

TO: Dr Alan Hersker, Interim Provost

17 October 2023

FM: Dr Gregory Gardner, Chair of Faculty Senate

Dear Interim Provost Hersker,

In response to the review of the proposed Administrator-initiated discontinuance of the 14 current programs, listed below, this document comprises the response to the proposal by the Faculty Senate Executive Committee (FSEC). It is based on the discussion at our meeting with you and other members of the administration on 5 October 2023, as well as follow-on discussion within the FSEC membership and affected departments.

FSEC clearly understands the need to reduce faculty headcount as part of a larger plan to reduce spending on the campus, in response to our \$9 million annual deficit. We realize that the administration plans a broad reduction in total headcount across the campus, through voluntary and involuntary separations, including in programs that are not proposed for discontinuation. Those plans are clearly already underway and are not addressed here. We think it is important, however, to recognize that the financial impacts (cashflow) associated with these proposed discontinuations are more complex than the administration may recognize and that there are substantial opportunities to reduce costs while sustaining what are clearly valuable and mission-centric programs such as these.


FSEC encourages the administration to take a broader perspective on the approaches to cost cutting, and to recognize the need to develop plans for future survival, rather than simply cutting programs. Many of the proposed cuts must be expected to also cause losses in revenue as students who seek these programs no longer consider SUNY Potsdam and decide to enroll elsewhere. We understand that “SUNY will not let us include any future increases in enrollment in our plans”, but without a plan for growth in the future, just cutting will almost certainly lead to our closure as a campus. The administration’s assumption that enrollment will remain at 2500 annually, regardless of the impact of cutting programs, is counterintuitive and appears unsupported. Many students arrive here because they seek a specific program. If we eliminate that program, those students will choose another campus. It is impossible to know the specific enrollment impacts of those decisions, but they cannot be avoided by deciding they won’t happen.

FSEC offers strong objections to the decision to discontinue 13 of the 14 programs listed below, based on the concerns included as Attachment 1 of this document. FSEC, instead, proposes the alternatives listed.

- Chemistry BA and BS – FSEC recommends the retention of the BA in Chemistry and the Deactivation of the BS, while the two programs are revised, in accordance with the department’s alternative plan.
- Biochemistry BS – FSEC recommends the Biochemistry BS be retained, in accordance with the department’s alternative plan.
- Art History BA – FSEC recommends the Art History BA be retained, while the department develops a plan for a new, more competitive program. The current BA to be modified to become the new program in Art History and Museum Studies.
- Arts Management BS – FSEC recommends the BS in Arts Management be retained, but be encouraged to pursue a re-design of the program to include more courses taught from other campus departments, as well as possible connections to existing non-arts programs that could benefit from fresh creative content.

- Philosophy BA – FSEC recommends the Philosophy BA be retained. The program is one of the most efficient and cost-effective programs on campus and it is also a key contributor towards the general education program. The Philosophy department can also be asked to increase its already strong contribution to other programs, including various professional programs.
- Physics BA – FSEC recommends the retention of the Physics BA and its modification to share low-enrolled upper division courses with Chemistry, in accordance with the department’s alternative plan.
- Public Health BS - FSEC recommends the retention of the Public Health BS and its modification to reduce low-enrolled courses, in accordance with the department’s alternative plan.
- Public Health MS - FSEC recommends the retention of the Public Health MS, giving us time to see the expected positive impacts of the recent name change and conversion to an online modality. Similar changes have caused explosive growth in enrollment in other graduate programs.
- Theater BA – FSEC recommends the retention of the Theater BA, with a renewed emphasis on enrollment growth, and the exploration of a new major in Musical Theater, in partnership with Dance and the Crane SOM, aimed at attracting a new audience from NYC with an interest in Broadway-style productions. The Musical Theater minor has proven very popular, with applications exceeding available spots by 4 times. A Musical Theater program was labeled as unaffordable in the past, but now that our President has secured \$1.5 million per year in additional funding for Crane, there should be additional funds available for this initiative.
- Dance BA – FSEC recommends the retention of the Dance BA, for the same reasons described for the Theater BA.
- Modern Languages – French BA - FSEC recommends Deactivation, rather than Discontinuation, while the department and administration work to explore alternatives that could allow the program to be sustained.
- Modern Languages – Spanish BA - FSEC recommends deactivation, rather than discontinuation, while the department and administration work to explore alternatives that could allow the program to be sustained.
- Music Performance MM - FSEC concurs with the administration’s proposal to discontinue the Music Performance MM.

Respectfully,



Dr Gregory A. Gardner
Chair of Faculty Senate

Attachment 1

Summary of Concerns by Program

NOTE: These concerns and recommended alternatives were developed by the affected departments. The details have already been shared with your office, so these are merely summaries.

Chemistry BA and BS

The Chemistry department has proposed a combination of the Chemistry BA and BS into a single program as a Chemistry BA. They have also proposed a realignment of multiple upper division courses by schedule and cross-acceptance with the Physics BA to substantially reduce the number of low-enrolled courses in both departments. They have also proposed an aggressive and creative set of approaches, including scholarship grants and recruiting from transfer sources, to increase enrollment in all STEM programs. These changes essentially allow the preservation of Chemistry and Biochemistry programs at SUNY Potsdam, while still generating significant cost savings. FSEC recommends the BA in Chemistry be retained and the BS be deactivated while it is revised.

