

Financial Sustainability Task Force Phase Two: Administrative Efficiencies December 15, 2023

Overview:

As part of the Financial Sustainability Task Force Phase 2, the Administrative Efficiencies Working Group received broad recommendations in approximately twenty areas that were identified by FSTF Phase 1 and the President's Executive Committee. The working group assessed these and read the original survey responses to Phase 1 for additional context. Cognizant of our charge to identify cost savings, revenue generation, and/or greater efficiencies, the working group identified six areas of study. The six study areas were:

- Personnel and reorganization of departments and offices
- Organizational structure with an emphasis on student-facing departments and offices
- External consultants, services, and systems
- Allocation of academic resources to campus offices and initiatives
- Consolidation of department and office operations
- Commencement efficiencies

Priorities:

After consideration, the working group eliminated the consolidation of physical offices from consideration. While the idea may produce efficiencies, the group determined that the scope of the inquiry involved multiple constituencies on campus that were not involved in Phase 2, including broad faculty, staff, and maintenance departments. Moreover, the FSTF Phase 2 Property and Infrastructure report should influence future considerations of consolidation on the campus.

Among the five remaining study areas, the Administrative Efficiencies group requested data and met weekly or biweekly during the summer of 2023. It completed an Interim Report and reconvened in the fall of 2023.¹ Data was received quickly; the subcommittee reviewed information as it became available.² Through review and discussion, the working group concentrated its analysis in three areas: Commencement Revisioning, Operational Savings, and Personnel Efficiencies.

Data and Information:

The committee conducted its work with the knowledge of the mission of public state universities in Massachusetts:

Each state university places a special emphasis on teaching and lifelong learning and promotes a campus life that fosters intellectual, social, and ethical development.

¹ [Financial Sustainability Task Force Interim Report, Administrative Efficiencies](#)

² [Data Request Form Phase 2 Financial Sustainability Task Force](#)

Committed to excellence in instruction and to providing responsive, innovative, and educational programs of high quality, they seek to develop each student’s critical thinking, quantitative, technological, oral, and written communication skills, and practical appreciation of the arts, sciences, and humanities as they affect good citizenship and an improved quality of life.³

It undertook its work with a focus on Fitchburg State’s commitment to excellence in teaching and learning, its ability to blend “liberal arts and sciences and professional programs within a small college environment,” and its responsibility to serve North Central Massachusetts and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.⁴ With its responsibility to the taxpayers of the Commonwealth in mind, the Administrative Efficiencies Working Group examined expenditures across the campus in all divisions. This process included assessing expenses, structures and potential efficiencies through data obtained from Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), the Massachusetts Higher Education Institutional Research System (HEIRS), the Division of Academic Affairs, the Office of Institutional Research and Planning, the Financial Services Office, Board of Trustee records, the National Education Association Fitchburg State Financial Audit Analysis, the New England Association of Higher Education accreditation reports and responses, and reports and information from divisions and departments across campus. The committee assessed such data within the context of national trends and the initiatives of the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education. At all times, the committee remained mindful of Fitchburg State University’s role as a comprehensive state university that integrates liberal arts and sciences programs with professional education as well as the unique history and character of the institution.⁵

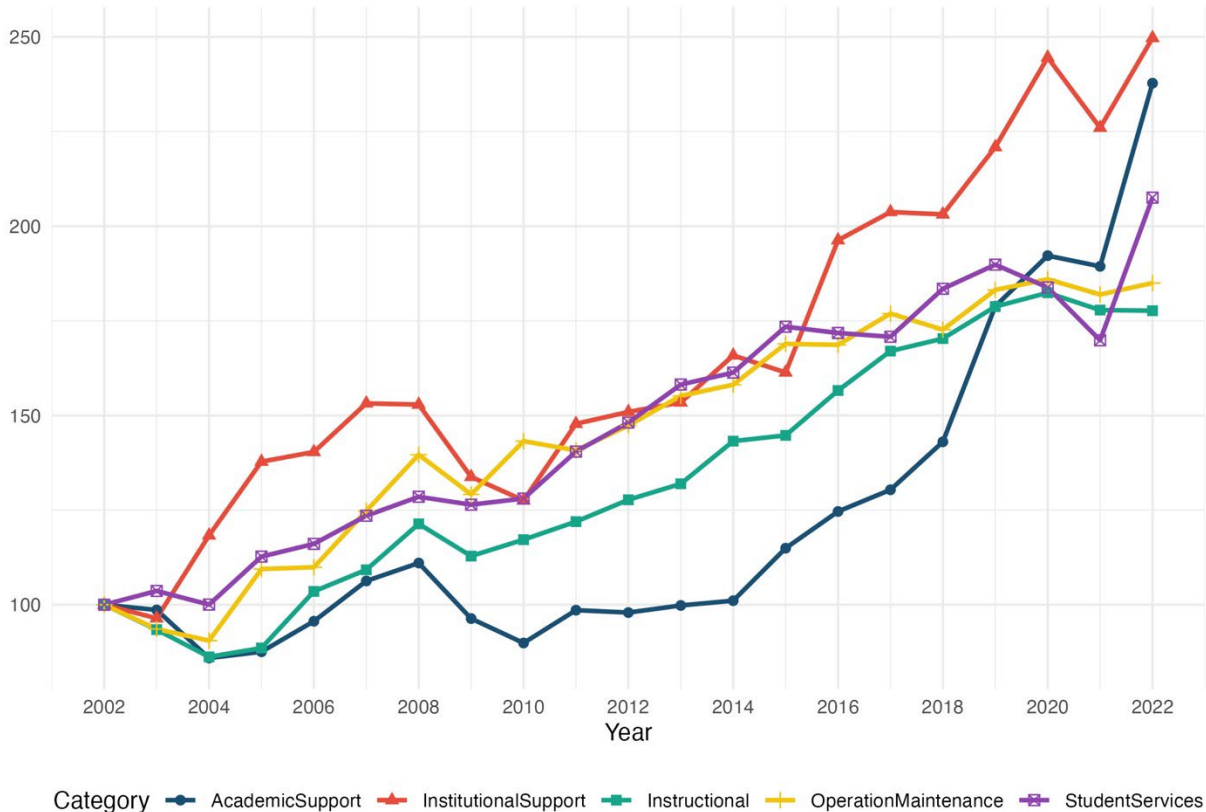
The Administrative Efficiencies group began its inquiry by considering university expenditures across two decades as represented in Figure 1: Indexed Expenditures by IPEDS Category from 2002 through 2022.

³ Massachusetts Department of Higher Education, [“Mission of the State Universities.”](#)

⁴ [Fitchburg State University Mission Statement.](#)

⁵ The unique character of each institution and the support for individualized and flexible responses is recognized and supported by the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education. See, for example, [Massachusetts Board of Higher Education 22-67 “Student Success Framework.”](#) (2022).

Figure 1: Indexed Expenditures by IPEDS Category from 2002 through 2022⁶



Note: 2002 values Indexed at 100. All others are relative to this value. Index can be interpreted as the percent of the 2002 value in Year X.

The committee identified a decades-long trend in expenditures that shaped the contours of its inquiry. From 2002 through 2022, allowing for pandemic adjustments to university operations, the university experienced the largest growth in the areas of Academic Support, Institutional Support and Student Services—a period of operating expense growth identified by an independent audit as “substantial.”⁷ However, this growth was not constant. From 2017 and continuing through 2022, the university experienced an undergraduate day enrollment decline of over 33 percent.⁸ According to IPEDS data, Academic Support expenditures increased 82 percent during the same period. Institutional Support increased 23 percent and Student Services

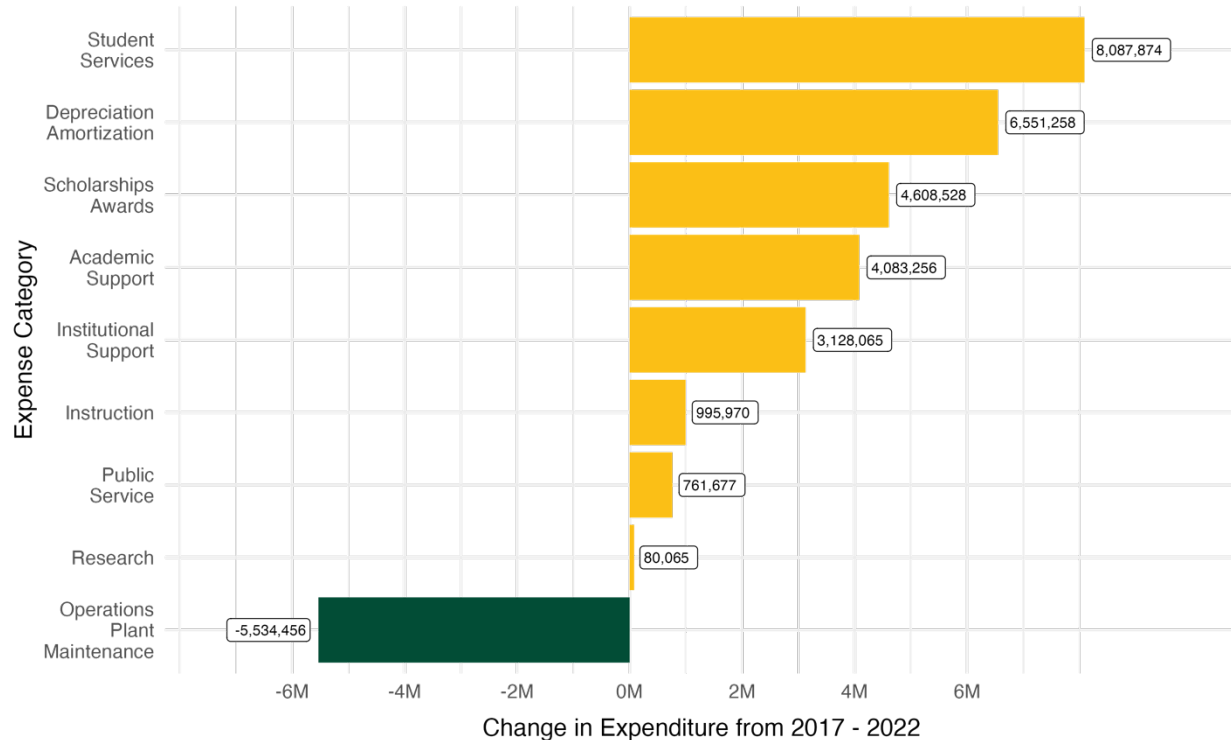
⁶ Data taken from Salary and Benefits per Activity Code, 2002-2022. It should be noted that these categories are defined by the National Association of College and University Business Officers for public institutions in the NAUCBO Financial Accounting and Reporting Manual. These are accepted as functional expense classifications for reporting for the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) Finance Survey. See Gregg M. Gascon, MPA, PhD Social Science Research, Evaluation and Measurement, L.L.C., “Fitchburg State University Financial Audit Analysis,” December 2022, 13.

