Counsel on Program Elimination

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Abstract
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Disciplines
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CHAPTER 8

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DEFENSIBLE DECISIONS

The four cases suggest that institutions discontinued programs at times when campus leaders thought “they could get away with it,” to quote one informant. As elaborated in an earlier chapter, program closures were not based on cost, quality, or institutional mission. Rather, the closed programs tended to share some common characteristics, which, when taken together, created political vulnerability. For campus leadership, this strategy raises fundamental questions related to the intent of program termination: Is the purpose institutional enhancement? Is it cost-savings? Is it to narrow curricular offerings? Is it to show symbolic notches in their political belt to state legislatures, trustees, and others pressuring institutions to do something drastic?

Most of the institutions in this study engaged in program discontinuance
under the banner of cost reduction (although some made public secondary objectives). If one assumes cost reduction is driving other institutions to consider program discontinuance, then institutional leaders should not limit their focus to politically weak units but also try to close some programs that are expensive and/or unproductive, even if politically well connected.

Leaders trying to reduce expenditures face two challenges in program discontinuance—the first is getting the task accomplished, and the second is meeting their objectives, such as saving money. If their expensive programs are politically vulnerable, they may be able to accomplish both. However, there is a good chance that programs that would save the most money are politically influential, such as expensive programs like medicine and engineering (Slaughter, 1995). Leaders either have to decide between the two competing objectives or find a compromise, because the units that are politically vulnerable may not be the ones that save significant dollars.

Based on the experiences of these four institutions, leaders might choose a middle ground—mixing politically vulnerable and costly programs. Because program discontinuance is difficult, if they begin down the termination path, leaders should ensure that some programs are eliminated, even if it does little to generate immediate savings. By ensuring a visible victory, leaders demonstrate that they are serious about closing programs, that the processes they devised work, and that they are able to complete the tasks they attempt. Early progress should help to generate the momentum needed to close expensive programs that will more directly meet their financial goals. Terminating costly programs creates a sense that the closures served a larger purpose, not just to flex administrative muscle. Without demonstrating that the closures led to savings, critics may protest that the closures were malicious and resulted in little institutional benefit. UMPC is a case in point. Campus leaders demonstrated the financial benefit by including both immediate savings and cost avoidance, the money that would have been spent to improve the closed programs.

Prior to embarking on this strategy of closing both politically vulnerable and expensive programs, leaders should consider the implications of a failed attempt. To what extent would a failed attempt create future constraints in leading the institution? Would the battle be their Waterloo? If the risks of not closing the expensive but well-fortified program are thought to be too great, leaders may want to rethink the strategy of program closure if cost saving is the primary objective. If the primary purpose of closing programs is not financial savings (but for political reasons or to reduce the breadth of program offerings), closing politically weak programs alone may meet their objectives.

**SAVINGS, COSTS, AND TENURE**

Program discontinuance may not be the best strategy for institutions looking to save significant dollars. The experiences of the four institutions dem-
onstrate that a process that is perceived as legitimate is complicated and
difficult and may not generate large savings. Unless the wolf at the door is
big, bad, and loud (for example, Ballot Measure Five at OSU), program dis-
continuance takes time. It takes time to build coalitions, make the case that
closures are the necessary strategy, devise legitimate processes, bring faculty
into the process, test ideas, and identify programs that are close-able. Program
closures also generate their own financial and human costs, including dis-
tressed, demoralized, and distracted faculty and administrators; enrollment
declines; and poor public image. Terminating academic programs becomes a
time- and resource-consuming activity for the institution, taking people and
energy away from other possibly important activities that might be useful in
putting the institution on firm footings.

One of the more significant cost-saving trade-offs is between retaining ten-
ured faculty and reaching financial goals through salary savings. For the most
part, all four institutions intentionally decided to retain tenured faculty even
if it meant realizing less immediate savings. (Only one institution laid off
tenured faculty and it eventually rehired all who wanted to return.) However,
not all institutions beyond these four universities that discontinue programs
will retain tenured faculty. Many faculty contracts stipulate that faculty can
be released upon the dissolution of their academic departments or when the
institution is under financial duress. (Administrators at all four institutions in
this study believed they were contractually able to release tenured faculty.)
Releasing tenured faculty who have significant salaries most likely will gen-
erate immediate and larger savings.

