

To: UWM Faculty Senate
From: UWM University Committee
Re: Report on the College of General Studies Program Discontinuance Proposal
Date: July 24, 2024

On March 11, 2024, Universities of Wisconsin President Jay Rothman ordered UWM to close the UWM at Waukesha campus. This came after the October 2023 announcement of the closing of UWM at Washington County, a closure that was concluded in June 2024.

The plan that UWM outlined after the order to close the Waukesha campus would result in the layoff of tenured faculty associated with the College of General Studies (CGS). In such a situation, Regent Policy 20-24 (Procedures Relating to Financial Emergency or Program Discontinuance Requiring Faculty Layoff and Termination) governs the process for considering the campus plan. In addition, on April 18, the Faculty Senate approved additions to Policies and Procedures (P&P) to codify the campus-level procedures.

Under the procedures laid out by RP 20-24 and the approved additions to UWM P&P, the Chancellor submitted the CGS program discontinuance proposal to the University Committee (UC) on May 3, 2024. The UC undertook a process described below to consider the proposal based on the seven considerations laid out in RP 20-24 (RP 20-24 IID, Appendix). This report to the Faculty Senate is the report on our process and recommendation on the proposal.

University Committee Activities

The UC received the program discontinuance proposal on May 3. RP 20-24 and UWM P&P require that the committee seek comments and recommendations on the proposal. Working with staff in the UWM Marketing and Communications office, a website was developed to receive comments. Invitations to comment on the proposal were sent to all employees and students in the College of General Studies, governance leads on main campus (Academic Staff, University Staff, and Student Association), as well as being posted on the website devoted to the branch campus closures for wider public distribution. The comment period was 30 days from UC receipt of the proposal.

The public comment period opened on May 3 and closed on June 2. The UC received 36 separate comments from 35 individuals. These individuals include:

- 18 CGS Faculty/Academic Staff
- 3 CGS University Staff
- 7 CGS Students
- 5 Main Campus Faculty/Academic Staff
- 1 Main Campus Student
- 1 Faculty/Academic Staff from another UW campus

The UC discussed the proposal at its regularly scheduled meetings on May 7 and May 14. A series of meetings focused on the proposal were held on May 20, June 7, June 10, June 12, June 14, and June 17. Meetings were attended by UC members. By custom, we invite newly-elected

incoming UC members to attend our summer meetings. CGS Faculty member Lisa Hager, an incoming member of the UC and Faculty Senate, attended the focused meetings. We then spent time in late June and July working through the major elements of the proposal and the main issues raised in the public comment period in developing our recommendation and writing this report.

Beyond considering the information and recommendations raised in the 36 comments submitted through the open comment period, the UC gathered information about various aspects of the proposal, issues raised by the public comments, and the status of CGS from Chief Legal Officer Joely Urdan, Vice Provost for Student Success Dave Clark, College of Letters and Science Dean Scott Gronert, and Associate Vice Chancellor for Finance and Business Services Drew Knab.

Program Discontinuance Proposal

The key arguments the program discontinuance proposal makes in support of the plan to close the College of General Studies and its three academic departments focus on the enrollment declines experienced by the branch campuses and the significant financial challenges facing main campus. We address each of these in turn.

