Aligning Distinct Course Offerings with Enrollment Trends

Background

While institutions seek to offer comprehensive and relevant curriculums to attract students and provide high-quality programs, they must also ensure that resources are not stretched too thin. Proliferation of elective courses can strain faculty resources and lead to students accumulating unnecessary credits. One way institutions can address this challenge is by comparing changes in course offerings to trends in student demand.

Demand-Offering Mismatches

Comparing the rate of change in course offerings to trends in student demand at the department level can reveal potential misalignment of resources. For example, the bottom right quadrant in the graphic below depicts departments at a high-research comprehensive institution where the number of courses is increasing while student demand is declining. These departments may have underutilized course capacity, as there are fewer students to fill an increasing number of courses. However, the top left quadrant highlights departments with increasing student demand but less growth in course offerings, potentially resulting in bottlenecks within the department.

Mismatch Between Student Demand and Course Offerings by Department

High Research Comprehensive Institution, AY 2016

This guide supports identification of mismatches between changes in course offerings and student enrollment trends to highlight areas in need of potential resource allocation realignment. However, keep in mind that mismatches can often be intentional, such as offering more specialized courses while in the midst of launching a new program.
How to: Match Course Offerings to Enrollment Trends

Use the steps below to dig into course-level data within your APS Platform to identify departmental mismatches between distinct course offerings and enrollment trends.

1. Getting Started: Set Your Filters

In the APS Dashboard, click on the Courses Tab and use the filters at the top of the page to refine your analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Filter</th>
<th>Setting</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Year</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus Name</td>
<td>A1</td>
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<tr>
<td>College Name</td>
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<td>Course Prefix</td>
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<tr>
<td>Course Type</td>
<td>Online</td>
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<td>Course Division</td>
<td>Upper Division</td>
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Recommended filters: College Name, Course Type, and Course Division.

2. View the Change in Distinct Course Offerings vs. Attempted Credit Hours By Course Prefix Chart

Scroll to the Aligning Course Offerings With Enrollments section of the page to compare annual percent changes in course offerings to the annual percent changes in student enrollment.

Source: Academic Performance Solutions.
Click on View Trends in Distinct Course Offerings By Course Prefix

Drill into a course prefix-level view of the data to see annual counts of course offerings by department.

Putting Data into Action

Now that you’ve examined trends in distinct course offerings, what did you find?

a) Enrollment growth is outpacing course growth: Consider increasing the number of course and section offerings within a department in order to avoid bottlenecks and continue to attract new students.

b) Course growth is outpacing enrollment growth: Consider offering fewer electives within a department. Use additional analysis below to evaluate if the courses are full or if the course growth has resulted in a low fill rate, indicating opportunity to adjust resource allocation by collapsing sections.

Helpful Hint: Filter at the top of the page for the course prefix or department you want to further investigate.

View Fill Rate Analyses Reports Section Consolidation Opportunity-Multiple Section Courses and Opportunities For Expansion Or Consolidation-Single Sections Courses

Scroll up to view current student demand in multi section courses and single section courses within the course prefix or department to identify courses with bottlenecks and courses with excess capacity.

Examine the number of collapsible sections over the past several years to determine if there has been an increase due to proliferation of courses.

Low fill rates may be attributed to proliferation of distinct courses outpacing demand.

Source: Academic Performance Solutions.
Best Practice Support for Matching Course Offerings to Student Demand

Resources Available on EAB.com

Research Brief: Breaking the Trade-Off Between Cost and Quality

- Academic Affairs Forum research focusing on greatest opportunities to realign academic resources while enhancing instructional quality and student success, including targeting small courses with low demand
  - Download at EAB.com

Toolkit: The Instructional Capacity Playbook

- Academic Affairs Forum research detailing best practice tactics to align instructional capacity with student demand, including reallocating underutilized capacity and reducing curricular bottlenecks
  - Download and watch the webconference at EAB.com

Source: Academic Performance Solutions; EAB Research.