Academic Program Viability and Curricular Innovation (WG2)
Executive Summary: Spring 2024 Progress Update[1]

As technology evolves and cultural and workforce needs change over time, academic programs need to keep pace with and be tied to current industry needs and learner demand. This working group has been charged by Provost Constancio Nakuma to develop recommendations for a clear, data-informed, and transparent set of processes and protocols for the early ongoing detection and required realignment and/or innovation of academic programs to current workforce needs and learner demand.

[Read full charge here.](#)

Key Work Completed

1. **Identified Focus Areas:**
   - Define guiding principles for determining program viability.
   - Address challenges related to data, enrollment, and program review cycles.
   - Enable clear, actionable recommendations for program assessment and innovation.
   - Make connections between program viability and curricular innovation.

2. **Assessed Data Landscape:**
   - Utilized Decision Support Toolkit (DSTk) to synthesize data on enrollment trends, student demographics, budget expenditures, course fill rates, and faculty-student ratios.
   - Analyzed trends in student demand, retention, graduation rates, and credit hour production to consider what should determine inputs related to program viability.

3. **Outlined Current Program Review Process and Reviewed Relevant Policy:**

   - Programs undergo a comprehensive review every seven years, involving self-studies, stakeholder engagement, and data analysis; much of this is outlined in policy.
   - Key performance metrics include headcount, enrollment, student credit hours, degrees awarded, and faculty workload.

4. **Identified Challenges Based on Current State:**
   - Inconsistent access to program data and limited understanding of relevant tools hinder effective program management.
   - Program review cycles are lengthy, making it difficult to implement timely improvements or compare program performance across departments.

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[1] This update does not incorporate valuable feedback received in meetings and surveys since August 2024. Prepared Oct. 21, 2024 for Nov. 6 Community Conversations event.

- Budget model does not necessarily support innovation and collaboration.
- Department chairs and program directors are over-burdened.

5. **Identified Promising Practices:**

- Availability of market intelligence data, campus-wide enrollment updates, and budget transparency sessions are beneficial practices for program support.

Preliminary Recommendations

1. **Establish Guiding Principles for Program Viability:** Encourage flexible options beyond program closure, such as mergers, renaming, or curricular revision, to foster success. Principles should focus on clarity, alignment with industry trends, student engagement, teaching innovation, and equity.

2. **Clarify Metrics for Program Viability:** Create a multi-faceted approach to annualized program viability metrics including both institutional data and directed departmental self-studies to ensure that quantitative numbers include qualitative context. Use key metrics such as enrollment trends, graduation rates, retention, credit hour production, and student-to-faculty ratios, along with qualitative data, and ensure that metrics align with institutional goals and support data-driven decision-making.

3. **Implement Data Literacy Training:** Offer comprehensive training for department chairs, faculty, and staff to ensure effective use of data in decision-making. Provide access to market intelligence data as well as the Decision Support Toolkit (DSTk) for program viability assessment.

4. **Develop Decision-Making Guidelines:** Clarify roles and responsibilities within the decision-making framework, ensuring shared governance is respected. Create a transparent process with clear communication strategies for all stakeholders.

5. **Annual Viability Check for Academic Programs:** Introduce an annual review process to assess program viability, addressing market shifts and enrollment trends in a timely manner. Use a tiered approach to categorize programs into "Strong," "Support Needed," and "Significant Concern."

6. **Tiered Support Model:** Programs identified in each tier can receive targeted assistance through collaborations with various campus partners, such as market intelligence experts, admissions, and budgeting teams. Intensive support will be discussed for programs facing significant challenges alongside strategic conversations about program viability.

7. **Construct Review and Appeals Process:** Build an appeals process that includes the Faculty Assembly Budget Priority Committee to ensure transparency and equity in program discontinuance or significant program changes.

8. **Align Budget Models with Program Growth:** Ensure that the budget model revision work considers incentivizing program growth and providing resources for enhancement so that financial support aligns with institutional priorities.