10 Steps to Successfully Developing a New University Program in Kinesiology and Sport Science

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Abstract

25   Developing new academic programs in higher education requires strategic alignment, data-

26   informed decision-making, and collaboration across departments. Kinesiology and sport science

27   programs face distinct challenges, including specialized placements and facility needs. This

28   article outlines a ten-step model to guide faculty and administrators through key stages of

29   program creation, including academic justification, student demand, curriculum design, financial

30   analysis, and long-term viability. Drawing from research, workforce data, institutional best

31   practices, and professional experience, the model offers practical strategies to ensure programs

32   are academically rigorous, market-responsive, and financially sustainable.

34   Key Words: sports science, physical education, academic program, program development

46   **10 Steps to Successfully Developing a New University Program in Kinesiology and Sport**

47   **Science**

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49   Creating a new academic program requires careful planning, coordination across

50   departments and colleges, and responsiveness to a wide range of institutional, student, and

51   societal needs (Lattuca & Stark, 2009). While program development may be driven by vanity

52   interests, such as faculty members' personal interests in a specific area, the program's needs and

53   curriculum design require careful deliberation and planning. This article outlines a 10-step

54   practical structure that explains the processes needed to propose, design, and deliver a new

55   academic program in kinesiology and sport sciences, encompassing physical education, athletic

56   training, sport psychology, coaching, biomechanics, sport nutrition, and exercise science.

57   Hereafter, we refer to this non-comprehensive list of disciplines globally as kinesiology. Each

58   step is introduced as a central section, and under each, key planning questions are provided with

59   detailed responses. The goal is to help university faculty and administrators think critically and

60   strategically throughout the process.

61   **Step 1 – Establish Academic and Strategic Justification**

62   The first step requires a clear justification for the new program. Specifically, *what gap in*

63   *the institution's current academic offerings does this degree fill?* Data are a crucial factor in

64   answering this question, which can be sourced from state employee data (e.g., State of Florida,

65   n.d.) or Department of Labor statistics (e.g., U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, n.d.). Additionally,

66   data can be compiled from similar programs nationwide, such as enrollment data (likely to be

67   obtained by contacting existing programs), the length of time in existence, the number of credit

68   hours required, and the specific courses taught. It is also important to compare the proposed

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69   program to others within the university to highlight key similarities and differences. Failure to do

70   this may result in recruiting students from other programs, which is likely to cause problems

71   elsewhere in the institution (i.e., drawing students from existing courses). While this may be a

72   non-issue for private institutions that are not part of a larger system, it is unlikely that the

73   university and its system will approve a new program that competes with an existing one. To

74   mitigate this risk, it is highly beneficial to engage with the Associate Deans for Academic Affairs

75   (or the Associate Provost) as early as possible in the proposal stage. These administrators often

76   serve as a collective review body that scrutinizes new degrees for potential overlap or "poaching"

77   concerns before the proposal ever reaches the Provost or the university's curriculum committee.

78   By addressing these institutional obstacles at the Associate Dean level, many potential conflicts

79   can be resolved, ensuring a smoother path through the formal approval process.

80   Second, how *does the program align with your department's, college's, and university's*

81   *strategic plan or mission?* Program reviewers will expect the program to align with the overall

82   scope of the department, college, and university's emphases, which can and should be clearly

83   explained. Accrediting bodies may also wish to confirm this alignment.

84   *Is the proposed degree interdisciplinary or built upon existing strengths?*

85   Interdisciplinary courses are attractive to administrators and accrediting bodies (Borrego &

86   Newswander, 2010). However, a decision must be made whether this new degree will require

87   resources outside the current program (e.g., classes taught by others). Finances play a significant

88   role in determining whether programs will be approved. Thus, there is a benefit to including

89   existing courses, as new faculty lines and associated costs are not required (James Jacob, 2015).

90   However, properly accounting for the time required by current faculty to serve in the proposed

91   program should also be taken into consideration. Any time dedicated by existing faculty to teach

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92   in a new program pulls them away from other duties (e.g., teaching, service, outreach); therefore,

93   part of their full-time equivalent is lost in that way.

