

**Academic Portfolio Task Force
Final Report of Subcommittee A: Pruning Programs
December 3, 2018**

SUBCOMMITTEE'S PRIMARY CHARGE: Pruning the undergraduate curriculum for unproductive programs through discontinuance or restructuring. The pruning programs group has broken into subcommittees to address potential models and metrics for pruning and restructuring programs. Here, we provide a definition of a productive academic program, as well as information on models to use, metrics to use, and decision-making considerations.

The University is in a budget crisis. This taskforce was convened to examine the academic portfolio and identify academic programs for restructuring and/or discontinuance in the interest of cost savings. We hope that these recommendations will be used alongside a thorough examination of non-academic areas for potential cost savings. We recommend that academic programs not be the first place the university explores for cost savings but, rather, the last.

I. PRODUCTIVE ACADEMIC PROGRAM

Up until now, the university's administration has not defined what it means to be a productive academic program. This task force was charged with defining the term, as well as the metrics for measuring productivity. As a subcommittee, we agree that a productive program is one that adds value to the university, but we have had difficulty developing a more detailed definition. Thus, we urge the university to pick up where this subcommittee has left off – by providing a clear and consistent definition of a productive academic program, by granting programs the opportunity to map to that definition, and by specifying the metrics that all units can use to measure productivity so that units understand how they will be evaluated.

While we have not been able to agree upon a definition for a productive program¹, we have outlined potential steps to take to evaluate the efficiency of academic programs and potential metrics to use to evaluate inefficient programs.

II. EVALUATION OF ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

After considering 19 metrics to evaluate the health of academic programs at UNC (e.g., number of majors, SCH, DFW rates), we consider the cost to deliver a program to be an important metric. Although we do not recommend cutting unprofitable programs outright, they may possess the greatest potential for cost-savings. Decision-makers should think carefully about cutting programs that are currently making money for the university, lest we dig ourselves into an even deeper financial hole. Of course, all programs should identify and address potential inefficiencies.

A. Program Cost Model

UNC's Marla Johnson has developed a model to evaluate the profitability of UNC programs. Johnson's model should be used to identify unprofitable programs, and unprofitable programs can be more closely scrutinized using two types of data: (1) quantitative data on productivity and growth/decline and (2) qualitative data on centrality to mission and value to university.

B. Program Data

1. Quantitative Data (or Metrics) – please note that the below list is suggestive, not exhaustive.

a. **Five Year Trends in Program Growth/Decline**

- UG majors
- UG minors
- MA students
- PhD students
- retention rates
- 4-, 5-, and 6-year graduation rates
- student-to-faculty ratios

To identify specific academic programs to restructure, prune, or enhance, it would be helpful to have these data by the specific degree, minor, or certificate conferred, not by the program, department, or unit. It will be important to manage the impact of decisions to minimize disruption to students' progress toward degree completion and to avoid the loss of students.

b. **Student Credit Hour Production**

- student credit hour production
- student credit hours per full-time faculty

c. **Quality of the Program**

Faculty evaluation criteria from individual units should be used to evaluate productivity in RSCW, instruction, and service, as disciplinary standards vary. RSCW enhances programs by attracting new students and raising the profile of the university. Digital Measures may provide a data source for a program's RSCW productivity. In addition, to evaluate the quality of a program's instruction, service, and scholarly activity, the university could:

- examine promotion guidelines and criteria, annual program reviews, and 5-year program reviews and outcomes
- examine factors related to external accreditation, if applicable

2. Qualitative Data

a. **Centrality to Mission**

- How does the program fit into the university's mission (e.g., statutory and public mission), as well as the branding of who we are as an institution of higher education in Colorado?

b. **Value to the University**

- service courses (e.g., LAC sections, LAC FTE)
- synergy between existing programs

III. POTENTIAL COST-SAVING MEASURES

The subcommittee recommends that the above factors be considered prior to any decision-making about the restructuring, pruning, or enhancing of academic programs at UNC. We realize that no set of metrics can capture the particularities of every program on campus. Thus, we recommend that all programs that are being considered for restructuring and/or discontinuance be notified immediately, and faculty, staff, and students should have the opportunity to provide detailed information about their program and explanations for any concerning data, as well as additional data. For example, some programs hold external accreditation; those accreditation requirements should be weighed in decision-making. Programs should also be given the opportunity to identify potential ways that they might save money within their unit. Feedback can be solicited either in written form or through focus groups. Discontinuing programs should be considered a last resort; restructuring options should be considered first.

Potential cost-saving measures could include:

- A. Course Scheduling and Enrollment Management (dept chair responsibility; deans monitor compliance; provost's office reviews for accountability)
 - examine faculty teaching load, course releases and reassignments, and use of adjuncts across campus
 - offer fewer sections, if existing sections are not typically full
 - examine course caps (e.g., zero cap courses until other sections are full; raise course caps for LAC courses to 65 unless there's a pedagogical concern; raise course caps on upper division courses to 30-40, where possible; examine equity in course caps within and across units)
 - examine low-enrolled courses in non-prime time slots
 - assign highest-quality instructors to intro, LAC, or first-year courses
 - balance full-time faculty across upper division, lower division, and service courses to reduce the use of adjuncts
 - train dept chairs on course scheduling to: promote efficient course enrollments, identify course/curriculum bottlenecks, and manage healthy DFW rates
- B. Pedagogical Enhancements
 - Restore CETL to train faculty on high-quality teaching strategies
 - include pedagogical experimentation and improvement in evaluation of faculty
 - encourage peer-to-peer observation of instruction to create culture of excellence in teaching and academics
- C. Curriculum Efficiency
 - examine course duplication with other programs on campus; consider combining programs and redundant courses (e.g., Akron's BS in Math and Applied Math programs were redundant; Math was restructured and Applied Math was kept)
 - consider the impact of course substitutions on course enrollments (e.g., transfer credits, independent studies, streamlining process)
 - consider cross-departmental offerings (e.g., rather than hiring adjunct faculty, look for qualified faculty in other units to teach courses)
 - consider dual-listing (or double numbering) 400-level and 500-level courses, when possible/appropriate

