Hi Peter,

You asked for a typed up version of my notes from yesterday's faculty meeting. Here is the outline of my remarks:

- I have thought VP for 3 semesters. This includes the interactive recitation style, the new visual lab style and the technical writing component. I cannot comment with anything other than my opinion on the Scale-Up because I have no experience with it.

- I have been impressed with the assessment that has been done on the VP program and I believe the feedback has significantly improved it. My bottom line is that I think it is an excellent program and should certainly be allowed to move forward and grow.

- I wish to say that the studies have taken a beating from me as we moved through the vetting process and I have been impressed with their thoughtfulness and robustness. I think they now address the right issues and provide data which speaks to the important questions as well as is possible at the moment.

- I believe those studies should be weighted more than my personal opinion because of their scientifically methodological approach. That being said, I will provide my own anecdotal experiences:

  - I have found the overall level of engagement of my students to be higher. This is most noticeable in my bottom students. The forced activities in the labs don't allow them to blow off the course until the exams come. I think the evidence showing the removal of the bottom of the exam grade distribution is striking especially because it can be shown that it isn't because the students drop.

  - My students can write! As one example, I had an undergraduate student, who had taken the technical writing portion, working for me this summer. He wrote up our work together. Frankly, I wished my graduate students could write so well. It wasn't beautiful or elegant. It was just clear, concise and on-target.

  - I believe the extra hands on time, as well as the engagement level helped capture the imagination of some of my top students. While I can't offer any proof of this, my students consistently out perform the others sections on the challenge exam and we've had some of the top students either switch to become physics majors or seriously consider it.

  - Frankly, running a VP section wasn't any more work for me. This, of course, is not applicable to the proposal for Scale-up. I see this as a significant advantage as it makes the transition from what we have to VP easy and smooth, and allows for another transition later.

  - I found that the interactive nature of the recitations cut down on the expository style favored by many of our TA's (i.e., writing on the board with their back to the students not paying any real attention to them). I have long found that no students complain about the expository style because it is easy for them (they just copy what the TA says). Of course it's easy... no one is learning anything. FORCING the TA's to interact with the students forced the TA's to really...
understand what the students didn't understand, and forced the students to confront their misconceptions because someone was engaged with them about it. This was nothing but a win in my opinion (once the TA's got good at the process).

- Finally, I want to comment that I believe this is a heavy load on our TAs. This is why I have pushed for VP TA's to be given 2 sections at most, and in general be more senior (i.e., not first-years). That being said, I think what the TA's learn about fostering learning, learning how to communicate and work well with people may well be the most important thing THEY will learn in graduate school. I have seen at least one TA really grow up and mature in this process. It was a pleasure and I believe it will really help him in his future, no matter what his final job is. This should not be underestimated in my opinion.

Again, I fully support the VP program and hope my anecdotal observations are useful as you complete more systematic studies and we move forward.

Cheers,

Dave