To: Members of the CSUEB Academic Senate and other faculty leaders

From: Hank Reichman, Professor Emeritus of History
First Vice-President and Chair of the Committee on Academic Freedom and Tenure, American Association of University Professors (AAUP)

Subject: Planning for Distinction: Program Prioritization

When I entered the Faculty Early Retirement Program a little more than two years ago, I decided to reduce my involvement in shared governance at CSU, East Bay. After three terms as Academic Senate Chair, nine years as a system-wide Senator, and fifteen consecutive years on our Senate ExComm it seemed time to let the next generation of faculty leaders steer our course. I have thus attended no Senate or ExComm meetings since then and largely refrained from comment on campus governance issues. But the announcement of the President’s “Planning for Distinction” initiative, which I received via email on October 8, produced a troubling sense of *deja vu*. To be sure, it is not my place to advise faculty on their response to this initiative, whether to participate with enthusiasm, to participate critically, to seek modifications in the plan, or even to resist or boycott the entire effort. That is up to you. But several colleagues have suggested that I might provide some useful historical and national perspective on this initiative, and that is the goal of this memorandum.

The American philosopher George Santayana once famously declared that “Those who do not know the past are condemned to repeat it.” His advice seems more than a little pertinent to this initiative, because CSUEB, the CSU as a whole, and American higher education in general are not without a good deal of past experience – much, if not most, of it negative – with efforts to “prioritize,” “restructure,” or “realign” (in educratese these words are generally synonyms) academic programs. Since I arrived at CSUEB in 1989, I have lived through more than my share of such efforts, including a stretch in the 1990s when we dutifully ranked academic departments by priority each year (with rankings changing significantly from year to year) in a well-intentioned but unsuccessful effort to rein in a Provost who seemed excessively secretive and arbitrary in his allocation of resources. Fortunately, while these efforts took up a good deal of time and effort (and sometimes precious funding), their impact was at most limited, with the main consequence being a noticeable increase in the level of cynicism among faculty and staff.

Experience with “prioritizing” elsewhere, however, has not always been so benign. At CSU, Dominguez Hills a top-down effort to prioritize promoted by a then-new President deeply divided the campus, as both faculty and students mobilized in resistance. In the end, the initiative was withdrawn and the campus was left to heal its wounds. More noteworthy was the multi-year effort at Humboldt State to rank all programs in three basic tiers, much as I’ve been told is the intention at East Bay. The process was not only time-consuming and wasteful, it was also highly divisive and in the end its sole concrete result was the controversial elimination of the Nursing program. But even this
decision, whose wisdom can be reasonably debated, was in fact the result not of the prioritization process but of events specific to that troubled department. If you’re interested in how this process “worked” at Humboldt, I would encourage you to contact Faculty Trustee Bernadette Cheyne, a Humboldt Theater Professor, and statewide senator and Emerita Professor of Nursing Marshelle Thobaben, both of whom were in the thick of it.

Across the country program “prioritization,” increasingly promoted under the cover of alleged financial distress, has led to problems at numerous institutions.¹ Last spring, for example, at the University of Northern Iowa (UNI) an administration-driven “comprehensive review” of programs led to an effort – resisted with partial success by the Academic Senate and the AAUP, which is the union representing UNI faculty – to terminate as many as 29 tenured faculty and close important programs in languages and science. National AAUP will soon release a disturbing investigative report on this affair. In Louisiana, such efforts – sometimes conducted under the excuse of stress caused by Hurricane Katrina – also led to faculty dismissals (not to mention lawsuits). Finally, there is the notorious (and, as we shall see, quite relevant) case of the University of Northern Colorado in the 1980s, which I will have occasion to discuss later in this memo.

Experience both nationally and in the CSU suggests that to avoid such negative consequences these efforts must be collaborative. In this light, one can only welcome President Morishita’s declaration that “Successful implementation will depend upon three key processes: effective communication, an inclusive and transparent process, and clearly articulated implementation plans.” Unfortunately, however, actions often speak louder than words. The administration’s apparent decision to initiate this process during the summer when most faculty are away and without the participation of elected faculty representatives, does not suggest a collaborative spirit. Neither too does the unilateral appointment of members of the steering committee and the two task forces. To those who stand outside the process it is unclear where decision-making will reside. But it is troubling that the steering committee includes twice as many administrators as faculty, with but one staff member and one student. Although the large number of faculty on the Instructional Programs Task Group is certainly encouraging, one wonders how much influence such a large group will be able to exercise.