⁷Gascon, “Fitchburg State University Financial Audit Analysis,”16.

⁸Massachusetts HEIRS data, student enrollment.

increased 22 percent. By contrast, Instruction increased 6 percent and Operation and Maintenance increased 5 percent.⁹

Figure 2: Fitchburg State Changes in Operating Expenses, FY2017-22¹⁰



In the financial audit analysis of 2017-2022, Instructional Expenses, which excludes administrative costs, increased at a modest 2.8 percent over five fiscal years. During the same period, operating expenses for Academic Support, which includes instructional support and academic administration, increased by 64.8 percent.¹¹ Student Services includes “expenses for admissions, registrar activities and activities whose primary purpose is to contribute to students’ emotional and physical well-being and to their intellectual, cultural and social development outside the context of the formal instructional program. Examples are career guidance, counseling, financial aid administration, student records, athletics, and student health services, except when operated as a self-supporting auxiliary enterprise.”¹² Student Services expenses increased 84.7 percent between 2017 and 2022. Operating expenses for Institutional Support, categorized as executive activities for planning and operational management, increased 29.0 percent.¹³ Operation and Maintenance of Fitchburg State’s physical plant decreased by 46.3

⁹ Gascon, “Fitchburg State University Financial Audit Analysis,” 16. IPEDS HEIRS data, student enrollment.

¹⁰ Gascon, Table 3, “Fitchburg State University Financial Audit Analysis,” 16.

¹¹ Gascon, *supra* note 5.

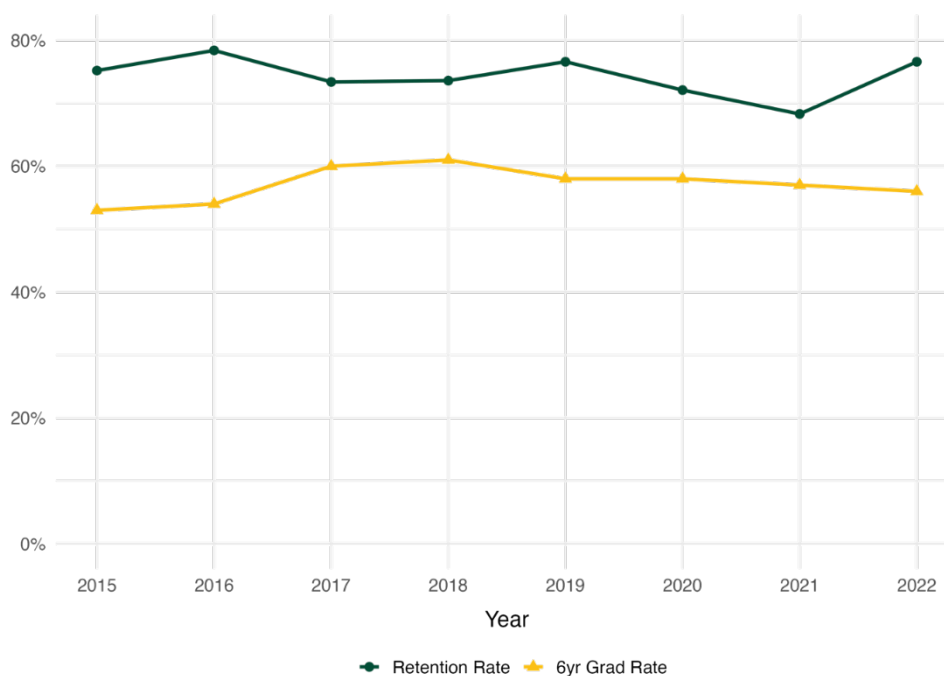
¹² Gascon, “Fitchburg State University Financial Audit Analysis,” 15.

¹³ Institutional Support is classified as “expenses for central, executive-level activities concerned with management and long-range planning for the entire institution, such as the governing board, planning and programming operations, and legal services; fiscal operations, including the investment office; administrative information technology (when not accounted for in other categories); space management; employee personnel and records; logistical activities that provide procurement, storerooms, printing, and transportation services to the institution;

percent during 2017-2022.¹⁴ The *Fitchburg State University Factbook* for 2022 indicates that from 2018-2022, Instruction expenses declined from \$49,271,000 to \$48,209,000. In contrast, Academic Support expenses increased from \$9,571,000 to \$13,551,000. Student Services expenses increased from \$14,885,000 to \$26,401,000. Institutional Support increased from \$15,112,000 to \$19,854,000.¹⁵ According to HEIRS figures, from Fiscal Year 2022 to Fiscal Year 2023, categories of Student Services and Academic Support each increased by 22 percent. Institutional Support decreased by 18 percent, Instruction by 2 percent, and Plant Operation and Maintenance by 45 percent.¹⁶

Since 2002, the university's retention rates have shown little variation, averaging 75 percent. Six-year graduation rates have remained stable as well.¹⁷ Both rates parallel the range of institutions within the Massachusetts state system and are in line with national averages.¹⁸

Figure 3: First Year Retention Rate and Graduation Rate within 6 Years¹⁹



support services to faculty and staff that are not operated as auxiliary enterprises; and activities concerned with community and alumni relations, including development and fundraising.” Gascon, 15.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 12-15.

¹⁵Fitchburg State University Office of Institutional Research and Planning (OIRP), *Fitchburg State University Factbook*, 2022, “Fitchburg State University Expenditures,” 35. Amounts are rounded to the nearest thousand. Operations and Maintenance is not included in the table.

¹⁶HEIRS, SRENCA Budget Worksheet, November 23, 2022, 3. OIRP, *Fitchburg State University Factbook* “Retention and Graduation Rates,” 29

¹⁷OIRP, *Fitchburg State University Factbook*, 2022, “Retention Rates 2002-2022,” 29.

¹⁸See, for example, the [Student Achievement Measure](#), which Fitchburg State University participates in. According to SAM, of the 2016 cohort graduating in 2022, Fitchburg State’s graduation rate from the institution was 56 percent, Salem State was 52 percent, Worcester State was 59 percent, and MCLA was 55 percent. The other state universities did not report. Accessed December 15, 2023.

¹⁹ OIRP, *Fitchburg State University Factbook*, 29; OIRP, “Common Data Set 2023,” 7.

In conducting its work, the Administrative Efficiencies working group benefited from the expertise of many individuals and are grateful for their time and effort. The group received presentations from the following:

Dr. Patricia Marshall, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs
 Jay Bry, Vice President for Finance and Administration
 Richard Toomey, Associate Vice President of Enrollment Management
 Pamela McCafferty, Associate Vice President for Institutional Research and Planning
 Christian Estrella, Associate Vice President of Finance, Planning and Analysis
 Jason Smith, Assistant Dean for Student Success
 Brion Keagle, Assistant Director of Core Services, Technology Department
 Elena Arranz Alonso, Director of Operations, School of Graduate, Online, and Continuing Education

The Administrative Efficiencies working group also consulted with the following individuals:

Angela Cruz-Guzman, Staff Associate, Events Management
 Bruce Serret, Director, Capital Planning & Maintenance
 Stefanie Aiken, Associate Director of Admissions
 Erin Turchetta, Director of Enrollment, School of Graduate, Online, and Continuing Education
 James R. Moughan, Assistant General Manager/Director of Sales DCU Center/ASM Global

Administrative Efficiencies Working Group Members:

Stefan Dodd, Chief Information Officer, executive sponsor
 Carin Bullis, Director of Budgeting, co-chair
 Christine Dee, Professor of History, co-chair
 Denise Brindle, Director of Financial Aid
 Rhonda Burgess, Administrative Assistant II, Engineering Technology
 Rala Diakite, Professor, Humanities
 Pat Jennings, Print Production, Auxiliary Services
 Cate Kaluzny, Director of Assessment
 Mark LeBlanc, Senior Associate Registrar
 Kenneth R. Mackie, Visiting Assistant Professor of Political Science
 Gretchen Mayhew, Senior Associate Director, Admissions
 Kim Page, Director of Human Resources
 Tara Prosser, Administrative Assistant II, Student Development

Recommendation 1: Commencement Revisioning and Elimination of Winter Ceremony

- Combine Winter, May Graduate Commencement, and May Undergraduate Commencement at the DCU Center during the week or on campus during a May weekend.
- Limit one paper commencement program per graduate in favor of digital programs.
- Estimated Cost Savings: approximately \$47,000-\$50,000 for commencement, plus additional savings derived from digital/print commencement program options.

The Administrative Efficiencies Task Force recommends the elimination of the winter commencement and the consolidation of undergraduate and graduate commencement exercises into a single May commencement. Together, the three ceremonies cost Fitchburg State University \$153,692 in FY2023.²⁰ Staff costs alone for the winter 2022 commencement were \$7,204. The winter commencement in 2022 conferred 366 graduate degrees and 180 undergraduate degrees for a total of 546 degrees conferred. Of those, 140 graduate and 97 undergrad students attended the graduation ceremony for a total of 237 student attendees. For the May 2023 commencement, 417 graduate degrees and 399 undergraduate degrees were conferred for a total of 816 degrees conferred. Of those, 202 graduate and 419 undergraduate students attended the graduation for a total of 621 student attendees.²¹ Based on 2022-2023 attendance, a combined ceremony would include 342 graduate attendees and 516 undergraduate attendees for 858 attendees.

