



# The Right Mix of Academic Programs

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MAKING DECISIONS TO ADD, CUT, GROW,  
OR SHRINK DEPARTMENTS AND DEGREES

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# Program Audit or Prioritization

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## ARTICLE ABSTRACT

Higher education needs to develop processes to examine all academic programs for efficiency and relevance.

- TAKING STOCK
- MAKING CUTS
- DECIDING WHERE AND HOW TO GROW
- OPTIMIZING COURSE SCHEDULES

# Program Audit or Prioritization

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## CHALLENGES

- RISING LABOR COSTS
- FALLING PUBLIC FUNDING
- SUPPRESSED TUITION REVENUE
- STARK DEMOGRAPHICS
- PUBLIC DOUBT ABOUT THE VALUE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

# TAKING STOCK

- Examine the finances, demand, performance, and relevance of all academic programs to guide decision making.
- National data on enrollment and career opportunities provide important context, but colleges need to analyze their own markets.
- The criteria for evaluating programs should be collectively set, transparent, and consistent.
- The results of programs audits can be surprising, busting assumptions about program size and profitability.
- The process is imperfect, but the key findings help frame tough discussions.

# MAKING CUTS

- Top-down decisions will lead to strife. Share information with faculty members and let them guide the process.
- Financial viability is important, but a program essential to an institution's mission should endure.
- The faculty in programs that close can be reassigned to or retrained in growth areas.
- Have a communication plan to inform current students, as well as alumni and donors, and respond to their concerns.

DECIDING  
WHERE AND  
HOW TO GROW

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Consider multiple measures of demand before starting new programs. A hunch isn't enough.

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Students look for value and relevance, and partnerships with employers can help integrate career development into the curriculum.

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Look at the size, scope, modality, and popularity of existing programs to guide expectations and design for a new one.

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Experiment with a new minor or noncredit program to test the waters.

# OPTIMIZING COURSE SCHEDULES

While course scheduling may seem like a mundane task, it has serious human and financial implications.

Precedent is a powerful driver of course schedules, but data on fill rates and student performance could inform new approaches.

An under enrolled course may not generate enough tuition revenue to cover its costs, and a jam-packed course may signal unmet demand.

Class times that snap to a grid and schedules that come out in advance may help students graduate on time.

# STRENGTHS



Robust Academic Program Review process, including demand, employability, transferability, completion, and resources allocated equitably and use efficiently.



Provides an opportunity for staff and faculty to actively participate in the growth and improvement of their programs.



Provides a vehicle for accountability and transparency.



Institutional planning and budgeting are based on recommendations and evidence provided by process.



Implemented a process to optimize data-driven course offerings.



# WEAKNESSES



YC does not look at the whole portfolio of offerings to ensure that we have the right mix of programs but instead looks only at individual academic programs.



Does not move beyond the data with reliable rubrics for sunseting programs. No criteria for creating or sunseting programs.



Have gone against the data provided by Institutional Research when starting new programs.



ELT has access to all academic program reviews. Review the analysis of the programs and use data for data driven decision making.

# OPPORTUNITIES



Many opportunities to work with the REDC to meet our county employer's needs. May lead to many CTE partnerships.



Need to take lessons/benchmarks learned from academic program review process to include feedback on benchmarks for continuous improvement.



Need to explore how we can work more collaboratively with and use noncredit as an incubator for the credit side of the house.



Design programs that will easily transfer to other disciplines and careers, so students aren't stuck in a particular job. Ability to transform a program.



Noncredit enrollment should understand the curriculum process for credit programs and credit programs should understand how noncredit can assist in bringing enrollment into their programs.

# Threats

- Private industry has moved into the educational realm to train the nation's workforce. Private industry trainers can often provide a more efficient model that takes less time to complete and connects to post-education job opportunities within the industry.
- Institutions must evaluate the decline in liberal arts courses and programs and how they connect our students to an effective career pathway.
- Understand credit courses meet HLC and Department of Education regulations. Analyze the rationale of moving noncredit offerings to credit courses strictly for financial aid and tuition purposes.
- Use noncredit option that offers the speed needed to develop programs related to an urgent work-force need.