It is a fundamental principle of shared governance that faculty representatives on committees and task forces should be chosen either directly by faculty through election or by the appropriate elected faculty leadership. I have been told that this did not happen and that the composition of all three committees was determined by the

¹ The website established by the administration for this project includes links to program prioritization efforts at five other institutions. Unfortunately, these links lead only to official pages and do not provide access to any independent assessment of the ultimate success or value of these efforts. I would encourage faculty to conduct your own investigations of these experiences. What were the final results of these processes? Were elected faculty representatives involved from the start? How did faculty, staff, and students evaluate the process at the end?
administration. It is no reflection on the character, commitment, or intelligence of those faculty members appointed to serve on these bodies to note that it is misleading to think that they do so as "representatives" of anyone other than themselves or the Provost who selected them. That at least some of these administrative appointees have also been provided with assigned time – even while assigned time for core educational functions like graduate advising is dramatically reduced – also creates the appearance that certain faculty members have been “rewarded” by the administration, perhaps for their assumed agreement with some as yet unarticulated hidden agenda. I do not make this charge; I simply point out that the method by which these bodies have been constituted will inevitably raise such suspicions in some quarters.

Here it may be appropriate to remind everyone, including our administrators, of the following provision of the Higher Education Employer-Employee Relations Act, which has governed higher education in California since 1979:

The Legislature recognizes that joint decision-making and consultation between administration and faculty or academic employees is the long-accepted manner of governing institutions of higher learning and is essential to the performance of the educational missions of these institutions, and declares that it is the purpose of this chapter to both preserve and encourage that process. Nothing contained in this chapter shall be construed to restrict, limit, or prohibit the full exercise of the functions of the faculty in any shared governance mechanisms or practices, including the Academic Senate of the University of California and the divisions thereof, the Academic Senates of the California State University, and other faculty councils . . .

Also of relevance are the following passages from the CSU Board of Trustees’ 1985 Report on Governance, Collegiality, and Responsibility, which declares:

Authority in the modern public university derives from two quite different sources: (a) from the power vested by law and administrative code in governing boards and administrators and (b) from the knowledge of the subject matter and from the pedagogic expertise of the faculty. . . . Collegial governance assigns primary responsibility to the faculty for the educational functions of the institution in accordance with basic policy as determined by the Board of Trustees. This includes admission and degree requirements, the curriculum and methods of teaching, academic and professional standards, and the conduct of creative and scholarly activities. . . . The governing board, through its administrative officers, makes sure that there is continual consultation with appropriate faculty representatives on these matters. Faculty recommendations are normally accepted, except in rare instances and for compelling reasons. The collegial process also recognizes the value of participation by the faculty in budgetary matters, particularly those directly affecting the areas for which the faculty has primary responsibility.2

2 I should also suggest that AAUP’s 1966 “Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities,” jointly formulated with the American Council on Education (ACE) and the
To be sure, it is certainly possible that as this process proceeds elected faculty representatives will be able to play their appropriate part, but the top-down method by which it has been initiated and its participants identified should be disquieting to all involved.

This process also stands in marked contrast to our last major effort at academic planning and, yes, “prioritization,” the creation of our February 2008 Academic Plan. That plan was the product of a joint administration-faculty task force in which six faculty members from all four colleges and the Library were appointed by the Senate Executive Committee to work with six administrators appointed by the Provost and a student representative from ASI. As Senate Chair at the time I served on this task force and wrote much of the eventual plan. The process was not only transparent, it was begun with the full commitment and involvement of elected faculty leaders.

That Academic Plan wisely chose not to “prioritize” specific academic programs. Instead it emphasized that CSUEB should be characterized by the growth and development of “programs of distinction” in nine overlapping areas: 1) general education for undergraduates; 2) graduate education; 3) global awareness and understanding; 4) multiculturalism and diversity; 5) environmental awareness and sustainability; 6) arts and culture; 7) professional programs; 8) teacher preparation, educational leadership, and collaboration with K-12 education; and 9) Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics. Although some saw this as a “laundry list,” in fact these focuses reflect the necessary diversity of our complex institution. Moreover, the assumption was that specific departments seeking to maintain or expand resources would in future need to make the case that their program helped serve one or more of these broad areas.

