



UNC Asheville's 2024 Academic Portfolio Review Background, Recommendations, and Next Steps

Background

Necessity of phasing out select programs

Similar to other colleges and universities across the nation, UNC Asheville is facing financial challenges. During the first several months of 2024, the University took immediate steps to address a structural deficit forecast at approximately \$6 million for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024. Efforts are ongoing to minimize and resolve an additional deficit in the University general fund in fiscal year 2025.

The deficits stem from several factors, including an enrollment decline of about 25 percent — more than 900 students in all — over the past five years.

Enrollment challenges are not unique to UNC Asheville. They can be observed nationwide due to reductions in the population of traditional college-aged students and a perceived decline in the financial value of a college education. I believe factors specific to UNC Asheville have also contributed to its decline in enrollment. Key among these institution-specific factors is a reluctance to scrutinize and evolve our academic offerings in line with student demand and relevance to 21st-century society. The University must provide relevant programs for which student demand is robust and sustained.

By carefully identifying a number of consistently underenrolled academic programs to be phased out, the University will ease its budget deficit and free resources for necessary reinvestment in higher-demand programs. The academic portfolio review, or APR, initiated in spring 2024 has allowed senior leadership to identify programs to phase out.

Other steps to address budget issues

The APR is among a host of initiatives that UNC Asheville has undertaken in recent months to address its budgetary pressures. Among key actions already completed or underway:

- Creation of a Budget Task Force to perform a holistic review of options
- Imposition of travel restrictions to limit expenses
- Renegotiation of procurement contracts where possible
- Scrutiny of proposed personnel actions, including hiring, by a personnel review committee
- Comprehensive review of staff positions and an associated reduction in force
- Implementation of the UNC System Faculty Realignment Incentive Program for eligible faculty, with at least twelve faculty participating over the next two years
- Reorganization of senior staff and elimination or consolidation of several senior roles: vice chancellor for admissions (eliminated), executive director — governmental and community relations (eliminated), chief of staff (consolidated), and chief financial officer/chief operating officer (consolidated)

Recommendations

Process

The APR followed a measured approach in spring 2024 to evaluate current program offerings. Academic leaders including deans, the Faculty Senate Executive Committee, and department chairs received findings from an external, independent academic program margin study. The material helped inform the identification of areas for greater attention and inquiry. Individual meetings with academic department chairs and associated deans helped to contextualize the quantitative data. Additional consultation with senior staff followed.

This proposal, if accepted by President Peter Hans and the UNC System Board of Governors, will involve the phasing out of select academic programs, a reduction in the University's collection of academic majors, and faculty reductions in some academic departments to align with enrollment trends.

Identified programs

If the UNC System accepts this proposal, the University will proceed to:

- Phase out the Ancient Mediterranean Studies degree program and academic department
- Phase out the Drama degree program and academic department
- Phase out the Philosophy degree program and academic department
- Phase out the Religious Studies degree program and academic department
- Curtail the Languages and Literatures academic department by eliminating concentrations in French and German

Through the APR, senior leadership sought to minimize the impact of prospective program changes, while setting the groundwork for longer-range strategic reinvestment.

Program context

If approved, these actions would affect five of the University's 27 undergraduate academic departments. In academic years 2020 through 2023, these programs and concentrations together have averaged 25 graduates per year.

During the same four-year period, UNC Asheville averaged 763 graduates a year. Graduates in the impacted programs accounted for about 3 percent of the total graduates in those years. More recently, in the University's census for Spring 2024, the five impacted programs counted 72 students as declared majors. Together they represented 3.5 percent of the 2,023 UNC Asheville students who had declared their majors as of the census.

Implications: students and faculty in impacted programs

While currently enrolled students in the impacted programs will be able to complete their chosen majors at UNC Asheville, future admissions to these programs would be halted. Detailed plans and timelines for winding down the programs — known as teach-out plans — would take shape and be announced following approvals at the UNC System level. The University would help students to complete their programs with minimal disruption and in full compliance with accreditation standards.

For any tenured and tenure-track faculty who would be impacted, the University would provide notice of up to 12 months in advance of any changes to employment. Other impacted faculty would receive notice and/or severance in accordance with applicable UNC System policy. The



University offers a process for potential appeal of any personnel decisions. Any faculty members being separated from the University would be eligible for reasonable assistance to pursue new opportunities.

Next steps

Asheville 2030

While UNC Asheville needs timely action to address its structural budget deficit, the APR is more than a stopgap. It should be a periodic exercise to make sure the University's academic offerings are the right mix to meet student needs, ensure sufficient support for programs, and keep the institution competitive, relevant, and fiscally responsible.

The 2024 APR will help make resources available as the University plans for strategic reinvestment in existing high-demand programs — in subject-matter areas where the University stands out — and in promising new programmatic areas. Developing these plans is an important part of [Asheville 2030](#), the University's community-wide, long-range visioning effort that will gather momentum in the 2024-25 academic year.

The University needs a sustainable enrollment of 3,800 to 4,000 students by 2030. In the Asheville 2030 overall vision, these students will be drawn to UNC Asheville's model of an innovative university of the future — known for its student-centered focus, liberal arts and sciences foundation, hands-on learning, technology-driven solutions, and career-ready emphasis.

By bringing the community together, Asheville 2030 will be, and already is, an inclusive process that prepares the University to capitalize on its greatest strengths and areas of opportunity. Through this work, UNC Asheville will be better prepared and better equipped to carry out its public-service mission for more students — and more communities — for generations to come.

