April 2, 2019

Interim President John Green
University of Akron
302 Buchtel Common
Akron, OH 44325-4702

Dear Interim President Green:

The interim report you submitted to our office has now been reviewed.  The staff analysis of the report is attached.

On behalf of the Higher Learning Commission staff received the report on program review. No further reports are required on this topic.

The institution's next reaffirmation of accreditation is scheduled for 2022– 2023.

For more information on the interim report process contact Lil Nakutis, Accreditation Processes Manager, at lnakutis@hlcommission.org. Your HLC staff liaison is John Marr (jmarr@hlcommission.org); (800) 621-7440 x 104.

Thank you.

HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION

STAFF ANALYSIS OF INSTITUTIONAL REPORT
DATE: April 2, 2019
STAFF LIAISON: John Marr
REVIEWED BY: Steven Kapelke

**INSTITUTION**:  University of Akron, Akron, OH

**EXECUTIVE OFFICER**:  John Green, Interim President

**PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTION AND SOURCES**:  An interim report is required by 12/31/2018 on program review.

This interim report derives from the Team Report of the institution's 2017 Comprehensive Evaluation. The report should document that program review of all programs is underway. Evidence of program review of undergraduate programs that do not hold specialized accreditation is expected.

**REPORT PRESENTATION AND QUALITY**: The University of Akron (UA) interim report on academic program review is presented in a clearly written narrative with a substantial range of supporting materials situated in the appendix. The appendices include the final report from the Academic Program Review Committee, UA's Three-Year Action Plan, and other documents pertaining to program review. Much of the documentation provided in the report is also available on the institution's website.

**REPORT SUMMARY**: The report's narrative describes the process by which the institution developed its existing procedures for academic program review, the results of its first round of program reviews, and how it employed these reviews in its planning and budgeting activities.

The report notes that the institution determined to align its first comprehensive program review undertaking with its strategic planning process, with all of its academic programs undergoing review during AY2017-2018. To effect this, the institution formed the Academic Program Review (APR) Committee, comprising 24 faculty members, and an Executive Committee, which was responsible for identifying common data sets, report templates, and "*a categorization scheme so that we could review all of our degree programs in a summative way in one calendar year with the goal of resource allocation (not financial savings).*"

Following review of the APR's final report by the Academic Policies Committee of the Faculty Senate, the Committee issued a report to the Faculty Senate, which was then

forwarded to the President, who subsequently "*presented a series of recommendations to the UA Board of Trustees.*" The Board's final decision, working from the recommendation, resulted in several notable actions, including a large number of degree programs being placed on phase-out plans, while, at the same time, 32 new faculty positions were approved "*for investment in strategic academic areas of strength and growth potential.*" Programs identified for elimination were those that were producing low numbers of degrees; had declining demand/enrollment; or created competition or program duplication with other colleges and universities in Northeast Ohio.

According to the report, the response to changes derived from the comprehensive program review were mixed, with support from a number of UA administrative and governance units, including the Faculty Senate, while the faculty would have preferred a more widely-based decision making process, one that involved campus-wide discourse. This raised some issues pertaining to shared governance, which the report acknowledges, making reference to a separate report filed by the University.

Subsequent to the completion of the original program review process summarized here, the University "*returned to the formative program review process on a seven year cycle...,*" which the institution sees as one feature in its continuous improvement process. The report notes that all future reviews will include evaluations by outside consultants and a feedback system that will enable academic units to submit plans to address identified weaknesses or concerns. Although formative in nature, subsequent program reviews will inform planning and budging processes with regard to "*identifying future investment or disinvestment areas.*"

The report also makes reference to similar review of its administrative support units through the Administrative Activities Review (AAR), which produced a report issued in Fall 2018. The APR and AAR together "*set the backdrop for UA's Three-Year Action Plan which was built from unit-level plans, vetted across campus…and endorsed by the Board of Trustees on December 5th, 2018.*" This plan was to form the basis of the FY2020 budget planning. Here the report notes also that the unit-level planning offered academic units the opportunity to propose revisions of the phase-out program recommended by APR.

