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SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY BUSINESS OFFICERS
INNOVATE – EDUCATE – ADVOCATE – LEAD

2025 Best Practices Submission

Presentation Title:
Strategic Academic Planning: Using Market and Economic Data to Evaluate New Programs

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Presentation Description:
This session will explore best practices for using institutional and external data to identify your best opportunities for growth using your existing portfolio. Working from an institutional case study, we will explore key elements of the strategic academic planning process, which takes a proactive and data-driven approach to enrollment growth. In addition to covering important metrics and how to find them, the session will identify ways to wrap people and process around the data. At the end of the session, attendees will have a road map for a sustainable and ongoing planning cycle that helps to create and maintain a robust academic portfolio. Special emphasis will be placed on managing different goals and expectations across colleges, campuses, or institutions within systems.

Statement of the Problem:
Our institution has been intentional about expense management for years and has benefitted from that approach. However, we recognize that there is an opportunity for strategic growth, given our strong reputation for career-focused programs. We needed to determine which of our existing programs were best situated for growth and which potential new programs presented the best opportunities to serve our community and the OSU system.

Identify the Solution:
For years, we have used a tool that examines economic trends and enrollment data. This year, we decided to use aspects of the data that would focus on growth. This initiative supports our community, but also supports the OSU system's new OSU Polytech Initiative, which aims to expand our high-impact career programs to students across the state. With this initiative in mind, we used data to identify programs with strong margins that were showing signs of growth. By examining our application and yield data, we got a sense of

which of our programs were being best received in the market. We also used class sizes to determine which of those programs could grow without adding additional resources. We identified programs that had interest across the state. We worked with our entire cabinet, including our Provost, Vice Provost, Deans, Director of Enrollment Management, VP of Fiscal Services, and marketing teams to review programs with potential for growth. We took a comprehensive approach by pulling in data from peer institutions, BLS, employers, and industry surveys to understand the feasibility of launching three new programs. We are proud of the retreat we held with this team. It allowed us to discuss all research findings and reach consensus about which programs were most situated for growth and how those programs might be structured to serve our students and community. We now have a strategic academic plan that prioritizes specific action items to build out and optimize our academic programming for the next 2 years.

Implementation Timeline:
Validate goals of project and acceptable use cases for data (Month 12)

Review internal data and identify best opportunities for growth (Month 23)

Review external data to understand market for existing and potential new programs (Month 24)

Hold retreat with Cabinet to review and build strategic academic plan based on goals and data (Month 35)

Validate and operationalize strategic academic plan (Months 4 and 56)

Implement strategic academic plan (Month 6 and beyond)

Benefits & Retrospect:
Our strategic academic plan was just built in 2024, and we are actively working to implement it. Its main benefits so far have been a clear strategic direction for our academic programs as well as consensus about how to achieve our strategic objectives. The process was also energizing for our academic deans, who will be essential to moving the process forward. It has also been a great way to unite our relatively new cabinet around the same strategic vision.