REVIEW OF THE ACADEMIC PROGRAM SUSTAINABILITY PLAN (APSP) PROPOSAL

SUBMITTED BY

FACULTY SENATE CURICULLUM AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

INTRODUCTION

The Faculty Senate Curriculum and Planning (CnP) Committee convened its first meeting on September 11, 2025, with the primary objective of reviewing the Academic Program Sustainability Plan (APSP) proposed by the University Planning and Analysis Committee (UPAC). This review was intended to be informal and aimed at gathering committee members' perspectives and constructive feedback before the proposal is discussed within the Faculty Senate. Vice Chair Christopher Brown participated in the meeting to provide essential context regarding the development and current status of the APSP. The CnP committee's role is to act as a preliminary sounding board to ensure that NMSU faculty voices are considered early before the implementation of the plan. The meeting stressed the importance of faculty engagement in shaping institutional strategies that affect academic program viability and resource allocation.

DISCUSSION AND DELIBRATION

During the committee's review of the APSP proposal, members expressed concerns about the narrow definition of viability metrics, which currently focuses on only enrollment and degree completion rates. The committee argued that such metrics could unfairly disadvantage programs that are essential to workforce development but naturally operate with lower enrollment. To address this, the committee suggested expanding the metrics to include factors such as community engagement and faculty productivity. The members agreed to concentrate on the 'action plan' section of the proposal (pages 4–9), with each member conducting an informal review and uploading feedback to the shared drive by September 25. This approach ensures a thorough and collaborative evaluation of the implementation processes outlined in the proposal.

The committee's discussion highlighted several other critical areas of deliberation. First, members emphasized the need for up-to-date data from the Provost's office and questioned the narrow definition of "sustainability". Members also debated the inclusion of a Strength Weakness Opportunity and Threat (SWOT) analysis in the review process. The committee agreed that faculty should be given the opportunity to suggest refinements even if the proposal's structure is largely fixed. Second, the committee focused on enhancement strategies for low-yield programs, advocating for improvement rather than elimination. The committee noted the impact of external factors, such as changes in financial aid, on enrollment and graduation timelines. Two members volunteered to collect additional information to support this analysis. Third, the committee discussed exceptions to the proposed metrics, arguing for exemptions for low-enrolment programs that serve important state, national or community needs. Questions were raised about the classification of required and general electives for financial aid purposes, prompting a call for further clarification. Lastly, the committee emphasized the urgency of gathering and submitting meaningful faculty feedback within the semester, recognizing its influence on decisions at the Board of Regents and central administration levels.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS' COMMENTS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

This section presents the consolidated and verbatim informal reviews of committee members. Tables 1-6 outlines the concerns, questions and recommendations of 6 members with regard to certain portions of pages 4-9. Recommendations by other members and final comments on the proposal are stated at the end of this section.

Table 1: Informal review by member 1

Point in Proposal	Concern	Recommendation	Question
(on pg. 4) The term *low yield* is often applied to unproductive programs; and (on pg. 5) ..an institution process should include.... (component 5) a procedure for a low productivity unit to submit an action plan to help the program become sustainable;...	The state of New Mexico does not clearly define the expectation for productivity and has yet to establish a legislative process to review academic programs for low yield productivity. As such, a vague expectation remains for academic programs to discern how best to produce a steady stream of graduates. Academic programs that appeal to part-time enrollees (particularly those utilizing the 2-course per term tuition waiver program extended to full-time NMSU employees) may demonstrate a pattern of successful course completers who are negotiating a program of study on a part-time basis. For instance, Education majors frequently drawn to these options (tuition remission and part-time study) may inadvertently have a negative impact based on the overall view of program productivity.	Define how *low productively* will be applied to assess the overall yield and sustainability of academic programs with small enrollments.	Will clarification of the expectation for academic program productivity emerge from a legislative process or a campus/college/dept based process?

Table 2: Informal review by member 2

Point in Proposal	Concern	Recommendation	Question
Productivity criteria	It is unclear what "program" means here. Are we talking about total enrollment in a college, enrollment in a major, or enrollment in concentrations?	Clarify what "program" means in the context of productivity.	How will enrollment criteria be applied to degrees shared by colleges?
Timelines	"Including newer programs that listed target enrollments during the new program proposal review process"	Keep the 3-year timeline. Units will be informed of low-yield program and will have three years to develop action plans, implement plans, and assess the effectiveness of the plan.	I thought newer programs were not considered until N + 1?
	Annual review process would potentially make it difficult for units to develop improvements and assess such improvements		

Table 3: Informal review by member 3

Point in Proposal	Concern	Recommendation	Question
Bottom of Page 5: Productivity Criteria:	First, point to address is the "Enrollment thresholds: 10 students per class/headcount cutoffs for existing programs." It may be unfairly causes issues with small programs that are necessary for accreditation or are mission driven.	A thought could be to do a "balanced approach" which can use mathematical cutoffs and a rubric that has a goal alignment, workforce demands, and accreditation standards.	Which non-numeric factors could override program thresholds?
Middle of Page 6: Academic unit actions on low-yield programs:	Second, while it may be an idea to entail "action plans for low-yield programs," these plans could be wishful thinking if there are no existing ways to hold individuals accountable. To ensure idea may work, have SMART goals, check-ins halfway through the academic year, and a way to halt progress if it is not being made.		Question: What is the potential outcome if mid-year checks and balances are not completed?
Middle of Page 2: Some strategies for sustainability:		Lastly, is to use "external market tools, such as job postings and competitor scans," to help make program decisions. Tools like this are helpful, but if you rely on them too much, you can chase short-term changes in the job market. To ensure the plan is sustainable, cross-check these statistics with long-term labor projections, alumni outcomes, and advice from advisory boards.	Question: How can the organizational institution avoid overreacting to short-term changes?

