

Remarks to Faculty Senate on Program Vitality

February 15, 2024

Greetings colleagues. As many of you may recall, in April of 2023 I wrote the Chair of the Faculty Senate to provide an annual report on program vitality. This was a follow-up to the one I wrote in April 2022. In the April 2023 report, a link to which Chair Christensen provided in the Senate packet for today, I spoke to 13 programs, or concentrations within programs, 10 undergraduate and 3 graduate, that I was placing on probation, hiatus, or noting as needing attention. The intent of the report was to encourage focused departmental effort toward those programs should they wish to update or rework them in ways to enhance their strength. What was also provided were 4 comprehensive program vitality reports, one for each college, and inclusive of all degree programs, undergraduate and graduate, as well as minors and certificates, at the university. I say “comprehensive” intentionally because it included a variety of vitality metrics such as student demand for a program as measured through yield from admissions, total enrollments in a program, and graduates of a program, as well as measures of the external opportunities for graduates and the competitiveness of an offering vis-à-vis others in the area that offer the same program. The data also took a 5 year perspective so it was not just about a program at a moment in time, but over an extended period.

What you will find on the website that was linked in your packet and shown here are updated vitality reports by college, using the Fall 2023 data. I encourage everyone to explore the information closely, reviewing the other documents on the site if you have not and that also inform. Your Dean, or Jonathan Lincoln, can aid you in making sense of the materials, including on your department’s programs, and if you would like some assistance - for instance deploying a more robust external market analysis such as how competitor programs are structured - they can assist with resources we have available. Let me also say that most, although not all, of the data you see is replicable from other university resources such as the University Factbook, although deep dives of major concentrations that you will also see in the reports required separate IT programming to obtain. That said, if you surface any data anomaly, please alert Jonathan Lincoln.

I am finalizing my letter to the FS Chair now, and anticipate posting it in the morning in the spot on top that is not yet a hotlink, along with these remarks. But let me tell you briefly what you we see in my report:

I will speak to the programs referenced in my April 2023 report, some that have done superb work and will be shifted back to good standing. Others I currently will be recommending to the President on March 29 for closure, some with the urge to rebuild a new major in part informed by elements of the closing one. I say “currently” because I am intentionally providing this report to the Senate early should the Senate wish to do their own study of these program and offer me counsel prior to March 29.

I will also speak to a small set of minors that I will be recommending to the President for closure either because there are no faculty with the skills or background to deliver required and/or elective courses in them, or they have had no, or nearly no, students enrolled in them for some time. Some may also represent opportunity for reinvention as a more focused

certificate, a strategy we are deploying here at WP to enable stackable credential opportunity for students.

Third, I will speak to three main campus programs for which we now only deploy that program online and thus need to close the main campus offering that has had no, or nearly no students enrolled in them. Let me also say that any program closed will have a teach out plan for the few students enrolled in them so they continue as normal to obtain their degree.

4th, I will also be speaking to a small set of additional programs I plan to place on probation. In some cases, these are fairly new programs that we launched with the potential for growth that aren't really seeing the progress desired and planned when originally approved. I see this as early opportunity for strengthening with the ability to deploy helpful external positioning tools that can aid.

Finally, I intend to relay a recommended departmental merger from one college Dean in their college, effective Fall24. You may recall that as a matter of routine, I seek input from the Faculty Senate before deciding what to recommend to the President, something I will also do on March 29.

One last point. The Deans have communicated to every program you will read about in my report, in some cases, having worked with them for many months either on plans to rework or to prepare for what is seen as a mutual logical need to close and shift energies elsewhere. Some are already actively engaged in rethinking a program in different and exciting ways, a number who have already been utilizing the resources of the EAB in this effort.

As I wrap up, let me remind that closing a program, whether a major or a minor, does not necessarily mean a particular course won't continue to be offered, particularly if it serves as a requirement of another program. Furthermore, this exercise is NOT about layoffs. It is about deploying resources, including but not limited to people, in ways that optimally enable programs, and the university to be healthy and distinctive. Let me also say this. William Paterson actually has approximately 100 undergraduate programs and concentrations, 55 graduate programs and concentrations, and 72 minors. We have a very large portfolio. Of course having a comprehensive portfolio of offerings is important and one of the defining characteristics of a University. Yet, at the same time, we must be mindful that resource stewardship is an expectation of the state and the Board of Trustees. And one builds distinction not just by adding things but also by strategic innovation with offerings, and finding focus in ways that enable vitality.

Thank you. Dr. Christensen, and I look forward in the spirit of shared governance to engaging with the Faculty Senate as we move forward to March 29 when I would ask that any feedback to me be provided.