94   Last, ask what learning outcomes students will achieve and how these compare with

95   those of *peer institutions*. Provide a clear explanation of how the proposed program compares to

96   those that currently exist. In this case, emphasizing differences is important (i.e., unique selling

97   points), as it highlights a market gap that students might be drawn to.

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99   **Step 2 – Gather Evidence of Student Demand**

100   The second step is to *demonstrate student demand through concrete evidence*.

101   Sustainability hinges on student interest, which should be substantiated by quantitative data (e.g.,

102   surveys, trend analyses, and application inquiries) and qualitative feedback from current

103   students, alums, and advisors (Basheer et al., 2025). Pairing internal enrollment data with

104   broader market analysis strengthens the case for the program and informs realistic projections for

105   future growth (Yantz, n.d.)

106   Additionally, speaking with current students, advisors, market researchers, admissions

107   officers, and advisory boards can provide insight into latent demand. Market research,

108   particularly that offered by Gray Decision Intelligence (n.d.), for example, can accurately predict

109   student demand for programs, including regional data by program area. Gray Decision

110   Intelligence (formerly Gray Associates) is a data analytics firm that provides a Program

111   Evaluation System (PES) designed to help higher education leaders assess the viability of

112   academic programs using more than 50 metrics related to student and employer demand. If a

113   program can demonstrate strong student interest and differentiation from existing offerings, it

114   will be easier to justify investment and support. Evidence should be specific and include

115   justifiable predictions of enrollment growth over time. We recommend using conservative

116   numbers in the application, such as the minimum required amount to break even financially.

117   Next, ask whether there is *evidence of student interest*. This can be internal. For example,

118   some students in a physical education program may be enrolled because it is the closest program

119   to coaching. Asking alumni (e.g., "Would you have been interested in this program when you

120   were a student?") is also valuable, as it demonstrates interest from those who attended the

121   institution. Surveying the community is also important. For example, Baghurst et al. (2015)

122   surveyed interscholastic athletic directors in Oklahoma to justify the development of a coaching

123   minor. Given that student-athletes may be interested in sport-based programs, compiling

124   feedback from the institution's student-athlete support services (e.g., a letter of sport from the

125   Director) is also recommended.

126   Determining whether the program will attract new students or simply retain existing ones

127   is crucial. Programs that primarily move existing students from one program to another without

128   increasing overall enrollment may face approval challenges due to limited institutional growth. If

129   this is a possibility, approval is unlikely, as it would mean the institution would need to add

130   administrative bloat (e.g., new faculty and staff) to accommodate the same number of students.

131   *What are the enrollment projections over the next 3–5 years?* Predictions are difficult, so

132   being conservative is recommended. We recommend consulting with representatives from

133   programs at other institutions to gather data and support an accurate prediction of enrollment.

134   Last, ask *how the program will support diverse student populations*. While this supports

135   the strategic plan or mission of most institutions, proponents must be mindful of the current

136   legislative and institutional climate regarding Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in the

137   United States (Holmes et al., 2025). In many jurisdictions, particularly in public systems, explicit

138   DEI-labeled processes are under significant scrutiny or have been restricted. Therefore,

139   justifications should be framed through the lens of student success, workforce readiness, and

140   "broadening participation" to ensure the program remains compliant while still serving all

141   students.

142   Furthermore, it is essential to acknowledge that some institutions may be situated in areas

143   with limited diversity. As a profession, kinesiology is not particularly diverse (Pennington,

144   2023). Pennington (2023) offered several practical suggestions for addressing this disparity that

145   could be incorporated into the application including: (a) establishing a curriculum oversight

146   committee to ensure the program's content is inclusive and representative of diverse

147   perspectives; (b) developing targeted recruitment and outreach efforts, such as age-appropriate

148   community activities and "pipeline" programs with local schools; (c) ensuring visual

149   representation in all program marketing, including websites, flyers, and social media, to help

150   underrepresented students see themselves in the field; and (d) providing cultural competence

151   resources and training for faculty and staff to improve student retention and belonging.