The committee examined data provided by Fitchburg State's Office of Financial Services. It researched costs associated with the DCU Center in Worcester, which is a popular venue for university commencements, and GameOn in Fitchburg. The committee learned from GameOn that their capacity is 1700, which eliminated it from consideration.

Figure 4: Graduation Revisioning Models²²

	Option A: DCU Center	Option B: Combined On Campus	Option C - program printing
Current Costs	\$153,692	\$153,692	\$34,207
Estimated Cost	\$107,000	\$104,046	\$0.00
Savings	\$46,692	\$49,646	\$34,207

The Administrative Efficiencies Task Force identified the following options for cost savings:

A. DCU Center Commencement: [Per the information provided by the DCU Center](#), Rental of space \$42,000; Average estimated costs for additional expenses based on the information provided in the quote would be approximately \$45,000 depending on our need; Estimate for Ancillary costs would be approximately \$20,000. (For total costs we would calculate the \$42,000 flat rental plus additional costs of \$45,000 plus \$20,000 ancillary costs= \$107,000 estimate). Optional catering costs are Continental Breakfast \$15.50/person or Boxed Lunch \$22/person. Holding commencement at the DCU Center would eliminate or reduce the following expenses:

- Custodians necessary for maintenance

²⁰ All historical cost data from Fitchburg State University cited below is referenced from the [FY23 T65 Graduation 0001 07 18 2023](#) report provided by the Finance department and the [Cost of Staff Commencement report](#) provided by the Human Resources department.

²¹ May commencement includes some undergraduate students who walk in the ceremony, but do not have a degree conferred until they complete up to two remaining requirements.

²² Financial Services Office, [FY23 T65 Graduation 0001 07 18 2023](#); James R. Moughan to Mark LeBlanc, November 19, 2023.

- Campus police needed for parking
- Staffing costs for one ceremony instead of three
- FY23 cost of \$27,880 for tents and chairs for the May and Winter ceremonies combined
- FY23 cost of \$9,197 for three separate meals (two dinner, one breakfast) for volunteers
- FY23 cost of \$3,737 for shuttle parking services for guests for the May and Winter ceremonies combined
- FY23 cost of \$5,000 for lighting the Winter and Graduate ceremonies

The benefits of this option are that the ceremony is not dependent on weather, eliminating the need for a rain plan; guests are unlimited; security is provided by DCU staff. A potential drawback to this option is that moving the ceremony 30 minutes away would impact events for online student graduates-some of whom are on campus for the first time. Such events would need to occur on a different day. In addition, institutions currently holding commencements at the DCU Center are given priority for date selection. Currently, weekends in May are fully booked, so FSU would most likely have to schedule a weekday ceremony. A weekday commencement, however, would reduce staffing overtime costs.

B. Combined May Graduate and Undergraduate Commencement on Campus with weather contingencies: The commencement ceremonies could be combined to serve approximately 850-900 students and their guests. The variable continues to be weather. Contingency plans could involve moving the ceremony to the Recreation Center on Saturday. The \$104,046 figure includes an additional \$7,000 estimated for additional staffing costs due to lengthened ceremonies. This does not include costs for Campus police or reduction in printing and does not allow for unlimited seating and attendance.

C. Eliminating printed programs to students and providing digital programs with a QR code and providing a .pdf version on the commencement website would result in savings of over \$30,000 based on the FY 2023 cost of \$34,207 for printing.²³

Implementation Strategy:

For option A, eliminate the Winter 2024 ceremony and combine it with May 2025 graduate and undergraduate ceremonies at the DCU Center for immediate savings. Contact the DCU Center for further information and to determine available dates for May 2025. Option C can be implemented along with Option A for further savings.

For option B, eliminate the Winter 2024 ceremony and combine with the May 2025 ceremony for immediate savings. Option C can be implemented along with Option B for further savings.

For option C, eliminate printed commencement programs through the use of a QR code that links to a .pdf program for both May 2024 graduate and undergraduate ceremonies for immediate savings. Associated publicity on signage at the ceremonies and online/social media could highlight the QR code.

²³ Financial Services, "Operating Report, Graduation, FY 23."

Importance:

Consolidating commencement ceremonies realizes cost-savings. Goal Six of the Strategic Plan requires the university “steward physical and financial resources responsibly and navigate a path to long-term organizational sustainability.” Conducting a single commencement in an indoor venue saves costs and alleviates the contingency time and expenses of weather alterations. Potential benefits include raising visibility and marketing for the university in the Worcester area, reflecting Goal Five to “proactively reach, engage, and recruit prospective students through marketing efforts whose reach extends regionally.” Celebrating both graduate and undergraduate success together would showcase Fitchburg State University’s graduate programs to undergraduates and their families, which also meets Goal Five of the Strategic Plan. Alternatively, without use of the DCU center, eliminating the winter ceremony and combining all graduates into the two traditional May ceremonies can reduce costs but does not address the weather and space limitations. Eliminating commencement printing and moving to a digital QR code and placing a .pdf version on the commencement website demonstrates the university’s commitment to environmental stewardship reflected in Goal Four of the Strategic Plan.

Recommendation 2: Operational Savings by Reducing External Expenditures and Leveraging Internal Expertise

- Discontinue EAB products APS, and Global Executive Strategies. Consider the Edify product in light of an altered scope of work. Retain admissions products Enroll360, UVisit and Intersect. Retain SSC Navigator.
- Create a process that identifies software efficiencies and enhances budgeting for any products that exceed \$10,000 in cost.
- Educate departments about potential reductions in the expenses for catering, print services, and branded merchandise for non-admissions and non-athletic departments.
- Review professional development programming to maximize efficiency.

The committee identified a pattern of increased expenses deriving from costs for initiatives, services and products that are not best suited or of a scale appropriate for Fitchburg State University. This is not unique to our university. The higher education industry, including consulting services and ancillary products, are designed to appeal to the greatest number of institutions and to profit. In the prevailing climate of higher education, it is imperative to consider most carefully the advice we follow and the products we utilize. We must ensure that our desire to follow industry standards and innovative practices is accompanied by critical analyses and enhanced processes.

In this spirit, beginning in June 2023, the Administrative Efficiencies Task Force began researching the complete EAB suite of products used by the university. The business model of EAB and its steady acquisitions of products renders it ubiquitous in higher education. In FY 2023, the university spent \$1,174,400 on EAB products. Over many months, the Administrative Efficiencies members researched the contract, scope of work, return for each individual product

and usage data. It consulted with the offices of Finance, Institutional Research, Admissions and Academic Affairs to assess product usage, effectiveness, and need. It held a joint meeting with the Academic Efficiencies committee. In all cases, the contracts, costs, and product information were supplied in a timely, detailed, and accurate manner through the Financial Services office. Their efforts should be commended.

The Task Force determined that the admissions products Enroll360, UVisit and Intersect were utilized and essential to admissions and enrollment operations. Similarly, SSC Navigator has proven effective for both faculty and staff in their work with students. It found that EAB products Academic Performance Solutions (APS) and Global Executive Strategies had not provided value or utility for the university and should be discontinued. The EAB product Edify has not proven effective when measured by its original scope of work.

Figure 5: EAB Product Elimination, Fiscal Year 2022-2025 figures²⁴

EAB Product	Main Usage	Cost FY 22	Cost FY 23	Cost FY 24	Cost FY 25
Edify*	Finance	\$220,800	\$225,840	\$231,132	\$236,688
Academic Performance Solutions aka APS	Finance	\$91,598	\$ 95,952	\$ 100,525	Contract ended
Strategic Advisory Services, aka Global Partnership	Executive Cabinet	\$95,673	\$ 100,257	\$ 105,069	Contract ended
Total Estimated Cost Savings				\$436,726	

*Note: The amounts listed represent costs for hours needed to build the product. It does not represent actual costs. It represents Annual Program Fee and Annual Service Fee, Gold Tier.

Academic Performance Solutions (APS) promises to assist with academic annual reviews, plan academic course offerings, standardize faculty hiring, and reduce academic instruction costs. The Administrative Efficiencies Task Force learned that the information available in APS is of limited use owing to the structure of academic programs, scale of the data, and the limits of using return on investment models to measure academic effectiveness and allocate resources. The provost, as chief academic officer of the university, affirmed that the Office of Institutional Research and Planning provides specific data for academic questions related to university operations, making APS an unnecessary expense. Similarly, the committee determined that EAB SAS/Global is not a necessary product for Fitchburg State University. When queried, university officials could identify a single report produced through this service in 2017.²⁵ The SAS/Global Product has not provided information beyond what can be ascertained by utilizing campus expertise. The committee concludes that the Office of Institutional Research and

²⁴ Fitchburg State University Finance, "EAB Summary of Service," 2023

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1zLSUL5KGC8myOU6mNmb3WDg_OKSJQtRg/edit#gid=1556351057

²⁵ "Integrating Academic and Career Development: Strategies to Scale Experiential Learning and Reflection Across the Curriculum" (2017).

Planning, coupled with the researching expertise of campus departments, can meet the strategic needs of the Fitchburg State. It affirms the value and utilization of the EAB Admissions products as seen by an increase in enrollment yields. Similarly, usage data for SSC Navigator indicates wide-spread utilization across departments within the university.

The product Edify, also referred to as the “Educational Data Hub,” has a troubled history at Fitchburg State University. Its contract began on December 31, 2020, and runs through December 30, 2025. The Edify product, by EAB’s description, promises to “support higher education organizations in deriving value from data through a cloud-based data management technology and associated professional services.”²⁶ Edify was contracted according to a tiered fee schedule.²⁷ According to the contract from 2020-2025, the total cost to the university for the product will be \$914,460.²⁸

The initial objective of the Edify project at Fitchburg State University was to integrate data from the Banner Student Information System (SIS) and the Slate Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system into EAB’s cloud-based data hub. This integration was aimed at enhancing reporting capabilities and providing insightful dashboard metrics, equipped with predictive analytics features. The early phase of the project focused on delivering dashboard insights to the university. Additionally, Edify was to establish a functional data feed from the Slate CRM to the Ellucian Banner SIS.

