California Community Colleges:

Program Viability & Discontinuation Processes

Desert Regional Consortium

June 2012

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Overview

In accordance with Title 5, Section 51022, "College districts are required by current regulation and statute to develop a process for program discontinuance and minimum criteria for the discontinuance of occupational programs."

In its paper, "Program Discontinuance: A Faculty Perspective," the ASCCC outlines issues and criteria to consider in creating this process. In addition, it states, "The development of a program discontinuance process, should be considered within the context of the college mission statement, and should be linked with the college educational master plan and the department's goals and objectives." The Academic Senate for California Community Colleges (ASCCC) has recommended that college districts create a process for program discontinuance that takes into account, 1) negative effects on students, 2) college curriculum balance, 3) educational and budget planning, 4) regional economic and training issues, and 5) collective bargaining issues.

However, not all community college districts in California have an approved policy for program discontinuance. And among those that have an approved policy the metrics and processes vary widely.

Project Scope

This policy and procedure review and analysis was conducted to identify and categorize the current metrics mentioned in approved Board Policies and their corresponding Administrative Procedures to show the variation and innovation across districts. The consortium's hope is that this information will be helpful for districts still creating such policies, as well as for those districts desiring to modify/enhance existing policies in light of changing industry and community needs, economic uncertainty, and evolving institutional goals/objectives/missions.

This policy analysis is merely a snapshot in time as of June 2012. A good-faith effort was made by the Desert Regional Consortium to identify all approved/posted CCC District Board Policies and/or Administrative Regulations related to program discontinuance. A few districts seem to have policies still in development that, since not finalized, were not included herein. The scope of this project was also initially focused on the state's 72 districts, not 112 colleges. So there are instances where a particular college may have a robust program discontinuance policy in place, but it is not included in this analysis if the district's board policy either did not include the same metrics, and/or if it was not accessible on the district website.

Policy Inventory & Analysis

Among the 72 community college districts in California, program discontinuance policies and/or administrative procedures were identified for 60 districts. No policy was found for 12 districts. Out of the 60 policies/procedures identified, 58 can be located online at district or college websites.

Each policy/procedure found was reviewed and analyzed for a set of specific criteria. The results of this review are summarized on the spreadsheet corresponding to this report (posted at www.desertcolleges.org).

The policy inventory spreadsheet includes each policy's or procedure's number, title, internet hyperlink, length in number of pages, date approved or last modified, the stated initiators of the program discontinuance process, metrics used to trigger/initiate a program discontinuance process, mention of the committee membership, stated metrics/variables used during the program discontinuance process to evaluate a program and determine next steps, the process duration, stated possible outcomes of the review, additional policy considerations stated, and references cited. If the policy was silent on a particular item, the cell was left blank. Below are some descriptive statistics and frequencies highlighting the key findings.

Policy Title, Length & Date
Titles of the policies and procedures related to program discontinuance vary from district to district.

- Most common title used was "Program Discontinuance". Thirty-five districts or colleges used this title to describe their policies, with some variation in language (e.g. "discontinuance process", "academic program discontinuance", etc.).
- Eight out of the 60 districts (13%) included program discontinuance/revitalization provisions within a broader policy or procedure focused on program/curriculum development, review, and modification. Common policy titles in these cases were "Program and Curriculum Development", "Program Management", and other.
- Three of the districts have only developed discontinuance policies for career and technical/occupational programs. Hence, the titles of their policies were specific to CTE.
- Other titles utilized by the community college districts included the following: "Program Viability", "Program Modification", "Program Vitality", "Program Revitalization", "Program Appraisal and Recommendation Process", etc.

Among the policies reviewed, 57 provided the date(s) when the current language of the procedure/process was approved and/or revised. Many of these policies are very recent – 15 districts (26%) approved or revised them in calendar years 2011-2012. Twenty-three policy documents (40%) can be considered "fairly recent" as they were developed/modified from 2008-2010. The remainder 19 policies (33%) were approved or modified between 2000 and 2007. Exhibit 1 shows the discontinuance policies of the college districts by year they were approved or last modified.

