SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY.

Policy on Academic Program Viability and Sustainability Review (VSR)

Version: 1.0   **Responsible University Official**: Provost
Effective Date: 3-26-25

1.0 Introduction

Review of the viability and sustainability of our portfolio of academic programs must be a component of ongoing academic planning and oversight – not a reaction to episodic financial challenges. This policy was developed in response to a request by the Academic and Medical Affairs Committee of SLU's Board of Trustees to incorporate regular, ongoing reviews into our processes, ensuring they are institutionalized and integrated into our cyclical work.

2.0 Guiding Principles

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Any process for determining program viability and sustainability must be conducted in alignment with the *Faculty Manual* and is not a substitution for other procedures specified in the faculty manual. The design of the VSPR Policy process outlined below is governed by the following principles:

1. **Context matters:** Numbers tell part of the story but never the whole story. Every numerical data point must be investigated in a fuller context, and no decision about a program's viability or sustainability can occur without paying attention to that fuller context.

2. **Regular baseline reviews:** Reviews of baseline data about each academic program's viability and sustainability should be conducted regularly. *Note: such review is different from (though complementary to) other regular review processes, such as APR, Third-Year Reviews, and annual assessment review.*

3. **Staged reviews:** Reviews of each academic program's viability and sustainability should be staged, ensuring that demonstrably healthy programs undergo minimal review, while programs flagged for concerns undergo increasingly more rigorous and comprehensive reviews.

4. **Clear and consistent criteria:** Criteria for evaluating program viability/sustainability should be transparent and consistent, attentive to what applies equally across all programs, and sensitive to what variations necessarily exist given unique features of particular programs.

5. **Strengthen mission, market, margin:** Criteria and recommendations should consider mission, market, and margin, attending to qualitative, as well as quantitative, data. These

three are not mutually exclusive or antithetical, and reviews should seek the greater flourishing of all three.

6. **Avoid planning silos:** The University must balance predictability and adaptability across our portfolio. SLU's portfolio of academic programs should be managed *as a portfolio*, both internal to each academic unit and across the entire university, according to clear academic planning priorities, including those that recognize the following:
   ● Selected programs in the red might warrant prioritization and resources over selected programs in the black,
   ● Opportunity costs influence leadership's decisions on program prioritization (i.e., not all programs in the black should, necessarily, be continued; other programs might put those same resources to be used more positively for SLU, bringing either greater financial return, greater mission-based impact, or some other disproportionately greater benefit),
   ● Some programs are inextricable from programs in other academic units, from programs within the same academic unit, and/or from the Core, and
   ● Some programs, even within academic units with otherwise essential offerings, may be outliers and do not warrant further investment.

7. **Maintain financial balance:** A financially sustainable balance of supported and self-sustaining programs must be maintained. Not every academic program can or should directly produce an operating margin (per our current accounting practices), but every program that does make money needs to help support one (or more) that operates at a financial loss.

8. **Correlate options to resources:** We must balance our desire for curricular options and specialties against our faculty, staff, and infrastructure resource realities.

9. **Good does not equal essential:** It is neither intellectually honest nor financially feasible for SLU to pursue every worthy academic curricular or scholarly endeavor – including all those reflecting our Jesuit educational heritage.

10. **Recognize limits:** As one of hundreds of Carnegie-classified research universities in the U.S., and one of 27 U.S. Jesuit colleges and universities, there are other outstanding institutions that offer what SLU, today and for the foreseeable future, cannot and should not offer.

11. **Mitigate unintended consequences:** The review process must look at the potential impact of recommendations on other programs or units and ensure communication with relevant parties in order to mitigate detrimental consequences that could have been prevented. In other words, a domino effect of unintended consequences should be avoided as much as possible.

3.0 Key Definitions and Scope

Viability Review: This is for programs with declining enrollments and/or revenues, changing market/landscape, major quality concerns, or other challenges and factors that threaten

programs' viability. Following a thorough review and careful consideration of internal and external factors, recommendations could include continued investment to improve viability, program closure, restructuring, right-sizing, or another major intervention.

Sustainability Review: This is for programs that are growing and financially viable but that might be expanding faster than current faculty and student resources can support. These might warrant additional resources or mechanisms for supporting the growth/expansion of the program or slowing or stabilizing growth. Proper support for these programs might require changes to departmental or college practices or another major intervention (such as departmental or college restructuring).

