

Getting on the same page: WSU Faculty Senate workshops Jan-Feb 2023

The Kansas Board of Regents (KBOR) commissioned the rpk Group to conduct an academic portfolio and workload review (see https://www.kansasregents.org/academic_affairs/academic-portfolio-reviews). The final report, feedback link, and data for WSU programs is posted on [Documents and Reports](#). Faculty, staff or administration who would like to provide feedback on the [final report](#) (academic portfolio review section — pages 5-11*) can do so by the [online form](#) or speaking with your chairs, senators, and deans. Feedback will be accepted until 5 p.m. **February 17**.

The only decision KBOR has made thus far is to suspend *their* program reviews for two years. WSU will continue on schedule with our internal reviews and accreditation reviews. KBOR will discuss taking action on the recommendations made in the academic portfolio review section of the final written report at its **March 22** meeting.

The purpose of these WSU Faculty Senate “workshops” is to provide a forum for Senators and other interested parties to a) discuss possible feedback from the Faculty Senate to KBOR, and b) discuss feedback more broadly. It would be great if we can come up with straightforward, concise, constructive feedback that we can all agree on. Maybe we won’t. Let’s find out.

Update: Well, we can’t be concise. Many people listed the same issues. I tried to fit in everyone’s feedback as concisely as I could, but it turned out to be pretty long.

Faculty are encouraged to submit their own feedback, as are departments, divisions, and other logical units that may have specific points they wish to emphasize. These notes are being made available to help faculty frame their thoughts.

Please note that the feedback form does not allow rich text – bold, bullets, and other formatting will be stripped out. We will probably need to submit feedback in pieces.

The order of bullets below is not indicative of their importance. Physics is emphasized in these compiled notes because it was specifically and incorrectly highlighted by rpk. We received little or no feedback from some divisions, but I tried to represent their interests.

Best wishes to all,
Susan Castro
Faculty Senate President

Compiled Notes

- The rpk Final Report is ‘**quantitative**’, which may make it seem to be objective and authoritative, but the numbers are meaningless out of context. The internal reviews we conduct include more complete data, explanation of that data, and the **qualitative** reporting that often cannot be

* This feedback is limited to the academic portfolio review section because the board will not take action on the teaching workload section of the final written report (pages 12-16). The teaching workload section is for campus review only.

captured in a number. We need to be able to tell our story in order for the Regents and others to understand the value we contribute. We care about the taxpayers' ROI as much as anyone.

- Using the **median** as a standard for program health guarantees that roughly half our programs will be deemed healthy and half unhealthy regardless of what we're measuring. This unfairly penalizes healthy programs and neglects programs that need attention. We need a standard of categorization that tracks actual program health, not relative program health. The points below outline parameters and considerations that can do this.
- **Headcount** enrollment in majors is not equivalent to value or need and low number of majors should not suggest elimination. This focus on numbers can easily have terrible unintended consequences. Some majors like philosophy, history, mathematics, physics or studio art may not produce a lot of majors but these programs offer courses that are intrinsically valuable, and often include courses that are needed or helpful in other majors. Eliminating basic disciplines like math and art will also make recruiting faculty to teach in these areas difficult for Kansas. Studio art majors, for example often do crucial design work for which they are prepared but not "trained". Everything we use is designed.
- The **metrics** we use need to align with our aims. Degree completion is one of many aims. Grant-funded research, DEI, badges for professional development for industry partners, applied learning, and non-degree-seeking adult education are just a few pieces of the comprehensive university package. Programs contribute to these in various ways.
- **Inclusive excellence** requires us to serve our *entire* constituency well.
 - WSU is an urban-serving university, meaning that we serve the city through research partnerships, our senior citizens through lifelong learning courses, our industry partners through applied learning and collaboration, and so on. None of these are captured in the metrics used in the rpk review.
 - We have a high percentage of Pell-eligible students, who often work full-time and have dependents. Many of our students are first-generation college students. These students often cannot be full-time students and do not aim to graduate in four years. We serve these students well when we support them in *their* educational goals.
- **Applied Learning** at WSU is a highly valuable but time-consuming component of our educational work. Faculty and staff spend a lot of time making connections with employers to lay the grounds for internships and other opportunities for students. Actually getting students into those applications takes a lot of work, and a great deal of oversight and mentoring is required to ensure that these opportunities are effective for all involved. These efforts are often de-coupled from the students' specific majors, and they're not captured in credit hours. They may also delay graduation *to a purpose*.
- The **labor data** used as a secondary metric is highly misleading. In some cases the data available to the reporting source is too sparse to be representative, but the rpk report treats categories with known bad data as equally authoritative as those with good data. In many cases we know what students did after graduation while labor bureaus, whether state or federal, don't. For example:
 - The RPK report listed very little need in Kansas industry for Math and Physics degrees. On the contrary, though our numbers might be small, Physics and Math play an important role

in industry as demonstrated by the Math and Physics degree holders who do go off to work in industry getting the great salary acknowledged by RPK report. Companies don't pay high salaries for employees and skills they don't need.