The 2008 Academic Plan is still on our website³ and I would hope that its principles would at minimum guide this proposed process. I certainly urge those involved in this initiative to read it carefully. Indeed, I might note that when Provost Houpis first came to CSUEB to interview for the job he now holds he specifically told members of ExComm that he saw his job as implementing this plan, which he praised highly. I hope that he has not forgotten that commitment.

Unfortunately, not long after the Academic Plan was approved, the Qayoumi administration seemed to step away from the plan’s balanced approach with a poorly conceived and ill-defined scheme to transform CSUEB into a “STEM-centered University,” which led to such ludicrous spectacles as the CLASS Dean’s declaration that her departments are also STEM departments because they use computers! Now that President Qayoumi is gone, we don’t hear much about either the 2008 Academic


Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB), is a useful guide to such principles. The full text is available at http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/pubsres/policydocs/contents/governancestatement.htm
Plan or the “STEM-centered University.” Apparently, it is now the turn of yet another administration to take a crack at this. One can only hope (perhaps expect) that one day, when our current administration, as is inevitable, is replaced by a new crew seeking to reinvent a dysfunctional and unnecessary wheel, we will be able to say of this effort as well: “this too has passed.”

But wait! This time will be different, we are told, because now we have a guide for our process, a book by one Robert Dickeson, *Prioritizing Academic Programs and Services.* I have not read this book nor do I intend to. Here’s why: Dickeson is a career administrator with little to no teaching or scholarly experience who first developed his ideas on program prioritization at the aforementioned University of Northern Colorado (UNC) in the early 1980s. As a result of his efforts, 47 faculty members, 39 of whom were tenured professors, including five of nine tenured faculty members in the Department of Anthropology, were fired without cause or due process, prompting an AAUP investigation and, in June 1984, the placement of UNC on the AAUP List of Censured Institutions.

According to the AAUP investigation, under Dickeson’s leadership UNC in 1981 adopted a system of evaluation known as *Comprehensive Program Analysis,* essentially similar to the procedures advocated in Dickeson’s book. Under this program all university academic and nonacademic programs were to be evaluated according to several criteria, including the need, demand, size, productivity, cost, quality, and “maturity” of the program. From mid-January to mid-March of 1982, faculty members in each department at UNC prepared assessments of their respective academic programs. These assessments were submitted to the deans of the respective schools or colleges. The deans were asked to place each academic program in one of five categories, ranging from “high priority and worthy of investment” to “low priority and candidate for elimination”. . . . On the basis of these rankings from May 1 to May 3 the president and the vice-

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4 Curiously, we are not told how or by whom this book was selected. But I will venture to guess that members of our Educational Leadership Department, who just might have some expertise in this area, were not consulted and neither were our elected faculty leaders. By contrast, recently the administration of Notre Dame de Namur University on the peninsula called on their Academic Senate to revise the University’s Faculty Handbook, which governs curriculum, shared governance, and other issues. The Senate itself chose to use as its guide AAUP’s *Redbook: Policy Documents and Reports,* a choice then embraced by the President and Provost (herself a refugee from the authoritarian Shirvani administration at CSU, Stanislaus).

5 AAUP’s thorough, measured and ultimately damning report is too lengthy to summarize in full here. It may be found in the AAUP magazine, *Academe,* Vol. 70, No. 2, 1984. Back issues of *Academe* are carried on J-STOR, but these are not included in our library’s subscription. However, bound copies of the journal may be found on the periodical shelves at LB2301.A3. I hope to obtain an electronic version of this report from AAUP staff to make available to interested colleagues. All quotes in my account of the UNC events are from the report.
presidents met in executive session to discuss the numerous proposals for reorganizing. President Dickeson’s *A Plan for the Future* was published on May 6 . . . and four days later was adopted by the Board of Trustees.

The termination notices followed on August 2, effective in June 1983. According to the AAUP investigation

. . . in the actions that were taken at the UNC in 1982, there was little genuine consultation between the administration and the faculty before the administration issued notices to 47 faculty members. At its meeting on May 7, 1982, the faculty overwhelmingly approved a motion that there had been no “real and meaningful faculty involvement” in the decisions to effect changes in academic programs that were set forth in President Dickeson's *A Plan for the Future*. The faculty also declared that the system for assessing academic programs under the administration’s *Comprehensive Program Analysis* resulted in reports that were “completed too hurriedly,” that were based upon “untested and unclear criteria,” and that used “methods and justifications for conclusions . . . not . . . disseminated to allow for critical review.”

