

## Setting and Achieving Institutional Priorities

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Good afternoon. At your request, I am pleased to join our Trustee, Allen Ford, to discuss examples of priority setting and related administrative actions at Case Western Reserve over the past few decades.

My own background includes about 37 years in higher education, of which 35 or so have been spent at Case Western Reserve, primarily in a series of administrative roles, including the last 16 years as Vice President for Public Affairs. I have also worked on planning issues with a series of six presidents and with many Trustees.

These remarks are intended to convey my perspective on board/administration activities in setting mission and priorities. At Case Western Reserve over a period of about 30 years, this activity has moved from being primarily driven by presidents to a situation in which the deans and faculty leadership play a very important role. In addition, it has progressed from a "long-range planning" model to one that links mission and vision with specific programs and metrics, and with resource needs (people, funds, facilities). This activity was previously on a five-year cycle, but is now continuous.

Allen Ford mentioned eight examples of programs that have been directly affected by these planning efforts. Let me cover five of them rather quickly, and then provide greater detail on the other three.

The graduate programs in **Economics**, **Religion**, and **Theater** can be viewed together, though there are some distinctions among them. In the planning cycle for 1975-80, we asked each graduate program to present a self-assessment to a committee charged with recommending future priorities in graduate education. Among the criteria they used were such issues as quality of students, presence of a critical mass of faculty and scholarship, and demand for graduates. These three programs, all in the arts and sciences at that time, were judged to be lacking on one or more of these criteria:

The graduate program in Economics was suspended at the department's request, although the undergraduate program remains robust and the faculty's scholarship is strong. The department is now part of the Weatherhead School of Management, and its faculty teach in a wide range of management-related

graduate programs. Departmental faculty are active in a number of research-oriented centers and projects.

The graduate program in Religion was also suspended, and again its undergraduate program is very strong and its faculty members play important scholarly roles. At one point in the 1990s, for example, its four full-time faculty members held the editorships of five of the leading international journals in religious studies.

The graduate program in Theater was suspended as well, and the undergraduate program has continued to exist. In the 1990s, a collaboration with the Cleveland Play House made possible a new MFA program that is operated jointly by the two institutions. This professional program has just been renewed and extended, and is enormously successful. We believe the program is just as valuable for the Play House as it is for the University.

The University's **Frances Payne Bolton School of Nursing** has long been ranked as one of the finest in the nation. The School began in the 1960s to build a research-based program that prompted additional thinking about its undergraduate curriculum, leading to the Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree. The school's faculty developed a new first professional degree program leading to the Doctor of Nursing degree, and voted to phase out the BSN. Some years later, in response to a severe shortage of nurses regionally and nationally, the school reinstated the BSN, and has migrated the ND to a graduate professional niche. Today both programs are doing well, though the nursing shortage is once again severe

Along with all other dental schools in the nation, our **School of Dental Medicine** was affected by the immense success of fluoride and other dental care, so that by the 1980s there was a concern that there might no longer be a need for dentists. Applications to dental schools across the country were dropping, and several closed. By the late 1980s the school was having difficulty meeting its budget. Through new leadership and an investment of time and resources by the then-Provost of the University, the school has regained its strength and is today among the most-applied-to schools in the nation, with an active research program, a very strong faculty, and an effective and innovative program of outreach into the Cleveland public schools.

In each of these cases, the Board of Trustees was involved in considering and approving the recommendations brought to them by the president following appropriate faculty action. In some cases the Board's review was very extensive, and in all cases there was no rush to judgment.

The three other examples Allen mentioned require a bit more explanation. I will take them in chronological order.

## **Architecture**

There had been an undergraduate program in Architecture at Western Reserve University for several decades. In the mid-1960s, the faculty recommended that the B.Arch. program be phased out since it was no longer considered the first professional degree for the field, and that a master's program be considered. After more than a year of conversation, the trustees voted in 1967 to suspend admission to the undergraduate program and to close the department in 1972. They also authorized planning for a master's degree program to begin operation in 1972. This happened just as Western Reserve and Case were being "federated."

The following several years were a period of intense change and challenge – within the institution as a result of the 1967 federation of Case and Western Reserve and the onset of financial problems; within the region as Cleveland and other cities experienced upheavals; and nationally and internationally because of the War in Vietnam and a wide range of economic and cultural shifts. There were few prospects for the resources needed for a new master's program, but the board formed a special committee to monitor the effort of the faculty to develop a plan and to identify resources.