Enrollment Declines

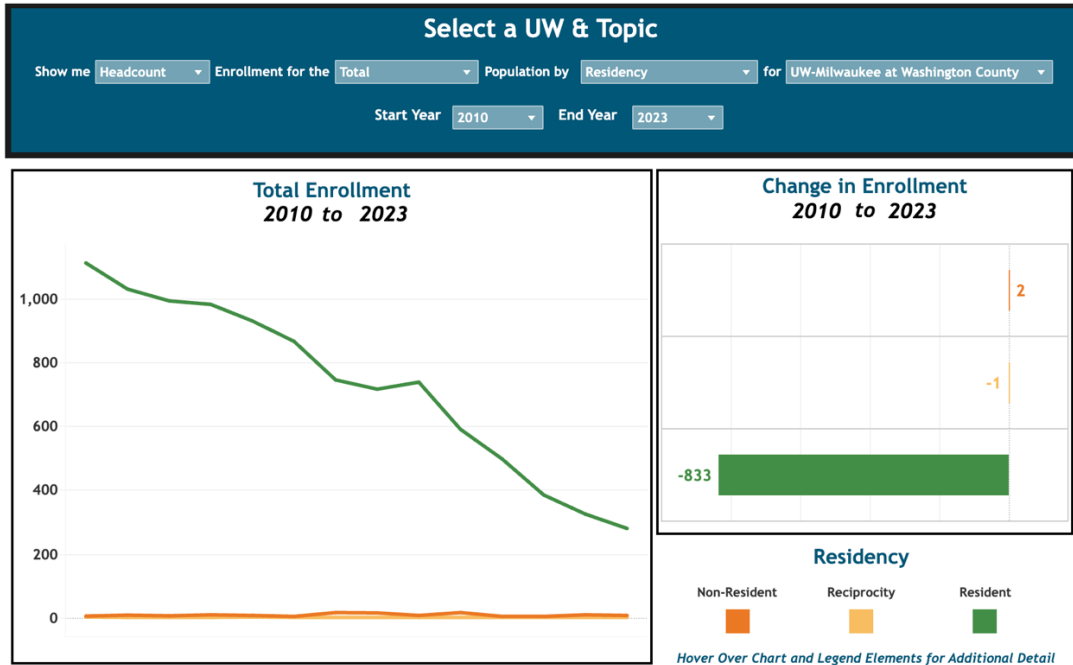
One of the stark realities of the UWM branch campuses is the consistent declines in enrollment since 2010. This trend is not just occurring at the Washington County and Waukesha campuses, but at almost all the branch campuses and mirrors declines in enrollment at two-year institutions nationally. Because of these enrollment declines, four of the 13 branch campuses have closed at the end of the 2023-2024 academic year – UW Platteville-Richmond, UWM at Washington County, UW Oshkosh Fond du Lac, and UW Green Bay Marinette. UW Oshkosh Fox Cities is scheduled to close at the end of the 2024-2025 academic year. UWM at Waukesha will be the sixth branch campus to close.¹

The total enrollment at the 13 branch campuses has declined from a high of 9959 students in 2010 to 3556 in 2023, a decline of 64.3 percent.² The same patterns are evident for the Washington County and Waukesha campuses, as shown in the figures below.³ The Washington County campus lost 833 students in this 13-year period, while the Waukesha campus lost 1531 students. These declines are approximately 65 percent of the student population from 2010 to 2023. It is important to note that these enrollment declines started well before the merging of the former UW College campuses with various four-year campuses in 2018.