Although many institutions can release tenured faculty as part of program
termination, it is probably wise to retain tenured faculty. First, retaining fac-
culty demonstrates an important commitment to faculty and to the academic
core at a time when critics may perceive the intellectual life of an institution
to be under attack. Second, this strategy makes the process achievable. By
releasing tenured faculty, administrators introduce a high hurdle into the pro-
cess that they may not be able to clear. Administrators create a rallying point
for those already opposed to the closures and removing tenured faculty invites
external forces into the process, such as the AAUP, other professional bodies,
and faculty from other institutions. The mathematicians at Rochester are the
case in point. Tenure is one of the most coveted agreements in the academy
and dismissing it, even on financially justifiable grounds, can only lead to
complications, impassioned protests, and prolonged debates. When tenure is
on the table, conversations may turn to the values and traditions of the acad-
emy and away from the task of closing programs.

Additionally, the discontinuance process does not end with the announce-
ment of the closures as administrators must continue to work with faculty as
the business of the institution continues. Releasing tenured faculty may create
residual effects that make it difficult, if not impossible, for administrators and
faculty to continue to work together. Trust, shared values, and common beliefs
that created the foundation that allowed administrators and faculty to be productive may be lost. Retaining tenured faculty requires a financial trade-off, possibly for the short-run only, but the lingering effects of releasing tenured faculty may cause more problems than the solution provided by program closures.

Also related to savings and termination, administrators at the four campuses did little to track savings upon implementation of the closure decisions. Once the process was underway or completed the effectiveness of the closures became a non-issue. No institution felt compelled to determine or report on the amount saved. No one seemed to care, either on- or off-campus, how much money was saved through program discontinuance although the process was initiated as a cost saving measure. The pressure to close programs came from the outside but a corresponding pressure to report on the success of the strategy did not exist. This phenomenon may be an example of higher education organization where inputs and initiation are more important than outcomes (Birnbaum, 1992). The implication is that accountability in higher education, especially when originating from the outside through legislatures or trustees, may be circumscribed and limited as institutions are more accountable for doing something and not for doing the best thing. The important lesson here might be that campus leaders should not spend significant time and energy on assessing the effectiveness of their actions (actual dollars saved), but on getting something done, declaring victory, and moving on.

Although its effectiveness as a cost saving measure is unknown—and seemingly immaterial—program discontinuance may play an important symbolic role in the larger objective of saving money because it creates an institutional climate that permits other cost saving steps to occur. For example, deans, chairs, and faculty who are having their travel budgets cut and vacant faculty billets taken away may believe they should not complain as academic programs are being closed, a much more drastic action. In circumstances not marked by program terminations, these actions may bring forth complaints, but the presence of program closures may help create new definitions of acceptable actions. Program closures also may serve other worthwhile purposes beyond saving money, such as sending strong messages to political leaders, furthering institutional improvement goals, or serving as symbols of accountability. To that effect, it may be more important for an institution to be perceived to be saving money rather than actually doing so.

**THE SEARCH FOR INSTITUTIONAL PURPOSE**

This research suggests that the process of closing academic programs may be less about saving money than about the search for institutional purposes, identity, and values. Program discontinuance processes may help institutions clarify goals (i.e., become a leading research university teaching outstanding undergraduates), find understanding in the midst of confusing times (i.e., we are a land-grant institution in a state not committed to higher education), or
confirm shared institutional beliefs (i.e., becoming a top-tier research university is possible through the enhancement plan). The process is a search for meaning as well as for savings.

Some clues from all four of the processes that suggest this conclusion include the facts that the institutions developed unclear and potentially contradictory criteria or did not develop criteria to identify programs for closure; they ignored the criteria when identifying programs; they failed to develop objective measures of success; and they were unable to determine the actual amount of money saved through the process.

Discontinuing programs based upon the use of complex, contradictory criteria through an unclear framework to reach unspecified objectives may be an inefficient way to select programs for discontinuance, but it is essential to the search for institutional meaning and purpose, which may be particularly important as institutions try to right themselves during difficult financial times. In situations that bring about program elimination “decisions are seen as vehicles for constant meaningful interpretation of fundamentally confusing worlds not as outcomes produced by a comprehensive environment” (March, 1994, p. 179). Rather than helping identify specific programs for closure, identifying criteria and designing a process to close programs brings key constituents together to sort out different understandings, clarify values, and build common perceptions in a turbulent world where the rules of operating are being re-written. Constant negotiation and discussion during the termination process allows key decision makers to test hunches before committing to a specific choice and contributes information that is difficult to obtain directly on topics such as political allies, historic significance, and dominant campus perceptions.