- examine all degree tracks within each program, department or unit

D. Graduation and Retention Rate Improvements

- provide guidance on healthy DFWs for dept chairs and faculty
- examine DFW rates and graduation rates to see if better advising, teaching, or program design could improve student success
- examine DFW rates in non-prime time slots (e.g., 8am, 2:30pm)
- connect with students regularly to ensure that they are being advised well, and also that they are aware of helpful resources on campus

E. Program and Administrative Staff Adjustments

- consider differential tuition rates for programs with high costs per credit hour
- to save on course releases, chair stipends and admin staff, combine low-enrolled majors under one department, such as Department of A and Department of B become Department of A and B
 - estimate cost savings before making decisions and consult departments to avoid Charting the Future mistakes
 - consider disciplinary similarities and differences when exploring program combinations (i.e., two completely unrelated programs should not be combined because this could cause problems for faculty evaluation).

IV. DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

A. Cost-Savings is Paramount

Aside from Kim Black's APS Cost Per Credit Hour spreadsheet, this subcommittee did not have data detailing program costs during the drafting of this report. Thus, we cannot identify specific programs that might warrant restructuring or discontinuance. However, it is important that the administration determine: How much would actually be saved by pruning or restructuring a program, department, or unit? In addition, faculty, staff, and students should be consulted in the decision-making process. If the remediation efforts fail, programs might be considered for discontinuance.

B. Other Universities' Cost-Saving Models

The subcommittee reviewed five universities' cost-saving plans as potential models for UNC's work in restructuring or pruning academic programs (e.g., U of Akron, Humboldt State, U of New Orleans, UNLV, and U of Kansas). The [University of Akron's Academic Program Review Results](#) and the [University of New Orleans' Academic Program Restructuring Report](#) provided the most detailed public reports. However, we have no direct knowledge of whether their cost-cutting efforts were effective. Nor do we know the long-term implications of their models. Thus, we note them here to provide background, but we cannot recommend them as an approach for UNC to adopt.

We note that the university's work with Huron presents an exciting opportunity to build and manage enrollments and increase retention and graduation rates to increase revenue as we save money in other ways.

C. Potential Challenges

Restructuring and reimagining UNC's academic portfolio represents a challenging task for various reasons, including the institution's organizational climate, leadership structure, and decision-making history.

First, UNC's organizational climate is in transition. On one hand, faculty and staff expect transparency from the administration, but at the same time faculty and staff are concerned that proposed budget cuts may negatively impact their livelihoods. We anticipate that there will be significant concern when the task force reports are released. We want openness, but we are not accustomed to having it and can take potential cuts personally, which creates an awkward dynamic. UNC faculty and staff have not traditionally been invited to participate in the administration's decision-making process. So, while we welcome the shift in approach, we admit that it has been both uncomfortable and empowering to be part of these discussions (making for some long and difficult meetings).

Units on campus have also been asked to cut in the past. Those programs that resisted were often rewarded by not having to make difficult cuts, while programs that complied were left unfairly penalized. This has led to inequality across units and colleges, feelings of resentment across units and colleges, and a sense that resistance might prevent cuts. To fully embrace the recommendations, promote fairness, and reduce inequality, the administration will need to address the organization's climate.

Second, efforts to examine the academic portfolio may prove particularly challenging at UNC where deans and chairs have not traditionally been empowered to make and implement restructuring decisions within their respective colleges and units. In fact, when this subcommittee asked deans to identify academic programs within their colleges to potentially cut or restructure, they expressed reticence. UNC's deans overwhelmingly replied that it was not their responsibility to identify programs to cut or restructure. They indicated the Provost's Task Forces should do the work instead. As a result, we hesitate to recommend a plan that requires deans to make these difficult restructuring and pruning decisions. We also feel that asking deans to make across-the-board cuts (e.g., 10% cut to each college) could reinforce existing inequalities across the university.

As an alternative, we recommend that deans and faculty from each college (selected by fellow faculty members) be included in the initial evaluation of programs, once profitability data are available from Marla Johnson. Faculty and deans have a unique perspective on programs that can add context to the discussion about potentially restructuring and/or discontinuing programs. We recognize that the President and Provost will make final decisions about how to move forward, but we recommend that deans and faculty from all colleges be consulted in these decisions.

Third, in the recent past at UNC, a dean has implemented the administration's difficult decision (with the support of a provost) to restructure a program, but the decision was quickly overturned following backlash. We recognize that, in some cases, public opinion can raise awareness about problems or help the university maintain a positive face. Thus, in moving forward, we recommend that the administration take as many factors as possible into consideration before discontinuing programs; the university will need to clearly articulate the need and rationale for difficult program cuts. These decisions should not need to be revoked under public scrutiny, assuming the rationale has been clearly articulated. Restructuring decisions are difficult and contentious, and we'll need to

be patient, strong, and compassionate throughout the process – holding steady to our vision that we are working to improve UNC for the benefit of our students.

¹ At one point, the subcommittee discussed but did not develop consensus on using two main types of metrics to evaluate program productivity: (1) the number of students served (e.g., non-majors, majors, minors, SCH) and (2) the relative cost of delivering the program (e.g., cost per credit hour). It was noted that faculty scholarship (e.g., Research, Scholarship, and Creative Works) benefits students and could also be considered.