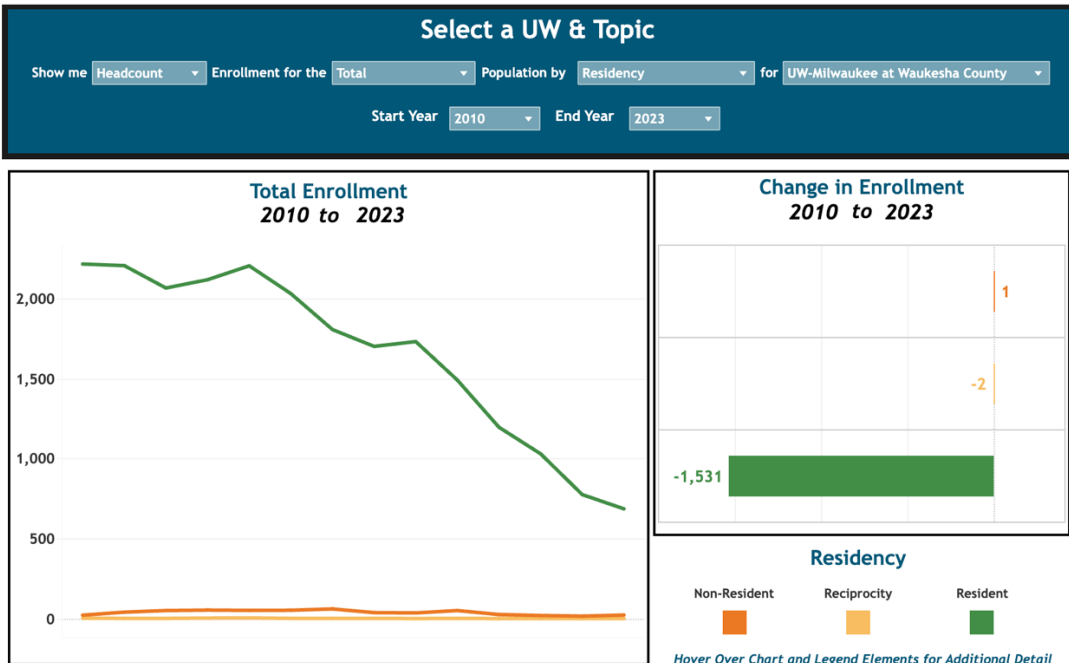
Declines in enrollment at the two-year campuses are explained by a confluence of potential issues. National data suggest that student behavior is changing, with declines among students at two-year institutions and small increases in students attending four-year campuses.⁴ Here in Wisconsin, the educational playing field has been influenced by several trends. One is the six-percentage point decline in the number of high school students since 2010.⁵ Related to this is the resulting competition from four-year campuses. As four-year schools have competed for a declining number of high school graduates, the acceptance rates at the UW comprehensive

campuses have gone from 84.8 percent to 93.8 percent. This change has occurred at the same time the 16 Wisconsin Technical College System (WCTS) campuses have been given the authority to offer AA and AS degrees, offering one more point of competition for the UW branch campuses.⁶

UWM Washington County and Waukesha Enrollments 2010-2023



UWA Office of Policy Analysis & Research



UWA Office of Policy Analysis & Research

This enrollment decline is also not a function of UWM main campus leaders failing to make efforts to grow the branch campuses. Main campus worked with CGS leadership to provide recruitment and marketing support since the 2018 merger. While it has evolved over time, the recruitment staff at CGS consists of an admissions recruiter, a visitor experience coordinator, and a New Student Orientation staff member, with the main campus Office of Undergraduate Admissions (OUA) providing application review and other support. The main campus Marketing and Communications office has worked with CGS over time to provide robust advertising covering a range of media – billboards, bus wraps, ads in movie theaters, radio spots, direct mail to residents in West Bend and Waukesha counties, as well as digital and online search campaigns.

Finally, regarding enrollment patterns, there is little optimism that current trends will turn around in the coming years. While national figures may look different, the number of high school students in Wisconsin is projected to continue to decline approximately 12 percentage points between 2024 and 2037.⁷ The UWM campuses exist in an area of the state with a significant number of higher education institutions, providing many choices for high school students seeking higher education. Also, the enrollments in the new AA and AS degrees offered at Waukesha County Technical College (WCTC) have not been as robust as anticipated, even with their greater financial resources. In the end, while many Wisconsin colleges and universities are experiencing enrollment declines, including UWM’s main campus, it is clear that the declines at the two-year branch campus are more significant and less likely to rebound.

Financial Challenges:

The enrollment declines experienced by UWM Washington County and UWM at Waukesha have led to financial challenges. As tuition revenue declines, CGS is stabilized by increased General Purpose Revenue (GPR) allocations and the growth of the main campus Bridge program, in which several CGS personnel serve. One current reality is the unit’s overdependence on GPR allocations compared to the rest of UWM units. Approximately 48 percent of the CGS budget is covered by the state appropriations subsidy, compared to an average of 27 percent of the budgets of main campus units. As enrollment continues to decline, this percentage would have to continue to increase to cover CGS expenses.