Program elimination processes help sort out institutional goals, confirm institutional beliefs, and find understanding in ambiguous and uncertain situations. The implication is that suggestions to follow approaches typically described as “rational” (March, 1994) to program discontinuance, such as spending precious time identifying data formats to quantify criteria, developing extensive processes to collect information, and analyzing significant amounts of data (Dickeson, 1999), may not fulfill all of the functions as well as other, more ambiguous and messy processes. What may be important in program terminations are messy processes, such as the ones here, that help clarify goals and aspirations, and produce collective sensemaking. They may lead to action and a better understanding of an institution reborn in changed waters.

**ADVICE FOR ACADEMIC LEADERS**

This research points to a series of practical insights both for campus leaders seeking to close programs and for those individuals who are fighting closures. The final set of implications to practice offered here is suggested modifications to AAUP policies and recommended strategies based upon this research.
For Those Who Want to Discontinue Programs

The experiences of these four institutions suggest a set of lessons for academic leaders (faculty, administrators, deans, or trustees) considering program closure because the institutions were successful in their endeavors. In each case, campus leaders met their goals of closing programs: they saved or re-allocated (some) money; the institution did not erupt in turmoil; and no academic administrators were forced to resign. These most likely will be the outcomes that those who attempt program closures aspire. That said, the reinstatement of the doctoral program in Mathematics at UR adds an informative negative case example.

Not as a First or Only Step

Academic leaders should not engage in program termination as an initial cost saving measure, but only after other steps that reduce expenses have been taken. Program discontinuance is difficult for those involved and those affected. It is time consuming, creates distress, and distracts from the business of the institution. In this study, program termination occurred only after institutional leaders had engaged in across-the-board cuts, implemented hiring and salary freezes, limited travel, and halted non-essential expenditures. Exploring and exhausting other strategies first may be necessary in order for faculty to support and whole-heartedly participate in the drastic measures of closing programs. Through faculty participation, aspirations of what may be possible (saving all programs) become aligned with a reality that some programs must go (Cohen & March, 1986).

After taking other steps, academic leaders should combine the program termination strategy with other cost savings strategies, as by itself, program discontinuance may not generate the needed savings. Findings suggest that any money saved is difficult to track, may not become immediately available, and may not amount to much. Combining strategies may reinforce the seriousness of the financial situation and demonstrate that all areas of the campus are feeling the pain of the financial downturn. This approach also may help suppress opposing alliances, because faculty in other departments will realize that their programs might be targeted if they actively disagree with the current slate of closures.

Make Closures Seem Inevitable

Academic leaders should frame the challenges and proposed solution—program closures—so that key constituencies (e.g., faculty, students, other administrators, trustees) come to believe that it is the solution. Leaders are responsible for articulating the challenges and creating beliefs that program discontinuance makes the most sense as a strategy at this time. They should use various strategies to shape beliefs, create a common sense of reality, and set direction. These approaches might include continuous references to the
challenges facing the institution in public meetings and speeches (such as at UR and UMCP), editorials and articles in the student and faculty newspapers about the need to take drastic action (such as at OSU and UMCP), or informal conversations with faculty and campus opinion leaders (such as at UR, KSU, UMCP, and OSU). Leaders can use the institutional stage provided by shared governance to call attention to the institution’s plight and the best solution. By evoking emergency measures, such as forming the Faculty Consultative Group at OSU or asking the senate at UMCP to develop criteria to guide closures, leaders can define a reality where program closures are perceived as necessary, acceptable, and even beneficial.

Leaders at the institutions in this study started the public conversations discussing which programs and how many to close, not whether or not to close programs. In no part of any public campus discussions was the potential not to close programs offered. Leaders should convincingly translate environmental pressures to so that the closures seem inevitable and the institution will be better off because of them. At these four institutions, a previous round of budget cuts or long-term financial distress helped create persuasive stress.

**Frame the Closures as a Requisite Step toward Improvement**

The ways in which leaders frame the purposes for closing programs may lead to different futures. The attitude leaders take can strongly influence widely held perceptions on campus (Neumann, 1995). People on the campus might have higher morale if leaders frame program discontinuance as a necessary step toward a better future. Leaders who tie program discontinuance to greater ends such as enhancement (UMCP) or improving academic rigor (UR) may foster a campus climate that intentionally seeks silver linings in the storm clouds generated by closing programs. Leaders who adopt a positive attitude should not be Pollyannas, but acknowledge the pain and difficulty of the situation and then frame the challenges in aspirational terms.

