

Modesto Junior College Program Discontinuance: Guiding Principles and Process

I. Background

A. Statutes, Regulations, Policies and Standards Pertaining to Program Discontinuance

In accordance with **Title 5, Section 53200** academic senates in California Community Colleges are to make recommendations to local administrators and the governing board of a district with respect to all “academic and professional matters.” This Title 5 empowerment includes the obligation of community college governing boards and designees to “rely primarily” on academic senates concerning matters of “curriculum, including establishing prerequisites and placing courses within disciplines,” “degree and certificate requirements,” and “educational program development.” Yosemite Community College District (**YCCD**) **Board of Trustees Policy 7-8408** confirms that in these areas the board “relies primarily” on the advice and judgment of its academic senates. Moreover, according **Education Code, Section 78016**¹ as well as **Title 5, Section 51022** all community college districts are “required by current regulation and statute to develop a process for program discontinuance” including minimum criteria for the discontinuance of programs. **Title 5, Sections 51022, 55601 and 55130** as well as **the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC)** provide additional regulations and standards to guide program discontinuance.

Because of said statutes, regulations, accreditation requirements and district policies the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges (ASCCC) encourages local academic senates to approve a transparent process for program discontinuance that is agreed-upon by the local academic senate, administrators, and its governing board. This process for program discontinuance should include consistent guiding principles and clear criteria for program elimination in order to assure that programs are not “terminated using inconsistent approaches, which is problematic for students, counselors, and academic senates, each of whom feels significant repercussions when discontinuance is managed inconsistently” (*Program Discontinuance: A Faculty Perspective Revised*, ASCCC, Fall 2012). Therefore, ASCCC has recommended that local academic senates create a process for program discontinuance, informed by guiding principles and specific procedures, which considers how a program’s discontinuance might impact: 1) students; 2) the overall curricular offering at a college; 3) the college’s education master plan; 4) the college’s strategic budget planning; 5) regional economic and training needs; and 6) collective bargaining issues.

¹ Education Code 78016: “(a) Every vocational or occupational training program offered by a community college district shall be reviewed every two years by the governing board of the district to ensure that each program, as demonstrated by the California Occupational Information System, including the State-Local Cooperative Labor Market Information Program established in Section 10533 of the Unemployment Insurance Code, or if this program is not available in the labor market area, other available sources of labor market information, does all of the following: (1) Meets a documented labor market demand. (2) Does not represent unnecessary duplication of other manpower training programs in the area. (3) Is of demonstrated effectiveness as measured by the employment and completion success of its students. (b) Any program that does not meet the requirements of subdivision (a) and the standards promulgated by the governing board shall be terminated within one year. (c) The review process required by this section shall include the review and comments by the Local Private Industry Council established pursuant to Division 8 (commencing with Section 15000) of the Unemployment Insurance Code, which review and comments shall occur prior to any decision by the appropriate governing body. (d) The section shall apply to each program commenced subsequent to July 28, 1983.”

B. Definition of a Curricular Program

According to **Title 5, Section 55000** a program is defined as “an organized sequence of courses leading to a defined objective, a degree, a certificate, a diploma, a license, or transfer to another institution of higher learning.” The ASCCC paper *Program Review Setting a Standard (2009)* goes on to give examples of different kinds of programs that are clearly focused on *curriculum* including: 1) disciplines, such as natural sciences, or, even more broadly, science; 2) departments, such as early childhood education, counseling, etc.; 3) academic majors or areas of emphasis, such as humanities; 4) student pathways such as career technical education, basic skills, and transfer. For the purposes of program discontinuance, under the definition of **Title 5, Section 55000**, a “program” at Modesto Junior College meets at least one of these two definitions:

1. A program offers a degree, certificate, diploma, area of emphasis, or series of courses that transfer to another post-secondary institution.
2. A program includes all academic, career technical, basic skills or student support programs that complete program review and have identifiable program outcomes that are assessed and analyzed to gauge student learning.

