Ten ‘No-Regrets’ Analyses

Decision Support Every Institution Should Provide to Every Department

What information can IT provide to help academic leaders improve instructional costs while advancing teaching, research, and service missions?

In partnership with the Gates Foundation, EAB has identified 10 analyses that isolate the key drivers of academic costs, pinpoint opportunities for savings, and allow department leaders to better meet future student demand.

Provide these analyses to department chairs and deans to enhance allocation of teaching, classroom, and advising resources.

**STUDENT AND COURSE DATA**

Data Elements
- Course enrollments, credits and grades earned, and section capacity
- Course affiliation with majors, minors, and cross-listing

Obstacles to Analysis
- Department-level tracking of enrollment: Changes in enrollment caps might be recorded at the unit level instead of the registrar. Section caps set to zero will impede analysis.
- Cross-listed courses: Not always attributed to all relevant departments.

**FACULTY COST AND WORKLOAD DATA**

Data Elements
- Teaching load definitions and per-term loads
- Faculty service and administrative activities

Obstacles to Analysis
- Shadow systems: Data is tracked sporadically and inconsistently, if at all.
- Unused ERP functionality: Release time tracking fields are often not activated or only partially used.

**ACADEMIC PROGRAM DATA**

Data Elements
- Courses, majors, and faculty working within academic programs
- Additional administrative support provided at the department level

Obstacles to Analysis
- Organizational change: Units changing names, breaking up, or even merging over time can limit longitudinal analysis if changes are not recorded and tracked.

Managing by Department Cost per Student Credit Hour
- Divide the direct salary costs of instruction, department administration, and other locally purchased goods and services by total student credit hours to discover trends and outliers, as well as the root causes of variation among ostensibly “like” units.

Mapping Class Size Distribution
- Plot total institutional student credit hours in a semester by the maximum section enrollment cap. Find out if independent study, lab, and internship policies are sustainable, how many classes can reach the breakeven point of 10 students, and if selective shifts to very large courses can subsidize more small, specialized offerings.

Indexing Changes in Curricular Complexity
- Divide annualized changes in SCH taught by the change in number of course offerings. If courses are proliferating faster than enrollments are growing, it may be necessary to adjust strategy moving forward.

Collapsing Excess Sections
- Divide actual section-level enrollments by maximum section-level enrollments to identify opportunities to combine sections, reclaim space, and redeploy faculty resources. Focus on “prime time” sections (i.e., 10 am–3 pm, M–Th) for analysis.

Analyzing Course-Level DFW Rates
- Divide earned SCH by attempted SCH to identify where course-level attrition is concentrated, and pinpoint courses for “flipped classroom” redesigns or additional advising resources.

Eliminating Bottleneck Courses
- Identify courses in high-demand rooms during high-demand hours that also have high physical space and section cap utilization. Opportunities to adjust the size, location, and time of these sections will have the greatest impact on space availability and faculty resources.

Measuring Actual vs. Contracted Workload
- Measure the number and percentage of faculty members teaching a standard, underload, or overload academic schedule. Identify the faculty ranks and departments where underload and overload schedules are most common.

Imputing Actual vs. Potential Workload
- Impute the potential classroom gains from shifting some underload faculty to a standard load. Multiply the percentage of underload by the courses it would take to reach a standard load, then multiply that by the average class size to find out how much extra teaching capacity is available in each department.

Tracking the Relative Growth of Department SCH
- Track the average institutional growth in SCH, and graph department growth against the overall average to find out which departments are growing faster and slower than average.

Redesigning Curriculum Based on Cross-Discipline SCH
- Map the SCH taught by each department alongside the SCH taken by majors within departments to clarify the role of services and effectively allocate new funding that reflects actual enrollment. Consider new programming to take advantage of existing cross-disciplinary enrollments by students.

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