The attitudes of leaders are contagious. Findings suggest that leaders' attitudes have the ability to shape the perceptions of others. Talking about progress, a better future, and institutional improvement may help facilitate the closures more than talking about pain, suffering, and agony. Even if the attitude adopted by leaders does not directly affect how cuts occur, it may make those involved feel better about their institution, their actions and decisions, and even themselves, and it may help address the negative fallout common to program terminations. Leaders may feel the need to adopt a victim perspective to reach other goals (such as sending a political message to legislators), but they should realize the on-campus costs of such an approach.

Leaders who identify closures singularly as painful obstacles may unintentionally create feelings of victimization across campus that are hard to overcome. A campus that understands the challenges only as threats and not as opportunities and that feels constantly bombarded may adopt a siege mentality. Faculty and administrators within such an institution may have diffi-
ulty creatively addressing problems, taking risks, and creating a supportive environment.

**Develop a Defensible Process**

This study suggests that attention to the processes used to discontinue programs is extremely important. Leaders have to be conscious of not just *what* they are doing but *how* they are going about it. Leaders should strive for a defensible process, one that passes intense scrutiny of critics. Because program discontinuance will most likely have opponents, either against the procedure in general or against specific closures, the process must be intentionally designed so they cannot argue that it was unfair, exclusive, faulty, or dishonest. The strategy of program discontinuance is itself contentious, and processes poorly designed become another point of attack. A solid and defensible process is important because violations of norms can easily unravel hard fought battles and well-intended decisions.

At a minimum, the discontinuance process should include conversations with, and the involvement of, key constituencies. The types of involvement might vary, but they must be perceived by those involved, as well as by others with the power to derail change efforts (such as members of the faculty senate or trustees), as meaningful and legitimate. A particularly important process element is opportunities for faculty to influence the process because of commonly accepted norms of shared governance. These opportunities may be either through formal governance avenues or through informal means, but in such a way that satisfies campus expectations.

**Tap Knowledgeable Leaders**

As the different processes adopted across the four institutions imply, the specifics that create defensible processes will vary and what is perceived as legitimate on one campus may violate many ingrained norms on another. Thus, leaders must either know the campus intimately enough to design the process themselves, or they must involve knowledgeable insiders whom, in the words of one faculty member, “know where the water leaks.” In all four cases, the leaders facilitating the processes were long-time institutional leaders with an intimate knowledge of the institution. Only at UR was the president new, but he worked closely with two campus leaders (the provost and the dean) who had long histories at the institution. Long-time leaders may also have a cache of good will that give the process a credibility to move forward.

**Build Upon Previously Established Legitimacy**

Academic leaders may benefit from utilizing decision-making bodies and processes already viewed as legitimate rather than trying to develop ad hoc committees that have to overcome suspicion or that need to spend their limited time and energy gaining acceptance. Whether or not the appropriate body is the academic senate depends on the historic patterns in decision mak-
ing on campus. Even when senates were used, academic leaders also tapped other joint faculty-administrative bodies or faculty-only groups that had established legitimacy and a history of decision-making involvement.

By building on established legitimacy, academic leaders may avoid debates over representation, authority, decision-making turf, and inclusion. The history and culture of the institution already has determined those answers. Leaders can then focus their attention and energy on other procedural issues and the difficult tasks ahead.

**Develop Supportive Coalitions**

Leaders who want to close academic programs must build an alliance strong enough to permit them to enact their decisions. For example, administrative leaders at UMCP, OSU, and UR built coalitions with their campus senates. Administrators at UR also built an alliance with its board.

To build the supportive coalitions, leaders can engage in a variety of strategies. They may articulate the ways in which program closures will benefit members of various sub-groups in meaningful ways or that, if the proposed action is not accepted, the alternatives might generate additional harm. They might delegate important tasks to potential allies, such as administrators at UMCP asking the senate to develop criteria and guiding principles or asking faculty leaders to sit on the APAC sub-committees investigating implications.