II. Guiding Principles and Criteria for the Program Discontinuance Committee

In accord with the aforementioned statutes, regulations, policies and standards pertaining to program discontinuance, and utilizing the above definition of a curricular program, the Modesto Junior College (MJC) Academic Senate adopts this document entitled “Program Discontinuance: Guiding Principles and Process.”

Modesto Junior College recognizes that its curriculum and course offerings must be responsive to the needs of the students and the community that it serves and, furthermore, that the college must continue to support its mission as well as the goals of individual programs over time. Because the needs of the students and our community change, the educational programs at our college undergo *regular program review* in order to assure that the college is effectively using its resources to meet the education needs of our community. In certain, special cases the college might also decide to **discontinue or qualify the continuance of an existing program**. The purpose of the following process is to ensure a sound, fair and unbiased determination of a course of action in those cases where a program is to be recommended for **discontinuance or continuation with qualification (reduction)**.²

² This document refers to cases in which a program is being considered for either discontinuance or continuation with qualification (reduction or revitalization). In the case of program initiation, the MJC Academic Senate and its Curriculum Committee will work with administrators to forward proposals to the YCCD Board of Trustees. According to YCCD Board Policy 2200 “Board Responsibilities,” the YCCD Board of Trustees, in conference with the Chancellor, has the power to: “Authorize new projects, and determine what proposed expansions shall be made in the work of the District. Annually review new programs and curricular offerings, *relying primarily on the advice of the respective academic senates.*”

A. Guiding Principles

The following principles guide the determination of a program as a candidate for **discontinuance or qualified continuance (reduction)**.

Whereas the purpose of this document is to provide a procedure whereby instructional or student services programs undergo a formal and transparent review by a **Program Discontinuance Committee** (which can recommend to reduce or discontinue a program or to maintain the program) composed of key representatives of major constituent groups, and whereas the charge of the Program Discontinuance Committee is to recommend to the MJC Academic Senate a course of action in regards to the identified program, this recommendation is to be approached with the Modesto Junior College's long-term strategic planning, education master plan and mission in mind.

Here are additional guiding principles by which the Program Discontinuance Committee should pursue its charge to recommend either *program discontinuance, qualified continuance (reduction), or continuance*:

1. The college community, as well as the larger community we serve at MJC, is best served when curricular and pedagogic rationales drive the budget development process. Similarly, the college community, as well as the larger community we serve at MJC is best served when strictly fiscal rationale do not drive program discontinuance or qualified continuance (reduction) unless fiscal exigency is declared by the YCCCD Board of Trustees.
2. Program discontinuance is a very serious matter that has long-term consequences for the students, faculty, the college, the district and our community. Short-sighted, reactive decision-making can often make a situation worse so this kind of programmatic decision should be made with gravity, fairness and an overwhelming abundance of evidence.
3. There is an inexorable link between academic planning and student success. Diversity begets diversity—programmatic diversity is a cornerstone to equitably serving our diverse community. Robust student success demands a wide range of programs, both large and small, covering a diverse spectrum of skills, professions and trades and program reduction or discontinuance should be guided by this ideal.
4. The review and decision regarding program discontinuance is a joint venture of the faculty and the administration that aims for consensus and operates under the principles of shared governance and decision-making based on “good faith” efforts.

5. Program discontinuance and reduction can be particularly traumatic for a college community. Therefore, any program deemed “at risk” for program discontinuance or reduction should be based on clear evidence that a given program is not serving students and the community and is failing to serve at significant cost to the district. If there is an objective need to reduce or discontinue a program and it is done under normal fiscal conditions, then it should be fairly easy to gain consensus – as the data will be so overwhelming that few could disagree – including those in the program affected. The program reduction or discontinuance should be informed by a history of program review and supporting data and, thus, should be historical in nature, not simply based on relatively short time periods.
6. Given the interdependence of many of our college programs, the reduction or discontinuance of a program must not threaten the vivacity and success of other programs who require course offerings in the program going through a program reduction or discontinuance.
7. Programs should not be discontinued solely because of retirements, impacted resources, personality conflicts, chronic neglect or other issues of mismanagement—in these cases a program support plan should first be pursued.

