduate level and 20%/80% (SCH/degrees) for the graduate level. These weightings should be re-examined, especially in light of their effects on the offering of and getting credit for "service" classes. A higher SCH weighting factor encourages service classes while too low a weighting value (as evidenced by the 20% factor at the graduate level) can make service courses for students in other departments impractical.

The type of faculty we hire can be impacted by ABB-scoring, with increases in temporary instructors, who can be easily (and inexpensively) re-assigned to respond to student demand. Hires should be based on curricular needs, but increases in the number of temporary faculty have potential long-term impacts on curriculum and continuity.

The increasing frequency of courses with minimum enrollment requirements is of concern. For example, minimum class sizes larger than a degree cohort (formal and informal) can negatively impact curricular decisions and time-to-degree. This can lead to the teaching of core courses less often (possibly every other year) or expanding them into larger courses that do not cover the materials with the same depth.

ABB-based funding distribution may result in reduced diversity of graduates. There are few incentives to spend resources (faculty and staff time) on riskier students (first generation college student, low-income students, etc.), which may result in longer times to graduation or even students dropping out.