The report continues:

The administration made the decision that a “program exigency” existed. The criteria for termination were set unilaterally by the administration and were applied by the deans and the academic vice-president. Faculty members provided additional information at meetings convened by the academic vice-president and then by the president. After these meetings, however, the president and the vice-presidents met in executive session, and the faculty was then notified of the decisions that had been reached.6

UNC was removed from the AAUP List of Censured Institutions in 1992, but only after Dickeson’s departure permitted the adoption of new policies, recommended by AAUP, governing the termination of faculty appointments for reasons of financial exigency, and after those faculty who were dismissed won various forms of redress, including, it seems, some substantial monetary settlements, which created significant financial challenges for UNC. But the impact on faculty morale and institutional quality of Dickeson’s tenure persisted for some time after. Indeed, some of my AAUP colleagues in Colorado claim the effects are still felt today.

6 Dickeson claimed that the terminations were compelled by “program exigency” and financial considerations. Yet less than a year after the terminations went into effect, on March 28, 1984, UNC ran a full-page ad in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* soliciting applications for 28 new faculty positions. In addition, among those terminated in 1983 were faculty members who had previously agreed to retire in June 1986. UNC, however, declined to accept the recommendation of a hearing officer to withdraw terminations in these cases and retain the faculty for an additional three years. Yet in September, 1983, UNC adopted a significantly expanded program of early retirement, which was not offered retroactively to those who had been terminated just three months earlier.
After leaving UNC, Dickeson developed a reputation as one of those educational “reformers” whose notion of “reform” is to bash faculty in a manner that we’ve heard all too often from the likes of Charles Reed. Senior staff at AAUP could surely tell more stories, but I will simply use one example. In 2005, the notorious Spellings Commission on the Future of Higher Education, headed by Texas investor Charles Miller and authorized by George W. Bush’s education secretary Margaret Spellings, published a white paper submitted by Dickeson under the title “Frequently Asked Questions about College Costs.” Dickeson advised the Commission that “faculty salaries are especially expensive.” He also wrote that “the time-honored practice of tenure is costly” and that it has “evolved” from a mechanism to protect academic freedom into a “system to protect job security.” Dickeson blamed faculty for the management problems of the university: “To understand the management of a college, one must understand the unique culture and extraordinary power of the faculty,” he wrote. “To many faculty, they are the university.” They assume they “own all curricular decisions.” If too many are tenured, he declared, the university loses “institutional flexibility.”

In a letter to the Commission, the AAUP argued that “The Dickeson paper employs a problematic and simplistic listing of ‘what’s being done and can be done,’ without providing documentation or even clear recommendations. The paper fails to consider the need for maintaining quality and effectiveness in higher education, focusing instead on cutting costs without regard to the consequences.” The AAUP concluded that Dickeson’s paper “seems to rest on a fundamental assumption: that higher education is about providing student (and employer and state government) ‘consumers’ with a ‘product’ (education) at the lowest cost and in the most efficient manner possible. This approach ignores the longstanding agreement about the role of higher education in the United States: that it exists to provide a public good in a democratic society, in the form of an educated citizenry and the free transmission of ideas that lead to discovery, innovation and an improved quality of life.”

Given this history, faculty might be well-advised to take Dickeson’s guidance with more than a grain of salt. It also leads one to question the wisdom not only of employing this book, with its questionable author, but also of hiring an outside consultant to help with the project. The website maintained for the prioritizing program includes a strange link to something called “Academic Impressions.” When one clicks on this link, it leads to the home page of an organization that claims that it “serves higher education professionals by providing educational products and services that help institutions tackle key, strategic challenges.” I assume this outfit has been retained to assist with this project, which leads me to ask: Why this organization? What will be their role? How were they selected? Was this contract put out for competitive bidding in accordance with state guidelines? How much is the university paying for this “service?” And why would we trust our future to some outside profit-making firm rather than to the wisdom of

7 The text of AAUP’s 2005 letter to the Commission can be found here: http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/GR/Archives/camp/comm/Letter+to+commission+chair+Charles+Miller.htm
our own colleagues, who, after all, know a few things about higher education in general and CSUEB in particular?