- According to KSdegree stats, physics majors from Kansas have a 60% rate employed the region (<https://ksdegreestats.org/ProspectusController?app=compare>).
- The American Physical Society lists the top 8 companies in Kansas that hire physics BS degrees and over 250 other companies with very good salaries that do so as well. The list below is only a portion of the employers who hired recent physics bachelors into technical positions (<https://www.aip.org/statistics/kansas>).

[BHC Rhodes](#)

[Black & Veatch](#)

[Cargill](#)

[Cerner](#)

[CPR Corporation](#)

[EN Engineering](#)

[Kasa Companies Inc.](#)

[NIC, Inc.](#)

- Some of our programs are pipelines to graduate school in disciplines or sub-specialties that are not available in KS, but which KS needs. When a student leaves KS on a fully-funded PhD program in another state for 7 years, this is a great success *that is incorrectly reported as a failure* from the labor-data perspective. This is common for majors in service programs.
- Many programs are **cost effective** (pay for themselves or generate revenue) even with low majors and headcount. For example, from 2013-2021, Physics taught an average of about 8000 credit hours per year at the undergraduate level, 90% of which was required for degree completion of other majors. Conservatively estimating that revenue, based on in-state tuition at \$228/cr, that's \$1.7M. Add to that the ~\$3M in grant funding – just for 2021. The total salary of the department is paid just by the overhead from those grants. It makes no sense to label Physics an “unhealthy” program.
- The issue of **duplication**, as the Regents have acknowledged as recently as January 18, 2022, is really a non-starter. Not every campus environment is right for every student. Campus culture, class size, proximity to family support, and other factors make each university unique. Many students will not take a program elsewhere as the location of the university and the ability to live at home is one important reason student attend. Geography matters. These students will either give up on college or choose something they really don't want. This is a negative sum game. Some programs like history and philosophy and English ought to be duplicated at every university because they are, as Regent Kiblinger said, part of the university's core mission. Other kinds of program may be resource-intensive, or too specialized to duplicate, e.g. Veterinary Medicine and J.D. programs. We can certainly work to distinguish program emphases within CIP codes.
- There are many **efficiencies** we've developed that are not captured in this report that should be applauded, even if they appear to compromise the metrics used in the rpk report.
 - Transfer/streamlined programs: 2+2 and 2+3 programs like LEAD, affiliations like WSU/WSU Tech

- Interdisciplinary programs, cross-listed courses, team-taught courses
- Program metrics should fit the **program type**. Here is an example of a framework that might help Regents understand the various ways we structure our programs to efficiently serve distinct aspects of our mission.
 - Direct workforce pipeline: Some programs are direct pipelines to a particular job profile, for example, teacher education, engineering, social work, accounting, and nursing programs.
 - Service programs: These majors are well-suited to preparing students for jobs that don't exist yet, work that necessarily requires post-graduate training, positions that primarily require these fungible skills, and for responsible participation in the community.
 - Essential fungible knowledge/skills: Some programs focus on developing high demand fungible skills that everyone needs in a thriving community with healthy, productive workplaces. In addition to the workforce preparation described above, these programs support degree completion and job-readiness through general education, e.g. humanities, arts and sciences.
 - Gateway programs: Some programs like physics and math develop technical skills that are necessary stepping stones to a wide variety of professions, e.g. engineering, health care, and law.
 - Example: BS degrees in Math and Physics are a necessary stepping stone for MS students in those areas, and the BS courses required to maintain these BS programs are largely *the same courses* required for engineering accreditation and other necessary university functions.
 - Community enrichment: Some programs serve societal needs through a different infrastructure, e.g. the arts. If we want to attract businesses and community members to Kansas, or keep them here, we need to empower universities to contribute well to the enriched environment these constituencies demand.
 - Interdisciplinary programs: Some programs have a non-traditional administrative structure, like Honors, WEIS, and Innovation and Design. These programs have few majors and few faculty appointments, but they serve a large constituency and specific elements of our strategic planning through efficient use of affiliated faculty, coursework, and other partnerships.
 - Hybrid/mixed programs: Some programs may be hybrids of the above categories, e.g. social sciences. Programs categorized as hybrid for review purposes may have a dual mission, e.g. Communications may be divided into a journalism pipeline and a fungible skill emphasis for students with broader career interests or a particular niche career aim.