Despite over three years of dedicated effort, the project has been plagued by consistent issues in data integration, resulting in a non-functional data feed between Slate CRM and Banner SIS and no project completion date in sight. Multiple departments have indicated significant dissatisfaction with the Edify Slate to Banner project. Diligent and countless work hours in Information Technology, Admissions, the Office of Institutional Research and Planning, and the School of Graduate, Online and Continuing Education have been devoted to these efforts. In Admissions alone, on average, an equivalent of more than one full workday per week is spent on the project in the hope of producing a complete and accurate report from Edify. In addition, Information Technology has provided uncounted hours of work to support the project, resulting in hidden costs absorbed by departments. This significant time investment has increased the

²⁶ EAB Edify Program Order Form, December 22, 2020. The form states, “In exchange for full and active participation in this Program, including the fulfillment of Organization Requirements outlined below, EAB's Education Data Hub ("EDH") will provide the following services to Organization: Education Data Hub Technology. EDH is an extensible, cloud-based technology built specifically for higher education institutions that consists of inbound data connectors, a higher-ed specific canonical data model, and an accessible interface to make data available for Organization's use cases.” EAB also contracts to be “pleased to offer additional professional services to Organization to support technical and business use cases and serve as an extension of your team. These professional services are available to organization via access to a block of service hours per year, which can be used for a variety of use cases and needs in addition to the initial Implementation of Selected Data Sources.”

²⁷ EAB Edify Fee Schedule includes the following tiers of service: \$36,000/yr. \$66,000/yr., \$120,000/yr., \$216,000/yr. In addition, overage fees are billed by the hour on a sliding scale inverse to the expense of the tiers. For example, a \$36,000/yr. tier of service includes a fee of \$325 per hour for overage hours whereas the \$216,000/yr. tier is charged \$250/hr. for any necessary overage hours beyond those contracted in the tier of service. EAB is changing the pricing to a fee structure based on institutional enrollments beginning in 2025.

²⁸ [EAB Summary of Services](#)

workload for Fitchburg State employees, contrary to the project's original intention of streamlining processes and reducing labor.

Efforts by EAB to use Edify to streamline HEIRS reporting proved equally challenging.²⁹ The Office of Institutional Research and Planning decided to discontinue using EAB's Edify for HEIRS reporting due to significant efficiency issues. EAB struggled to replicate the HEIRS reports effectively, leading the department to conclude that their existing methods were more productive and efficient. This decision reflects a broader concern and doubts among university stakeholders regarding Edify's ability to function as anticipated, particularly in delivering the advanced predictive analytics and in meeting the university's data analysis requirements.

Beginning in September 2023, Financial Services began an Edify project “The Financial Sustainability Accelerator- Four Year.”³⁰ The revised statement of work for this Edify project would be to create analytics for Financial Services to determine the revenue and expenses per student credit hour broken out by academic faculty member, department, and school including top and bottom performing departments and programs, measured against average faculty salary cost, class size, classes under 10 students, drop/fail/withdraw rates.³¹

The Administrative Efficiencies Task Force met with the provost, who indicated that this scope of work is not necessary because the Office of Institutional Research and Planning provides the information required for planning. The Administrative Efficiencies Task Force recognized the similarities between the scope of work in the Academic Performance Solution (APS) product that was recommended to be discontinued and the new scope of work designed for the Edify product. The current cost of Edify is \$224,486 in FY 2024.³²

The Financial Services department desires to use Edify for future projects if a satisfactory contract can be negotiated. This includes using Edify instead of the current process of extracting Crystal Reports and using Excel for data analysis. Financial Services finds this process labor-intensive because of the lack of built-in computational capabilities in Crystal Reports and Banner and the reliance on Excel workbooks. The process requires reformatting reports, careful review, and delays in detecting financial discrepancies. Financial Services wants to use Edify to improve the frequency and efficiency of report generation to produce reports covering all university revenues and expenses, including comparisons to historical data, produce Board of Trustee reports to monitor actuals compared to the approved budget, and design the Edify dashboard to measure student enrollment by credit hour and full-time equivalencies. It would also like to use Edify to manage unallocated and lapsed salaries from budget positions and actual payroll expenses.

²⁹The HEIRS Reporting project’s statement of work (SOW) explained “Fitchburg State produces annual and term reports for HEIRS. This project will allow Edify to serve as the source of data for HEIRS reporting needs, to streamline data transformation and reporting work across campus.”

³⁰ Financial Services, [Edify Statement of Work “Financial Sustainability Accelerator – 4 Year” Fitchburg State University](#). September 1, 2023.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³²Fitchburg State University Finance, [EAB Summary of Services](#), *supra* note 28.

Recommendation:

Regarding the use of EAB Edify at Fitchburg State, the committee believes that the Slate to Banner integration project should be executed with a different vendor. The three-year project suggests that the use of Edify for that project is untenable. The OIRP's decision to discontinue the Edify HEIRS project highlights the need for a process that ensures products' efficacy and congruence with institutional strategic objectives.

A majority of members of the committee oppose the continued efforts, this time by Financial Services, to attempt to utilize an Edify product that has proven unreliable and has drained resources from Fitchburg State University with nothing to show for it. It believes this would constitute a sunk cost fallacy and does not believe the product is suited to the university.³³ If the Edify product were continued beyond the current contract, Fitchburg State would assume an annual cost of approximately \$85,000 to 165,000 per year if it contracted at the newer pricing structure from EAB.³⁴

A minority of members of the committee believe that Financial Services should attempt to use Edify to access data and insights for reporting and projections through the new scope of work because extracting the data currently in Banner Finance and Banner HR is neither timely nor convenient. If the university negotiates a new contract at a reasonable cost, Edify could streamline processes and create efficiencies in Financial Services, including enhanced salary reports. Financial Services could improve its ability to manage salaries which make up 40.62 percent of the operating budget.³⁵

The Administrative Efficiencies group recommends discontinuing EAB APS and EAB SSA/Global for a savings of \$188,395. Eliminating Edify, as recommended by a majority of the committee, would add an additional \$236,688 of savings, in addition to eliminating unknown future product costs.

The analysis of EAB suite demonstrates that the university needs a new process for software acquisitions to ensure efficiencies in the contracting process and renewals.³⁶ The Administrative Efficiencies Working Group endorses the "Fitchburg State University Software Request Review

³³ For a discussion of the sunk cost fallacy, for example, see for example Ryan Doody, "[The Sunk Cost Fallacy is not a Fallacy.](#)" *Ergo* 6 (2020); Emma Williams, "[Is the Sunk Cost Fallacy Sinking Your Career?](#)" *Times Higher Education* February 24, 2022; Steven Mintz, "[Is Higher Ed Tackling the Right Problems?](#)" *Inside Higher Ed* November 13, 2023.

³⁴ EAB Edify Fee Schedule includes the following tiers of service: \$36,000/yr. \$66,000/yr., \$120,000/yr., \$216,000/yr. In addition, overage fees are billed by the hour on a sliding scale inverse to the expense of the tiers. For example, a \$36,000/yr. tier of service includes a fee of \$325 per hour for overage hours whereas the \$216,000/yr. tier is charged \$250/hr. for any necessary overage hours beyond those contracted in the tier of service. EAB has changed its product pricing for Edify that would go into effect if the university were to extend its contract. It is based on enrollment and EAB has indicated the approximate cost for Edify beginning in 2026 would be \$165,000 per year, excluding potential discounts for pricing and not accounting for inflation.

³⁵ FY 25 Board of Trustees, Summary Financial Services.

³⁶ For example, to address the Slate to Banner connection issue, a potential solution may lie in contracting with a vendor renowned for their expertise and track record in successfully completing similar projects. Such a change could not only resolve the current challenges but also free up valuable hours for staff to dedicate to other important initiatives. This is an example of the scope of work the Software Request Review Committee would engage with.

Committee Charter” proposed by the Property and Infrastructure Committee. It makes the following additional suggestions:

- The threshold for review be set at \$10,000
- All software acquisitions, including those funded by grants, should include a comprehensive budgeting plan.
- Comprehensive budgeting plans outline the funding transition strategy from grant support to a departmental budget allocation.
- Scope of work, timelines, and Service Level Agreements (SLAs) are articulated.
- Security and data integrity policies are adhered to.

These measures will ensure that university stakeholders are involved in software procurement decisions on an ongoing basis and align software purchases with the university's strategic plan.

As requested by the Fiscal Sustainability Task Force Phase 1, the Administrative Efficiencies committee reviewed budgets and expenses across the university. Expense data indicated that the university has made efforts to reduce costs and commensurate with budgetary realities in areas of travel, catering, and printing. The committee believes enhanced awareness and information conveyed to university departments can result in additional savings. The committee examined expenses in these areas, removing the expenses accrued by Admission and Athletics, and calculated potential savings by reducing costs by five percent and ten percent based on Fiscal Year 2023 costs. It determined that in procurement, the university should require due diligence; all managers should research potential purchases and expenses thoroughly to ensure efficiency and productivity. The process should include research for similar products, requesting procurement bids, and contacting existing clientele for feedback on the proposed vendor and product.