Revenue Sources	College of General Studies		Milwaukee Campus	
	Budget \$	% Share	Budget \$	% Share
Subsidy (State Appropriations)	\$6,964,104	48%	\$139,420,394	27%
Tuition	\$4,836,425	34%	\$186,291,302	36%
Other Tuition & Continuing Education	\$1,095,700	8%	\$8,441,658	2%
Misc Revenue & Transfers	\$793,501	6%	\$32,829,592	6%
Segregated Fees	\$332,100	2%	\$28,213,799	6%
Contracts & Grants	\$242,637	2%	\$45,839,493	9%
Private Gifts & Trust Funds	\$54,950	0%	\$21,454,302	4%
Auxiliary Services	\$35,320	0%	\$42,593,000	8%
Indirect Cost Return	\$15,400	0%	\$7,686,588	1%
Total	14,370,137	100%	512,770,128	100%

An additional reality is staffing. While the faculty on main campus has shrunk considerably over the past several years through retirement, resignation, and vacant positions remaining unfilled, CGS faculty numbers have not decreased in line with their declining number of students. This, along with declining enrollment and greater support from main campus, creates a situation in which CGS has a higher cost per student than does main campus, even after including the cost of graduate education in main campus programs.

In short, the financial challenge facing CGS is that continued enrollment declines would require an increased commitment of money from the main campus to sustain current staffing and operations. Given the financial challenges facing main campus in general, any increased investment in CGS would require additional cuts to main campus units, which have experienced several years of cuts themselves. Since enrollment declines on main campus are not nearly as precipitous as are the enrollment declines in CGS, this doesn't make good financial sense.

Salient Themes from Public/Community Comments

Since the announcement of the closing of the Waukesha campus and the submission of the program discontinuance proposal, the UWM community and observers at large have asked numerous questions, raised concerns, and made several recommendations for the future of CGS. Many of these came through the public comment period and others have been a part of campus and individual level conversations. We address some of the most common questions and recommendations here to offer information to those who might have similar questions.

Do CGS and the departments meet the definition of a “program” under RP 20-24?

RP 20-24 (Definitions) states:

“For the purposes of this policy, “program” shall mean a related cluster of credit-bearing courses that constitute a coherent body of study within a discipline or set of related disciplines. When feasible, the term shall designate a department or similar administrative unit that offers majors and has been officially recognized by the UW institution. Programs cannot be defined ad hoc, at any size, but should be recognized academic units. Programs shall not be defined to single out individual faculty members for layoff. For the UW System’s cooperative extension and continuing education functions, the term “program” also shall include the substantial equivalent of an academic department that may or may not provide credit-bearing credentials.”

The program discontinuance proposal seeks to close the College of General Studies and its three academic departments. Under the definition of a program here, the focus is on ensuring that what is deemed a program is an existing unit that is recognized as such, as opposed to defining an area or discipline as a program for the purpose of targeting a faculty member or members. “Program” here can be a small unit or a large one, but the important point is that it is an existing formal unit. The three departments and CGS are academic units recognized by the University and each does offer a “related cluster of credit-bearing courses that constitute a coherent body of study within a discipline or set of related disciplines.”

Have all “feasible alternatives” been explored? RP 20-24 says that faculty layoffs can only occur “after all feasible alternatives have been considered.” 1) Since 2018, when the merger with the branch campuses took place, main campus has made efforts to stabilize and increase enrollments at the Washington County and Waukesha campuses. The recruitment and marketing efforts are discussed above on p. 4. 2) In 2022, when technical colleges were given the authority to offer AA/AS degrees, WCTC approached main campus to establish partnership agreements for UWM to be a transfer institution for their graduates. One element of this partnership was to use CGS courses and instructors to fulfill many of the requirements of their AA/AS programs. Unfortunately, the enrollments in the WCTC AA/AS programs have been lower than they anticipated. 3) Main campus has also invested in a number of bachelor’s completion programs at the Waukesha campus to attract students and keep them on the campus. The Nursing and Psychology programs and a planned program in Business were efforts to reply to market needs and allow students to pursue a BA/BS on the Waukesha campus. Enrollments to date have been modest and it is unknown whether students want to spend four years on the Waukesha campus. 4) It isn’t within the University’s power to raise tuition as a way to gain more revenue, as tuition rates are set by the Board of Regents. Raising tuition for a campus that has had significant enrollment declines is likely a non-starter. 5) Financial constraints on main campus limit the options available beyond those focused specifically on the Waukesha campus.