Exhibit 1 - Year of Policy Approval or Last Revision (n=57)
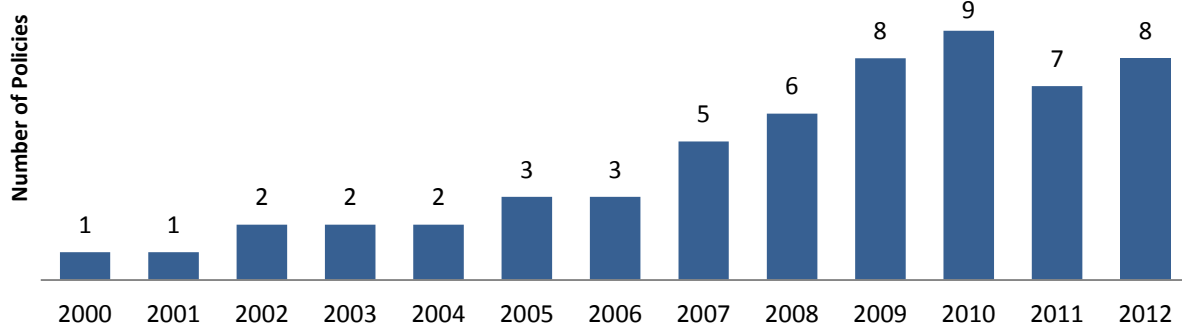
In terms of the length of the policy text, the discontinuance policies reviewed range from 1 to 16 pages in length. Many documents (12 out of 60) were relatively short – 1 page or shorter. As a rule, these shorter policies were not very specific and provided only general guidelines related to program discontinuance approach, without stating any evaluation criteria, process timeline and considerations, or other related details.   The majority of policies, however, were 2-6 pages in length providing sufficient amount of detail. Only a few documents reviewed exceeded 7 pages of content.

Initiation & Committee Membership

Only 43 out of the 60 districts with policies and/or procedures provide language related to the initiation of the program discontinuance process. The guidelines range from "any member of the college community" who could trigger the process to a specified list of individuals or departments/committees who are entitled to do so.

While the districts differ in terms of who can initiate the program discontinuance process, most policies agree that either Vice President of Academic Affairs, Vice President of Instruction, Vice President of Student Services, Dean of the affected program (or program manager/director/coordinator), or faculty of the affected program (or Academic Senate representative) are in the position to recommend a program for discontinuance or revitalization review. Other members of college community who may trigger the process in some districts include:

- Department/Division Chair
- Curriculum Committee Chair
- Education Planning Committee Chair
- Advisory Committee Chair
- Program Review Chair
- Articulation Officer
- Students
- Governing Board

Seven of the 60 policies tie the beginning of the program discontinuance process to the program review results, while there are also the policies that differentiate between program review and program discontinuance as two separate and distinct processes serving two different purposes.

Most community college districts prescribe the establishment of a Task Force or an Ad Hoc Committee to lead the evaluation of a program recommended for discontinuance. Forty-seven of the districts provide guidelines regarding the membership of such a task force or committee. In a few cases, these guidelines are rather general requiring the district to include "all parties potentially affected by the decision (faculty, staff, administrators, students, the employing businesses and industries, and the community)." Most districts, however, outline the membership of a committee in more detail.

Most common members of a program discontinuance task force/committee that appear in the majority of reviewed policies are:

- Faculty from the affected program
- Division dean or other administrator(s)
- Other faculty representatives (usually appointed by the Academic Senate)
- Vice President of Instruction or other senior level administrator(s)

Other members that are mentioned by about 20-30% of policies include:

- Department chair(s)
- Classified staff representative(s)
- Counselor(s)
- Student(s)
- Academic Senate president or designee
- Curriculum committee chair or representative(s)
- Dean outside of the affected program area
- Institutional research

More rarely, the following interest groups and/or individuals are included in the discussions:

- Advisory committee member (only 6 out of 60 policies prescribes representation from an advisory board)
- Local workforce investment boards (in consultation capacity)
- Program review committee chair or representative
- Community
- College President

Initiation Variables/Metrics Cited

Program discontinuance policies and procedures were reviewed for the criteria that are used by the districts to initiate the process. Among the policies identified, 37 provided specific metrics or general guidelines regarding what variables may or may not be used for such purposes.