B. Criteria

Student enrollment data, student success rates, labor force needs, community needs and transfer-student needs, program review data and curricular mapping information should all be considered by the Program Discontinuance Committee. The following are criteria informed by data that help to determine if a program is a candidate for **program discontinuance or qualified continuance (reduction)**:

Evidence that a Program is a Candidate for Reduction or Discontinuance

1. The program has entered a generalized period of low enrollment or the program has entered a generalized period of decreasing retention rates.
2. The program has a sustained and significant downward trend in FTES generated, load, enrollment, number and composition of sections offered, FTES composition, retention, and persistence and a sustained increase in expense or annual cost/FTES.
3. Transfer rates of students who have graduated from the program have decreased over time.

4. For programs that are mainly vocational in nature: lack of demand in the workforce as evidenced by a substantive decrease in jobs offered in this field over time.
5. For programs that are primarily academic in nature: decreasing success rate of students passing state and national licensing exams over time.
6. The cost of the program is significantly above the median cost of similar programs (out of a pool of at least four at other colleges from our cohort group in the California community college system) over time.
7. Program outcomes for the program are substantively shared by another existing program; the program is not unique and much of the content is duplicated by other programs.
8. The academic course articulation or transfer pattern with universities in California has been discontinued.
9. The program fails to relate or support any other programs at the college.

III. The Process of Program Reduction or Discontinuance

A. Request to Form a Program Discontinuance Committee

The process begins with a formal, written request to the MJC Academic Senate to form a **Program Discontinuance Committee**. The Request to Form a Program Discontinuance Committee must include pertinent evidence from program review as well as a rationale that illustrates negative quantitative indicators, such as low enrollment, a significant downward trend in enrollment, and/or lack of currency or relevance. Based on the request submitted in writing to the Academic Senate, the Academic Senate will vote (after both a first and a second read of the request) on whether to accept or reject the Request to Form a Program Discontinuance Committee. The MJC Academic Senate decision should be accompanied by a detailed rationale explaining the reasons for either accepting or rejecting the Request to form a Program Discontinuance Committee.

B. Formation of a Program Discontinuance Committee

After accepting a Request to Form a Program Discontinuance Committee, the Academic Senate will then form the **Program Discontinuance Committee**. The committee is charged with researching, formulating and returning to the Academic Senate to provide a final recommendation to the Academic Senate, which will then vote to either accept or reject the recommendation of the Program Committee. The recommendation from the Program Discontinuance Committee will be either to: 1) continue the program without change; 2) to qualify the continuance of the program through reduction; or 3) to discontinue the program.

The Program Discontinuance Committee will be made up of the following eight (8) members: **The Academic Senate President, the Academic Senate Vice-President, the Faculty Co-Chair of the Curriculum Committee, the YFA President, the MJC College President, the Vice-President of Instruction, the relevant supervising dean of the program under consideration, and the Student Body President of ASMJC**. The Program Discontinuance Committee will begin its work of formulating and returning to Academic Senate with a final recommendation.

C. Program Discontinuance Committee Charge and the Formation of Consensus

The Program Discontinuance Committee is charged with making a final recommendation to the Academic Senate, no later than the following semester, on whether to proceed or not with program reduction or discontinuance. Establishment of a **consensus** within the Program Discontinuance Committee is important in regards to the conclusion and recommendation. This consensus will be informed by the principle of a “preponderance of evidence threshold,” meaning the program cannot be reduced or discontinued without substantive evidence.

Absent consensus, the Program Discontinuance Committee will make a presentation of a majority and minority report. In this case of lack of consensus, the majority and minority reports of the Program Discontinuance Committee will be forwarded to the Curriculum Committee before presentation to the Academic Senate—recognizing the Curriculum Committee’s important function of overseeing curricular modification. When a majority and minority report are written (this occurs only in the case that the Program Discontinuance Committee cannot reach consensus), the Curriculum Committee will also forward its own report to the MJC Academic Senate so that when the MJC Academic Senate votes to accept or reject a recommendation to retain, reduce or discontinue a program, the MJC Academic Senate has the majority and minority recommendation of the Program Discontinuance Committee and also the opinion of the MJC Curriculum Committee.