152   **Step 3 – Demonstrate Workforce and Societal Need**

153   The program must include documented evidence of how it aligns with labor market and

154   societal demand, demonstrating that a clear academic need is being addressed. A compelling

155   case can be made when a program aligns with labor market trends and fills regional or national

156   workforce gaps. It is especially valuable if the program can serve the local community, such as

157   through placements in schools or local businesses. Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics and

158   state agencies, such as the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity, provide valuable

159   insights into current and projected employment trends. Engaging employer advisory groups and

160   regional workforce boards can further justify the program's relevance and potential for graduate

161   placement.

162   Other companies, such as Lightcast (n.d.), identify job market needs by aggregating and

163   analyzing millions of real-time job postings. At the same time, Gray Decision Intelligence

164   evaluates programs to identify needs based on current trends and market conditions. Lightcast is

165   a global provider of labor market intelligence that maps educational outcomes to the specific

166   skills demanded by regional and national employers. Employer advisory groups, or regional

167   workforce boards, should be used to justify how the program prepares students for in-demand

168   careers.

169   In addition to raw employment data, letters of support from industry leaders or

170   community stakeholders can demonstrate the relevance and need for the program. These

171   endorsements also highlight the potential for future partnerships, internships, or job placement

172   pipelines, reinforcing the program's long-term value.

173   Another question to ask is whether *employers or industry stakeholders expressed interest*

174   *in graduates with this qualification*. We recommend obtaining supporting statements from

175   donors and employers (e.g., athletic directors, healthcare providers) that demonstrate future

176   potential employment opportunities for graduates. In tandem, investigate whether there are

177   *accreditation bodies or professional associations supporting the discipline*. Obtaining supporting

178   statements from those in leadership positions can strengthen the legitimacy of the application.

179   However, it is also important to check whether there are significant costs associated with seeking

180   or obtaining accreditation.

181   Last, investigate whether *graduates will be eligible for licensure, certification, or*

182   *advanced study*. In disciplines such as sport psychology or physical education, for example,

183   licensure and certification upon graduation are attractive options for students. Obtaining these in

184   addition to the degree is likely to increase enrollment over more generic programs (Glennie et

185   al., 2020; Baghurst & Quick, 2025).

186   **Step 4 – Assess Institutional Fit and Resource Capacity**

187   The proposal or concept phase must consider *whether the institution can realistically*

188   *support this program*. Given the enormous amount of time and effort required to propose and

189   implement a new program, institutions must determine whether existing resources, faculty,

190   facilities, technology, and support services can accommodate the new program (Allen, 2004).

191   This includes carefully auditing departmental strengths and potential overlaps with current

192   courses.

193   If gaps exist, the proposal should outline realistic plans for addressing them through

194   phased hiring, facility renovations, or the adoption of online delivery methods. A clear

195   understanding of institutional capacity increases the likelihood of successful implementation and

196   prevents resource strain across departments.

197   Next, it must be determined *whether the institution has the necessary faculty expertise to*

198   *support the program*. This may also be dictated by accreditors. For example, physical therapy

199   programs are given three years to hire the program director, followed by the clinical director, and

200   then the faculty.

201   In this situation, resumes matter! It is expected that at least one "champion" of the

202   program (i.e., the designated program lead) is already employed; however, we recommend

203   having more than one, as programs can frequently falter if the faculty member departs. Equally,

204   it is beneficial to have a team of staff that can contribute to the development of a program (e.g.,

205   resource development, knowledge of accreditation, or knowledge of the local area), as this can

206   lighten what is likely to be a very heavy workload in the first four years while resources are

207   being developed. If there is insufficient expertise, are there resources to acquire additional

208   faculty?

209   An assessment of *existing courses and modules, as well as the development of new ones,*

210   *will be required*. Using modules within current courses is always preferable (cost saving), but the

211   lack of need will be questioned if new ones are not required. Creating materials from scratch is

212   often incredibly time-consuming. Where possible, it is more efficient for teaching materials to be

213   adapted/recycled. Moreover, if additional students register for courses, the administration must

214   consider whether current courses can support the increase.