**Develop Buffered Arenas for Protest**

Since a closing process most likely will generate some protest, leaders should prepare for the disruption by building buffered arenas for protest. Buffered arenas allow opponents to make their case and provide them an outlet to focus their attention and expend their energy in a manner that satisfies their needs but cannot derail the outcomes. These are arenas that generate a lot of light but little heat. For example, UMCP used open hearings at which people opposed to the closures could speak, but they were making their case to already convinced members of APAC or PCC who would only be swayed by overwhelming evidence. Protests on the floor of the Faculty Senate at UR had little impact, because it is not the vehicle that shapes institutional actions as compared to the Council of Department Chairs. Protesters expended significant time and energy collecting data, crafting their speeches, and drumming up supporters but made little headway. Because opponents were preparing for a fight in the buffered arena, they were not engaging in guerrilla tactics elsewhere that might have done real damage.

**Use Public Deadlines**

In all four instances, leaders set, or were given, meaningful and real public deadlines for the completion of the whole process and for individual components of the process. Public deadlines created a sense of accountability and pressed various decision-making bodies to act. For example, leaders at OSU
and UMCP set deadlines for the initial reports from the deans. UMCP's leaders created a timeline for the work of the APAC summer sub-committees. They also set deadlines for getting the report *Hard Choices* to the senate and for the senate to report back to the president with its final recommendations. OSU was given a deadline by the chancellor that helped mobilize campus administrators and faculty sitting on FCG.

Public deadlines created a sense of inevitability as well as a sense of urgency and accountability. By setting deadlines for themselves and for the various decision-making bodies involved, leaders reinforced the gravity of the tasks at hand. Not acting was not an option.

**Test Receptivity**

By testing how the campus might react to closure recommendations, leaders can make adjustments to the list of proposed programs or devise a strategy to present them with the least potential disruption. If leaders send up trial balloons they might avoid an unanticipated eruption, such as what happened during the earlier attempt to close programs at UR a few years previously.

This testing might be done in the open, such as the release of a preliminary report and subsequent sub-committee investigations at UMCP, or behind closed doors such as the individual interviews with faculty leaders at UR, or the confidential discussions with the FCG at OSU. The process for testing the recommendations should match campus expectations. At UR, leaders decided to question faculty opinion leaders in private and not publicly test their ideas. At UMCP, the opposite was true. Faculty expected opportunities to comment publicly, which they received through the open hearings and the debate on the senate floor.

Testing recommendations also provides a way to build support for the decisions. Allowing key campus opinion leaders early access to the recommendations may help gain their backing, thus widening the circle of allies.

**Expect Negative Fallout**

Program discontinuance is a situation that not only resolves a set of problems but has the potential to create others. The institutions in this study found themselves facing a host of unexpected problems caused by successful program discontinuance. For example, all of the processes generated negative public perceptions of institutional management and a sense of instability. In some cases, these perceptions directly translated into enrollment drops. Additionally, enrollment loss may be a serious consequence if the institution is tuition-dependent as fewer students may bring deeper financial troubles than those the closures were intended to fix. Alumni, especially those graduates from the closed programs, also may feel betrayed. They may curtail their financial gifts, speak poorly about the institution to prospective students or other donors, or stop other types of beneficial involvement (e.g., drop membership in the alumni association, not volunteer for alumni activities) in a period of financial
hard times. Leaders seeking to close programs should anticipate and prepare for a host of negative outcomes.

The responsibilities of those who instigate and lead the closures should not end with the announcement of program closures. Once programs are identified for termination, leaders should facilitate the transition following the announcement and attend to the needs of affected people. The efforts institutional leaders extend helping people through the closures transition will pay off in the future. For if the process leaves the campus bitter and divided or the remaining faculty disenfranchised, the ability of administrators to lead successfully will be compromised.

Leaders should respond to the needs of students, faculty, and staff. Closing units is likely to generate anger in those who remain on campus after their units are closed. The closures additionally may be traumatic for faculty and staff in other units as they may adopt a survivor mentality that can impede their productivity and contributions to the campus.

The negative after-effects can linger for some time and leaders must intentionally work to heal the campus. Simply finding new jobs or academic homes for the displaced may not be enough. Leaders need to design programs to help with the transition, such as forums for people to express their troubles and grief and counseling or career services.

For Those Who Want to Prevent Closures

Understanding the processes through which institutions terminate academic programs not only is helpful for those who intend to close programs but also for those who want to prevent closures. The experiences of the four institutions highlight some weak points in the process and suggest specific strategies to prevent closures. The following recommendations may be useful for those who want to save units from termination.

