CASE STUDY A: Mission Impossible?

Your institution’s accreditation visit (e.g. SACS) is looming. You are preparing a report for the visit that includes assessment measures of your graduate programs, so you ask all of your programs to turn in their assessment plans to your office. Once these have been received, you discover that five graduate programs only articulate teaching and learning outcomes and give no reference to research/scholarship/creative works, the latter of which comprises a significant aspect of your Graduate School and institution’s strategic plan.

- In two of the five cases, the program reports indicate that their uniqueness, focus, and strength lies in teaching/learning based and not research.
- In two other cases, the program reports indicate that the institution does not provide sufficient support or resources (e.g. assistantships, laboratory equipment) for their graduate students to engage in high-quality research.
- In the final case, no reason for the omission is provided.

You have called a meeting with these five graduate program directors. How will you approach this conversation and strengthen their integration?

CASE STUDY B: Herding Earthworms?

In an effort to encourage strategic thinking about program quality and growth, you bring in a nationally-recognized speaker to talk about models for graduate program development and how outcomes-based assessment can help build these models. The results are very encouraging—attendance is high, feedback is very positive, and programs seem eager to adopt the recommendations. You are also able to successfully garner the full support of the Provost and the Chancellor for implementing the model, and they are expecting you to deliver some initial results this academic year.

Building on the momentum from the visit, you meet with the faculty on the Graduate Council and the Council’s Planning Committee agrees to take the lead in operationalizing the model at your institution. During the first meeting, the chair, who was not present at the speaker’s presentation, publically expresses skepticism about the institution’s ability to implement such a program, citing faculty workload issues and generalized resistance to yet another university service commitment. Other members are drawn off to support other university initiatives. You bring the issue to the Graduate Council and no one volunteers to step up and lead the initiative.

What will be your next steps to take this initiative forward?
CASE STUDY C: Turf Battles?

You would like to implement a program that uses outcomes-based assessment to drive program improvement and resource allocation. In conversations, it becomes increasingly apparent that the other deans are not supportive of such an initiative.

The consensus is that the graduate programs belong to the faculty and the colleges and do not wish to cooperate with a centralized initiative led by the Graduate School.

Because they oversee tenure and promotion, the college deans also express concerns about the stress this initiative might place on faculty workload and the siphoning off of attention and energy from teaching and research toward administrative tasks.

There is also discussion that the program is redundant or unnecessary. Several of the deans indicate that the current university-wide Program Prioritization process, which takes place every five years and does include graduate programs, is sufficient for assessment.

Finally, there is some unease with the perception that the model encourages graduate programs at the same institution to compete with each other, a view which is viewed as potentially counter-productive.

You’re on the agenda to present the issue at the next Council of Deans meeting. How would you approach this presentation?