215   *Infrastructure needs* must be calculated. Examples include lab space, equipment,

216   software, and classroom space. The key issue for a department chair/dean is whether the

217   infrastructure is sufficient, and if not, the anticipated financial cost. We have found that faculty

218   who propose programs often underestimate the cost of running a program, including the number

219   of faculty required to deliver it, perhaps because they believe the administration will be more

220   likely to approve the program. The difficulties arise later when insufficient resources are

221   allocated to ensure the program runs properly. Therefore, infrastructure and faculty needs must

222   be predicted accurately, neither too high nor too low.

223   Infrastructure needs must be calculated with precision. Examples include lab space,

224   equipment, software, and classroom space. For department chairs and deans, the key question is

225   whether the current infrastructure is adequate and, if not, what the anticipated financial cost will

226   be. Faculty proposing new programs often underestimate these costs, such as the number of

227   faculty required to deliver the curriculum. This may be because assuming lower estimates will

228   increase the likelihood of approval. However, this approach creates problems later when

229   resources fall short, and the program cannot operate effectively. Therefore, predictions for

230   infrastructure and faculty needs must be realistic. *Too low* means insufficient faculty or facilities

231   to meet accreditation standards, maintain quality instruction, or support projected enrollment.

232   *Too high* means requesting resources far beyond enrollment projections or industry norms,

233   resulting in unnecessary financial strain. Applying benchmarks such as faculty-to-student ratios

234   and space requirements ensures that estimates are neither over- nor understated and remain

235   sustainable over time.

236   Accurate predictions of faculty and infrastructure needs are essential not only for

237   program success but also for compliance and funding. Accrediting bodies such as the Southern

238   Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) require institutions

239   to demonstrate adequate faculty resources and appropriate student-to-faculty ratios as part of

240   their Principles of Accreditation (SACSCOC, n.d.). This may also be determined at the state

241   level. For example, the Florida Board of Governors' Performance-Based Funding Model

242   evaluates universities on quality indicators tied to graduation rates, employment outcomes, and

243   cost efficiency, all of which are influenced by faculty capacity and resource allocation (Florida

244   Board of Governors, n.d.). For planning purposes, a student-to-faculty ratio of approximately

245   17:1, as reported by Florida State University (n.d.), serves as a reasonable benchmark for large

246   public institutions in the state. Programs that fail to meet these standards risk accreditation

247   challenges and reduced performance-based funding, underscoring the importance of realistic

248   resource planning.

249   Last, a description of *how the program will be delivered* (e.g., on-campus, online, hybrid)

250   will be necessary to provide a rationale for the choice. For example, a hybrid option or night

251   classes might be appropriate if the expected students are mature or working full-time (e.g.,

252   coaches). An online program may attract more students if the institution is located in a rural or

253   regional area. Building on the mode of delivery, it is necessary to consider the pedagogical

254   expertise of the staff. More specifically, faculty knowledge of online pedagogy is essential if the

255   proposed new program is to be online.

256   **Step 5 – Design a Quality Curriculum**

257   The fifth step is to design a relevant and attractive curriculum for the prospective student

258   body. It should ask *what the curriculum should include and how it should be structured*. The

259   curriculum should be grounded in clear learning outcomes and a logical progression that

260   supports skill development. Its content may also be tied to accreditation expectations. We

261   recommend using recognized frameworks, such as Harden's Integration Ladder (Harden, 2000)

262   or the Four-Dimensional Curriculum Framework (Lee et al., 2013), which ensure alignment

263   across courses and prevent fragmentation. Many disciplines also have their own program-

264   specific frameworks, such as physical education, as outlined by SHAPE America (2024), and

265   strength and conditioning, as outlined by the National Strength and Conditioning Association

266   (2017).

267   *The curriculum's structure should be clearly explained, identifying core courses,*

268   *electives, capstones, and internships*. It should also address both disciplinary content and career

269   readiness. Incorporating experiential learning, interdisciplinary options, and flexible delivery

270   formats (e.g., online or hybrid) can enhance student engagement and improve program

271   accessibility. For internships or other courses that require engagement with the broader

272   community, it is essential to determine the number of sites needed and whether that number is

273   attainable within the community. In addition, careful consideration should be given to whether

274   faculty need to visit these sites, as this will require extensive time and resources (Kasli & Ilban,

275　　2013). Program progression and content should be logical and consistent. Align it with an

276　　accrediting body, even if not seeking accreditation. In addition to the overall structure of the

277　　course, it is important to have a clear pedagogical approach that informs the curriculum (Waring

278　　& Evans, 2014). For example, spiral curricula, mastery-based learning, and integrated curricula

279　　inform the order and depth of content delivery (Waring & Evans, 2014).