Metrics not included in the rpk report that better capture the complex real value of distinctive programs:

- Service to graduation requirements and student interests outside the program
 - General Education courses
 - Required courses for other majors
 - Credit hours taught

- Recruitment appeal to prospective students
 - Programs that validate and support DEI and NISS
 - Programs that make college affordable through
 - paid applied learning opportunities
 - OAT/OER and other cost-lowering initiatives
 - Credentials that add distinction to students' resumes or portfolios, or that serve community needs
 - Minors (A minor like sign language may not have a high enrollment but elimination would be a disaster for schools and social services because the state would not produce enough translators.)
 - Badges
 - Certificates
- Efficiency through interdisciplinary curriculum planning
 - Cross-listing courses
 - Team teaching courses
 - Affiliations
- Efficiency in faculty utilization
 - Course releases for faculty research
 - Research that elevates our profile
 - Research that brings in grant funding
 - Research that advances knowledge and skills we share with students
 - Research in which students participate as part of their own education
 - Course releases for faculty service
 - Chairs and Coordinators recruit, advise, and mentor students; develop curriculum; recruit new faculty, and serve a host of other essential functions, at a fraction of the cost of an Administrative position.

Decisionmaking Considerations in Program Review

- **Punitive** approaches to program review are counterproductive, e.g. labeling large numbers of programs “unhealthy” on the basis of unrepresentative metrics. We understand that the Regents are responsible to the Legislature and taxpayers, as are we. Maintaining a healthy system and healthy universities in the long term, as state governance requires, often involves helping programs that face challenges rather than punishing them. We’re on the same team here. The rpk report pits us against each other by design.
- In considering whether a program should be **added or eliminated**, the following questions are crucial:
 - What are the real costs? Will KS students, families, and businesses lose something of real value? Is the cost marginal? Is this an investment in a positive-sum game?
 - What are the real benefits? Will this benefit those who need it the most? Will it broadly benefit everyone? Are there indirect or immeasurable benefits we should take into account?
- **Eliminating programs** carries ‘hidden’ costs. When a high-service program seems to be inefficient because it offers a selection of low-enrollment courses to its few majors, it may be

tempting to think that cutting the major would cut those classes and allow faculty to be more productively assigned to high-enrollment classes. However,

- When a program is cut, so is its grant funding because its faculty become ineligible. Community and industry ties for applied learning are broken. Capacity for curriculum development, faculty evaluation structure, and the rest of the infrastructure that makes those service courses *effective* and *current* are also cut.
- It is extremely difficult to hire or retain faculty without a department, for many reasons including those listed above.
- Faculty typically cannot be assigned to wherever the demand lies because we specialize in order to deliver the high-quality courses we construct. We write the textbooks that make high-impact specialties possible.
- Most departments are actually quite cheap in the end, i.e. the incremental cost of having a department chair.
- In considering whether a program is **healthy**, the following questions are crucial:
 - What are the aims of this program?
 - Are these aims aligned with the university or KBOR mission, strategic plan, vision, and priorities?
 - Is the program serving them well?
 - What steps can be taken to improve the program?
- In considering our **documentation**, it is crucial to keep in mind that the process of reviewing our programs is administratively intensive and redundant. In addition to the KBOR review,
 - All programs are subject to regular review by the Higher Learning Commission
 - Many programs are responsible to a disciplinary accrediting body like ABET.
 - WSU conducts its own internal reviews of every program every four years.Adding to the paperwork is counterproductive. We would be better served to use our accreditation process and internal review effectively. We're already doing this rather successfully at WSU.
- **Annual** assessment creates an undue and unnecessary time burden on departments. A single year is inadequate for data collection. Student and faculty work develops over years with success in degrees taking between two and five years, for example. The needs of the state and communities for various degrees are also much more responsibly assess every three to four years so that economic and social trend factors can be examined.