The first four recommendations are suggestions that might work best prior to the identification of programs to terminate and the last three are for once programs have been named. Because attention is finite and unit leaders frequently do not pick up clues (as one person said, she “did not see the writing on the wall”), some strategies realistically might be invoked only once programs are identified for closure. Defenses are rallied in respect to a threat rather than continually stockpiled.

Become Connected

Units targeted for closure tended to be isolated units that were disconnected from other programs on campus and had little contact with their alumni and other off-campus supporters and the community. A unit that is integral to the activities of other programs, such as offering a significant amount of general education courses or courses required by other majors, shares resources with other units and programs, is a good campus citizen, or
provides important diversity to the institution (if that is an agreed-upon objective) is more difficult to consider closing than programs whose activities are not deeply ingrained into the institution. An important strategy is to make connections with others on campus and off.

**Highlight Contributions to Campus and Beyond**

On a related point, program leaders might prevent their units from being slated for closure by calling attention to specific contributions of the program to the institution and community. In this study, units that publicized the important contributions they made both on and off campus were less likely to be closed than units that did not. Frequently, contributions went unrecognized by campus leaders, thus an important strategy was explicitly informing key decision makers about the work accomplished by the unit. For instance, at UMCP two programs were no longer considered potential targets once campus leaders learned of their contributions to the immediate community—Hearing and Speech because of its clinic serving the region and Nuclear Engineering because of its contribution to another state institution.

**Call Attention to Negative Impact**

In addition to highlighting contributions, department leaders can also demonstrate that a closure will have negative implications for the institution or community. Rarely do campus leaders want to make a decision that intentionally has a negative consequence somewhere else, either off campus or in another unit. Thus, a strategy to educate campus leaders about the potential damage if a particular program is discontinued might be effective. For example, the president of OSU removed Range Management from the list of potential program closures because of the possible negative effect it might have on another institution.

Those opposing the closures can also enlist the help of others by educating them about potential negative effects. The Mathematics Department at UR was very successful in pleading its case to other mathematicians and researchers. Others, outside the institution, picked up the call saying that if Rochester closed its Mathematics doctoral program, a domino effect might occur, endangering the field. This message rallied the scientific community and well-known scholars to come to the Mathematics Department’s aid and put very visible pressure on the institution at a time when UR was trying to recruit more academically talented undergraduates.

**Build Coalitions with Others Both On- and Off-Campus**

Another effective strategy is to build supportive coalitions. Supportive coalitions are important when no single interest group has the ability to achieve results, since networks consolidate enough power and influence to prevent an unwanted decision. Creating alliances among units wishing to avoid discontinuance creates a stronger front against those interested in closing units.
Coalitions can be built among groups either on- or off-campus. For instance, many departments may form a coalition able to prevent the closure of a specific unit within their college or units across colleges may join together to oppose closing a unit. Additionally, many of the departments in this study were able to prevent termination because they formed strong alliances with off-campus groups. These groups were able to exert adequate pressure to convince institutional leaders to look elsewhere for savings.

**Exploit Potential Hot Buttons**

Departmental leaders can create supportive coalitions by highlighting potential hot buttons, either process or product issues, around which supporters might coalesce. People can become agitated if they disagree with the decisions being made. For instance, an opposition might form if the programs slated for termination predominately serve women or under-represented minorities. At UR, external groups rallied for Mathematics because of the proposed replacement of research faculty with contract teaching faculty, a sore point in the scholarly mathematics community.

Those opposing the closures also might call attention to procedural violations. Leaders in targeted programs might look for procedural breaches around which an opposing force might coalesce. Some potential examples include the ways in which faculty were involved (or not involved) in key decision making, how information was collected and the way it was used, the lack of an opportunity for appeals, the ways in which decision makers were selected, or how the criteria to judge programs was identified.

**Use Atypical Means of Protest**

Institutions tend to have acceptable arenas for dissent that have little impact, such as the faculty senate, in some instances (Birnbaum, 1991). To retain a program marked as a potential target, protests should occur outside of these arenas, in places that cause unexpected, rather than expected, disruptions. Mathematics at UR was successful at doing this. By going off campus and gaining the support of Nobel Prize winners and mathematics scholars and by making a commotion in the national media such as the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and the *New York Times*, the department created pressure in areas and of an intensity the campus leadership was not expecting. It was their work off campus that drew the attention of the administrators, not the fiery, but anticipated, rhetoric on the Faculty Council floor.