Figure 6: Fiscal Year 2023 Expenses and Reduction Models (Travel Expenses exclude Admissions and Athletics)³⁷

	Fiscal Year 2023 Expenses:	5% Reduction Saves:	10% Reduction Saves:
Travel	\$338,507.43	\$16,925	\$33,850
Chartwells	\$416,204	\$20,810	\$41,620
Printing	\$483,791	\$24,189	\$48,379

Data indicates that except for student printers in the library, five academic departments and three university offices print over 20,000 pages per year.³⁸ Reducing printing is economical and

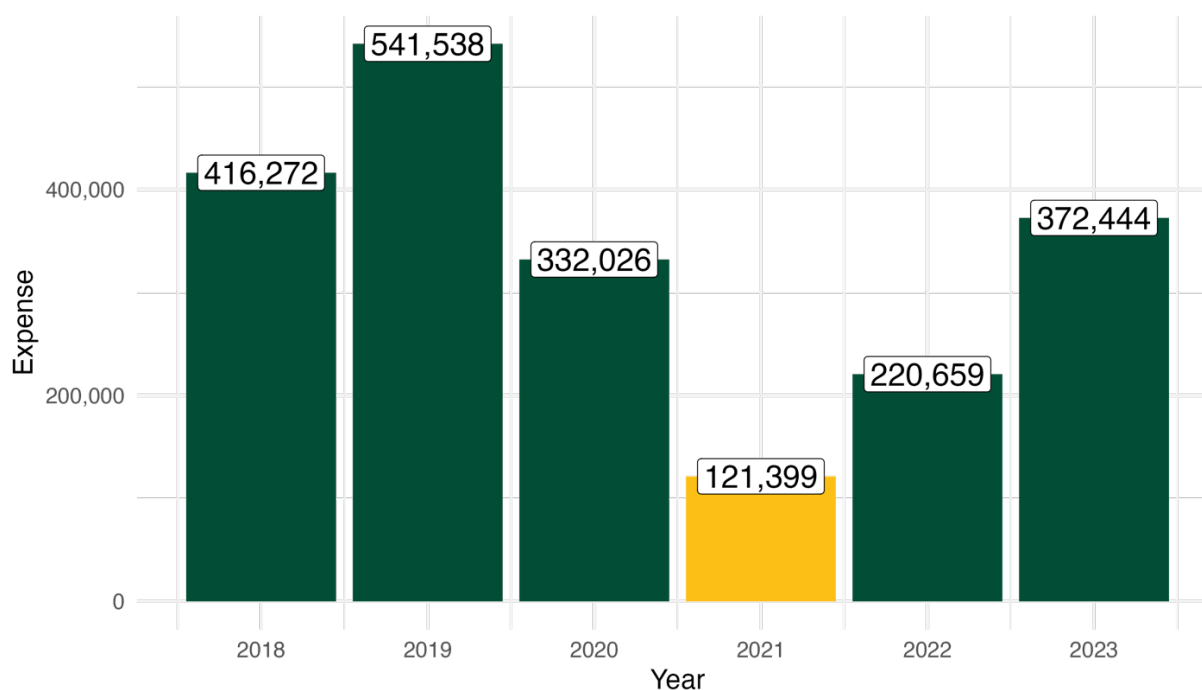
³⁷ Financial Services, “Consolidated Travel Expenses Banner w [FY23 Dept Operating Report Travel all funds](#)”

³⁸ These include Behavioral Science, Education, Math, Biology and Chemistry, Nursing, Capital Planning and Maintenance and the Executive Office and University Police.

valuable for increased sustainability. Reductions in printing costs within departments would save a few thousand dollars per year while aligning with the university’s goal of environmental stewardship.³⁹ The committee recommends that travel, catering and printing expense information be distributed to all departments on a regular basis. The university should engage in a unified campaign across all divisions to secure additional savings.

Fitchburg State University is committed to the professional development of its employees. It is part of the university’s strategic plan, including Goal Four to “Provide faculty and staff professional development opportunities and appropriate tools, including technology, to ensure they can be effective in their roles.”⁴⁰ Yet professional development products and services have proliferated at a similar rate as data analytics products in higher education. At the same time, technology has provided opportunities for savings in travel and conference fees. Employees should be educated about the importance of attending virtually through teleconferencing, virtual conferences, and accessing digitized content. The Administrative Efficiencies group recommends that current guidelines on travel outside of the region be more clearly communicated to deans and department and office heads. In addition, information should be presented to departments across campus to educate constituencies about the travel approval process and the importance of multiple quotes for flights and lodging, advance bookings, and ride sharing.

Figure 7: Travel Expenses, All Funds, 2018-2023 Including Athletics and Admissions⁴¹



Note: 2021 value reflects COVID-era travel restrictions.

³⁹ FSU Strategic Plan 2020-2025, 9. Goal 4.6.

⁴⁰ FSU Strategic Plan 2020-2025, 9. Goal 4.4

⁴¹ Financial Services, “Consolidated Travel Expenses Banner w [FY23 Dept Operating Report Travel all funds](#)”

The Administrative Efficiencies working group believes that reinvigorating travel policies and procedures with a focus on financial sustainability will result in savings for the university.

The Administrative Efficiencies Working Group recommends ongoing consideration of professional development costs related to initiatives. Like the process recommended for software purchases, the university should consider initiatives and their cumulative costs over time. This is especially important because student retention and graduation rates have remained stable even with the proliferation of initiatives.⁴² It is difficult to identify or quantify direct correlation between professional development expenses and results. This does not mean that programs and training are without value. Professional development is aspirational by its nature. It arises out of individuals and institutions seeking to advance and improve. Within the context of retention and graduation rates, economic headwinds, and the evolution of higher education, it is incumbent upon us as an institution to assess programs and initiatives within the context of 2023 and adjust. It calls for a reconsideration of resource allocation.

The group recommends the review of professional development for faculty to ensure that resources are efficiently deployed to reach and assist the greatest number of faculty and students at Fitchburg State. The Administrative Efficiencies group recognizes that the Division of Academic Affairs is examining professional development, program administration, increases in committee responsibilities, and issues of workload equity. As these initiatives are ongoing, the committee believes that the First Year Experience is worthy of attention.

Initially grant funded, the FYE program was developed in 2017. It began with eight sections of the course in the Fall 2018, scaling up to full operation in 2019. From its inception in 2017, the program required summer professional development and academic year professional development. This limited the number of faculty teaching in the program as well as the reach of pedagogical initiatives. The professional development for the program in 2023-2024 reached 21 faculty members.⁴³ A separate initiative, Faculty Academy, emerged out of the Achieving the Dream program. This program was introduced to the faculty in 2020. It has offered professional development for 30 faculty over three years in cohorts of 10.⁴⁴

The Administrative Efficiencies group believes that these models of professional development are not as efficient as they could be. These two initiatives have reached at most a quarter of the faculty. Desired professional development can be generalized and scaled to the larger number of faculty by taking advantage of existing structures. All faculty participate in three required days allotted to professional development each academic year. In addition, the Center for Teaching and Learning convenes professional development programs every two weeks, overseen by the Teaching and Learning coordinator. Using these existing structures would enhance efficiencies by reaching the largest possible audience and broaden the pool of faculty available to teach the

⁴² OIRP, *Fitchburg State University Factbook*, 2022, 29; OIRP, "Common Data Set 2023," 7.

⁴³ Academic Affairs, Master APRs, 2023-2024.

⁴⁴ See Dr. Alberto J.F. Cardelle to Faculty, February 14, 2020, February 27, 2020 and April 2, 2021, referencing the January 2020 Faculty Development Day presentation by Dr. Paul Hernandez, author of *The Pedagogy of Real Talk: Engaging, Teaching and Connecting Students At-Promise* and senior advisor to the president and CEO of [Achieving the Dream](#) and the creation of the Faculty Academy, which began with nine faculty members in June 2020.

university's essential gateway FYE. This would mitigate adjunct needs and strengthen pedagogical initiatives.

Implementation:

Eliminating EAB products should follow the Commonwealth Terms and Conditions Information Technology Contracts and, when applicable, the individual product contracts.⁴⁵ The creation of the "University Software Request Review Committee" should follow all procedures to establish University committees. Education around cost-savings can follow existing channels of disseminating information to departments. The consideration of efficiencies in professional development can be made within the Division of Academic Affairs.

Importance:

These recommendations to achieve efficiencies in software, processes, expenses, and professional development programming support Strategic Plan Goal One: Forge innovative paths to knowledge acquisition; Goal Two: Become a model student-ready university; Goal Four: Establish inclusive excellence, innovation, and environmental stewardship; Goal Five: Assert our distinctive value proposition.

Recommendation 3: Achieve personnel efficiencies across all university divisions.

Recommendations:

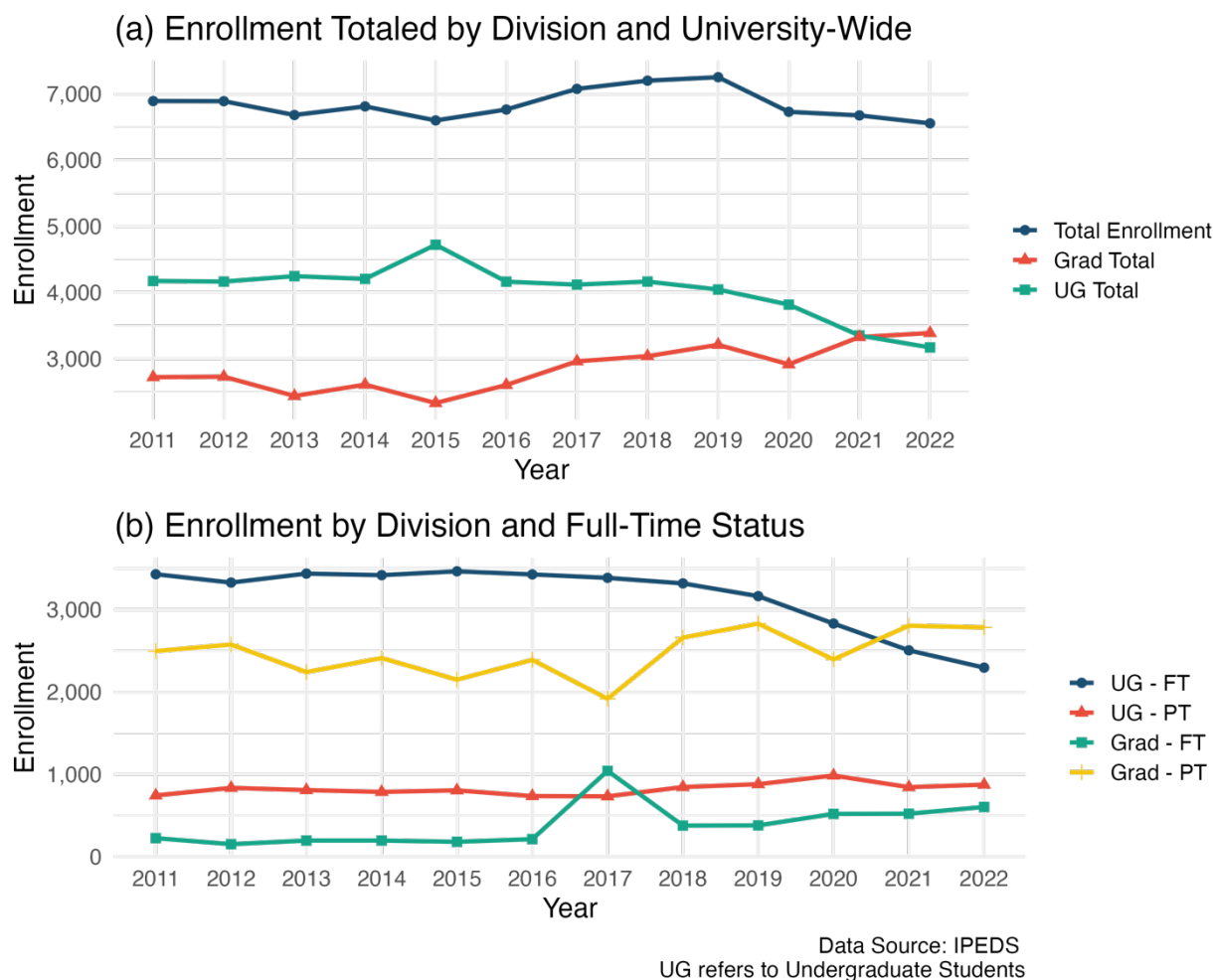
- Strategically examine all positions at the university.
- Review the structure of the Student Success division to eliminate redundancies and clarify department scope and responsibilities.
- Consider placing Disability Services within the Division of Academic Affairs

