

UHCN Article
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Rational allocation of resources is one of the scariest issues facing UH. To manage resources, an institution needs to set priorities, assess progress, and follow through on the incentives it sets to achieve its objectives. Clearly, the scary part of this scenario is to assess progress. To be successful at elevating UH to Tier One status, however, we need to bite this bullet. Yikes! We all appreciate the fear that comes from being judged— no matter whether we are being judged by our peers, administrators, or even by ourselves. Given our institutional priorities, however, we need to overcome our fears, and formulate realistic goals, and judge them against the resources expended.

Why are we so fearful of being judged? At least one part of the fear is apprehension over consequences. If we are judged as not doing as well as expected, we fear a decline in resources, and an attenuation of growth. On the other hand, consider the alternative. If we always judge ourselves as being excellent, why should we receive any new resources? Further, how can we aspire to improve without acknowledging shortcomings? Thus, if we can develop trust within the various elements of the institution, we can also make rational allocation decisions. Trust means understanding that making good choices is better than making politically motivated choices. Because while politics change with administrations, clearly following the path to Tier One is a longer run path over many administrations.

It appears that UH no longer has any choice, we need to make effective decisions. We are now responsible for the level of resources at our disposal, through locally generated revenue. But part of our mandate is to be cost effective for students, and given the competitive environment for higher education, we must be attractive to strong students to facilitate our desired institutional growth. Thus, UH cannot just “do everything,” we need to allocate resources to their highest and best uses.

So, how do we make good allocation decisions? We need to measure output, and progress, and we need to get used to the resulting judgements. We have already taken the first big step, which is the data collection effort for the Scholarship Report that is in preparation right now. This report has a lot of data, and some important stories to tell. There will be pockets of academic weakness. How will we, as an institution, respond?

First, to understand if, and why, there is weakness, we need to understand the resource commitment. Thus, the parallel to the scholarship report is an Expenditure Report to show how UH spends its funds by functional, or management, categories. The Senate has asked for such a report, which would show expenditures on tenure track faculty, other faculty, other personnel, total expenditures on graduate students from all sources, and other operating categories. The purpose of expenditure data by functional categories is so that UH can understand where it has been putting its resources, and determine whether that expenditure has yielded the hoped for results. Without an understanding of the resource commitment, a Scholarship Report will not be a useful management tool.

The corollary to the discussion about research output and dollars is that allocation decisions to improve the campus need to be taken explicitly. If we are going to hire 400 new faculty over the next decade or so, we need to allocate those new faculty to departments, and there needs to be a plan to do so. There will not be a consensus over such a plan (no department will get all the new faculty!), but as long as the criteria by which new resources gets allocated is explicit, and can be understood, then the campus community will get behind the plan. Conversely, if allocation decisions are made arbitrarily, or even worse, if allocation decisions are made randomly (unfortunately we have a past!), then there will be significant discontent. Fortunately, UH is at a crossroads, and we have the commitment from the Regents, the administration, the faculty, and even the students to push our campus forward into Tier One.