**Negotiate for a Resource-Neutral Alternative**

Program closures tend to be proposed as solutions to financial problems. Leaders of programs that are targeted might be able to negotiate resource-neutral alternatives with administrators. By appealing in fiscal terms, they might be able to broker a deal that avoids unit closure. This option might be more realistic if the target program's faculty are not going to be terminated.
Because administrators and faculty have been participating in the process, their perspectives of what is possible may have been altered (Cohen & March, 1986). Proposed alternatives that at one time seemed implausible, may have become more realistic and acceptable.

**Argue Discontinuance Might Not Save Money**

Finally, those in targeted units might present an analysis of data that discontinuing programs does not save significant amounts of money. The findings of this study suggest that institutional leaders do not know the effectiveness of program termination as a strategy to save money. At best, it may yield little savings and at worst, may be costly because of tuition loss due to enrollment drop and reduced campus productivity because of distractions.

**REFINING DISCONTINUANCE POLICY**

The AAUP (2001) proposes four guidelines for discontinuing academic programs: (1) that “there be early, careful and meaningful faculty involvement in decisions related to the reduction of instructional and research programs;” (2) that upon the decision to reduce programs, “it should then be the primary responsibility of the faculty to determine where within the program reductions should be made,” and that “before any such determinations become final, those whose life’s work stands to be adversely affected should have the right to be heard;” (3) “particular reductions should follow considerable advice from the concerned departments, or other units of academic concentration, on the short-term and long-term viability of reduced programs;” and (4) that the rights of tenured faculty be protected and that faculty should be “given every opportunity . . . to readapt with a department or elsewhere with the institution” (p. 193).

Three of the AAUP’s recommended actions are consistent with the experiences of the four institutions in this study: Faculty should be involved early on and in meaningful ways; faculty should provide considerable advice on the long- and short-term effects of the closures; and tenure should be protected. Without these three elements the processes at the four institutions might not have been successes. Faculty easily could have formed opposing coalitions around key procedural points halting the process if they were not involved in meaningful ways early on in the process, if they (or their representatives via governance) did not have opportunities to explore the implications and provide advice, or if tenured faculty had been terminated. Additionally, because faculty gave considerable advice as recommended by AAUP, administrators at OSU, UR, and UMCP revised some of their original recommendations. The outcomes may have been damaging to the institution had faculty not articulated potential negative unintended consequences.

The only AAUP recommendation not present in these four processes was
faculty having the primary responsibility for determining which closures occur. At none of the four institutions did faculty play this role. Administrators made most of the decisions. Only at UMCP were faculty partners in crafting the recommendations, and only there did faculty make the final recommendations through the senate. Nonetheless, at UR, OSU and KSU, faculty played meaningful roles by providing information and counsel and helping to explore the potential implications of closures.

The findings also suggest new recommendations for AAUP policy and procedures that should improve the shared governance process and set realistic expectations for faculty and administrators. First, the AAUP might recommend that program closures occur in conjunction with other steps to save money, because alone or as first steps, they may be less likely to succeed. Second, it might specify using faculty governance groups to explore the potential implications of proposed closures, which might be done through open deliberations (such as at UMCP) or in confidence (such as at OSU or UR). Third, the AAUP might include language in its document that specifies that the processes used to close programs most likely will vary across institutions because of differences in institutional cultures and norms in decision making. A process that might be acceptable to faculty at one campus where they play consultative roles (OSU) might not be acceptable at another where faculty play major decision making roles (UMCP). Fourth, the AAUP should recognize the important roles administrators play and the direction they provide in program discontinuance. In none of these four cases did faculty carry out the process alone. Finally, the AAUP might note that retaining tenured faculty even when programs are to be closed is important to keeping the conversations focused and keeping the process on track, but keeping tenured faculty from those programs may lead to trade-offs in terms of significant savings.

Beyond the specific AAUP discontinuance guidelines, the findings of this study suggest that AAUP should adopt a broader concept of shared governance. First, this study suggests that the concept of shared governance in practice includes faculty-administrator collaboration that occurs both inside and outside the formal governance structure; it varies by institution as one size clearly does not fit all; it may include decisions where parties act sequentially (e.g., OSU where administrators passed decisions to a faculty group, who in turn passed their decisions back to administrators) and jointly (e.g., UMCP where both faculty and administrators sit on APAC); and it is based upon institutionally defined norms, not on a schema adopted from the outside. Finally, and possibly most importantly, shared governance that is successful (a structure and process that allows many constituencies to make agreeable decisions) is dependent upon expectations that the various parties find acceptable.
SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Although this study addresses how program discontinuance occurs, the impact of the process on institutions and the roles of leadership, shared governance, and external forces raise further questions. First, because this study was limited to four cases, the common themes should be explored at other types of institutions to see if similarities and differences exist in process and results.

