November 7, 2012

To: College Deans and Associate Deans
    Department Chairs

From: Donald J. Para, Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs

Subject: Curricular Process Guidelines (revised: November 7, 2012)

**Workload Issues**

At the June 2011 Deans’ Retreat, deans and senior staff engaged in a substantial discussion of the necessity, in a time of diminished resources, to streamline curriculum and reduce the workload associated with the large amount of curricular development and revision routinely generated by CSULB faculty. As the budget picture grew more dismal, further consultation with deans, associate deans, staff and administrators resulted in the guidelines below.

The workload associated with academic curricula is substantial. In the December 2010 curriculum cycle alone, there were 503 changes to individual courses and 96 changes to program requirements. This workload falls not only on Enrollment Services staff who must code and recode the PeopleSoft system with each curricular change and on the staff of the Curriculum and Articulation Offices, but also on the curriculum committees and their staff support at each level of review. When courses and program requirements change, advisors face an added burden. With faculty and staff across the university doing more with less, it is important to identify ways to reduce workload in this area.

Some strategies already have been put in place, including the implementation of a single curriculum cycle each academic year and a moratorium on cosmetic changes to course prefixes and numbers. With significant budget cuts now a reality, however, we must focus even further on reducing the volume of curricular activity while maintaining our core commitment to student success and access to a university degree.

**Board of Trustees and Chancellor’s Office – New Standards**

The budget outlook has led the CSU Office of the Chancellor to implement new standards as well in respect to proposals for new degree programs. CSU campuses are being urged to look regionally at curriculum and avoid creating duplicative degrees on multiple campuses.
In addition, beginning in spring 2012, the only new degree programs approved by the Board of Trustees for projection on the CSU Academic Master Plan are ones that are offered through self-support and are of an applied nature.

**Guidelines**

Accordingly, the following guidelines on curriculum and academic programs will be implemented effective fall 2012.

- No new academic programs (major, minor, option, certificate, credential) will be approved by any curriculum committee unless it can be demonstrated, through data and statistics, that the proposed program meets an identifiable economic need in the state and the region that is currently not being met by existing CSU programs in the LA basin.

- Revisions to existing courses or academic programs will only be considered in the following situations: reducing high unit majors; streamlining degree programs by reducing options, concentrations, emphases, and tracks; complying with accreditation standards; modifying degree requirements so that an undergraduate major can be deemed “similar” to the STAR Act (SB 1440) Transfer Model Curriculum; transforming an existing course to meet a demonstrated need for a particular skill (e.g., modifying an existing GE Capstone to make it a Writing Intensive Capstone); discontinuance of outdated curricula; or correcting errors.

We understand the need for faculty to have some flexibility when creating courses. We ask, however, that they and all curriculum committees answer the following questions as they develop and approve new courses:

1. Is there an enrollment need for this course? For example, is there an unmet need for a particular course for the major or to fulfill a GE category?
2. Will this course affect the faculty member’s or the department’s ability to mount required courses for the major or high demand GE courses by allocating faculty resources to the new course?
3. Will this course affect other enrollments in the department or college? For example, will the approval of a new course for GE Humanities compete with other GE Humanities courses offered by the department or college for enrollments? For example, there were over 1000 unfilled seats in the Social and Behavioral GE category (D2). Would the proposed course compete with others in its department or college for enrollment?
4. If there is not a clear demonstrated enrollment need for the course, how will the department ensure that the course be fully enrolled? Will there be a need to make the course required for a major, minor or certificate?

**Student Success: Graduation Rates and Time to Degree**

We may think of our degree programs as comprised of 120 units that can be completed in four years of full-time study. In reality, **only 14% of CSULB freshmen graduate within four years.** On average, CSULB
students who began as a freshman take over **five years to graduate (in every college) and over six years in several majors.** About half of graduates earn 27 units more than the nominal number needed to graduate; one quarter earns 40 units beyond what is needed. These delays are costly: a year or more of students’ time and $6,000 or more in tuition fees and increased student debt. Federal attention to four-year graduation rates is growing, and CSULB’s performance in this area is low in comparison to national figures.

Also, excess units and excess time to degree mean that continuing students occupy spaces that could be used to admit other California young people. At a time when access to higher education is greatly threatened by budget cuts, increasing access by shortening time to degree is critical to the next generation.

While it is tempting to attribute delays in graduation to part-time attendance, in fact, over 90% of undergraduates are classified as full-time. Excess units among graduates demonstrate that graduation delays are not due to too few units, but to taking incorrect units.

Curricular complexity and high unit major requirements are barriers to timely degree completion. The importance of a curriculum that is efficiently designed and delivered cannot be overstated. Students need to graduate with a meaningful degree that meets our learning goals, and they need to do so efficiently. As the work of curricular review gets underway this semester, faculty and curriculum committees are asked to work toward the goal of decreasing excess units and time to degree.

Our academic purpose is to “graduate students with highly valued degrees.” Studies have revealed that campuses most successful at graduating students are characterized by an ethos that “student success is everyone’s job.” On these campuses, faculty, administration and staff implement policies, curriculum, and practices with a focus on helping students succeed. CSULB aspires to be such a campus. We need to be certain that first and foremost, curriculum is designed to help students progress to degree in a timely manner and become successful.

Please share these guidelines broadly with faculty and with curriculum committees. Thank you all for your leadership in addressing the challenges that face us and for your commitment to student success.