Most commonly cited metrics are changing/decreasing labor market demand and low/declining enrollment (23 districts state these variables; 38%), followed by the program review and analysis of trends (16 districts; 27%). Other common criteria include availability of human, physical, or fiscal resources; low student completion; low retention or persistence; transfer trends, etc.

Notably, some (10 of the 60) districts specifically state in their policies and/or procedures that budgetary considerations should not be used to initiate program discontinuance discussions, while other institutions include such variables as budget reductions, program cost, and availability of facilities and other resources among their criteria for process initiation.

Exhibit 2 provides a list of initiation metrics found in the district policies and procedures.

Exhibit 2 - Process Initiation Metrics (n=60)

Criteria	Percent
Change/decrease in labor market demand/community need	38%
Low/Declining student enrollment	38%
Program review and analysis of trends	27%
Availability of human, physical, or fiscal resources	22%
Low completions	22%
Low retention/persistence	22%
Change in transfer requirements/availability of transfer major	18%
Declining/low student success	18%
NOT Budget	17%
Lack of currency and/or relevance	13%
Advisory Committee recommendation	12%
Insufficient frequency of course offerings	12%
Failure to meet certification/licensure requirements	10%
Available faculty	7%
Program discontinuance evaluation metrics	5%
Budget reductions. Program creates financial hardship for the institution	5%
Resources/Cost and FTES comparison	5%
Program falls outside of the college mission/master plan/goals & objectives	5%
Decline in importance of service to related disciplines	3%
Perkins Core indicator data	2%
Program duplicates a similar program offered in the community	2%
Legislative mandates	2%
Declining transfer trends	2%

Percent of districts using these criteria

Program Discontinuance Process Variables/Metrics Cited

While some program discontinuance policies of the districts provide only broad guidelines about the discussion process, many also outline the variables that may (or need to) be considered to assess whether a program should to be revitalized, discontinued or continued without change. Forty-two out of the 60 policies analyzed were found to include such lists.

The evaluation metrics included in the policies can be categorized into two groups – qualitative and quantitative. In fact, certain districts have organized their recommended variable this way. Many policies emphasize the importance of evaluating qualitative aspects of a program instead of just focusing on quantitative metrics.

Among the most frequently used qualitative metrics for assessing program viability are: 1) regional duplication or replication, i.e. the existence of a similar program at other colleges (28 policies contain this variable; 47% of all policies identified), 2) impact of program discontinuance on other programs or cross discipline projects within the college (27; 45%), and 3) match of the program with the college mission, educational master plan, and goals and objectives (22; 37%). Other common qualitative criteria include effect on students, potential for disproportionate impact on diversity, balance of college curriculum, community need, ability of students to complete their educational goals using the program, quality of the program as perceived by such groups as students, businesses, and community.

Interestingly, advisory committee recommendations and employer satisfaction are the metrics that appear in the district policies less frequently, only 15 and 9 policies citing these variables, respectfully.

Figure 3 shows the qualitative metrics and the percent of policies that cite them out of those reviewed.

Exhibit 3 - Qualitative Metrics for Assessing Program Viability (n=60)

