

**Executive Brief** 

## Rightsizing the Program Portfolio

#### **Program Portfolio Optimization a Critical Necessity**

To remain financially sustainable in an era of increasing cost and enrollment pressures, colleges and universities must better manage a balanced program portfolio that advances the institutional mission, responds to market demands, and contributes to the bottom line.

To this end, campus leaders are beginning to think more critically about the programs that they launch, knowing that the "if we build it, they will come" days are over. Yet, unlike the enthusiasm generated by launching new programs, efforts to reevaluate existing offerings often meet resistance from a broad range of campus stakeholders. Without an effective strategy to review and realign the academic program portfolio, institutions face an ongoing drain on financial and reputational resources.

#### In Need of a New Approach

EAB endorses a holistic approach to academic program review that fosters a continuous improvement mindset, rather than relying on one-off, herculean efforts.

Regular program assessments identify struggling programs early. Ideally, these interventions will translate to improvements. However, when revitalization is not successful, this method also eases the path toward downsizing or discontinuance. These decisions are never easy—and only with careful planning and communication can campuses expect to realize savings and reinvest resources into growth areas.

#### **Four Imperatives to Guide Campus Leaders**

Rightsizing the Program Portfolio focuses on the four imperatives listed below to guide campuses in transforming their program review processes. Leaders should begin implementing these imperatives now to condition their campuses to start working toward the long-term health of the academic program portfolio.



#### Assemble the Right Data for Regular Program Health and Performance Conversations

- Evaluate programs annually to assess health, reward progress, and identify areas of concern
- Balance ease of collection, faculty receptiveness, an institutional priorities to determine the "right" program performance metrics

### Provide Watch-List Programs with Structured Guidance and a Set Period of

**Time to Improve** 

 Guide program leaders to design improvement opportunities with the right input of data and curricular expertise

 Establish up-front expectations for future performance across a set period of time

#### Increase Resource Flexibility in Parallel to Program Redesign Efforts

- Deploy appropriate retirement incentives
- Clear the emotional hurdles that often hinder retirement
- Ensure disciplined position control over vacated faculty lines
- Use retirement as a forcing function for larger planning efforts

# Ensure Program Discontinuance Minimizes Stakeholder Disruption and Maximizes Cost Savings

- Review institutional policies to ensure common faculty and student issues are appropriately addressed
- Refine talking points to explain the context and reason for discontinuance in light of larger institutional objectives