Low Enrollment Programs and Program Review: A Procedure

Historically, at UH Mānoa, program enrollment has only been systematically reviewed at the moment at which a provisional program seeks to be established as a permanent program. The program's enrollment is compared to the projections in the initial proposal, and any program which has fallen well short of the projections needs to justify the difference. But once past that threshold, there has been no systematic review of program enrollments. This stands in contrast to most universities, although of course deans pay attention to such matters when allocating resources. We propose to change this and make a review of low enrollment programs an explicit part of the program review process. This places this concern in a context of peer external evaluation focused on continuous program improvement.

We have set two thresholds of program size, one current enrollment and the other the number of degrees awarded across a five year period. The enrollment threshold is 10 and the degrees awarded threshold is 15: i.e., a program will be viewed as low enrollment if it has either 10 or fewer currently enrolled students or if it has awarded 15 or fewer degrees in the preceding five years. Obviously, being below both thresholds is more worrisome than being below just one, just as being well below is more worrisome than just missing the cutoff. We will collect five-year trend data on program size each year and make it available to the deans, so they know which of their programs are presently below the thresholds.

When schools and colleges undergo program review, any low enrollment programs will be identified and the review team will be asked to engage in a focused review of this program as part of the college/school review. These are some of the issues which the review team will be asked to consider in their review:

- What is the quality of the program? (Common quality indicators include placement rate, time-to-degree, graduation rates, evidence of the quality of student work while in the program)
- What is the cost of the program? If the program were discontinued, what faculty resources would be freed up to be repurposed towards other needs and what are those needs? Would that be a better use of the faculty time and effort currently invested in this program?
- What evidence is there that the program—even if small—fills a genuine student and/or community need?
- Does the program represent an area unique to UH or UHM which is important for the university's mission, reputation or identity?
- Does the program overlap with other programs (a Master's with a Ph.D., for example) such that it shouldn't really be treated as a separate program?

The program review team will be asked to recommend one of the following possibilities as the best path forward for the program:

- Stop-out admission and terminate the program

- Stop-out admission and terminate the program but make the program available to individual students through Interdisciplinary Studies (only an option for low enrollment undergraduate programs)
- Merge the program into an appropriate larger degree program as a concentration or track, or merge several low-enrollment programs into a single, more inclusive degree program within the School or College
- Continue the program

If the recommendation is to continue the program, the review team will be asked to provide suggestions about how to strengthen the program and make it more viable. In such a case, or if the dean wishes to argue against a recommendation to terminate or merge a program, the dean's response to the program review must contain a concrete and practical action plan in order to move the program off of this status.   The VCAA response to the program review will contain a definite decision on the future of the program.

If a low enrollment program is continued, either following or despite a recommendation by the program review committee, its progress and status will be a particular focus of the one-year and midterm progress reports. It is expected that such a program will have emerged from low enrollment status by the time of the next comprehensive program review, and if it has not, it should be expected that a recommendation to terminate or merge the program will emerge during the next review cycle.

Approved by Academic Affairs Deans
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