This recommendation is grounded in the university mission as an institution that blends liberal arts and sciences and professional programs within a small college environment. It reflects the belief that the university can better utilize its personnel resources and expertise to strengthen recruitment, achievement, and retention of students. This recommendation is made within the context of the growth in expenses in the categories represented by Figure 1: Indexed Expenditures by IPEDS Category from 2002 through 2022.⁴⁶ This recommendation is made in response to the trajectory of enrollments and spending at Fitchburg State University. Fitchburg State has seen an undergraduate enrollment decline since 2016.

⁴⁵ Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Office of the Comptroller, "Commonwealth Terms and Conditions for Information Technology Contracts" https://www.macomptroller.org/wp-content/uploads/form_commonwealth-terms-and-conditions-for-information-technology.pdf

⁴⁶ *Supra* note 6. These include Academic Support, Institutional Support and Student Services.

Figure 8: Change in Enrollment From 2011 to 2022 (a) Aggregated by Division, and (b) Separated by Division and Full Time Status⁴⁷



Since 2016, the administrative structure expanded.⁴⁸ For example, in 2017, the University had completed a hiring cycle that included the addition of elevation of a dean position to a Vice President position and the addition of four deans, resulting in a six dean structure.⁴⁹ In 2023, the structure was reduced to five deans: Library, Graduate, Online and Continuing Education, Arts and Sciences, Education, and Business and Technology and Health and Natural Sciences. There are seven assistant or associate vice presidents. The executive cabinet consists of four vice presidents, the provost, and the president.⁵⁰ During this same period, faculty numbers have declined. In FY 2023-2024, the university eliminated seven tenure-track faculty positions and

⁴⁷ OIRP, IPEDS data.

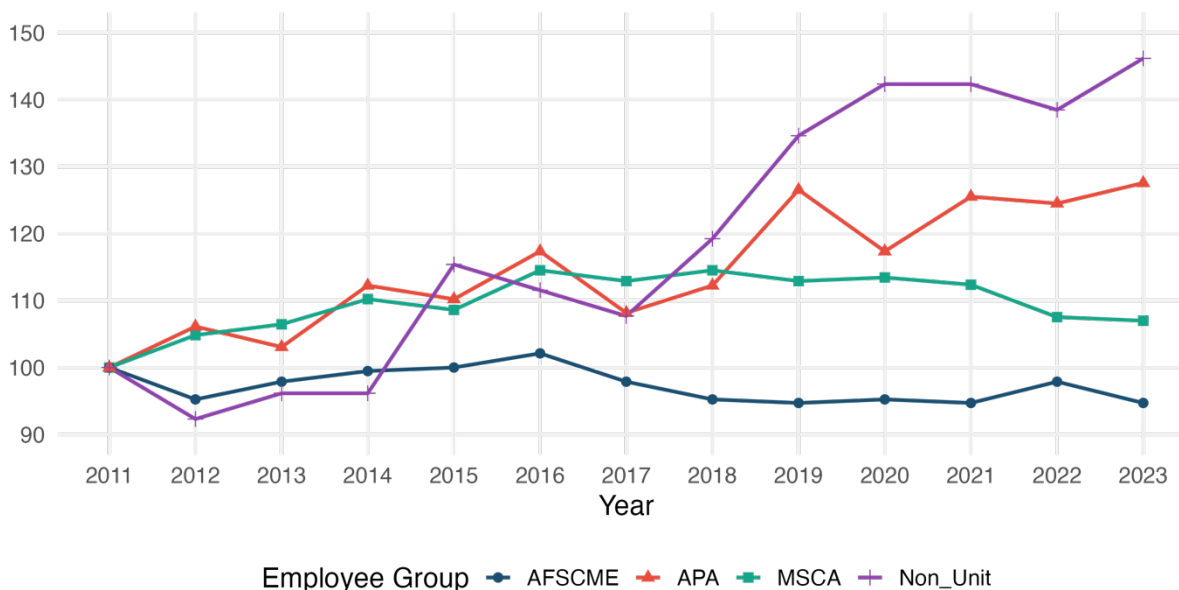
⁴⁸This is not unique to Fitchburg State University. See, for example, [Jones, Jr.Lamont, "One Culprit in Rising College Costs: Administrative Expenses." U.S. News and World Reports, June 1, 2023.](#)

⁴⁹ *Fitchburg State University Today*, April 3, 2017.

⁵⁰ This growth is captured in in categories that include Institutional Support, Academic Support and Student Services See Figure 1. For category definitions, see Gascon, MPA, PhD, Social Science Research, Evaluation and Measurement, L.L.C., "Fitchburg State University Financial Audit Analysis," December 2022, 13.

two maintenance positions, reducing expenses by \$1,180,629. Reducing courses taught by adjunct faculty saved an additional \$450,000.⁵¹ Whether measured by labor unit, by headcount or by cost, faculty ranks have been reduced.

Figure 9: Indexed Growth in Employee Unit Headcount, 2011-2023⁵²



Data Source: DHE-HEIRS; BANNER
 Note: 2022 values Indexed at 100. All others are relative to this value.
 Index can be interpreted as the percent of the 2022 value in Year X.

Considering the data represented in Figures 8 and 9, the committee recommends a strategic examination of all positions at the university.

The Financial Sustainability Task Force Phase 1 charged the Administrative Efficiencies Working Group with considering university expense data by category. The group noted growth in the areas of Academic Support and Student Services as represented in Figure 1. Considering this data, the committee recommends a review of the structure of the unit of Student Success to enhance efficiencies and clarify department scope and responsibilities. The recommendation is made within the context provided by the New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE) 2022 accreditation process. In its final report, NECHE determined that the university has “respectable rates for retention and graduation rates.”⁵³ This assessment is supported by retention rates and graduation rates that parallel peer institutions.⁵⁴ Within the assessment, however, is evidence that students believe career advising could be improved. Significantly, NECHE found “discussions with students indicate their relationships with faculty are warm and

⁵¹ Fitchburg State Financial Services Budget Narrative to the Board of Trustees, June 6, 2023.

⁵² HEIRS data, 2011-2023.

⁵³ NECHE Evaluation Team to the Faculty, Administration, Trustees and Students of Fitchburg State University, March 20-23, 2023, 8.

⁵⁴ *Supra*, note 18.

informal, and that faculty are available to assist and guide students in curricular, co-curricular, and career-related issues,” and that “students expressed concern about having limited access to faculty advisors.”⁵⁵

The committee recommends the review of the structure of the unit of Student Success within the context of the Department of Higher Education’s “Student Success Framework.” The framework supports a combined faculty and professional advising model in which student supports include “structurally embedded opportunities for faculty to engage with students, formally and informally” within the guiding principle that institutions can be flexible and craft individualized approaches that meet the needs of their unique circumstances.⁵⁶ The Administrative Efficiencies committee recognizes that Academic Affairs is reviewing the Student Success unit. This includes ongoing work to evaluate student success and retention initiatives and develop an evaluation plan for the First-Year Experience.⁵⁷ The committee affirms the important role that these state and campus initiatives play in supporting retention and graduation during our changing climate in higher education.

It is worth noting, however, that Fitchburg State’s current organizational structure for Student Success was created in AY 2017-2018.⁵⁸ During that period, two centers were created: the Academic Coaching and Tutoring (ACT) center and the Career Services and Advising Center (CSAC). Both were placed under the direction of a Student Success director. The position has since become an assistant dean position. Within the new alignment, professional academic advising was placed within the Career Services and Advising Center. Professional advisors were tasked with advising undeclared undergraduate students and transfer students. These efforts were undergirded by the ideas and initiatives set forth by Complete College America, Incorporated.⁵⁹ During this same period, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities Re-Imagining the First Year of College Program influenced the adoption of the FYE program, increases in peer tutoring, increased use of non-faculty advisors. It also recommended overall budget increases and resources allocated for these services.⁶⁰ Since 2018, the Student

⁵⁵NECHE Evaluation Team to the Faculty, Administration, Trustees and Students of Fitchburg State University, March 20-23, 2023, 13, 14, 18, 29.

⁵⁶ [Massachusetts Board of Education 22-67 Student Success Framework](#), “Faculty Engagement and Pedagogy.” June 21, 2022.

⁵⁷ See the Batista Consulting Services Proposal, July 25, 2023. This consulting work is grant-funded by an anonymous donation to the university.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1D4YcB3KKAvdv1U2uqzuiXPR4L4i2u2Hc/view?usp=drive_link

⁵⁸ See Fitchburg State University Board of Trustees Packet, September 12, 2017, p.14 that notes the merging of these departments and that “their size was doubled.” This was connected to the strategic goal to “Promote Student Success by Breaking Down Barriers.”