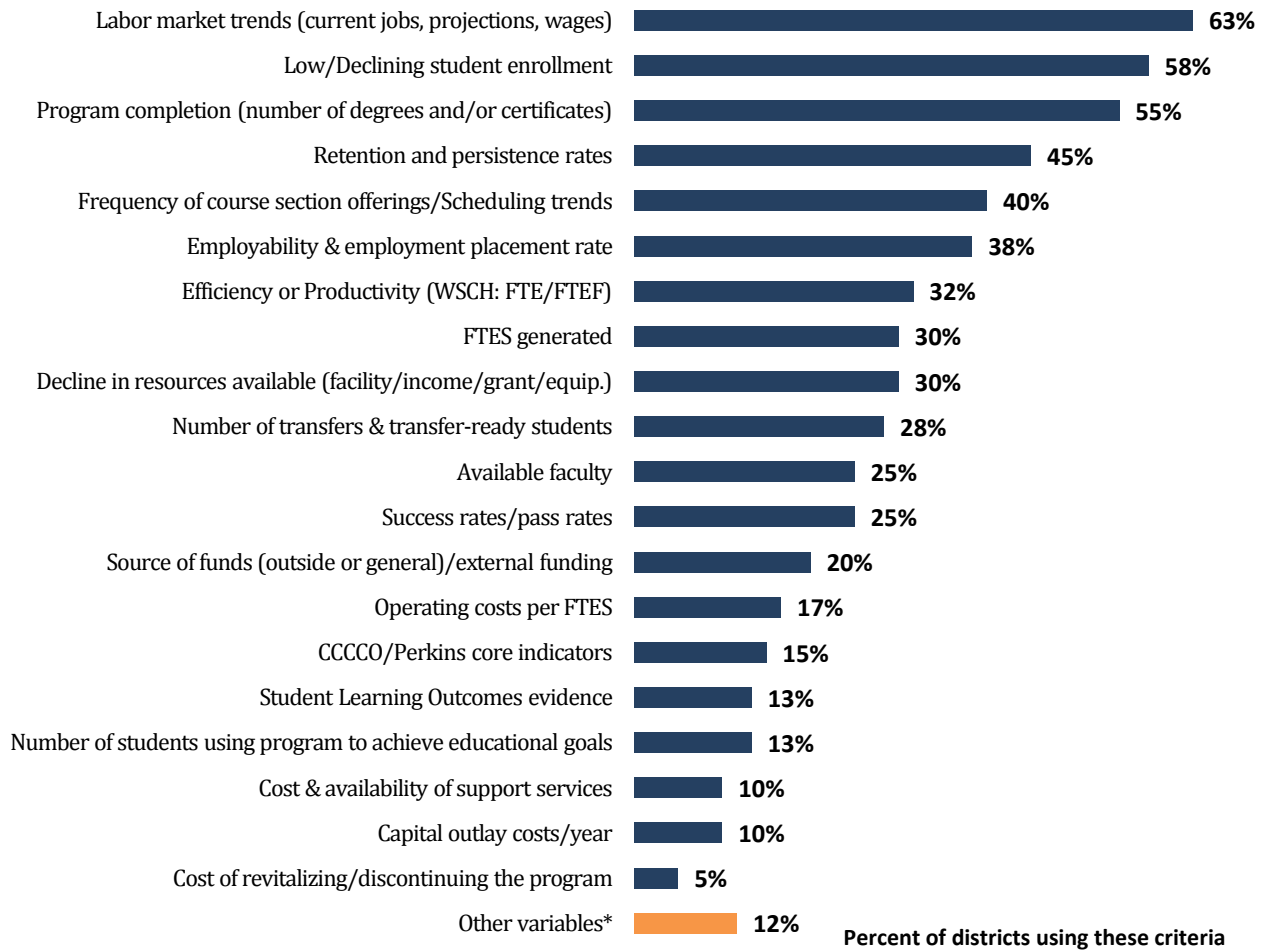| Metric	Percent
Regional duplication/replication	47%
Impact on [integration with] other programs	45%
Match with college mission and/or educational master plan	37%
Effect on students	32%
Potential for disproportionate impact on diversity	30%
Balance of college curriculum	30%
Community needs/reputation	28%
Ability of students to complete ed. goals/ catalog rights	28%
Quality of program as perceived by students, industry, community	28%
Currency and/or content of program review/unit plans	27%
Advisory committee recommendations	25%
Failure to meet certification or accreditation requirements	25%
Availability of transfer program/articulation	23%
Program distinctiveness/uniqueness	20%
Pedagogy of the discipline	18%
Lack of currency or relevance	17%
Employer satisfaction	15%
Student satisfaction	15%
Comprehensiveness of the college experience	13%
Impact on articulation agreements	12%
Workforce development trends	10%
NOT Budget	8%
Other variables*	23%

Percent of districts using these criteria

Other variables include less common metrics, such as changes in class offerings, student interest, trends at area colleges, impact on Tech Prep/2+2 programs, and marketing & outreach efforts.

