Academic Program Viability and Curricular Innovation

Context

Academic programs and course offerings across the curriculum allow students to fulfill personal goals, gain skills needed to meet workforce demands, become culturally literate lifelong learners, and more. As technology evolves and cultural and workforce needs change over time, and as enrollment patterns shift, academic programs that fail to keep up with the pace and direction of change ultimately become financially unsustainable. Ignoring signs of program distress, such as patterns of low and declining enrollments, or not recognizing the signs early enough to take action to realign programs and course offerings across the curriculum to current needs, are among the major causes of program failure. Good academic planning and regular program reviews are designed to help identify new opportunities and flag programs early for realignment, provided these tools made available have clear, data-informed and transparent metrics to guide the planning and review processes.

This group will consider the following questions:
- What are the variables that should be measured to assess program health and viability?
- What is the relationship between program viability and curricular innovation?
- What are the factors to consider when designing processes for program review and health assessments?
- What existing data do we have available to aid in program review, viability decisions, and health assessments?
- What are the costs of program delivery? How should these costs factor into program health assessments?

Goal

Develop a clear, data-informed, and transparent set of processes and protocols for the early ongoing detection and required realignment of academic programs to current workforce needs and learner demand.

Charge

This working group will study the determinants of academic program viability and establish data-informed and rule-guided check-in points for identifying programs for which substantive revisions will be required to realign them to current workforce needs and learner demand. They

will identify and recommend key metrics and a protocol for flagging programs for further review to understand why their enrollments are low and/or trending downwards. These additional reviews will then be used by the program leads (or affected departments) to make revision decisions as appropriate and set measurable goals.

Deliverables

A report detailing factors to consider, justification for each factor, and data sources that feed into a developed protocol for flagging programs needing further review and action. This report should include a description of how this protocol fits into already-established program review cycles.

Timeline

April 15, 2024, report due. Full academic year to complete research identifying relevant metrics and developing a protocol for automatically flagging programs needing deeper review and realignment.