Table 4: Informal review by member 4

Point in Proposal	Suggestion/Recommendation
The section of the document entitled *"II. Ideas to help low-yield programs to become sustainable"* suggests that *"an institutional process should include…2. In cases of low productivity, a procedure for the unit to submit an action plan to help the program become sustainable"* (pg 5). However, the document also later states that academic units can, *"3. Request exception to the low-yield criteria to allow the program to continue as is for a fixed duration"* (pg 6). In the paragraph that follows, it further explains that, *"the action plan should address in broader terms the role of the program and unit in fulfilling the academic mission of the institution. That is why the action plan should be aligned with academic program review which also addresses cost efficiency and resources. If the plan requests resources, it must provide data linking loss of resources to decline in enrollments and explain why an investment will result in increased productivity"* (pg. 6).	Perhaps some additional language could be added here to accommodate programs that may be consistently "low-yield" while not entailing any significant expense to the university. It seems that specific low-yield programs that occupy a narrow, but important, niche ought to be able to partially justify their continuation by pointing to their low cost, and/or the fact of not requesting any additional resources in their action plan. (In our last meeting, I recall that someone mentioned specific types of engineering programs that might fall into this category.) So, perhaps we could suggest the following (e.g., as a new paragraph directly following the pg. 6 paragraph quoted): **"For programs that are consistently low-yield, the requested exemption to the low-yield criteria should provide a brief explanation of why a significant increase in enrollment would be unrealistic for that program. If applicable, the requested exemption might also highlight the low cost of the program (as defined in cost-per-credit-hour, total financial resources consumed, or other relevant criteria)."**

Table 5: Informal review by member 5

Point in Proposal	Concern	Recommendation	Question
Enrollment thresholds (10 students per class; degree completions as measure)	Numbers alone may not show the full value of a program.	Add flexibility for programs that serve unique or community needs even if small.	How will smaller but important programs be treated?
Cross-listing and dual-numbering courses	Could blur the difference between undergrad and grad expectations.	Keep clear guidelines so learning outcomes remain distinct.	Who will check that quality is maintained?
Planning metrics (SCH, DFW, retention, etc.)	Heavy focus on numbers may overlook things like community impact or alumni success.	Allow departments to share short narratives along with data.	Will departments get that chance to explain context?
Retention strategies (orientation, mentoring, alumni)	Good ideas, but smaller programs may not have resources.	Provide shared or college-wide support for mentoring/orientation.	Will smaller programs get help to do this?
Low-yield program thresholds (15 completions for bachelor's, 10 for master's, etc.)	Hard rules may cut out niche but valuable programs.	Use thresholds as a guide, not the only factor.	Will there be room for exceptions if a program is important to NMSU's mission?
			Who makes the final call on exceptions—the Provost alone or with others?

Table 6: Informal review by member 6

Point in Proposal	Concern	Suggestion/Recommendation	Question
Exceptions		The two additional exceptions: • unit has a relatively low cost per credit hour or per graduate based on factors such as high adjunct instructor use, online courses, or other factors reflecting limited use of campus infrastructure. • unit has experienced a temporary decline due to external factors beyond its control, such as shifts in regional workforce demands, governmental transitions, policy changes, or economic instability. Here is the new language to add after the exceptions: Consideration may be given to units that are actively pursuing appropriate resources to implement improvement plans. However, failure to secure requested resources alone does not constitute sufficient grounds for an exception. Failure to acquire resources requested to implement an action plan should not generally be considered grounds for an exception	

Additional Recommendations by other members

1. The definition of "yield" should be open. It should be subjective and context dependent on the nature of the program, noting that "ALL academic programs are not EQUAL". For example, from one perspective, it could be defined as fulfilling financial targets and another perspective may define it as fulfilling labor force needs.
2. The following criteria should be considered in the designation of a program as Low Yield Academic Program.
   o Current relevance/demand based on industry perspective/need
   o State and National goals in relation to the program
   o Institution's mission
3. Before final approval of the proposal for implementation, this should be considered:
   o To ensure fairness and transparency, a working group may be required. The working group will comprise representatives from all departments. Each departmental representative will contribute ideas, thoughts and concerns specific to their department.

Members' Final comments on the proposal

- Overall, the "Academic Program Sustainability" proposal provides a solid framework for ensuring program sustainability over time.
- This framework offers a thoughtful and collaborative process for navigating difficult situations. It ensures that key issues are addressed and that relevant stakeholders are meaningfully involved. While the structure provides a solid foundation, its effectiveness will ultimately depend on the individuals responsible for implementing it. Their judgment, leadership, and commitment will shape how well the process serves its purpose.
- **Overall concurrence:** In general, I agree with nearly all of the ideas set forth in this proposal.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Curriculum and Planning committee reaffirmed its essential role by providing faculty perspectives on the academic program sustainability plan (APSP). Members offered balanced input that not only addresses concerns but could also strengthen the APSP in ways that reflect the diverse needs of NMSU's academic programs. Keeping in mind the purpose of the APSP, which includes optimal use of resources, institutional effectiveness and focus, and to efficiently serve the state and nation, the committee is committed to serving as the 'voice of reason' and advocates that decisions made about the plan be grounded in both data and the broader values of the NMSU university and the community it serves.