



The College of New Jersey

Section:	II.3.34
Title:	Principles of Prioritization for Program Closure
Effective Date:	September 2010
Approved By:	Provost
Responsible Unit:	Academic Affairs (609-771-3080, academic@tcnj.edu)
History:	Approved by CPP May 12, 2010
Related Documents:	

I. INTRODUCTION

This policy details the principles of prioritization for program closure.

II. DEFINITIONS

N/A

III. POLICY

The Governance Structure and Processes Policy approved by the Board of Trustees (2005) states that the administration is “primarily responsible” for the development of institutional priorities. The same document also indicates that the Committee on Planning and Priorities has the responsibility to periodically “examine internal and external challenges and opportunities and define strategies for achieving the College’s mission.” In a speech on March 2, 2010, President Gitenstein requested that the Committee on Planning and Priorities (CPP) provide input on principles of budgetary prioritization for program closure.

The College faces an external challenge caused by declining state funding. This is not a new challenge. In 2005, CPP developed “Criteria for the Closure of Academic Programs, Academic Centers and Non-Academic Programs” (www.tcnj.edu/~academic/policy/programclosure.html). This document defines both Academic and Non-Academic Programs, and describes a rigorous deliberative procedure for making such decisions. The current CPP endorses the procedures and criteria established in this document and does not recommend any amendments or changes to these policies at the present time.

CPP has also set forth another document, “Budget Decision-Making Principles and Process” (2005, last updated April 9, 2008), which articulated principles to guide decision-making concerning the selection of academic and non-academic programs for possible closure. This document stated the following principles, listed in order of importance, which should guide such decisions:

- Preserve the health, safety and security of our students, faculty, staff, and visitors.
- Preserve the integrity and excellence of the educational programs and services through which the College realizes its mission.
- Preserve the institutional integrity of the College, including our obligations to staff, faculty, and students (e.g., scholarships).

In implementing these principles, decisions will also be guided by the institutional strategic initiatives, in particular, the need to preserve and enhance the College’s long-term financial well-being.

CPP understands its present charge from President Gitenstein to provide additional input on how budget managers should interpret and apply these principles in the current institutional context, and specifically how they should interpret the phrase “preserve the integrity and excellence of the educational programs and services through which the College realizes its mission.” After due consideration, CPP proposes the following additional points addressing how these principles are to be interpreted and implemented in identifying programs and services for possible closure. The numbering of the points is only for ease of comprehension and does not indicate an order of priority or importance.

First, in using the term “program closure,” CPP is employing the term “program” in the broad sense of any set of structured activities, and not only existing academic, administrative or support units. An academic department may offer several programs, e.g., a major degree program, one or more minors, research labs, and support for student groups. Administrative units may provide several distinct sorts of services, class audits, course registration, and so forth, each of which can be considered to be a program. Support includes tutoring and some types of advising. So when we articulate criteria for “program closure,” closure should normally be understood as restructuring or eliminating particular sets of activities or services carried out by different units, not eliminating those units as a whole, although this may be the result in some cases where the principles are applied.

Second, while CPP created somewhat different criteria for the closure of academic programs, academic centers and non-academic programs, it did not intend to rank one of these kinds of programs over others as more likely to be selected for closure. Indeed, in CPP’s view, the relationship between academic and non-academic programs is complementary. Some non-academic programs provide services that are essential to maintaining the excellence and integrity of the learning environment and without which academic units could not function, and as such should be regarded as essential to the ability of the College to realize its mission.

Third, the degree to which a particular program or service helps the College to realize its mission and core values should be the primary means of assessing the value of different academic and non-academic programs. In times of financial challenge, TCNJ's primary goal should be to maintain its excellence as a highly competitive, primarily undergraduate, residential college dedicated to the transformative power of education. Moreover, the College's commitment to offering students an integrated educational experience encompassing both academic rigor and a rich student life is crucial to the character of a TCNJ education. Each program, service or activity should then be evaluated as to how well it contributes towards achieving these primary goals.

