

UNIVERSITY COUNCIL
PLANNING AND PRIORITIES COMMITTEE
FOR INFORMATION ONLY

PRESENTED BY: Dirk de Boer, chair, planning and priorities committee
DATE OF MEETING: April 20, 2017
SUBJECT: **Report on the Work of the Enrolment Subcommittee**
COUNCIL ACTION: For information only

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND:

The enrolment subcommittee was constituted in March 2015 as a joint committee of the planning and priorities committee and the academic programs committee of Council to review the report, [Issues and Criteria when Considering Viable Enrolments at the University of Saskatchewan](#)” which was endorsed by Council in 2007. The report provides direction on when review of low enrolment courses and programs is called for and what criteria to apply to the review. The report focuses on undergraduate on-campus courses and does not apply to graduate programs, off-campus courses, or courses that are not in lecture format.

DISCUSSION SUMMARY:

The enrolment subcommittee met on four occasions in the spring of 2015 academic year and reported to Council on its terms of reference in April, 2015 as part of the planning and priorities committee [Report on Institutional Priorities](#) (scroll to last page). As part of its work, the subcommittee looked at a sampling of comparable U15 universities [Queen’s, Dalhousie, Manitoba, Calgary, McMaster, Waterloo] and several small enrolment universities [Acadia, Mount Allison, Lethbridge] to ascertain what policies and practices inform these institutions with respect to low enrolment [i.e., are small enrolments managed locally, centrally, not at all?]. The subcommittee identified that additional time was required to further explore this question more directly as none of the universities identified had policies of this type readily available on their websites.

The enrolment subcommittee reviewed extensive enrolment data and had begun to make some observations about the nature of low enrolment programs and low enrolment courses. On May 21, 2015, members of the subcommittee met with the associate and assistant deans’ academic to report on the subcommittee’s work. Some of the topics discussed by the subcommittee and presented to the group were:

1. *How should the university define low enrolment? Historically, we have considered programs with 5 or fewer graduates per year or courses with 5 or fewer students enrolled to be low enrolment programs/courses. Is this the right number? The university has a great many classes at the undergraduate level with fewer than five*

students registered. In 2014, 51% of the programs offered conferred degrees to fewer than 5 students.

2. *What is the breakeven point for a course offering for a particular unit or college? That is, how many students need to be enrolled in a particular section of a course in order to cover the costs of offering that course? How can units balance offering courses that fall below the breakeven point with larger courses and is this part of the conversation when course assignments are made each year? How does the breakeven point vary among different colleges?*
3. *What proportion of our students graduate from the 10 largest programs on campus? Why are our students gravitating toward a small set of degree programs? From an institutional perspective, what is the right balance between large programs and small programs?*

The discussion with the associate and assistant deans academic communicated to the subcommittee the degree to which academic units were already actively involved in enrolment planning. The modelling tools available through the university's transparent activity-based budget system (TABBS) enabled units to directly forecast tuition revenue based on enrolment. At the same time, the implementation of the Resource Centre Management (RCM) model and envelope funding placed the responsibility for revenue and expenditures directly within the colleges and schools. As a result, the purpose of the subcommittee became less apparent. Eventually, the subcommittee discontinued its work, and the report to be submitted to Council was never written.

On February 1, 2017, the planning and priorities committee was provided with an overview of the work of the enrolment subcommittee and a copy of the report *"Issues and Criteria When Considering Viable Enrolments at the University of Saskatchewan."* Members agreed that the work of the enrolment subcommittee, although important, was work that was already being taken up throughout the university at the program, department, college, and school levels. In order to bring closure to the work of the subcommittee, the planning and priorities committee determined that a report to Council about the subcommittee's work should be made. This report fulfills that decision.

At the February 1 meeting, the planning and priorities committee also reviewed the criteria identified within the 2007 report by which to measure low enrolment courses and programs. Although much of the report is dated as circumstances have changed, the committee affirmed that these criteria continue to be relevant to colleges and schools in contemplating their academic programs and re-submits the criteria to Council for information.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Enrolment subcommittee membership and terms of reference
2. List of criteria excerpted from the 2007 report [*Issues and Criteria when Considering Viable Enrolments at the University of Saskatchewan*](#)

ATTACHMENT 1

Excerpt from “Report on Institutional Priorities” submitted to Council by the planning and priorities committee (April 2015)

Enrolment Subcommittee – Purpose and Terms of Reference

The Enrolment Subcommittee is a joint effort of the Planning and Priorities Committee and Academic Programs Committee of University Council. The subcommittee is supported by the Institutional Planning and Assessment (IPA) office, with administrative support provided by the University Secretary’s Office.