Why not integrate faculty into main campus departments? Integrating CGS faculty into main campus departments is not possible because of the financial situation in most main campus units. While main campus enrollment declines haven’t been as dramatic as those at the branch campuses, these declines, combined with continued disinvestment on the part of the state, has resulted in financial strains across main campus. UWM’s financial composite index, used by the Higher Learning Commission and the U.S. Department of Education, is a good indicator of the impact of these challenges. The index ranges from 0 to 10 and UWM currently sits at 2.47. Alongside the continuing problem of campus budget deficits, this index suggests that UWM continues to face significant challenges. The challenge of integrating CGS faculty is made more complicated by the fact that the College of Letters and Science (L&S) is the College where most CGS faculty disciplines are housed. L&S enrollments have declined 41 percent over the past 10 years and the college has had consistent structural budget deficits over that same period. Since 2014, the tenure track and tenured faculty in L&S have declined from 366 to 276, mostly because faculty who retired or left the University were not replaced. For FY2025, L&S has further reduced budgeted Full Time Equivalent (FTE) by 35 FTE. As a result of these financial constraints, L&S departments have been under a hiring freeze/reduction in recent years and the College has recently non-renewed a number of instructional academic staff in an attempt to “right-size” the teaching staff. L&S departments have also experienced cuts in S&E budgets and in summer course offerings in the most recently concluded academic year. It is difficult to see how L&S or the main campus as a whole has the budget capacity or the instructional needs to absorb 35 tenured faculty without making further cuts to existing main campus instructional staff and department budgets.

Why the focus on discontinuance of CGS instead of change? Some have asked why main campus doesn’t just let CGS get smaller as enrollments dictate and others have asked why we don’t increase CGS tuition to gain more revenue. The former isn’t realistic, as it would decrease tuition revenue even further and require more investment of main campus financial resources.

There are salary, fringe, and fixed costs (student services, administrative costs, utilities) that would have to be paid. And moving CGS to a per-student cost similar to main campus would remove about 50 percent of their funding, which would have to be made up in faculty/staff reductions. Cuts of this size would likely make significant dents in the programs and curriculum CGS could offer, which would not do much to increase enrollment. The inability of main campus to raise CGS tuition was discussed above.

Why does the discontinuance proposal move the Bridge program to main campus? – What is currently known as the Bridge program evolved out of main campus's Academic Opportunity Program, an alternative admissions program for students who didn't meet main campus requirements. The current program began in 2016, when it was known as Summer Bridge. It served students who had applied for admission to UWM's main campus, but did not meet main campus admissions requirements. These students were admitted to main campus if they successfully completed the Summer Bridge program. Summer Bridge students generally took a Math course, an English course, and an Educational Psychology course designed to help them succeed at the University. The Summer Bridge program transitioned to the semester-model currently being used during 2021 when it became clear that the Covid-19 pandemic would not ease in time for us to have Bridge students in-person that summer. By Fall of 2021, we were back to in-person classes, so Bridge was shifted to the fall at that time. Summer Bridge and the current Bridge program have always served students who applied to main campus, not the branch campuses. CGS personnel have staffed the program because of their mission and facility with the type of students admitted to Bridge. The Bridge instructional staff has been mostly composed of CGS academic staff, but some CGS faculty have been assigned to teach in Bridge at main campus as their ability and availability has expanded because of declining enrollment in Waukesha.

What happens to the money currently being spent on CGS? – If the program discontinuance proposal is approved by the Board of Regents, the General Purpose Revenue (GPR) money currently being spent on CGS would be used by campus for other purposes that support existing programs and other campus activities.

