

This is the body of a message that Paul Drake sent to the faculty in May 2007. It discusses the philosophy of a great university and its relation to statistics used for performance. (rbr)

What matters in a great university is achieving greatness. This is true in the abstract, it is a real motivation for those of us who take on these tough, tough jobs, and it is truly necessary for long-term success.

Greatness in research is how we change the world for the better and how we make seminal contributions to human knowledge. Greatness in teaching is how we prepare and motivate the young to take on the most challenging work they can do. Greatness in service, on all levels from departmental to international, is how we steer our world, or the World, toward better functioning.

But great students do not come to us because our units are profit centers according to some particular Byzantine method of counting dollars. Great students do not come to us because we teach well, although at the graduate level they do care about the depth and breadth of the program we offer. Great students come to us to work and study with the smartest possible people. In other words, they come to us because of greatness in research.

Research is the engine that drives the train. Its most important outcome is not to make money -- just as the engine does not make money -- but rather to create and sustain a great institution that attracts great students.

As a result, the department's self-image, how the department evaluates its faculty, and how the College evaluates the departments should be focused on achieving greatness in research, teaching, and service. This is the right thing to do, in the long view. You as chair should take every opportunity to celebrate and communicate the fact that most of our senior faculty are major international figures in their areas, and to encourage our younger faculty as they pursue over time this level of prominence. Taking the long view, our intellectual prominence is a strong reason to retain us as a department.

Surely administrators must make the books balance, and over time this may lead to a variety of difficult decisions. But making the books balance is neither victory nor defeat in the battle that matters. If at some point the College decides that we do not add enough value, it can make some kind of structural change. The fact that we've gotten 5 faculty hires in the past 2 years indicates that such dire prospects are far from imminent. But in any event that is not our problem. *AOSS should focus on greatness in what we are now organized to do.*

As an administrative operation, the College needs indicators to help understand its operation. One would hope that they might be better designed than the present indicators are. My view is that one of your jobs as department chair is to focus on interpreting the indicators in the context of your own department. Every department is different, and small departments are very subject to special circumstances and to the statistics of small

numbers. When you provide numbers to us, and when you speak to the College, I urge you to set the numbers in context and relate them to the task of achieving greatness.

Regarding the present indicators, they are scoring schemes that reflect poorly designed data gathering and presentation methods. To my mind their intent is sensible, but as implemented they are intellectually worthless. Some specific comments follow.

It would maximize our \$/FTE score to never hire a non-senior research scientist, because such individuals do not have the job of bringing in money yet they appear in the denominator of this indicator. However, our non-senior research scientists add enormously to our intellectual breadth and depth, and they are the means by which we accomplish great things. As I've pointed out before, if I succeed at landing either of the two Centers I am working on, this will lower our departmental score in this indicator while raising that of other departments. This is a demotivating situation, but I ignore it as best I can. My goal is greatness, not compliance with the implications of ill-designed tools. You, as chair, should have the better number ($\$/(\text{Money raiser})$) in your head, in your emails, and on your viewgraphs.

It would maximize our SCH/(T&TT) score to downgrade or eliminate our graduate and undergraduate programs so they needed much less teaching, and to devote ourselves to service teaching that the College gives us credit for, if we could find it. One must devote substantial resources to sustain high-quality graduate and undergraduate programs. Achieving greatness at this should be our first priority and should be what the College expects of us. The service teaching we do do in LS&A is also a very important contribution to the University. Providing all students with exposure to and experience with scientific and engineering work is part of achieving greatness as an institution. This is true whether or not the College recognizes it. You as chair should be prepared to make the case, in the various relevant contexts, that we are seeking greatness in our teaching.

The certain implication of our small size is that most of our courses will produce far less SCH than do the courses in the big departments. It is certainly worthwhile to improve our programs and attract more students, as we have been doing during recent years. But we should not undertake excessive measures just to score well on this indicator. Again, we should be great. That's what matters.

The design of the Ph.D.'s/FTE indicator is truly destructive in giving no credit for students who are supported and advised in graduate Programs or in other departments. The deans claim to value interdisciplinary work, which certainly is consistent with our times, but this statistic as designed strongly promotes departmental fiefdoms. At present, AOSS would not score well anyway, because nearly a third of our faculty are untenured faculty in junior ranks, just beginning to build their research programs. But beyond that, we are a very strongly interdisciplinary place. Several of us have no sensible choice but to often work with graduate students who are not enrolled in the AOSS graduate program. We do this because, given the research we do, it is the way to find students who are motivated to do the type of work required by our research, and who are excited by the jobs that it naturally leads to. This is part of the quest for greatness in our research. You

as chair should be digging out the total number of graduate students involved in the department and communicating the results.

Greatness matters far more than statistics. I believe that the present deans have the capability, if given the necessary information and context, to interpret the information in context. (I am rather more doubtful about this regarding the previous Dean.) Your job, for all of us, must be to provide that information and context to the deans.