⁵⁹Complete College America, Inc., is a non-profit organization that promotes “Guided Pathways to Success.” This program asserts “Too much choice —especially uninformed choice — leads to indecision or poor decisions” and suggests “a substantial number of people accept — even welcome — a default choice designed by informed professionals.” CCA promises increased graduation rates, closing the achievement gap and a decline in lost credits among students. It recommends that students follow degree maps, marketing these efforts as “guarantee[d] for on-time completion. See, for example CCA Presentation 2017 <https://completecollege.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/GPS-BOOKLET-06-14-FINAL.pdf>

⁶⁰ American Association of State Colleges and Universities Re-Imagining the First Year of College Program, Presentation, Fitchburg State University, May 23, 2017.

Success office, and specifically the CSAC, has become responsible for a peer mentor program for the FYE, advising students with undeclared majors, advising transfer students, advising students changing majors, career services, some internships, professional development for staff, and campus initiatives around issues of orientation, retention, academic deficiencies, and career development.⁶¹

The Administrative Efficiencies committee recommends a review of the structure of Student Success to enhance efficiencies and eliminate duplication of efforts. Currently, consulting is underway to inventory of Student Success initiatives, create an assessment plan for the FYE program, and “enhance leadership development and readiness efforts for leaders including the Executive Cabinet, Student Success, and other leaders from Student Affairs and other identified areas.”⁶² In addition, the Administrative Efficiencies committee recommends that special attention should be paid to academics and the centrality of the faculty in the academic mission of the university. Currently, within the Student Success division, Career and Advising is responsible for career development, academic advising and internships. According to annual reports, approximately 52 percent of the students served by Career Services and Advising received academic advising in 2021-2022 and 48 percent received career services. In addition, Career Services and Advising advised 42 students to change their majors in 2021-2022.⁶³ According to the institutional data set, Fitchburg State University employed 189 full-time faculty members in AY 2022-2023, all of whom are contractually responsible for academic advising. Across academic departments, advising loads vary, as indicated in Figure 10.

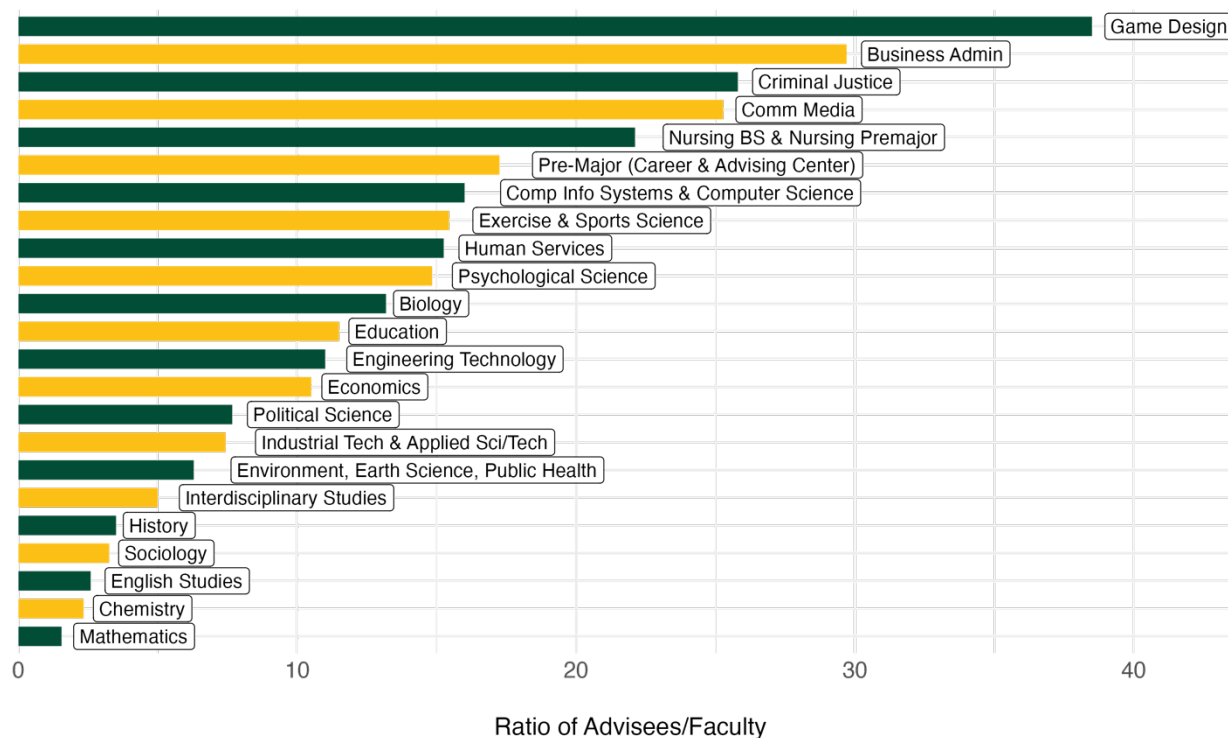
⁶¹ [Office of Student Success Annual Reports \(including CAC and ACT\), 2020-2023.](#)

⁶² Batista Consulting Services Proposal, July 25, 2023.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1D4YcB3KKAvdv1U2uqzuiXPR4L4i2u2Hc/view?usp=drive_link

⁶³ Career and Advising Center Annual Report, 2021-2022.

Figure 10: Faculty Advising of Undergraduate Students by Major/Concentration Fall 2022⁶⁴



There is a wide variation between undergraduate advising among academic departments as well as the Career Services and Advising Center, which advises students who have not declared a major. According to SSC Navigator, in Fall 2023 there are 66 undeclared majors under 45 credits who are being advised by professional advisors in the Career and Advising Center.⁶⁵

The Administrative Efficiencies committee recommends a strategic reallocation of academic advising across some academic departments and selective utilization of professional advisors to support larger programs, especially those with growing graduate programs. Indeed, between 2018-2022, annual registered graduate credits increased from 41,754 to 51,153. In contrast, annual registered undergraduate credits declined, from 109,356 to 85,245.⁶⁶ Faculty in departments with fewer advisees, especially in departments that serve the general education curriculum, are well-positioned to advise undeclared students and transfer students.

By placing undeclared and transfer advising with faculty, it would be possible to embed professional advising within large departments, fostering synergies between professional advisors and specific programs, many of which are professional in orientation.⁶⁷ At the same time, realigning undeclared and transfer students with faculty members at the earliest point in their careers at Fitchburg State will provide students formal and informal access to faculty

⁶⁴ Financial Services Office, Major Data, 2018-2022, Financial Sustainability Task Force Data, October 22, 2022.

⁶⁵ Fitchburg State Common Data set, 2022-2023 reported October 19, 2022.

<https://www.fitchburgstate.edu/about/institutional-research-and-planning/institutional-data>

⁶⁶ Fitchburg State University, *Factbook*, 2022, 23.

⁶⁷ The University of Massachusetts Lowell, for example, employs professional advisors within its schools, including its [Manning School of Business](#).

members, the value of which is supported by both the NECHE report and the Massachusetts Student Success Frameworks.⁶⁸ Faculty academic advising of undeclared and declared majors is not unprecedented at Fitchburg State. Three decades ago, faculty staffed an academic advising center on the first floor of Thompson Hall. As a catalog indicated, the advising center “specialize[d] in assisting undeclared students, non-traditional students, students experiencing academic difficulty, and students needing help in interpreting specific academic regulations.”⁶⁹ The Academic Advising Center was staffed by faculty and was overseen by Academic Affairs. The deemphasis of the faculty role in advising students is a relatively new development, marked by the removal of faculty from the section on student advising in the 2020-2021 university catalog.⁷⁰

A more strategic approach to allocating academic advising resources has the potential to better support career service personnel, providing greater opportunities to enhance career services and internship development for the Fitchburg State community. This has been identified as a signature aspect of an education at Fitchburg State University. It fits within the university goal to support experiential learning and position the University as the leader in the region and the state. To do so, it may be most efficient to return academic advising—including pre-major and transfer students—to faculty which is provided for in the MSCA contract and support summer advising as necessary.

The Administrative Efficiencies Task Force recommends that the university administration consider placing the Office of Disability Services within the Division of Academic Affairs to enhance connections between disability services, academic support services, career services, and the Schools of Education, Arts and Sciences, and Health and Natural Sciences. This may be the most effective means to enhance efficiency and effectiveness, considering national trends in higher education, Massachusetts, and Fitchburg State.⁷¹ Nationally, the movement for disability services for post-secondary education is growing.⁷² Research indicates that students with disabilities are an at-risk student population with lower retention and graduation rates than students without disabilities.⁷³ It also suggests that this student population is an underserved population in the student services profession.⁷⁴ To address this deficit in higher education, the University of Massachusetts Boston’s center “Think College” has been at the forefront of the movement to increase access for students with disabilities and to promote best-practices.⁷⁵ In

⁶⁸ Current university policy requires undergraduate students to declare a major and move to faculty advising by the 45-credit point. See Fitchburg State AUC 15/16-03. See *supra* note 55, 56.

⁶⁹ Fitchburg State Catalogs, 1987-2000. See for example, 1993-1994, 164.

⁷⁰ As a comparison of the *Fitchburg State Catalog* indicates, between [2019-2020](#) and [2020-2021](#) “faculty” was removed from the catalog section on student support services.

⁷¹ See Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, [“Report to the Legislature: Annual Report on Students with Disabilities 2015-2016, Chapter 159, Acts of 2000 September 2017.”](#) and Mark Fermanich, [“DESE Policy Brief: Exploring MA Special Ed Data.”](#) February, 2020.”

⁷² See, for example, Cate Weir, [“Why Your College Should Join the Intellectual-Disability Movement.”](#) *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 10, 2023.