The majority of policies reviewed cited the following quantitative assessment variables: labor market trends, including current and projected employment and industry wages (38 of the 60 policies [63%] included this variable); low and/or declining student enrollment for a significant period of time (35 policies; 58%); and program completion/achievement rates (33; 55%). Other frequently cited quantitative metrics are retention and persistence rates, frequency of course section offerings and scheduling trends, employment placement rates, efficiency/productivity of enrollment, FTES generated, resources available, etc.

Similarly to the initiation criteria, budgetary concerns are included in the program viability discussions by only a few community college districts. Primary attention is given to the student enrollment, persistence, and completion as well as demand for the program in the region.

Exhibit 4 lists the quantitative metrics identified in the program discontinuance policies and their frequencies among the 60 policies analyzed.

Exhibit 4 - Quantitative Metrics for Assessing Program Viability (n=60)

Metric	Percent
Labor market trends (current jobs, projections, wages)	63%
Low/Declining student enrollment	58%
Program completion (number of degrees and/or certificates)	55%
Retention and persistence rates	45%
Frequency of course section offerings/Scheduling trends	40%
Employability & employment placement rate	38%
Efficiency or Productivity (WSCH: FTE/FTEF)	32%
FTES generated	30%
Decline in resources available (facility/income/grant/equip.)	30%
Number of transfers & transfer-ready students	28%
Available faculty	25%
Success rates/pass rates	25%
Source of funds (outside or general)/external funding	20%
Operating costs per FTES	17%
CCCCO/Perkins core indicators	15%
Student Learning Outcomes evidence	13%
Number of students using program to achieve educational goals	13%
Cost & availability of support services	10%
Capital outlay costs/year	10%
Cost of revitalizing/discontinuing the program	5%
Other variables*	12%

Percent of districts using these criteria

Other variables include less common metrics, such as percent of faculty with documented updated skills, comparison of the institution's enrollment rates to those at area colleges, affordability of the program to students, and ROI data.

Process Duration

Out of those policies and procedures reviewed, only less than a half of them (24 of 60) clearly state how long the program discontinuance discussions should take place before the decision is made. Those that do provide such guidance vary greatly on the recommended duration. Specifically, the following durations are cited:

- 1 semester or less (8 policies)
- from 2 semesters to 2 years (12 policies)
- over 2 years (4 policies)
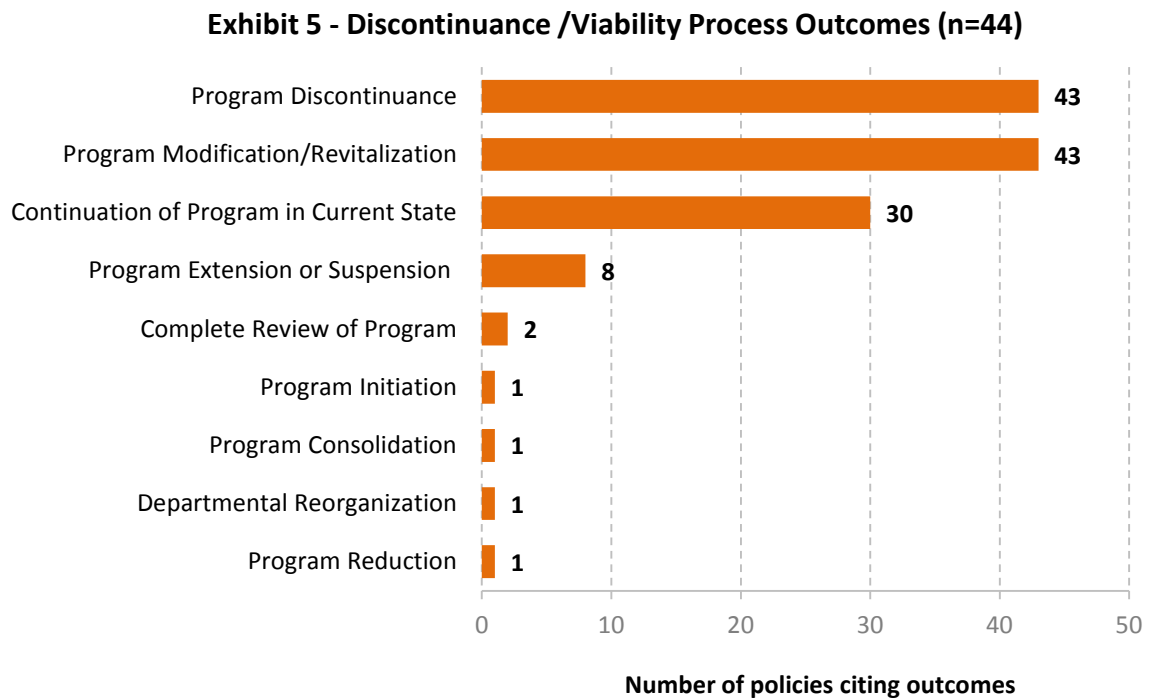
Stated Possible Outcomes

