

**Provost Remarks for Program Vitality Town Hall - June 15, 2023**

Good afternoon colleagues, and thank you for your interest in attending this Town Hall on Program Vitality. As mentioned in the email invitation to this session, the intent is to review the materials found on the Provost's Office website, spending time in particular to review the actual reports and the information it contains. The goal is to also provide both context and to have opportunity for attendees to ask questions.

In a moment, I am going to invite Jonathan to speak to the materials and reports specifically, but I wanted to begin with context. **First**, I wished at the get go to acknowledge that this kind of exercise is one that can produce anxiety and worry. One's identity and meaning as an academic is intimately linked to one's discipline, the training received in graduate school, the courses that one teaches, the curriculum that one collaborates with colleagues to build, the students we educate, and the joy that comes from the lives that our graduates pursue following receipt of their degree. Whereas I doubt I, or we, can assuage such feelings, I want to at least acknowledge it and in anticipation that you will leave this session with greater clarity on how to think about the data and its meaning both for you as you reflect upon it going forward, and by the Administration, both formatively and summatively.

**Second, I want to be clear that this exercise has at its core the intent of program improvement.** In the Spring of 2021, I introduced a

set of internal data points that are a lens on program vitality, common ones used nationally and that make intuitive sense, and invited the Faculty Senate to offer additional ones. The Senate declined, although did provide input on the regular program assessment process and cycle. Jonathan will speak in a moment to the metrics that inform the Program Vitality Reports, a document on the Provost's Office website. The intent is that these metrics provide an annual snapshot for departments regarding their program array, at least as captured by this data, and to use it in part to inform what they do in an ongoing way to ensure their programs remain vital, relevant, and innovative. On this last point, I wish to say this. Institutions of higher education and the programs they offer have never been static entities. The needs of society evolve and change and thus so do the needs of colleges and universities to meet them. We are in a moment today when that reality was laid bare by a pandemic and when the relevance of what we offer needs to be linked to career opportunity like never before, all while doing it in an environment where we are underfunded to deliver our mission. Furthermore, we are functioning in a newly unique moment when the state is laser focused on how many programs have grown across the state in recent years and signaling institutions that they expect us to be very intentional about our array and its assessment.

**Third, let me say this about program closure.** No one relishes closing a program, but neither does anyone do so in a vacuum. The

modest number of programs that were identified for probation, and even more modestly for hiatus, were meant to be powerful signals that attention in these areas are needed. And, some programs that had been placed in such status last year or otherwise identified for attention need, were later reinstated without concern based on the changes made and advanced through governance. Inactivity on this matter during the Fall Semester will likely lead early in the Spring Semester to extended probation, perhaps hiatus for programs currently on probation, or at the extreme, a closure recommendation by me to the President that I will first bring to the Faculty Senate for comment. By “inactivity” I mean no or limited engagement with one’s Chair, one’s Dean, and with Jonathan Lincoln in the Provost’s Office either this summer or early this fall. My report to the Senate on the website regarding these specific programs provides some initial talking points valuable for discussion with your Chair, Dean, and/or Jonathan and some departments have already been actively engaged in this arena. Let me also say that the needs of each program vary, from modest to significant.

**Fourth, let me say what this is not, an exercise in layoffs.** That is a separate matter and one involving the Administration and the Union, and none are planned now or envisioned at this time for the future. I frankly have no stomach for it and seek to do everything in my power to not go down that path again. And, closing a program does not

necessarily lead to a layoff. A major may not be offered any longer, but core courses often still need to be delivered either as part of the UCC or in service to other majors and programs within and/or outside the department. And those are important contributors to the University and the student's we serve! As I described in some cases in my report, opportunities, for example, to offer a certificate in substitute of, or augment to a major, also create possible new opportunity. That said, every program, whether a major, a minor, or a certificate requires resources and energy, and we should seek strength in all of our programs in ways that makes such deployment good investments, and attractive for our current and future students.

**Fifth, let me say something about new programs.** There are of course degree programs at the UG and G levels that are well matched with external interest and need. And, we are offering a number of them already, for example Nursing, but also, for example, degrees offered in the Communication Department that for a number of years saw declining enrollment, but for this coming fall has seen a very large increase in interest simply by what they did to revamp some of their curriculum and make stand-alone degrees rather than specializations. And, we've added some degrees very recently such as the Bachelors in Social Work, and in the area of Data Science. Furthermore, right now opportunity exists at the master's level in Computer Science, albeit hiring the faculty in that area is critical and competitive. Gaming is also

an area of opportunity and two new certificates are planned for final review this fall. Given that this state is especially top heavy in baby boomers, anything that has linkages to healthcare or healthcare management in one's curriculum is an area of opportunity. All that said, our future is not realistically built on adding a whole bunch of new programs but rather on selective high opportunity new ones, combined with the right array of strong programs coming from what we already have, and even more abundantly as has already been demonstrated through the work done this past year in a number of departments.

**Finally, let me say something about marketing.** Every year, William Paterson sets aside \$1 million for strategic initiatives. These resources have commonly supported specific projects in various units around the university, including the colleges. This year, those resources will be pooled for two specific purposes. First, to invest approximately an additional \$.5 million to substantively expand brand awareness in the most competitive, and expensive, media market in America, right here. We expanded the budget last year for marketing, although not this big, and our freshmen and transfer bump is in part testament to that spend increase. Much of the remaining \$.5 million will get deployed for a variety of recruitment and yield related activities within Enrollment Management, including in the arena of international student recruitment. In summary, while it does not answer the timeless question, "Why can't the University just invest more in MY program?",

it does provide what is likely the most sizeable jump in marketing and recruitment focus at one time in our history, and last year was substantive.

Let me close by saying this. William Paterson is an extraordinarily consequential contributor to this state and nation. If you watched NBC Nightly News this past Sunday evening, you will have a clear example of how – our story got broadcast nationally through the lens of our undergraduate Commencement speaker, and her mother, and their experience as Syrian refugees who both earned degrees from WP. That was up there for me as it regarded a proud moment. Caring for our current and future student's well being, and opportunity, as reflected in the quality and vitality of our programs is a singularly important task for which academics, both on the faculty and the Administration, are uniquely positioned to bring about.

At this point, I want to turn things over to Jonathan to walk you through the various materials on the website, how to think about each formatively, and how best to consider what's there as you think about your own program, all of which are in the Vitality Report for one's college. Some have color coding that has particularly meaning, but with only a small subset of those that were specifically noted in my report to the Faculty Senate. From there, I will invite each Dean to take 2 minutes to speak briefly about their thinking on the exercise ahead and working with departments and programs. At that point, we will take questions.

Jonathan, I turn things to you.

Order of Deans to briefly talk:

CCOB  
CAHSS  
COSH  
COE

Q&A follows.