D. Final Recommendation to the MJC Academic Senate

After the consensus report of the Program Discontinuance Committee is received (or the majority and minority report of the Program Discontinuance Committee and the opinion of the Curriculum Committee), the MJC Academic Senate will vote on its official recommendation.

The MJC Academic Senate will vote to:

- 1) continue the program without change;*
- 2) qualify the continuance of the program through reduction; or*
- 3) discontinue the program.*

The official Academic Senate decision should include all relevant research, a clearly worded and detailed recommendation for action, and an analysis of the impact that the action will have on:

- 1) students;
- 2) the overall curricular offering at a college;
- 3) the college's education master plan;
- 4) the college's strategic budget planning;
- 5) regional economic and training needs; and
- 6) collective bargaining issues, including application of policies for reduction in force and opportunities for retraining.

The Academic Senate's Official Recommendation Concerning Program Discontinuance will then be forwarded to the Vice-President of Instruction and the Modesto Junior College President as well as the Yosemite Community College District Board of Trustees for final approval.

Pursuant to Title 5 Section 53203(d) (1), "...the recommendation of the Senate will normally be accepted, and only in exceptional circumstances and for compelling reasons will the recommendation not be accepted. If a recommendation is not accepted, [the President] shall promptly communicate [his or her] reasons in writing to the Academic Senate."

E. Follow-Through Stage: Program Reduction or Discontinuance Task Force

In the case that a program has been approved for either reduction or discontinuance, **within a month** of the Yosemite Community College District Board of Trustees approval of the **Academic Senate's Official Recommendation Concerning Program Discontinuance**, the Academic Senate, along with the college President and Vice-President of Instruction and the appropriate dean or college administrator overseeing the program, will work together to form a **Program Reduction or Discontinuance Task Force**. The Vice President of Instruction will call a meeting with the dean or administrator overseeing the program as well as a minimum of three (3) faculty from the proper academic area, or a related area if necessary, to follow-through on the approved reduction or discontinuance by forming a Program Reduction or Discontinuance Task Force.

The composition of this Program Reduction or Discontinuance Task Force must be approved by the Academic Senate before the task force begins its work of crafting a final plan for the program's reduction or discontinuance and must include at least three (3) faculty members from the affected program (or a related program if necessary). The charge of the Program Reduction or Discontinuance Task Force is to study the program and decide how best to reduce a program or discontinue the program. The plan will be completed by the task force before the **end of the following semester**. The task force should craft a plan on how to inactive courses or reduce sections of courses, reduce the faculty and staff associated with that program, address the needs of affected students, faculty and staff, and create a timeline for the process.

Students already enrolled in the program must be given the time to complete the program or assistance in transferring to a college which offers a similar program. A process to facilitate the retraining of faculty which includes timelines and college support must be developed in conjunction with the local bargaining unit. Staff must be given assistance to transfer to another area of the college. Any Program Reduction or Discontinuance Task Force must work closely with the Curriculum Committee to assure the courses are deactivated or discontinued according to Curriculum Committee procedures and policies. **The final Plan of Action of the Program Reduction or Discontinuance Task Force must be forwarded to the Academic Senate, the Vice-President of Instruction and the MJC College President as well as the YCCD Board of Trustees for final approval.** Upon final approval, the Program Reduction or Discontinuance Task Force will then oversee the implementation of the plan. Until the task force plan of action is complete, the Program Reduction or Discontinuance Task Force should submit a progress report each academic semester to the MJC Academic Senate, the Vice-President of Instruction and the Modesto Junior College President detailing progress on the **Plan of Action of the Program Reduction or Discontinuance Task Force**.