⁷³ Adam Richard Lalor, “Identification of Disability-Related Competencies for Student Affairs Generalists: A Delphi Study” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Connecticut, 2017, 2. Lalor cites national data that 66 percent of students with disabilities do not graduate and the attrition rate is 17 percent higher than students without disabilities.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 10

⁷⁵ [Association on University Centers on Disabilities, “Think College Launches Public Awareness Campaign to Expand College Access for Students with Intellectual Disability”](#)

Massachusetts, as of December 1, 2022, the Department of Education reported that 19.2 percent of all students in public schools and charter schools in the Commonwealth had a disability.⁷⁶ As a student-ready university, Fitchburg State should strive to make services accessible, break down silos, and allow students to succeed through accessing a menu of opportunities without being hamstrung by an organizational structure that emerged as other units were reorganized.

At Fitchburg State, data indicates that the number of students with disabilities has increased. In 1992, 33 students completed a disability census; in 2019, 500 students self-reported to disability services through the census. 60 percent of these students had Autism Spectrum Disorders, Learning Disabilities, and Attention Deficit Disorders.⁷⁷ In 2022-2023, the Office of Disability Services registered 388 students.⁷⁸ Beginning in the Fall 2024, Fitchburg State will participate in the Massachusetts Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment Initiative (MAICEI). After a decade in existence, the program was codified into law in 2022. At Fitchburg State the program is overseen by the School of Education within Academic Affairs. Moreover, since 2012 an interdisciplinary minor in Disability Studies exists within the School of Arts and Sciences and Academic Affairs. Faculty teach content and co-curricular activities centered on an interdisciplinary understanding of disabilities.⁷⁹

The models for the organization of disability services in higher education include placing the office within student affairs units, academic affairs units, and within offices of diversity and inclusion.⁸⁰ Scholarship indicates that a collaboration between practitioner and faculty working with disability services would benefit students at Fitchburg State, especially considering the academic synergies that already exist.⁸¹ Furthermore, scholarly assessments of the place of disability services within higher education indicate that very large institutions most often place disability service offices within student affairs whereas smaller institutions more frequently place

⁷⁶ See the Department of Education [“Selected Populations Report, 2022-2023.”](#) The state counted 179,095 students with disabilities enrolled in public and charter schools.

⁷⁷ See Katrina Durham and Juli Maki, “Disability Services: A Historical Perspective,” January 27, 2020. According to IPEDS Data Feedback Report 2021, 500 students in 2019 comprised approximately 10-15% of the student population depending on whether FTE or headcount calculations are used. This data seems to reflect the larger study conducted by Huber, Table 6 p. 147.

⁷⁸ The Vice President of Student Affairs provided the following data on students registered with Disability Services: 2020-2021 N=394, 2021-2022 N=375, 2022-2023 N=388.

⁷⁹ In 2022, the MAICEI was codified into Mass. General Laws. The law allows for individuals “to: (i) take a credit-bearing undergraduate academic course for credit if they have met the course prerequisites and requirements; or (ii) audit a credit-bearing undergraduate academic course, consistent with campus policies governing selection of students for audit participation if they have not met the course prerequisites and requirements.” It pertains to undergraduate day courses. See Jeffrey C. Riley, Commissioner to Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, April 20, 2023. The MAICEI Program can be accessed at <https://www.mass.edu/strategic/maicei.asp> ; See also Massachusetts General Laws, [c. 15A, §30A](#); [c. 71B, § 17](#). In 2012, Fitchburg State University created a Disability Studies Minor to advance “knowledge of the historical, social, aesthetic, literary, legal, educational, philosophical, biological and political framing of disability. Students develop a strong interdisciplinary foundation, with emphasis on cultural constructions of human ability, and the intersections of disability, race, gender, sex, age, class and other markers of diversity and difference.” See Fitchburg State AUC 2012-35. See also Dr. Kisha Tracy, Fitchburg State University Exhibit, [“Disability Heritage.”](#)

⁸⁰ Scott, S., Markle, L., Wessel, R. D., & Desmond, J. (2016). Disability Services Partnerships with Faculty Members. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*, 29(3), 215-220.

⁸¹ Scott, et al.; “Disability Services Partnerships with Faculty Members,” 216-217.

disability services within academic affairs.⁸² The Financial Sustainability Task Force Phase 1 recommended that the university consider a hub service delivery model for student services. Placing disability services within the same structure as Student Success would strengthen the relationship between academic departments and disability services, facilitate career development and transition support for students with disabilities, and remove structural and ableist access barriers to instruction.

Historically, Fitchburg State followed the model that placed disability services within an administrative structure aligned with academic support. In the 1990s, following the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, Fitchburg State's disabilities coordinators worked within the academic success program.⁸³ Through 2010, Disability Services was part of the Academic Success Center. Placing Disability Services within the Office of Counseling Services is a recent decision. The Office of Counseling Services currently oversees Counseling Services in addition to Disability Services. Counseling Services reports to the Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs. The Office of Disability Services is, according to its website, responsible for "Empowering qualified students with disabilities to engage in all facets of academic, residential and student life" which and is "responsible for verifying student eligibility for accommodations and for coordinating those accommodations across campus."⁸⁴ Fitchburg State's Disability Services identifies its goals for 2022-2023 as:

- Build effective collaborations between the Disability Services office and a variety of academic departments and support services to create accessible instructional and social environments.
- Students associated with the Disability Services Office will demonstrate the development of self-advocacy skills and a healthy disability identity.
- Reduce structural and access barriers to campus physical and instructional environment.⁸⁵

The committee believes the university should consider a model that places Disability Services within Academic Affairs to accelerate the department's stated goals, each of which involve academics. Aligning Disability Services with Student Success would support historically underrepresented populations more effectively, including neurodiverse populations.⁸⁶ Upon transitioning to post-secondary education, students with disabilities must self-identify, provide

⁸² Wendy S. Harbour, "The Relationship Between Institutional Unit and Administrative Features of Disability Services Offices," 150.

⁸³ In the 1990s, disability services worked within Academic Success. See Katrina Durham and Juli Maki, "Disability Services: A Historical Perspective," January 27, 2020. It should be noted that the goals for Disability Services are found on the university website but annual reports and outcomes are unavailable. It is therefore not possible to measure outcomes with the emerging accreditation standards for students with disabilities.

⁸⁴ [Fitchburg State Disability Services website](#), accessed December 15, 2023.

⁸⁵ Student Affairs Assessment Webpage <https://www.fitchburgstate.edu/student-support/office-student-affairs/student-affairs-assessment>, accessed December 15, 2023. As of the NECHE report in 2022, the assessment of student affairs departments is in development. NECHE Report to the Faculty, Administration, Trustees and Students of Fitchburg State University, March 20-23, 2022, 13.

⁸⁶ Lalor, "Identification of Disability-Related Competencies for Student Affairs Generalists: A Delphi Study," 82.

their documentation or obtain evaluations and assessments, and request disability services to facilitate access. As the burden is placed on disabled students in post-secondary education, it renders it especially important that impediments are reduced for student access. Placing this department within Academic Affairs as with Career Services and Advising and the Academic Tutoring Center would move toward the seamless service delivery recommended by the Student Success Framework adopted by the Board of Higher Education.⁸⁷

Implementation:

A strategic consideration of AFSCME, APA, MSCA and Non-Unit professionals at the university can be conducted within divisions spearheaded by leadership. Review of the structure and responsibilities of Student Success can be considered in conjunction with the grant-funded consulting work and reviews by Academic Affairs. Placing Disability Services within Academic Affairs could be part of a structural realignment of the Student Success area within Academic Affairs.

Importance:

Strategic consideration of personnel is crucial to identifying efficiencies, as demonstrated in Figure 1 and Figure 9. This aligns with the Strategic Plan Goal Four: Promote a culture of transparent organizational communication and decision making so that all members of the campus community feel valued and heard; Promote environmentally sustainable values across the institution and Goal Five: Remain affordable and accessible to all prospective and current students.

A review of the structure of Student Success would aligned with Goal One of the Strategic Plan: to forge innovative paths to knowledge acquisition, career readiness, social mobility, and lifelong learning; Goal Two: Achieve a cultural shift around how we advise, mentor, and teach all students, especially traditionally underrepresented and underserved students, so that we meet them where they are; Develop and implement a purposeful and holistic model of student support services grounded in evidence-based practices; Ensure all processes and support services are adequate to meet the unique needs of transfer students, non-traditional students, online learners, and graduate students; Integrate career services into departments and curriculum, and build more consistent career advising across campus, especially for first-year students and sophomores.

The consideration of placing Disability Services within Academic Affairs would support historically underrepresented populations, including neurodiverse populations. This would meet

⁸⁷ For example, Massachusetts Department of Higher Education and Deloitte, “Implementation Options & Recommendations Student Success Framework,” May 27, 2022, which calls to “expand one-stop models of student support to create seamless service delivery with essential student-facing functions of the student experience from matriculation to graduation.” It also supports the goal of cultivating “inclusive environments that promote a sense of belonging for students socially, academically, as well as inside and out of the classroom.” “The New Undergraduate Experience: A Vision for Dismantling Barriers, Recognizing Students’ Cultural Wealth, and Achieving Racial Equity in Public Higher Education in Massachusetts,” January 14, 2022.

the Strategic Plan Goal Five: Establish Fitchburg State's commitment to education justice; Goal One: Fortify and promote the distinct role of the general education curriculum that provides every undergraduate student a relevant and challenging liberal arts foundation; Establish a learning environment in which academic and co-curricular programs work in synergy to offer applied learning experiences that prepare students for purposeful personal and professional lives; Leverage existing curricular strengths to develop new programs that meet demand and forge deeper connections between our curriculum and community needs; Goal Four Increase the visible diversity of our faculty and staff in order to nurture the commitment to equity and inclusion throughout the campus community; Goal Three: Continue to provide educational opportunities and cultural programming that attract and engage members of the local community. Finally, this recommendation would support every subset of Goal Two: To become a model student-ready university and narrow the achievement gap.

Future Considerations:

In the spirit of recommendations made regarding a reorganization and clarification of roles and responsibilities in Student Success and the most effective and synergistic placement of Disability Services in the university community, the Administrative Efficiencies Task Force recommends a thorough assessment of the organization structure of the university considering how we may best meet the needs of students amidst the continuous evolution of technology. This will position Fitchburg State University to embrace the opportunities to engage with both our present and our and future students.