The UWM Chapter of the AAUP's statement on the discontinuance proposal says that limiting CGS to the same rate of state appropriations as main campus (27 percent) "would only require an additional \$2.5M or 4/10ths of one percent the University's annual operating budget." Why not provide additional funding and keep the CGS faculty? - First, there are two errors in the calculations in this statement. Using the 27 percent figures results in an annual budget gap of \$3.1M, not \$2.5M. Second, the 4/10th of one percent figure includes several sources of main campus funding that cannot be used to address a budget deficit in CGS – contracts, grants, auxiliary funds, segregated fees, gifts. Beyond these calculation errors, there is the reality that the \$3.1M gap would likely grow over time due to inflation, possible pay plan expenditures, and fringe benefit cost increases. As was stated previously, this would require main campus units to cut spending to shift the funds to a unit with declining enrollments and this transfer would likely grow each year as costs increase.

Why does main campus leadership think that a university-center partnership with WCTC is a better solution than retaining CGS? – The campuses in the state technical college system are funded differently than the 13 four-year campuses in the Universities of Wisconsin. Technical colleges receive funding from local and county property taxes (about 30 percent of their total funding), as well as funds from the state, federal government, and tuition revenue. Currently, the technical colleges receive more funding per student than the four-year campuses, \$17,733 compared to \$15,079.⁸ Funding for the technical college system ranks 5th highest in the nation, while the funding for the four-year campuses ranks 43rd. The technical colleges, which are already competing in the AA/AS market, can do so with more funding and more modern facilities than UWM Waukesha can.

What does this move say about the state of tenure? As RP 20-24 acknowledges (RP 20-24 Policy Statement, Appendix), tenure is the cornerstone of academic freedom on college and university campuses and, as such, actions to lay off tenured faculty should not be undertaken lightly. The groundwork for a potential layoff of tenured faculty such as that described in the CGS program discontinuance proposal was laid in 2015, when the Governor, state legislature, and UW Board of Regents worked to redefine tenure in the state of Wisconsin by removing tenure guarantees from state statute, reducing the power of faculty in campus governance, allowing tenured faculty to be laid off for programmatic reasons, and instituting post-tenure review requirements. The Board of Regents then developed policies for these new definitions of tenure (RP 20-24 IIA, Appendix). Alongside these changes to tenure, a decade of tuition freezes and budget cuts has created a situation in which UW campuses across the state have struggled financially, with many running budget deficits and others barely able to survive. Currently, six campuses have continuing budget deficits, one of which is operating with no financial reserves and is forced to rely on loans from the Universities of Wisconsin as a result. As many faculty and academic organizations predicted in 2015, being faced with situations in which tenure and academic freedom would come face to face with financial hardships would result in extraordinarily challenging situations. This proposal is one such situation, a situation that raises several complex issues. On one hand, because of the closure of the Waukesha campus, 64 CGS academic staff and university staff received non-renewals or layoff notices because they don't enjoy the protections of tenure, which raises concerns about hierarchies among employees. On the other hand, this decision contributes to the erosion of tenured positions on campus, which results in a decline in the number of employees with the academic freedom of inquiry that tenure represents. At the end of the day, there are 35 tenured faculty associated with CGS and it would require \$3.65M each year to retain them, acknowledging that this annual cost would increase approximately 4 percent a year for salary/fringe and other expenses. Current financial and enrollment declines may not support the idea that main campus can support the retention of 35 additional faculty, but this reality is a sobering one.

Conclusion and Recommendation:

After many years of a concerted lack of real investment in financial resources from the state legislature, the UWs campuses face difficult financial and personnel choices. As a result of changes to tenure made by the state legislature in 2015, the status of tenured faculty is more