280　　　　　*The number of credit hours required, the cost, and how the program compares to*

281　　*competitors* help demonstrate whether students will be more or less likely to enroll. Evidence

282　　suggests that shorter programs with fewer required credit hours are more attractive to students, as

283　　they offer greater flexibility, faster completion times, and remain comparable, or even better, in

284　　terms of academic performance (Carman & Bartsch, 2017; Müller et al., 2023). Baghurst and

285　　Quick (2025) recommended shorter eight-week courses for kinesiology students, who often

286　　juggle sports, work, and family responsibilities while pursuing their studies. A clear explanation

287　　of *what high-impact practices are included* (e.g., experiential learning, research, global

288　　engagement) and other desirable elements (e.g., short courses) helps identify what makes the

289　　program stand out from its competitors.

290　　　　　The application process should also be as basic as possible, including what is necessary

291　　to make an informed decision. Requiring the Graduate Record Examinations (GRE), for

292　　example, may discourage prospective applicants from even applying due to the barriers it

293　　creates, particularly among minorities (Hahn et al., 2023), and has a limited impact on initial

294　　decisions by reviewers (Branner & Mapp, n.d.; Gitomer & Wey, 2025). We recommend

295　　eliminating application fees.

Step 6 – Plan Accreditation and Assessment Processes

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297   Although not all programs will be accredited, many will, and it must be clearly explained

298 *how the program will meet accreditation and assessment expectations*. All new programs should

299 be designed with accreditation in mind, whether through regional bodies or specialized agencies.

300 Early conversations with institutional effectiveness staff or accreditation liaisons can clarify

301 requirements and timelines. Furthermore, it is essential to include a specific plan to meet the

302 reporting obligations of relevant institutional and regional oversight bodies, such as the Southern

303 Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) and the State

304 Department of Education. This step is particularly critical for programs in teacher education and

305 counseling, where state-level mandates and specialized accreditation standards often dictate

306 curriculum and reporting structures.

307   There are pros and cons to accreditation, but if required, we recommend incorporating

308 workload appreciation (e.g., course release) to acknowledge the effort required. This is already in

309 place for some accrediting bodies, such as athletic training (Commission on Accreditation of

310 Athletic Training Education, 2019).

311   Effective assessment planning begins with identifying measurable learning outcomes.

312 Designing assessments that accurately reflect student achievement and implementing regular

313 review cycles ensures continuous improvement and program credibility (Gardner et al., 2023). A

314 commitment to continuous improvement helps build credibility with both internal and external

315 stakeholders. We also acknowledge that the type of assessment (e.g., coursework, exam, or

316 practical) is vitally important. Assessment in higher education is evolving, with tests becoming

317 increasingly aligned with the practicalities of their associated professions. For example, physical

318 education trainee teachers are assessed on teaching students. In a different instance, students

319   studying strength and conditioning are likely to be evaluated on their ability to coach lifts.

320   Therefore, ensuring that the assessment matches the course and profession is a necessary

321   requirement when designing programs.

322   An explanation of *how the program will be assessed for quality assurance and*

323   *improvement, as well as how student learning outcomes will be measured,* is expected. Although

324   this is often part of accreditation or institutional requirements, there must be a plan to

325   demonstrate how students learn and benefit. By systematically tracking the post-graduation

326   experiences and professional milestones of alumni, the institution can substantiate the program's

327   long-term value and ensure its curriculum evolves in tandem with industry demands. This may

328   take the form of alumni surveys, employment rates, employer satisfaction ratings,

329   licensure/certification pass rates, and other relevant metrics.