**REPORT ANALYSIS**: Materials presented in the University of Akron interim report on program review indicate that the institution has developed and implemented a comprehensive and sustainable program review system, one with a defined set of procedures and common data sets.

The report aptly describes the institution's decision-making process with regard to program review, noting specifically the significance of these reviews to the strategic planning the University was undertaking at that time (AY2017-2018). Program review at UA, as described in the report, is rightly faculty-driven in terms of process, while, at the same time, involving appropriate administrative examination and input, with final determinations from the Board of Trustees.
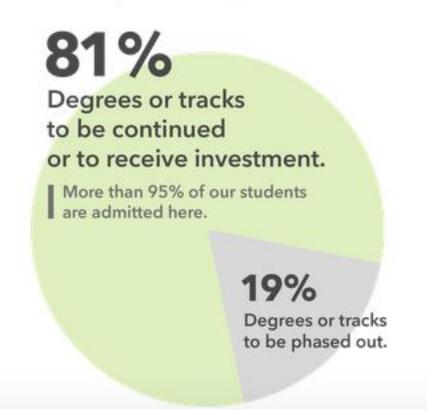
Specifically, the Academic Program Review Committee, comprising 24 faculty members, was responsible for making recommendations based on the data derived from the University-wide review process undertaken in AY2017-2018. Evidence indicates that the subsequent submission and review of the APR report followed appropriate governance procedures—having been submitted to the Academic Policies Committee of the Faculty Senate. This Committee issued its own report to the President who ultimately presented a series of recommendations to the Board of Trustees.

The program review system created by the institution is appropriately detailed, with clearly stated procedures and goals, virtually all of which are contained in the report's appendices and available on the UA website. These include the *Timeline of Activities*, the *Academic Program Review Assessment Form*, the *Individual Program Reviewer Assessment Form*, and the *Academic Program Review Final Report*, among others. The following image, also accessible on the website, provides a graphic overview of program review results.

Aug. 15, 2018

Today, the Board of Trustees approved recommendations from Academic Program Review, a faculty-led, year-long process to evaluate every degree and degree track we offer.

The review will allow us to increase resources in degree programs of greatest interest, opportunity and benefit to students. New degrees will be created, many will receive investment or continue as is, and some will be phased out.

# 81%
Degrees or tracks
to be continued
or to receive investment.

| More than 95% of our students are admitted here.

# 19%
Degrees or tracks
to be phased out.

The one remaining procedural issue, which the interim report acknowledges openly, pertains to shared governance, with the faculty expressing concern that final decisions about program elimination (for example) were made without a broader, campus-wide discourse. This is an issue that the University has addressed in a separate report, but needs to be cited here, given that the concern derives from the program review process.

Analysis Concluding Statement: The University of Akron has crafted what appears to be an effective set of procedures and standards for academic program review and a corresponding system for *Administrative Activities Review* (AAR). The first set of reviews, undertaken in AY2017-2018, are summative in nature and designed to be employed as foundational planning documents, while subsequent reviews are of more formative character. These are to be enacted on a pre-determined seven-year cycle.

It is evident that the institution used the AY2017-2018 reviews to make difficult but necessary decisions pertaining to its academic programs, with more than 80 programs now scheduled for elimination ("*phase-out*")—but with additional resources to be invested in programs that show room for growth. Subsequent program reviews will also play a role in planning and budgeting, as is appropriate.

The Higher Learning Commission acknowledges the University's efforts to date with regard to academic program review and will not require additional reporting on this matter. However, the institution should assume that the HLC Peer Review Team conducting UA's next Comprehensive Evaluation in AY2022-2023 will examine its continued progress in this area.


**STAFF FINDING**:

Note the relevant Criterion, Core Component(s) or Assumed Practice(s): Core Component 4.A

Statements of Analysis (check one below)
**X** Evidence demonstrates adequate progress in the area of focus.
_ Evidence demonstrates that further organizational attention is required in the area of focus.
_ Evidence demonstrates that further organizational attention and HLC follow-up are required.
_ Evidence is insufficient and a HLC focused visit is warranted.


**STAFF ACTION**: Receive the report on program review. No further reports are required on this topic.

The institution's next reaffirmation of accreditation is scheduled for 2022– 2023.