Scope/"Unit of Measure": The unit of direct review for the VSPR will be the academic program. All undergraduate- and post-baccalaureate academic programs at SLU, are subject to this review. Moreover, the same program review requirement and process applies, regardless of campus or location at which the programs are offered, and regardless of the "delivery method" (campus-based, online, cohort model, etc.), for all degree programs, including:

- Bachelor's, master's and doctoral degree programs (inclusive of their various concentrations, tracks, certificates, and minors within the degree programs); and
- Discrete certificates and minors

Indirectly, critical elements of the administrative unit in which a program is housed (typically the department) will be considered within the review process because the two are closely related.

> *NOTES:*
> - *While the University Core does not undergo VSPR, the review of undergraduate programs will necessarily incorporate data pertaining to the University Core.*
> - *Professional programs in the School of Law and School of Medicine are not subject to VSPR.*

4.0 VSR Design

The VSPR process is modeled on the multi-stage annual data review process of the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), which leads to increasingly more rigorous, detailed review – but only when demonstrably needed. It is designed intentionally to dovetail with, draw from, and complement other existing review processes so that it does not overburden chairs and program directors, deans, or other university personnel. It features a scaffolded, three-stage process:

> **Stage I Review** is the initial level of review that all programs will undergo on an annual basis for the first two years following this policy's adoption; thereafter, Stage I review will be conducted every three years for each program. Stage I review involves assessing a limited but indicative set of quantitative data available through existing MySLU Tools focused on the program and will also include some key data points that

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are only available at the department/unit level. Program directors and unit chairs provide data, which is reviewed by the Stage I Review committee, to identify areas not aligned with established thresholds. Programs that are flagged by the committee are placed on a viability track or sustainability track and proceed to the next stage of review. Note that SLU-Madrid programs may have thresholds specific to its campus.

Stage II Review is the next level of review for all programs that were flagged at Stage I for potential concerns. At this stage, the goal is to conduct a more in-depth analysis that takes additional factors into account to determine whether potential concerns identified in Stage I review constitute actual concerns that require minor intervention or whether actual concerns rise to the level of meriting a full-scale viability or sustainability review. Stage II review is performed by all the deans and combines quantitative metrics in combination with qualitative data and contextual considerations. At this stage, related but different rubrics are utilized, depending on whether the program is to be reviewed for viability or for sustainability and inform whether a Stage III review is warranted.

Stage III Review is the final level of review, performed by a committee tailored to the program to be assessed, and adds more in-depth analysis of concerns threatening viability or sustainability. The analysis at this level continues to combine qualitative, quantitative, and contextual information, with a look to the health of a program independently, within the context of its home academic unit/department, and in light of the university's entire academic portfolio. The result is a set of recommendations presented to the provost.

Appendix I provides more detailed descriptions of each stage.

5.0 VSR Annual Timeline/Cycle

Date in VSR Cycle	VSR Element/Activity
April 1	Program directors or department chairs begin compiling data for Stage I Review
April 15	Program directors or department chairs submit a data sheet for Stage I Review to the VSR Stage I Committee.
May 1	Programs flagged for Stage II are notified.
August 1	Stage II program data and chair/director response to flagged Stage I data points due to the dean.
September 15	Stage II Review is completed by deans collectively and programs advancing to Stage III are notified, as is the provost. Provost's Office appoints ad hoc review committee for each program facing Stage III review and meetings commence.
November 15	Stage III Review is completed, and the provost is notified of the recommendations.

November 30	Provost announces the decisions regarding the program(s) that underwent Stage III review.
Additional Note:	*In the event that the Provost's decision is for a program's closure: the Faculty Senate Executive Committee, the Dean or comparable administrator, and the Faculty Assembly or equivalent group of the affected faculty unit may offer alternative proposals directly to the Board of Trustees or its designated committee (typically the Board's AMAC committee). This process, if invoked, must be completed such that the full Board of Trustees is prepared to make its final decision on program closure at its quarterly meeting February.*

7.0 Policy Review

The VSPR data points, standards, processes, and rubrics will be reviewed annually by the Provost's office, with input from key stakeholders, for the first two years after approval and every three years thereafter.

8.0 Approvals

This policy was:

1. Endorsed by CADD: 3-24-25
2. Approved by Provost: 3-26-25