330   **Step 7 – Model Financial Viability**

331   *Can the program sustain itself financially?* A realistic financial model is essential to

332   securing approval. Financial projections should account for both initial startup costs, such as

333   faculty hiring, facility upgrades, and marketing, as well as ongoing operational expenses. These

334   should be balanced against conservative enrollment estimates to ensure long-term sustainability.

335   Break-even analyses help clarify the scale of enrollment needed to maintain the program.

336   It is also helpful to develop contingency plans for years with low enrollment or startup

337   costs. In addition to internal budget concerns, proponents must consider state-level viability

338   checks that monitor "degree productivity." For example, many state systems, such as the Florida

339   Board of Governors (n.d.), typically require a bachelor's program to produce an average of at

340   least 10 graduates per year (or 30 over a three-year period) to be considered viable. Programs

341   falling below these thresholds risk being flagged for termination, making conservative but

342   realistic enrollment projections even more vital to the proposal's success. Some institutions

343   leverage grants, external partnerships, or seed funding to offset early costs and ensure a smoother

344   launch. Perhaps the most critical component of getting a program approved is addressing the *cost*

345   *of marketing, launching, and sustaining the program*. Within this, the financial implications of

346   hiring new faculty and staff will likely be the most significant outlay, estimated at $250,000 to

347     $500,000, due to faculty salaries, benefits, startup costs, and other related expenses (Rize

348   Education, 2022). Some institutions implement overhead charges for new revenue-producing

349   programs to account for institutional infrastructure costs, which can be pooled to fund new hires

350   or strengthen institutional capacity (Morriss-Olson, 2016).

351   Other costs may include lab space, equipment, and marketing. Based on personal

352   experiences, the administration will be less likely to approve a new program if it requires the

353   addition of full-time faculty. While it may be unlikely that a staff member is needed to create a

354   single program, additional staff support may be needed at the department level. Accrediting

355   bodies can even require them.

356   Although there are undeniable costs, demonstrating a return on investment helps to

357   mitigate the risk of additional expenses. Ask *what the revenue projections are* from predicted

358   tuition and other potential funding sources, such as grants, contracts, and partnerships. These can

359   be discussed with the department chair and staff.

360   **Step 8 – Conduct Competitor and Market Analysis**

361   If the institution is part of a system of other institutions, it is crucial to consider *how this*

362   *program compares with similar offerings elsewhere*. This includes both the formal administrative

363   system, such as a state-governed system like the University of North Carolina System (2024) or a

364   multi-campus private organization, as well as the geographical system (the cluster of regional

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365   competitors, regardless of their governing body). Reviewing peer institutions and regional

366   competitors helps ensure the program is distinctive. In many formal state systems, it is expected

367   that sister institutions (i.e., those under the same governance) will provide "no-compete" or

368   support letters to avoid unnecessary duplication of degrees. Program developers should analyze

369   curriculum structure, delivery mode, cost, and outcomes of other institutions offering similar

370   degrees. Simultaneously, developers must analyze the geographical market system; institutions

371   located in close proximity, even if they belong to different systems, create a competitive

372   landscape where students compare costs, delivery modes, and outcomes.

373   Regardless, the proposal should present a convincing case by identifying differentiators,

374   such as unique course offerings, faculty expertise, applied experiences, career pipelines, or

375   program length (Baghurst & Quick, 2025). For example, from our own experiences, offering

376   compressed and time-aggressive programs has been successful with older, more prepared

377   students who register for the more rigorous program. Differentiators also inform marketing

378   strategies and help avoid redundancy. Presenting a comparative table of similar programs can

379   effectively highlight your program's *unique value proposition and areas of differentiation*.

380   Not all programs are successful, so investigating whether institutions are discontinuing

381   similar programs may be necessary. If there are, explore *what caused the discontinuation* and

382   explain how the proposed program can be addressed to avoid similar pitfalls. Undertaking these

383   investigations will provide insight into broader trends across both administrative and

384   geographical systems that can better inform the current state of the market.

