Notes Concerning “Tony’s Spreadsheet”

I developed this spreadsheet several years ago as a means of offering some guidance in considering hiring priorities. It uses measures common to such efforts and is merely one tool I use. Last spring, I had planned to share this document at meet-and-confer, but BSUFA leadership and I agreed that the timing was not ideal. Last fall, the deans, AVPAA, and I translated the key components of the spreadsheet into a set of guidelines for departments preparing proposals for faculty hires. When asked to do so by individuals preparing our HLC Assurance Argument, I was happy to provide the document for inclusion. I should have realized the need at that time to review the spreadsheet for language that I understood but that might lead to misinterpretation or inadvertently cause offense. I apologize for that oversight. I also apologize for failing to share the document sooner. I don’t attach the level of importance to it that appears to have been assumed and should have been more sensitive to how lack of clarity could lead to wrong assumptions as to its purpose.

The spreadsheet utilizes two-year averages compiled by Institutional Research to provide thumbnail images of a program’s numerical strength and staffing. The information covers lower-division and upper-division course enrollments, number of majors and minors (as well as certificates, badges and graduate students if applicable), and ratio of majors, minors, etc., to full-time faculty. These items are weighted according to what I consider to be their relative importance to numerical strength and staffing, and the product of these calculations provides me with a general picture of numerical strength and staffing that I find useful to consult when reviewing proposals for faculty hires. It was not designed with the slightest intent to suggest whether programs should be eliminated; I have never used it—nor will I ever use it—for that purpose.

Philosophical Underpinnings
The weights assigned to the various measures are determined by my own experience and convictions about what is most important in assessing the numerical strength and staffing of an academic program. These weights are certainly debatable, but it would make little sense for me to base them on somebody else’s experience and convictions. The philosophical positions that shape them are stated below:

1. Majors, minors, etc., reflect the level of student passion for and commitment to an academic program.
2. Upper-division enrollments reflect the level of student passion and commitment to a program beyond introductory/general knowledge and are thus more important measures of a program’s numerical strength than are lower-division enrollments.
3. Lower-division enrollments, while valuable, reflect more so the curricular design of the institution’s general education curriculum and introductory opportunities than depth of student passion and interest in a program.
4. The primary work of mentoring students and guiding their academic development is done by full-time faculty in the students’ chosen area(s) of study; thus, while important advising/mentoring relationships regularly develop outside the structure of majors,
minors, and other transcripted opportunities and involve individuals other than full-time faculty, the ratio of majors, minors, etc., to full-time faculty is nonetheless the key measure of staffing for a program.

5. Program growth is essential to the health of BSU.
6. It’s my job to use what are precious university resources in a manner that best supports program growth.
7. Enrollment numbers alone don’t signal the overall health of a program; a much more instructive number is the ratio of students enrolled in a program to the full-time faculty who drive its structure and academic pursuits. Smaller programs with higher ratios may therefore be stronger numerically and more effectively staffed than larger programs with smaller ratios.

Visionary Underpinnings for Academics at BSU

1. Although we will continue to advocate for state support and seek out external funding, the importance of tuition revenue will likely grow rather than decline.
2. With tuition revenue primary, we must grow enrollment (roughly, from around 5,000 to around 6,000 by Fall 2023).
3. In addition to recruiting vigorously out-of-state and internationally, we must develop attractive and high-quality graduate programs in order to grow this area of our enrollment to 800 by 2023.
4. With dependence on tuition and limited endowment resources, we need to free up instructional costs for investment through a reduction in the number of courses on our schedule by roughly 5% to effectively support current enrollment; we will then add sections as enrollment increases. Our current schedule would benefit from greater efficiency, and I believe we can achieve this reduction by cutting adjunct and overload assignments and by revising course rotations to reduce the number of poorly enrolled sections.
5. We need to support recruiting efforts on a term-by-term basis with a nimble process for increasing section sizes in response to need and anticipated need (hence the Course Caps Protocols).
6. We need to support enrollment growth as well as student success by continuing to improve retention and persistence rates (hence the Student Success Council).
7. Success in meeting enrollment goals will generate the tuition revenue needed to support increased faculty lines and investment in other instructional resources. The idea is to generate initial investment revenue through greater efficiency, build long-term investment revenue through increased enrollment, and prepare for growth in the interim by developing a growth mindset in program design and delivery (Hence “Tony’s Spreadsheet”).
8. Mode of course delivery should be determined by the needs of our target student market in relation to a given program. Nothing at all in the growth plan envisions increasing the proportion of online courses; we expect face-to-face and online to remain at roughly present proportions while both models increase numerically. We will not maintain proportions, however, by restricting growth in online.