

## Case Study: So Is the Widget Engineering Program at Southeastern State University Really a Top 20 Program?

### Part II

#### Situation

In preparation for some strategic planning, Andrew started to look at some data. He found the following enrollment characteristics of the Widget Engineering program when compared to peer institutions –

| <i>School</i>      | <i>B.S. Enrollment</i> | <i>M.S. Enrollment</i> | <i>Ph.D. Enrollment</i> |
|--------------------|------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| Southeastern State | 250                    | 25                     | 7                       |
| Auburn             | 275                    | 10                     | 25                      |
| LSU                | 300                    | 25                     | 30                      |

Andrew discussed these numbers with the faculty members in one-on-one situations, and received a variety of responses. Many comments revolved around the poor doctoral enrollment and a sense of pride in the undergraduate program. Some comments focused on the poor quality of incoming graduate students, others focused on lack of doctoral level courses, and still others felt that the doctoral degree was unemployable.

The doctoral program had 4 key core courses, which were taught infrequently. If there were a choice to be made about teaching “Advanced Topics in Widget Engineering” (a required doctoral class) or a second section of “Introduction to Widget Engineering” (a sophomore level class), the department would always cancel the graduate course and add the second section of the undergraduate course. As Barney would often say, “Our undergraduate program is the reason we are here today – let another university teach graduate Widget Engineering”. Additionally, when students had to take the “required” qualifying exams, if one of the core courses was not offered during their tenure at Southeastern State, this topic was often waived.

During faculty discussions, there were a lot of ideas on how to increase the number of doctoral students, however, not all faculty members even agreed that this was the thing to do.

It became clear to Andrew that one of the first things that had to occur was to increase the doctoral student numbers – that there should be at least a 1:1 ratio between M.S. and Ph.D. students.

Fred, who had received his Ph.D. from Southeastern State U, lead the charge on why the doctoral program was fine the way it was. During the course of the discussions, Andrew suggested that the department consider a “direct admit” doctoral program where promising undergraduates could be admitted directly into the doctoral program. Fred blew a gasket following this discussion. “This would set us back 20 years,” he said. “Further, no major top research university has a direct admit program.”

It seems that Andrew is going to have a very difficult time moving the department forward. The faculty members don’t seem to want to really change, the leading research faculty member doesn’t want to see the doctoral program evolve, and the department needs a strategic plan.

Given this situation, and your time spent in this course, what course of action would you take?  
Please prepare a short, written response. Be as specific as possible, as we will ask you to share your answers