385   **Step 9 – Navigate Governance and Approval Pathways**

386   Each institution and the state in which it is will have different rules and processes;

387   *identify what approvals are required and how they should be approached*. Most institutions have

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388   multi-layered governance processes for new programs, which typically involve departmental

389   review, college committees, university curriculum bodies, system offices, and possibly state-

390   level agencies. Developing a detailed roadmap of the approval process can help anticipate

391   potential delays. Maintaining clear and consistent communication with stakeholders at every

392   stage is crucial for navigating success. Engage early and often to answer questions, incorporate

393   feedback, and build momentum. Providing well-prepared documents and making thoughtful

394   presentations can facilitate the approval process.

395   A proposed *timeline for development, approval, and launch* must be presented. We

396   recommend building a cushion into proposed timelines, as committees and other processes can

397   take longer than anticipated to complete. Furthermore, proposals may be delayed by pushback,

398   questions, and revisions.

399   **Step 10 – Plan for Sustainability and Future Growth**

400   The final step is *to identify strategies that keep the program relevant and sustainable*.

401   Sustainability depends on ongoing assessment, alumni engagement, and responsiveness to

402   changes in the field. Program proposals should build in regular review cycles and collect data on

403   student success, job placement, and employer satisfaction.

404   Involving advisory boards, tracking industry trends, and adapting curriculum accordingly

405   helps ensure that the program remains competitive and valuable. Strategic planning for future

406   growth can include stackable credentials, online pathways, or articulation agreements with

407   community colleges. This can help the program remain relevant amid changing academic and

408   labor landscapes.

409   Developing *robust marketing, recruitment, and retention strategies* is essential,

410   especially given that institutional support may be limited. Beyond internal faculty efforts, it is

411   vital to leverage the specialized expertise of the institution's communication, marketing, and

412   recruitment departments. These professionals play a critical role in promoting and publicizing

413   the program to a broad, diverse audience through established institutional channels. To maximize

414   their effectiveness, program proponents should ensure these personnel are continually updated on

415   development efforts, allowing them to craft informed promotional strategies that accurately

416   reflect the program's value and enrollment goals.

417   While not necessarily part of a typical faculty member's annual review, they may need to

418   actively create promotional materials, establish a social media presence, and engage with

419   prospective students and alumni. There are examples of effective strategies in the literature (e.g.,

420   Dennis, 2016; Wilson et al., 2018) for best practices in marketing, recruitment, and retention at

421   both the undergraduate and graduate levels. These can serve as the foundation of a new

422   program's marketing, recruiting, and retention plan. Long-term use of these strategies, combined

423   with awareness of common barriers, challenges, and strategies for overcoming them, is crucial

424   for program sustainability (Ankareddy et al., 2025; Veiga Ávila et al., 2019). Negotiating

425   workload credit for this effort may be worth exploring. Based on our experiences, we have found

426   that graduates of our programs serve as the most effective advocates for recruiting new students.

427   For example, flyers and graphics with testimonials from graduates can serve as promotional

428   tools.

429   Last, explore *the possibilities of future expansion and contraction*. For example, could

430   proposing a minor or certificate be the foundation for a degree program? Often, growth in a

431   program justifies expansion. Note that doctoral programs are more challenging to obtain

432   approval for due to their greater financial overhead. Doctoral programs often operate as cost

433   centers rather than revenue generators for the university (Trapnell et al., 2009). This financial

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434   structure, which includes the significant overhead of faculty time and student funding, creates a

435   disincentive for enrollment growth and makes it challenging for institutional leadership to

436   expand or approve new programs (Trapnell et al.).

437   Contraction of a program should also be considered. Is this program riding a wave of

438   popularity that may not last in the long term? A commitment to conducting reviews every three

439   years, for example, helps to identify when a program has outlived its productivity. Continuous

440   evaluation helps ensure that programs with low enrollments are identified and adjusted, allowing

441   programming to remain relevant to the needs of the customer (i.e., the student).

442

443   **Conclusion**

444   Developing a successful academic program requires a blend of strategic thinking,

445   collaboration, and evidence-informed planning. By systematically addressing these ten steps,

446   universities can design programs that attract and retain students, meet evolving workforce

447   demands, and advance the institution's mission. This structured approach ensures long-term

448   relevance and financial sustainability in a dynamic educational landscape.

449

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