precarious than ever. In this current situation, a difficult set of decisions faces UWM in the wake of the Universities of Wisconsin decision to close UWM’s Washington County and Waukesha campuses. The unfortunate reality of the current situation is that the main campus budget has little ability to invest additional money in a unit with steeply declining enrollment and no realistic path to enrollment increases. CGS costs would continue to increase as all costs do (salaries, benefits, inflation), which would require additional annual main campus investment of resources. Continuing to invest in CGS would require main campus units to continue to cut what little spending they have available to free up these additional funds. Given that CGS enrollment declines are steeper than main campus declines, this isn’t a logical decision, particularly given the current austerity being observed by most main campus units. From this financial situation flows the extremely difficult decision to lay off tenured faculty associated with CGS. No one involved takes this decision lightly and all would wish for a different resolution of the situation. All faculty are mindful of the decline in the number of tenured faculty on campus and this proposal contributes to that decline. However, a lack of investment by state legislators, continued declining enrollments at CGS, and the current financial realities on the main campus, leave UWM with no clear feasible options for retaining these positions without risking greater campus-wide financial instability. As a result, the members of the University Committee recommend that the Faculty Senate support the Chancellor’s program discontinuance proposal.

Kathleen Dolan, Chair
Melinda Kavanaugh
Kelly Kirshner
Richard Leson
Lindsay McHenry
Wilkistar Otieno
Gillian Rodger

¹ <https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/education/2024/06/13/university-of-wisconsin-oshkosh-closing-uw-fox-cities-campus/74083903007/>

² <https://www.wisconsin.edu/education-reports-statistics/enrollments/>

³ <https://www.wisconsin.edu/education-reports-statistics/enrollments/>

⁴ <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cha>

⁵ <https://knocking.wiche.edu/dashboards-profiles/>

⁶ https://madison.com/news/local/education/university/new-transfer-paths-between-technical-colleges-uw-campuses-open-up-options-for-students/article_186d6cb1-d906-5bb1-b8a9-9ce8d9ce291f.html

⁷ <https://knocking.wiche.edu/dashboards-profiles/>

⁸ https://captimes.com/news/education/uw-system-public-funding-lags-technical-college-spending-report-finds/article_4f8dc6ee-82f4-53f9-b644-1eb00fbc25e0.html

Appendix

RP 20-24 IID “the designated faculty committee’s review and evaluation of a program discontinuance proposal “may be based on the following considerations, where relevant:

1. The centrality of the program to the institution’s mission;
2. The academic strength and quality of the program, and of its faculty in terms of national ratings, if applicable;
3. Whether the work done in the program complements that done in another essential program;
4. Whether the work done in the program duplicates academic instruction and content delivery in other programs in the institution;
5. Student and market demand and projected enrollment in the subject matter taught in the program;
6. Current and predicted comparative cost analysis/effectiveness of the program; and
7. Other relevant factors that the committee deems appropriate.

RP 20-24 Policy Statement - Tenure is the keystone for academic freedom and excellence and is awarded for academic and professional merit. Tenure is an essential part of the guarantee of academic freedom that is necessary for university-based intellectual life to flourish. The grant of indeterminate tenure to faculty members represents an enormous investment of university and societal resources, and those who receive this investment do so only after rigorous review which established that their scholarship, research, teaching and service meet the highest standards and are congruent with the needs of the university. It is therefore expressly recognized that the awarding and continued enjoyment of faculty tenure is of vital importance to the protection of academic freedom and to the overall academic quality of the University of Wisconsin System institutions.

Accordingly, faculty layoff will be invoked only in extraordinary circumstances and after all feasible alternatives have been considered. Additionally, faculty layoff shall not be based on conduct, expressions, or beliefs on the faculty member’s part that are constitutionally protected or protected by the principles of academic freedom.

RP 20-24 IIA – “The maintenance of tenure-track and tenured faculty, and of essential instructional and supporting services, remains the highest priority of the university. To promote and maintain high-quality programs, the institutions of the UW System may over time develop new programs and discontinue existing programs. Accordingly, and notwithstanding RPD 20-23 (Regent Policy Document on Faculty Tenure), a tenured faculty member, or a probationary faculty member prior to the end of his or her appointment, may be laid off in the event that educational considerations relating to a program require program discontinuance. Educational considerations may include strategic institutional planning considerations such as long-term student and market demand and societal needs. Layoff for reasons of program discontinuance may be made only in accordance with this policy and Wis. Stat. s. 36.22. “