Biochemistry BS

If the Chemistry programs are retained, as described above and in the department's response, the Biochemistry BS can be supported at essentially no additional cost, per department estimates. The program currently has 13 students enrolled, generating a tuition/fee revenue stream of \$113,000 annually. If the program is discontinued, that revenue stream is at risk, further increasing the campus budget deficit. FSEC recommends the program be retained.

Physics BA

The Physics BA currently has an enrollment of 18 Students, generating tuition/fee revenue of \$157,000 annually. The department believes that this program can be supported by 2 faculty members. The department's proposed plan shows that the program is currently cashflow positive. In addition, by sharing upper division courses with Chemistry, the number of low-enrolled courses in both programs can be reduced. FSCE recommends the Physics BA be retained.

Art History BA

While enrollment in the Art History major is low, the department also teaches coursework that is included in other programs, meaning we will continue to need some faculty in the discipline, even if the major is discontinued. The department has proposed an alternative in the form of a new program combining Art History with Museum Studies. The initial analysis of this program appears promising, and it also allows for the inter-disciplinary use of courses from Anthropology and other programs. FSEC recommends the deactivation of the Art History BA, rather than its discontinuance, giving the department time to develop the proposed new program. It would almost certainly be easier to convert the existing Art History BA into the new program than to go through the process of creating and gaining approval for a completely new BA. A deactivation costs the same as a discontinuation, but it does leave the existing program in place while the department makes the program changes. FSEC recommends a deactivation of the Art History BA and its conversion into the proposed new program.

Philosophy BA

As noted in the department's response to the administration, the Philosophy department has one of the highest Student/Faculty ratios on campus, well above the school and campus averages. The program involves no significant low-enrollment courses for majors, and its required and elective courses are extensively integrated into the General Education curriculum and serve as service courses for other departments/programs. The program currently has 8 enrolled students, generating a tuition/fee revenue of \$70,000 annually, but the real financial contribution comes in efficiently teaching so many students in other programs. If the Philosophy program and courses are eliminated, it will simply require other programs to expand their offerings to compensate – probably at a lower level of efficiency/higher cost. Given the extensive demand for philosophy coursework across the campus, it is unclear how eliminating this program will reduce the campus budget deficit. FSCE recommends the Philosophy BA be retained.

Public Health BS and MS

As outlined in the department's response, the Public Health programs serve critical community needs and can be modified to further reduce operating costs. They have made a number of changes to enhance enrollment, including shifting the MS online and renaming both programs to the more attractive "Public Health" from the former "Community Health". These changes have not yet had a chance to demonstrate their full effectiveness, but strong post-pandemic trends support their promise. The department has recently completed a plan to bring the PH BS to the JCC campus (JCC signed the articulation agreement 2 weeks ago), as well as establishing a number of strong partnerships with health agencies in the community. Employment forecasts show a severe shortage of workers in healthcare, especially in regions like ours. The advantages of these programs seem to outweigh the costs. With 42 enrolled students in the 2 programs generating an estimated \$366,000 in tuition/fee revenues, they appear to be cashflow positive, with significant growth opportunities. FSEC recommends the Public Health BS and MS be retained.

Theater and Dance BAs

Theater and Dance offer unique academic opportunities to many students, with an emphasis on BIPOC students, many of whom are recruited through well-established partnerships with High Schools in the region, as well as in New York City. Both programs have an unusually high percentage of BIPOC students, with rates much higher than other programs on campus. While enrollment in these programs was disproportionately affected by the pandemic, that is behind us, and we are positioned for growth. The programs are supported by a \$60 million performing arts building that offers a chance to differentiate our programs from others in these disciplines. These programs are also strong contributors to community partnerships and are flagship programs in connecting our campus to a variety of communities in the region. The department has identified a number of opportunities to increase enrollment and to expand community impacts.

Arts Management BS

The Arts Management BS is an interdisciplinary program with strong career employment capabilities. It has enjoyed stable and relatively strong enrollment since it was created 5 years ago, even allowing for the SUNY-wide pandemic declines in enrollment. The program is well-positioned as an interdisciplinary bridge between various arts programs, including Crane's music programs and music business, as well as the Business Administration BS and possibly the MS in Management. A strong and creatively-designed program in arts management could give SUNY Potsdam a unique differentiation among students interested in the arts, as well as in general management.

Music Performance MM

FSEC has received no response to the proposed discontinuation for the Music Performance Department and understands that the department supports the decision to discontinue the Music Performance MM.

French and Spanish BAs

Modern languages are an important part of a liberal education. FSEC recognizes, however, that enrollment in the French and Spanish BA programs has been low. At the same time, three members of the ML faculty retired in Spring 2023, leaving the department without the faculty needed to support these programs. While there is moderate interest in the programs (especially in Spanish), there is strong interest in modern languages, both in the general education program and among students interested in being modern language teachers in a public school setting, or interested in Latinx or related studies as a part of another program. While the current programs may be unsustainable, it is vital that SUNY Potsdam retain the ability to deliver at least 30 credits worth of content in both French and Spanish. Many SUNY campuses are apparently experiencing similar problems with language programs, and SUNY is exploring alternative efforts to share resources virtually. SUNY Potsdam, with strong capabilities in Mohawk as well as other languages, may be able to use these programs to support a sustainable program in Spanish and/or French in the future.