The Enrolment Subcommittee was constituted in March 2015 to review the current enrolment policy document and make recommendations about low-enrolment programs. In 2013, the TransformUS academic programs prioritization report identified low enrolment programs as an area for further scrutiny. Since that time, the university has undergone a shift in the way resources are allocated to colleges and units. This shift includes envelope funding and the adoption of a responsibility centre management (RCM) budgeting system. This will likely impact the perception and management of small academic programs in the future.

The current [viable enrolments policy](#) was developed and passed by University Council in 2007. The Enrolment Subcommittee will use that policy document as the basis for its discussions, and it will present an updated version of this document to University Council at the conclusion of its work.

As part of its work, the subcommittee will:

1. Review the “Issues and Criteria when Considering Viable Enrolments at the University of Saskatchewan” document approved by University Council in 2007;
2. Survey enrolment and graduation information provided by IPA to decide on appropriate metrics for defining low-enrolment programs;
3. Develop principles and a process for reviewing low-enrolment programs that can be used by deans and department heads as tools to gauge the value of these programs;
4. Identify broad issues for further conversations, such as service teaching and the efficient delivery of programs within units;
5. Distinguish between graduate- and undergraduate-level programs;
6. Consider a streamlined process for the omnibus removal of programs that are currently moribund;
7. Examine how low-enrolment programs are considered and managed at a number of other post-secondary institutions;
8. Make recommendations to the Planning and Priorities Committee, the Academic Programs Committee, and other Council committees as relevant and to University Council about the consideration and management of low-enrolment programs and courses.

Subcommittee membership:

Lisa Kalynchuk, chair, Planning and Priorities Committee (PPC)

Leslie Walter, PPC

Desirée Steele, PPC

Sina Adl, Academic Programs Committee (APC)

Kevin Flynn, APC

Patti McDougall, APC

John Rigby, resource member, PPC

Troy Harkot, resource member, PPC

Sandra Calver, secretary, PPC

ATTACHMENT 2

Excerpt of pages 2 and 3 from the report “Issues and Criteria When Considering Viable Enrolments at the University of Saskatchewan” (January, 2007)

Criteria to consider as “viable”

The basic question is: “Do the accomplishments of the program justify the resources committed to it?” This question implies considering:

- **Incremental resources required:** on the resource side the fundamental question is, “What resources are being consumed by this program that would be available for other uses if the program was not offered?” Three general resource issues could be considered.
 - o Use of teaching resources: how many students are enrolled in the program or course? How does this number compare to other programs and courses across campus? The issue with enrolment is equitable and efficient use of teaching resources.
 - o Administrative and Support requirements: what administrative and support resources are devoted to a program and would become available if a particular program is discontinued?
 - o Complementarity: does the program support other programs (e.g. B.Mus & B.Mus.Ed.)?¹ Does the program use courses from, or in combination with, other program offerings on campus? The implication is that complementary programs will use fewer incremental resources than will completely standalone programs, other things being equal.

- **Program accomplishments:** on the outcome side the basic question is, “Is the program making a meaningful contribution to Society and to the overall goals of the University?” One could consider:
 - o Completeness of program offerings: some programs may be important to support a claim of providing a full line of offerings in a particular academic area. An Agricultural College is expected to have a Soil Science program for example. Similarly, an Arts College is expected to have a Philosophy program.
 - o Service teaching: some programs may have low declared enrolment but may provide a valuable and necessary role providing first and second year courses for other programs on campus. Attracting and retaining faculty in these areas may be dependent on the presence of degree program.
 - o Public Good: some small enrolment programs may result in disproportionate levels of positive outcomes and contributions to Society as a whole. Some programs may significantly promote the University of Saskatchewan’s “sense of place” within the province and country.
 - o Prestige: some small enrolment programs may result in disproportionate levels of positive publicity and prestige accruing to the Department, College, and University. The faculty in some programs may attract significant Tri-Council funding.

¹ Examples are sometimes given in this document as an aid to clarity. No comment about the viability or lack of viability of the examples is intended.

- o Quality of program including program coherence and ability to meet stated learning outcomes: although the integrated plan states that even some high quality low enrolment programs may need to be restructured, unless there is compelling grounds flowing from the above criteria, there seems little justification for continuing low quality low enrolment programs. Most programs at the University of Saskatchewan have undergone a Systematic Program Review (SPR) in this planning cycle so considerable information regarding program quality is available.

From pages 7 and 8:

Summary

The viability of low enrolment programs and courses continues to be an issue worthy of the attention of University Council. The basic question is: do the accomplishments of the program justify the resources committed to it.

Viability should, therefore, be determined by comparing the incremental resources required by low enrolment programs or courses against the accomplishments of the program. Resources can be considered from the perspective of teaching resources, administrative resources and complementarity. Accomplishments can be assessed by considering completeness of program offerings, service teaching, public good, prestige, and quality of the program.