Most district policies (44 out of 60) define possible outcomes of the program discontinuance discussions. The majority of policies state that the committee deliberations should result in one of the following outcomes:

1) ***Recommendation to Continue or Accept the Program in its Current State***. A program is recommended to continue without any changes when it has been determined that it is in the best interest of the college, students, and the larger community to do so.

2) ***Recommendation to Continue with Qualifications/Modifications (Revitalization Plan)***. A program is recommended to continue with qualifications when it has been determined that interventions are necessary in order to strengthen the program, improve its viability and responsiveness. As a rule, such decision should be accompanied by a specific plan of actions and agreed upon timeline to revitalize the program. Most policies include provisions specifying that the program affected is to be reviewed again upon the completion of the revitalization plan and schedule. Some districts' policies also incorporate specific revitalization strategies for each of the possible problem areas, thus providing more detailed guidance to a program discontinuance committee/task force (e.g. MiraCosta CCD).

3) ***Recommendation to Discontinue***. A program is declared obsolete and recommended for discontinuance when it has been concluded that it is no longer viable, i.e. it falls outside the district/college's mission, strategic goals, and/or the department's goals and objectives. The majority of the policies stipulate only permanent discontinuance of a program. However, as an exception, Pasadena CCD policy indicates that a program may be "discontinued permanently" or "discontinued with the curriculum placed in inactive status", and after three years of inactive status, a program is automatically dropped from the District inventory of programs.

Additional outcomes stated by individual community college districts include:

- Program consolidation (consolidation of class sections from two or more colleges at one college in order to preserve the program or major)
- Additional review of the program (when consensus is not reached)
- Program extension or suspension
- Departmental reorganization
- Program reduction
- Program initiation

Exhibit 5 demonstrates the frequencies of the outcomes found in the program discontinuance policies and/procedures.

Exhibit 5 - Discontinuance /Viability Process Outcomes (n=44)

