Committee Members
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Charge: To actively consult with the Provost’s Office and the Office of Continuing Professional Education to support, evaluate and refine programs in the areas of adult learning and executive education, including program development, admission policies, awareness programs, online resources, program evaluation, and degree completion initiatives.

Focus for AY 2018-2019: Assessing the current state of the university’s professional and continuing education programs.

Report: As noted in last year’s committee report, the university’s strategic plan highlights the university’s ambition to become the “region’s go-to destination for executive, professional, and continuing education” (p. 10). The strategic plan also provides a target for the university to increase its annual executive and professional education revenues from their current level of $7 million to $50 million (p. 11). The central organizational unit for achieving this goal is the Executive and Professional Education (EPE) program (https://execed.gmu.edu/), formerly known as Mason Learning Solutions. In last year’s report, the committee noted that EPE was seeking a new executive director, and the committee planned to meet with the new executive director during the 2018-2019 AY to discuss his or her plans for expanding EPE.

The committee learned this year that the search for a new EPE executive director was not successful, due primarily to what the selection committee and EPE officials saw as the challenges of fulfilling both EPE’s executive education mission and its professional education mission in one organizational unit. Subsequent to this search, EPE therefore underwent a reorganization. Its executive education function was moved to the School of Business, where it is directed by Associate Dean Dr. Roy Hinton. The EPE unit now focuses on continuing and professional education. EPE is currently directed by Ms. Kate Leeds-Brody, who is serving as the interim executive director as the unit undergoes a new executive director search.

The committee met with Ms. Leeds-Brody to discuss EPE’s operations, future plans, and challenges. EPE has approximately 20 staff members and continues to be a completely self-supporting unit. It offers certificate programs in human resources and project management as well as courses on a variety of other topics such as government contracting, business analysis, information technology, and cyber risk management. These courses are delivered to individuals and groups from area businesses and government agencies, and they are taught primarily by industry professionals rather than Mason faculty. EPE also partners with units in the university to offer other specialized forms of professional education. When partnering with university units, EPE provides marketing and business services for a share of program revenues (typically 15% or
20%). Currently, EPE is actively engaged in such programs with units in five of the university’s colleges and schools (CHSS, VSE, SBUS, SCAR, and CVPA). EPE has also initiated and is in active discussions with three additional units (CHHS, SCHAR, COS). After a new executive director is hired, EPE hopes to expand these partnerships and offerings.

Based on its discussions internally and with Ms. Leeds-Brody, the committee identified a number of challenges for the EPE program and the university’s broader goals for expanding executive and professional education. First, because the EPE unit is entirely self-funded, it must charge fees for its services that are prohibitively expensive for some university units that might otherwise wish to partner in these efforts. This likely limits the scale and coordination of professional education efforts throughout the university. A second challenge concerns incentives for faculty participation in professional education. Heavy reliance on outside experts arguably limits the university’s efforts to grow professional education and to promote its reputation for providing this type of education and training. Third, classroom space is an ongoing issue for the EPE program, as its classes are given low priority for tight classroom space. Finally, there is a need for in-depth analyses of the area’s executive/professional education market to help EPE and the university reach their strategic goals in these areas.

It is recommended that the committee revisit these issues next year with the new executive director of CPE, the director of executive education in the School of Business (the committee had planned to meet with Dr. Hinton this year, but the meeting had to be postponed), and officials in the Provost’s Office. In consultation with these officials, the committee should consider whether there are specific actions that it can take to assist in advancing the university’s goals for professional education. The committee should also plan to periodically assess the status of other adult learning programs and offerings in the university, including the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, the Bachelor of Individualized Study program, and other non-degree courses.

1 Some university departments provide professional education to outside entities through direct contracts. In such instances, they may work through the EPE unit to provide certificates and Mason credits to participating students. However, a recent inventory (December 2018) reported by EPE to the Provost’s Office found few professional and executive education efforts outside the EPE program.

2 The committee’s understanding is that compensation and incentives for participation in professional education courses (e.g., additional pay or buyouts from regular courses) vary widely across the university.