Academically, the College's goals are chiefly attained by exceptional teacher-scholars who engage students in intensive learning experiences consisting of excellent classes that are supplemented by pedagogical practices including but not limited to small seminars, disciplinarily appropriate research and faculty-student collaborative activity, community engaged learning with structured reflection, a global focus including study abroad, interdisciplinary opportunities, and self-designed majors. A faculty-student ratio appropriate to support these activities is necessary.

Beyond the classroom, talented staff educators and practitioners offer a broad range of programs, services, and facilities that are fundamental to fostering the holistic development of students as engaged learners, responsible citizens, and leaders. This expanded curriculum seeks to provide diverse and enriching living-learning environments and experiences, as well as essential academic support services; to promote student health and wellness; to support career and personal goal achievement; and to foster a strong sense of community. A staffing level appropriate to support these activities is necessary. The College values diversity in its cultural, social, and intellectual life and should continue to enhance the academic and social integration of the overall student experience.

Fourth, in considering the mission-driven characteristics of programs and activities, CPP strongly recommends that the quality of all programs and services considered for possible program closure be evaluated by evidence-based and objective measures, where possible. Given the diversity of programs and services, reliable data that make it possible to do comparisons across programs may not always be available. Nonetheless, decisions about which programs and services to select for possible closure should take evidence-based measures of performance and excellence into account where these are available. Relevant and consistent performance indicators and other appropriate assessments should be utilized, such as the results of formal program reviews, accreditation reports, evidence of excellence in achieving or exceeding program goals, impact on students and alumni, as well as the program's external reputation. Additionally, the cumulative impact of past cuts should be considered. The faculty and/or staff connected to programs identified for possible closure should be appropriately involved in conducting such assessments. Such measures should be used according to the process defined in "Criteria for the Closure of Academic Programs, Academic Centers and Non-Academic Programs (2005)."

Fifth, because the process of closing a program or discontinuing a service is itself arduous and time-consuming, CPP wishes to emphasize that in its 2008 Budget Priorities document it recommended that “in implementing these principles, decisions will also be guided by the institutional strategic initiatives, in particular, the need to preserve and enhance the College’s long-term financial well-being.” In light of the current budgetary crisis produced by already announced cuts in state funding, as well as the possibility of further reductions in state funding during the next several years, CPP recommends that, in considering programs for possible closure, budget managers look to programs whose reduction or termination will yield net cost savings in a timely manner, as well as significant and sustainable cost savings. Other things being equal, the potential for timely and efficient program closure that will yield significant cost savings should be a pragmatic criterion for prioritizing programs for possible closure.

Sixth, maintaining the public mission of the College should also be a significant consideration. As a public institution, The College has a responsibility to offer an outstanding educational experience to all students, including state citizens of low and moderate income. TCNJ should protect programs that foster students’ intellectual and leadership development and prepare students for public service. However, this should not be understood to mean that every program that meets a public need must be preserved in the context of declining state support.

Seventh, in the near run, prioritization of programs will take place in the absence of a traditional strategic plan, though in the presence of significant strategic planning that includes campus-wide strategic initiatives. Looking to the future, CPP is determined to embrace its role in “promoting the TCNJ mission and core values as the primary guide in campus planning, decision-making, and resource allocation” (“Renewing CPP’s Role in Strategic Planning,” spring, 2010). CPP is committed to reengagement in the strategic planning process so that, as the College moves ahead in a time of likely ongoing reductions of state support, future budgetary planning takes place in the context of a strategic plan that enjoys broad campus support. Having an institutional strategic plan will allow for future budget prioritization choices to be made more strategically rather than opportunistically.

In these financially challenging times, the administration faces a difficult process of budget balancing. CPP recognizes this difficulty and advises that the primary criterion guiding choices should be an assessment of the degree to which a program or activity supports TCNJ’s Mission and Core Values, and does so in a manner that is demonstrably excellent.

IV. RELATED DOCUMENTS

N/A

V. HISTORY

Approved by CPP May 12, 2010