

Pitt AAUP

*the University of Pittsburgh Chapter
of the American Association of University Professors*

4515 Forbes Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15213

May 10, 2012

Patricia E. Beeson, Provost and Senior Vice Chancellor
801 Cathedral of Learning
University of Pittsburgh
4200 Fifth Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15260

Dear Provost Beeson:

The Pitt chapter of the AAUP is concerned that the recent decision by deans of the Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences to suspend admissions to the graduate programs in Classics, German, and Religious Studies was made prematurely and without adequate consultation with the chairs of these departments or review by the relevant Arts and Sciences and Planning and Budgeting committees.

At its meeting on April 30 the chapter formed an ad hoc committee to investigate the processes leading up to this decision, chaired by Marianne Novy, and including Lisa Brush, Bruce Venarde, and Philip Wion. This letter reports the committee's findings, which are based on a review of all available documentation, including meeting minutes, and statements from faculty serving on the relevant committees.

It is clear from the University's *Guidelines for the Review of Academic Planning Proposals* (1995) (<http://www.academic.pitt.edu/pb/proposal-guidelines.htm>) that any decision to terminate or substantially modify a graduate program requires approval by the Provost, not merely by the dean of a school, and that any proposal to do so must follow detailed procedures which include significant involvement of unit and center Planning and Budgeting Committees and other academic bodies.

We hope that your recent statements about opening a discussion among all interested parties mean that any changes to these graduate programs contemplated by A&S administrators will quickly be subjected to serious review by the appropriate bodies, so that the futures of these programs may be clarified and the decision to suspend admissions may be either confirmed or reversed.

The chairs of these departments first became aware of the deans' intentions on April 2, when Deans John Cooper and Stephen Carr informed them that admission to the graduate programs in their departments might be suspended in a few days, in the context of the possible phasing out of the three graduate programs. As explanation, they were given a preliminary version of the Arts and Sciences document "Focusing for the Future: Strategic Plan for FY 2013." The three chairs attempted to respond to various points in this document, but to no avail. On April 5 Deans Cooper and Carr met with the chairs individually to inform them that no new students could be admitted to their graduate programs for the foreseeable future, and gave them some statistics about their

departments (statistics they have been disputing). On that same date letters were sent out from Dean Carr to prospective graduate students already admitted to the three departments, informing them that although the University would honor its commitments for next year, future graduate admissions to the three departments had been suspended, because “we have been compelled to make strategic but challenging choices related to our budget.” Dean Carr advised the prospective students that they should make an “informed choice” about their options for the coming year.

Neither a policy of closing graduate programs nor a decision to suspend admissions was endorsed by any of the relevant bodies, according to the minutes on record. (Apparently there were discussions at some of the meetings about criteria for evaluating programs for potential cuts and mergers, but they do not appear in the minutes.) On January 23, the A&S Planning and Budgeting Committee had a brainstorming session from which a number of cost-cutting suggestions emerged. Eight are listed in the minutes, including “Combine small departments;” but there was no mention of cutting graduate programs, let alone specific graduate programs, and the diverse list of suggestions is not presented as something on which the committee voted. At the February 13 PBC meeting, the Graduate section of the planning document was not presented. The PBC held a joint meeting with department chairs and program heads on February 14; this was another brainstorming session in which combining small departments was one suggestion made, but again no vote was taken. No minutes from this meeting or from the February 20 PBC meeting have been posted. Minutes from the March 12 PBC meeting also do not mention recommendations for cutting graduate programs. The only minutes from the Graduate Council on file are from the February 24 meeting; they indicate a “Dean’s announcement” of the need to “explore options for reducing the budget . . . without sacrificing undergraduate education,” but there is no mention of the members’ discussing or recommending graduate program cuts. There was also no discussion of these cuts at the Arts and Sciences Council meeting March 21, or at any earlier Arts and Sciences Council meetings. As Dean Carr said in his letter to graduate students in the affected departments, although A&S committees discussed criteria for evaluating programs, “there was no specific articulation of the general terms of evaluation with individual departments. The Dietrich School Deans made the final decision to suspend admission.”

The A&S document “Focusing for the Future: Strategic Plan for FY2013,” dated March 30, was apparently first made available to other department chairs and faculty on April 19 (in a version revised slightly after it was shown to the affected department chairs). This seems to be the first mention on record potentially for the faculty at large that the deans were planning to “review relevant programs and determine which must be suspended” (the earlier version had read “closed”), although on April 5 Dean Cooper had notified A&S chairs and program directors of the suspension of admissions to the three graduate programs. In his April 5 message he stated that “The decision to suspend admission to these graduate programs was a difficult but necessary step given the current budget situation, and was made in consultation with, and informed by the input of, our Deans, members of the Dietrich School Council and our Planning and Budget Committee, as well as the recommendations submitted by our chairs and directors.” However, no formal proposal to terminate these programs has yet been presented to, or reviewed by, any relevant committee.

To the extent that the suspension of admissions was premised upon assumptions about the termination or substantial modification of these programs, the lack of significant faculty involvement in consideration of these specific measures indicates a failure to follow important policies and procedures of the University. The 1995 *Guidelines for Review of Academic Planning Proposals* require that “all planning proposals must be reviewed by the appropriate academic unit(s) and academic responsibility center(s) as well as by the responsibility center Planning and Budgeting Committee (PBC) and relevant departmental PBC.” Section 1B, “Termination of Majors, Degree

Programs, Academic Programs, or Schools,” says that proposals should include (#7) “A list of the faculty groups and relevant administrators who were consulted, and a summary of their comments on the proposed change(s), including a statement from the Planning and Budgeting committees of the relevant department (if applicable) and responsibility center.” Proposals are also supposed to consider (#4) “The effects that the proposed change(s) will have on other University programs in both the short- and long-term. This should include an analysis of the impact that the proposed change(s) will have on other academic programs.” The word “suspension” may have been used rather than “termination” to avoid this requirement, but such a euphemism is certainly contrary to the spirit of the guidelines.

The *Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities* jointly endorsed in 1966 by the American Association of University Professors, the American Council on Education, and the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges affirms that “Effective planning demands that the broadest possible exchange of information and opinion should be the rule for communication among the components of a college or a university. The channels of communication should be established and maintained by joint endeavor.” Pitt’s policies and procedures provide multiple channels for such shared governance. But they can work effectively only when they are followed, and this has not been the case with the presumed program changes on which the suspension of admission to these graduate programs was apparently based.

We are motivated to send this letter because of our commitment to this University and its mission, the academy, our students, and the Commonwealth. Our concern is less with the merits of the decision to suspend admissions to the three graduate programs than with the process by which it was made. It is imperative, especially in times of fiscal austerity and political scrutiny, that faculty remain fully involved in decisions regarding academic programs, and not just in a token role. Going forward, we would remind all of our colleagues in the University community, administrators and faculty alike, how important it is that in addressing the serious budgetary and educational challenges before us we work together constructively and respectfully through our institutions of shared governance.

Sincerely,

Pitt AAUP

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A&S Department Chairs and Program Directors