Finally, there is the question of money. I have been told that in several meetings members of the administration have stated that this is not about cutbacks or cost-cutting, but if such remarks have been made they are belied by the text of the message sent by Provost Houpis and VP Wells to all faculty and staff. They write:

Cal State East Bay faces significant financial uncertainties affecting students, faculty, and staff. Due to the significant budget reductions in recent years, we are no longer able to provide the quality educational experiences called for in our institutional learning outcomes and strategic commitments. We will continue to face severe financial challenges in the coming years that will require us to prioritize activities and programs to ensure that we are spending our limited resources in support of our highest priorities and to maintain or expand our areas of distinction.

We recognize that all of our programs and activities have value and make important contributions in advancing the university, or we would not be doing them. However, based on our ever-decreasing resources, and if we are to protect the educational quality for our students, we must make some informed and strategic adjustments: We cannot continue to do business as usual. Together we need to assess our present and future infrastructure, and our ability to deliver high quality educational programs and services to our students within an uncertain budgetary future.

I will not challenge this argument, although it certainly does suggest that this is indeed about money and resources after all. But it should also be noted that despite the economic collapse, and despite dramatic cuts in state support – with additional cuts looming on the horizon – CSUEB is not in quite as dire financial condition as our administration would like us to believe. This is not the place to go into a detailed analysis of our campus finances, but I would urge colleagues to revisit the report delivered by Howard Bunsis, Professor of Accounting at Eastern Michigan University and Chair of AAUP’s Collective Bargaining Congress, at a forum sponsored by CFA in May 2011. Bunsis acknowledged, of course, that the CSU has taken a serious hit in state support, but he also noted that increased student tuition, salary freezes, and other cuts have left the campus with higher reserves than before the crisis. From June 2008 to June 2011, for instance, the value of CSUEB’s unrestricted net assets (this does not include buildings) increased from $12,228,610 to $47,454,788. To be sure, as our administration will hasten to explain, much of these assets are designated, if not

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8 Video of Bunsis’s presentation can be seen at http://www.calfac.org/post/what-did-howard-bunsis-say.

9 All CSU system and campus audited financial statements can be found at http://www.calstate.edu/SFSR/GAAP/financial_statements.shtml. They are certainly eye-opening.
restricted. But what is important is that during the past years of significant fiscal distress, salary freezes, increased class sizes, etc., these have still managed to grow by almost a factor of four.

In this light, it is also rather disingenuous of Houpis and Wells to claim we “must make strategic adjustments” when, even as this process was underway, the administration chose to create an entirely new and, in my opinion, unnecessary administrative position with the title of Director of Leadership Development and Employee Enrichment. While some staff members may have sought such support, I suspect many employees might find a decision to divide the funds dedicated to this position equally among all employees far more “enriching” than anything this position might achieve. More important, on what basis did the administration determine that such a new management position was a priority? And what does it say about the administration’s priorities when President Morishita accepts a 10% salary increase after just six months on the job, when almost all other non-managerial employees – most of whom were hired after an open, competitive search process – have received no increase at all for six years? It is decisions like these that lead one to, at the least, be skeptical that any program to “prioritize” our work will actually focus on preserving the central mission of this institution: teaching and learning.

Let me be clear: I do not deny that our university and we faculty must make some difficult choices. But I question whether an elaborate top-down process based on guidance from a discredited anti-faculty writer’s book is the best way to do it. In my years at CSUEB I have seen our faculty, through our elected institutions of shared governance, make such decisions time and again. We have completely revamped our general education program, struggling to put aside narrow departmental interests for the greater good of our students’ education. We have initiated new programs like Multimedia and Engineering, sometimes effectively denying needed resources to existing departments to do so. We have taken the lead in the wise and careful use of online instructional technology. And we have, where necessary, cut back or eliminated courses, degree programs, and requirements that no longer meet the demands of today’s educational environment. We have done it in the past and we can do it again. But what is critical is that when it comes to teaching and learning, it is the faculty, organized in our governance, college, and department structures, who must be the deciders.

To conclude, it should be obvious that I am skeptical of the utility, nervous about the impact, and disappointed at the top-down initiation of this process. But it is surely certain that without a strong faculty voice its results will be negative. It is the role of our Academic Senate and other governance structures to determine issues of curriculum and standards, and it is the role of our union, the CFA, to negotiate the terms and conditions of our work. It is not my place to tell either organization how to respond to this initiative, but both should speak up loud and clear. My role has been simply to provide some historical and national context based on my own years of experience at CSUEB and now in the AAUP. But whatever you do, I hope that you will work to
preserve our strong tradition of representative and genuine shared governance, which so far does not appear to have been served well by this latest administrative initiative.