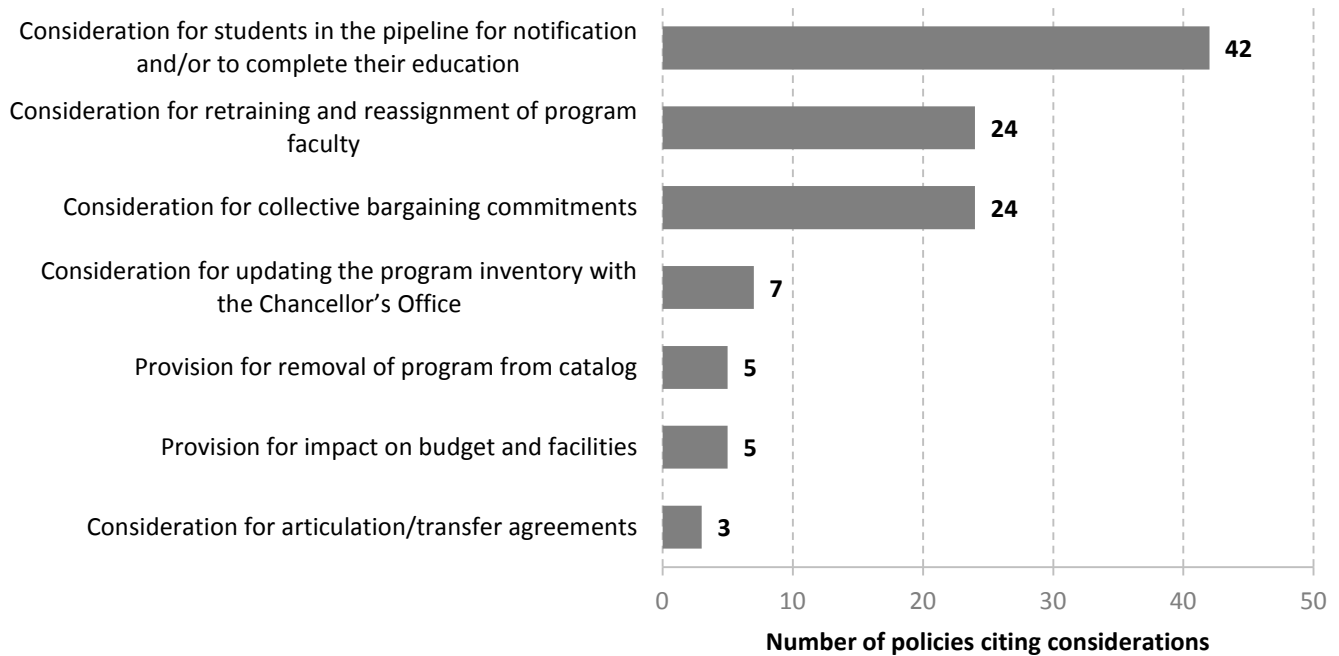| Outcome	Value
Program Discontinuance	43
Program Modification/Revitalization	43
Continuation of Program in Current State	30
Program Extension or Suspension	8
Complete Review of Program	2
Program Initiation	1
Program Consolidation	1
Departmental Reorganization	1
Program Reduction	1

Number of policies citing outcomes

Discontinuance Considerations

When a program is recommended for discontinuance, most policies state additional provisions that need to be considered by the college in their program discontinuation plan.

- Most widely cited provision is the consideration for the students who are currently enrolled in the affected program. The majority of policies (42 of 60) state that enrolled students should be allowed to complete their programs of study and their catalog rights must be maintained and accounted for in allowing them to finish the program.

- Maintaining collective bargaining commitments and reassigning and/or retraining program faculty are the other common policy considerations found in the discontinuance policies. Many policies clearly state that discontinuance plan needs to incorporate the implementation of all requirements of collective bargaining for faculty and staff, including application of policies for reduction in force.

- Other provisions include updating the program inventory with the California Community College Chancellor's Office, removing program from the catalog, assessing impact on budget and facilities, considering articulation agreement.

Exhibit 6 provides the policy provisions identified and their frequencies in the documents reviewed.

Exhibit 6 - Policy Considerations on Discontinuance (n=43)

Consideration	Number of policies
Consideration for students in the pipeline for notification and/or to complete their education	42
Consideration for retraining and reassignment of program faculty	24
Consideration for collective bargaining commitments	24
Consideration for updating the program inventory with the Chancellor's Office	7
Provision for removal of program from catalog	5
Provision for impact on budget and facilities	5
Consideration for articulation/transfer agreements	3

Number of policies citing considerations

References Cited

A number of policies cited specific institutional documents or additional Education Code sections, but a significant majority of policies cited at least the following four references:

- Education Code Section 78016, Review of program: Termination
- Title 5 Section 51022, Program Discontinuance
- Title 5 Section 55130, Approval of Credit Programs
- Program Discontinuance: A Faculty Perspective. ASCCC, adopted Spring 1998

Summary Observations

While the purpose of this project was simply to categorize the elements present in existing policies, there are some notable observations worth including:

- Some policies specifically expressed that the institution's budget and economic constraints should not be considered as part of a given program's evaluation (e.g. Glendale CCD), while other policies specified the specific fiscal considerations and formulas to use in determining if the revenue received and resources available were adequate to maintain the program in question (e.g. San Luis Obispo CCD).
- Some districts combine the Program Review forms/data/process with the Program Discontinuance forms/data/process (e.g. Contra Costa CCD), while other district policy's make a point that the processes are to remain separate (e.g. Redwoods CCD). In a third category,

multiple districts cite that program review data may be considered during evaluating a program for discontinuance.