Ultimately the Board voted in 1971 – more than five years after the initial discussion of architecture – to proceed with plans to establish the master's program the following year, but inserted the provision that the decision to start the program would be made at the discretion of the president. After further review, the president concluded that there were insufficient resources even for a "modest" graduate program, and the Board – including the special committee – agreed with the decision, while expressing a hope that consideration would be given to this opportunity in the future if circumstances permitted. In the following three decades, at least three succeeding presidents have discussed this matter with trustees, but none has found it possible to recommend that we establish such a program. Several faculty members were terminated, including a few with tenure.

## **Education**

Concerns about the future of our Department of Education surfaced in the mid-1970s. The job market for teachers was down, as were teachers' salaries, and there were fewer well-qualified students entering the program. At the same time, there were low-tuition teacher education programs at Cleveland State, Kent State, and other nearby schools. Most troubling was the increasingly restrictive nature of the statewide requirements for teacher education curricula, which made it more and more difficult for our program to distinguish itself. By 1977, the Faculty Senate and the Board approved a

recommendation from the department to discontinue undergraduate programs in elementary and special education.

Then began an extensive set of discussions about the department itself, including a lengthy review of the academic and financial aspects of the situation by committees of the Faculty Senate. The Senate deliberated the matter during two of its meetings in 1978, and later that year the Board approved a recommendation from the Faculty Senate that the department be closed effective June 1979, and that the University attempt to continue the graduate program in education in another unit of the University if possible. During a year of negotiations with other schools and colleges of the University, no acceptable alternative home for the graduate program was identified.

At the same time, however, the University launched a conversation with John Carroll University that led to a cooperative arrangement that remains in effect today. In this partnership, Case students are able to qualify for teacher certification by taking undergraduate education courses and student teaching at John Carroll, while taking their subject area and general education courses at Case. This has been shown to be a very workable program, and both institutions are pleased with it.

With the closing of the Education Department, several faculty members – some with tenure – left the University. At least one of the department's faculty members was able to qualify for a position in another school at the University, where he worked for a number of years before retiring.

## **Library Science**

The School of Library Science opened in 1904 and closed in 1986, by which time it was known as the School of Information and Library Science. For its first 50 years, the school focused on preparing school and community librarians, with a specialty in children's literature. In 1952, however, the school launched a pioneering project known as the Center for Documentation and Communication Research, which was in fact an early approach to using computers to manage library and research information. The Center was an immense success nationally, but it had little impact on the more traditional programs of the school and formed few links with other units of the University.

By the 1970s, both aspects of the school's program were sagging: the once-forward-looking Documentation Center because other disciplines were moving aggressively into the field of computerization, and traditional librarianship because job opportunities and salaries for librarians were not competitive. And again, standardized requirements for curricula limited the school's ability to distinguish itself from low-tuition alternatives. Enrollment fell, budget deficits appeared annually, and in 1981 the school received a "conditional" accreditation from the American Library Association.

The Board of Trustees had been briefed on the school's budget problems since the late 1970s by the senior officers of the University, and by the early 1980s the matter was under serious discussion with the Faculty Senate.

In 1984 and 1985 the Faculty Senate debated, and ultimately recommended, closing the school. Because closing – or starting – a school or college of the University constitutes a change in faculty structure, the recommendation was placed before the entire University faculty, which also supported it. In March 1985, the Board of Trustees completed its review of the issue and voted to close the school the following year, and to continue an effort to strengthen information science research and education in other academic units. Closing the school involved the termination of small number of faculty members, some of whom were tenured.

It's important to note that this was not the only one of our academic units to be experiencing financial stress during this period. The issue for the governance system was to determine just how central each of these programs was to the University's overall mission. This was the criterion that would drive decisions about whether and to what extent the rest of the institution would subsidize their operations until they could regain their footing.

You have asked us to focus our comments on examples of program closings and other instances where the institution's governance structures and processes faced hard realities. Let me add that, in their own way, even expansion opportunities require facing hard realities, and that Case Western Reserve has also had initiated a number of new programs during the past few decades.

The issues and procedures involved in closing a program, department, or school seldom appear in the how-to-do-it manuals for college and university planning, but they are among the most demanding and stressful aspects of institutional life. Without strong leadership at all levels in the governance process, without clear criteria for making these decisions, and without procedures that provide opportunities for discussion, they can breed distrust. Even when these factors are present, they are not easy.

We would be pleased to respond to your questions.