Second, the elements identified here should be further contrasted against the experiences of institutions that attempted but failed to close programs. Although there are probably many more reasons why a change fails than why it succeeds, comparisons may help distinguish the importance of some elements over others.

A third line of inquiry might focus more deeply on the roles and structures of shared governance. Although this study found that shared governance mechanisms can and do facilitate the hard decisions of program closure, critics hold deep-seated assumptions that shared governance is slow and unresponsive (Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, 1996; Benjamin, Carroll, Jacobi, Krop, & Shires, 1993). It would be interesting to compare the processes and results explored here—which frequently took many months to complete—and the process and results with administratively-driven and quick processes. Does one type of process, administrative or shared, lead to different types or magnitudes of results and effects? What happens when faculty are not involved but expect to be in processes that dictate academic strategy? Related research might explore differences in processes when the closures are externally mandated such as by a governing board or a state legislature. To what extent are processes, timelines, and results similar or different between internally and externally determined closures? What roles do faculty governing bodies play in externally mandated processes? What do administrative leaders do in these situations?

Fourth, the findings suggest that institutions met their budgetary goals but not necessarily through program discontinuance. This raises questions concerning exactly how institutions save money? What actions do they take and are there consistent patterns of cost-saving measures across institutions? On a related matter, in what ways does program discontinuance create an environment that allows these actions to move forward? An additional line of questioning for future research concerning finances centers on why institutional leaders did not thoroughly account for the money saved (or spent) and what role external accountability and outside impetus plays? Why was there no press from external bodies, such as trustees or legislators, to understand the efficiency of program closures?

Finally, it would be interesting to explore the impact of program discontinuance more deeply. For example, one might investigate the long-term effects of program discontinuance on the campus. This research might explore
issues such as cost efficiency, campus morale, and financial well being. Differences in process might lead to more or less productivity over the long run across the institution, within departments that were targeted but not removed, or within units where displaced faculty were relocated. Additional inquiries might focus on similar questions at an individual level. These two sets of queries might help uncover some of the deeper and long-lasting costs and benefits of program discontinuance. The interviews with people as long as five years after the events suggest that the process of closing programs leaves lasting marks on faculty and administrators and that the costs and benefits of program discontinuance are not visible immediately or solely on the fiscal bottom line.

CONCLUSION

Program discontinuance has the potential to be disruptive and painful for a campus. At the same time, it can be framed in such a way so that key institutional stakeholders, including faculty and students, regard it as an important step toward institutional enhancement. It tends to be undertaken during periods of financial duress as a cost-savings strategy, yet if done solely for financial reasons, it may be ineffective. This study provided an empirically based exploration of both the processes used to terminate academic programs and the effect of closures on campus. It highlighted the ways in which shared governance can make hard decisions and challenged the ideas purposed by the AAUP concerning governance and program termination. It noted the role and impact of leadership and challenged common notions that external forces constantly push institutions to change by identifying instances when they pressure institutions to remain the same.

The intent of this book was to dig deeply into the process of program termination, to understand the nuances and its effects from the inside. The hope was that from the detailed experiences of four institutions, others will find insight and guidance to undertake wisely this difficult, but potentially more-relevant strategy. The context in which American higher education works has changed. Most institutions can neither afford to be all things to all people, nor can they continue offering the same array of academic programs, even with attempts to be more entrepreneurial. They must offer innovative programs and revise curricula that match society's needs, make new choices to do new things, and, with more difficulty, stop old activities because the environment changed. The stakes are increasing and institutions can ill afford to make costly strategic and financial mistakes.

Program closure may not be the saving strategy for all institutions. As the experiences detailed in this book show, the processes can be long and time-consuming, they can be disruptive while under way, and once complete, and in the end, they may not lead towards large savings. That said, many higher education commentators suggest that an increasing number of colleges and
universities will have to undertake this process to tighten offerings and to respond to new demands. This study helps institutional leaders decide if program closures are the appropriate strategy for their institution and, second, points out key elements for the journey. The four cases illustrate that neither a single path does not exist, nor can anyone offer a successful seven-step solution. Nevertheless, with proper forethought and reflective and intentional leadership, the course for program closures can be charted successfully.