- A number of policies had unique elements included that made them stand out from the others. Some examples include:
  - Hartnell CCD and Cabrillo CCD's policy differentiated between the quantitative metrics to evaluate for CTE programs versus the quantitative metrics to evaluate for Transfer programs.
  - Chabot-Las Positas' policy and Gavilan's policy requires three metrics to be met in order to trigger/initiate a program discontinuance process.
  - The duration of the process varies greatly from one single term (e.g. Chaffey) to 2-4 years (e.g. Riverside CCD).
  - A few policies included appendices with helpful templates/resources. West Hills CCD's policy includes an "Occupational Program Two-Year Review form" and Sonoma County CCD's policy includes question prompts for a self-evaluation report.
  - In addition to Program Modification, Improvement, or Discontinuance, Los Angeles CCD lists two other potential outcomes: Program Initiation, and Departmental Reorganization
  - A few district policies, such as Marin CCD and Shasta-Tehama-Trinity Joint CCD, provide a provision to forego the lengthy evaluation process if the discipline faculty voluntarily submit a request to discontinue a program.
  - Some multi-college districts outline the metrics/data that colleges should take into consideration (e.g. Ventura County CCD), while other multi-college districts leave it entirely up to each college to decide (e.g. South Orange County CCD).
  - Most districts seem to leave it up to the program discontinuance task force/evaluation committee to decide what action can be applied to revitalized a program. However, a small number of districts actually provide a list of possible strategies for each potential problem (e.g. MiraCosta CCD).
- Interestingly, only 22 district policies specifically included the "Employability & Employment Placement Rate" as a metric to evaluate within a program vitality or discontinuance process. In light of the federal mandate of Gainful Employment disclosure requirements, perhaps the inclusion of this metric should be revisited.
- Only those policies approved/modified within the last few years included the assessment of student learning outcomes, or program learning outcomes, as a variable to consider in evaluating for program discontinuance. Noting its exclusion may be an opportunity for districts to revise existing policies.
- Comprehensive policies seemed to incorporate the following components: 1) metrics to determine if a program should be evaluated/considered for discontinuance, 2) the workflow, process steps, and appropriate timeline, 3) both quantitative and qualitative metrics used to evaluate if a program should be retained, modified, or discontinued.

- Notably, only a small minority of policies specified receiving feedback from their local Industry Advisory Board, and/or the Workforce Investment Board as part of the program vitality or discontinuance process.

Recommendations

Without knowing additional details specific to each campus, the Desert Regional Consortium does not want to be perceived as judging or evaluating specific district policies. Thus, no specific recommendations are noted in this report. However, the authors of this report believe that answering the following questions can assist a given community college district in ensuring its policy and the corresponding administrative procedures are up-to-date and adequately serve its regional community:

1) Has your policy been created/reviewed/modified in the last 5 years?
2) Does your policy outline an existing process or objective metrics to determine if a program should be evaluated or considered for a program vitality or discontinuance process?
3) Can multiple stakeholders within the institution initiate a program vitality or discontinuance process in your district?
4) Is the membership of a program vitality or discontinuance committee/task force clearly defined in your written policy?
5) Does your board policy include a robust mix of quantitative and qualitative metrics for review during a program vitality or discontinuance process to ensure a fair and comprehensive evaluation?
    - Given our current and foreseeable economic climate, do those stated metrics include economic factors (both program cost and program revenue)?
    - Does your policy include some of the top metrics cited throughout the state in other district policies including labor market trends, low/declining enrollment, completion, retention, and persistence rates, regional duplication, and impact on other programs and/or cross-discipline projects?
6) Does your district policy include additional considerations such as the impact on facilities, articulation agreements, 2+2 Tech Prep pathways, ensuring students with catalog rights can continue progress towards their educational goal, the retraining/reassignment of faculty, and the removal of a program from your catalog as well as the CCCCO Program Inventory?
7) Does your policy allow a fair opportunity for discourse and review, but also an expedient timeline to permit the institution to respond rapidly to changing workforce and community needs?