

Optimizing Academic Degree Program Management: A Systematic Approach and Impact

Problem Statement: Higher education has an opportunity to provide greater transparency in its return on investment by developing a sustainable and systematic approach to academic degree program portfolio development and management, and it is possible to do so by meeting and maintaining external standards and requirements through consistent processes and documentation.

Abstract: University of Phoenix has an internal structure in which the university and its operations are more centralized and thus has an intentional balance between academic freedom and internal and external standards. The University Program Lifecycle (UPL) process, established over a decade ago, in 2012 provides the structure to maintain the University's focus on rigorous and meaningful, market-benchmarked academic offerings for students that align to real-world opportunities. Meeting the vision for a valid and thoughtful academic portfolio established a major milestone on the journey to fulfill the University's mission as the higher education environment around the university continued to change. Over the past decade, UPL coordinated stakeholders across multiple functional areas ranging from academic progr

across disciplines, thought leadership related to coordinating complex university processes, and contributing to the University's market differentiation through skills-aligned learning.

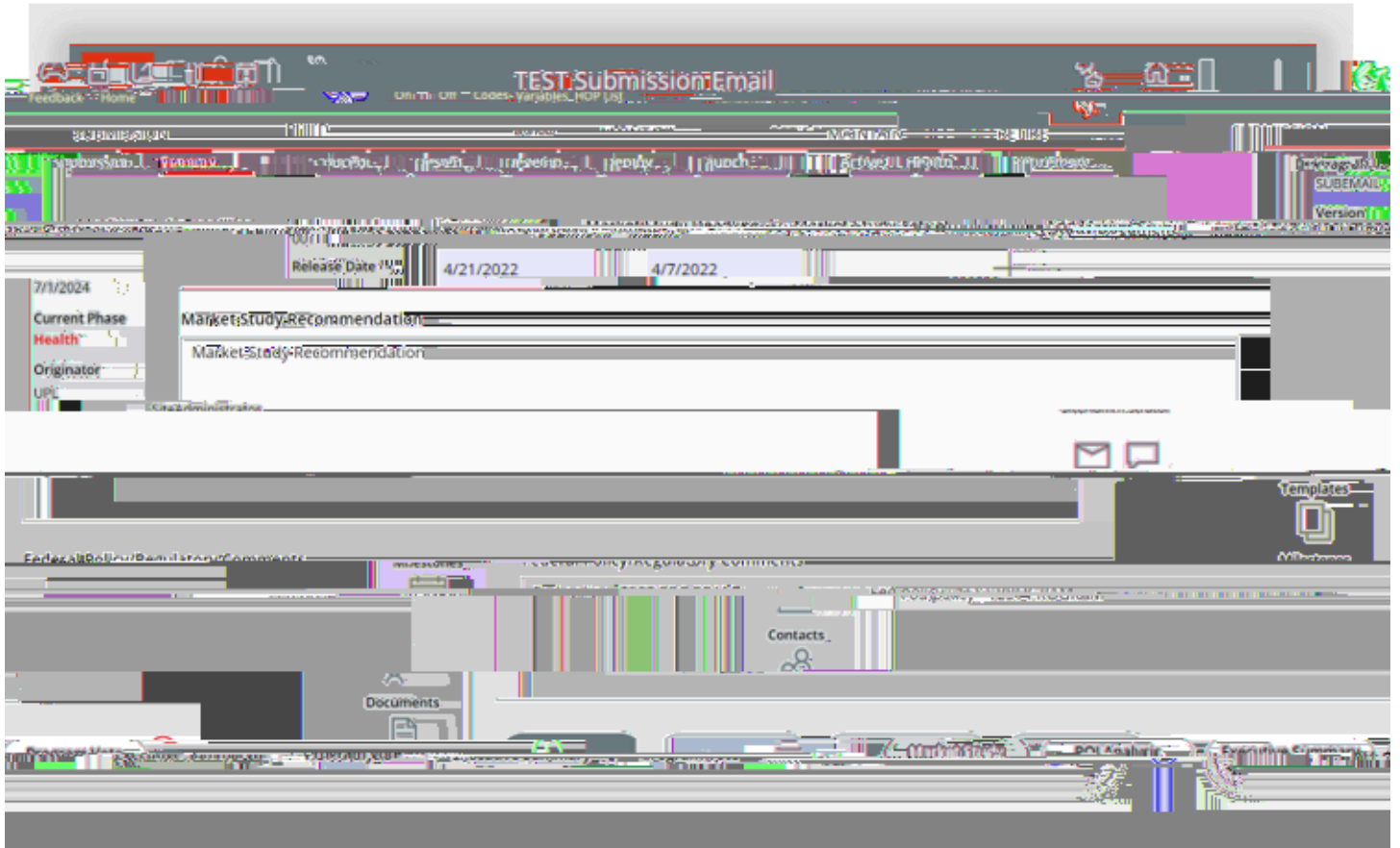
University of Phoenix is known for innovating to provide higher education through the online modality of learning for non-traditional students and adult learners. Reflecting the university's commitment to innovation, it has developed a unique approach to manage academic programs. The University Program Lifecycle (UPL) process has played a key role integrating skills effectively into academic programs. Microsoft Power Apps, a customized App used by UPL, provides a strategic and secure approach for academic leaders to b

quality, skill-aligned programs which have received the appropriate internal and external approvals,

UPL research requires that the College or academic dean select the intended Classification of Instructional Program (CIP), Standard Occupational Codes (SOC

The job posting analytics report allows for defined filters to pull job postings specific to a program's intended outcomes and the program to occupation selection. The data provided to the deans is

to ensure marketability and demand for the program. For new programs or requests to modify details on a program already licensed, this market study is repurposed and submitted to the state. The completed market study posts to UPL notifying the dean and the Federal Policy and Reporting team then explores the details to help identify any potential risks early.



The FP&A team uses the market study to conduct a return on investment (ROI) analysis, providing downstream stakeholders with the details necessary to prepare appropriately for growth and other operational needs.

The last step in viability is the executive summary and viability committee vote. The College dean uses the different analyses completed, the recommendations shared by the leaders within those departments, and all the completed research to provide a holistic summary addressing risks or concerns for the viability voting committee. The executive summary serves as a source and substantiation that the program concept is in fact viable based on different reviews. The committee that votes comprises leaders from across the key university functional areas: Academics, Marketing, Faculty, Financial Planning, Enrollment, Institutional Accreditation, and University Strategy. Brand-new program offerings require approval based on majority.

The Concept Phase aims to expand upon research and investment justification while also preparing for programmatic accreditation, professional licensure, and association approval or recognition. During this phase, the focus is on documenting the program's foundational methodology using

accreditation and programmatic information, as well as input from faculty and industry related SMEs connected to the Colleges.

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The official launch of a program signifies a major milestone in its active lifecycle. The responsibility falls upon the College dean to uphold the program's integrity by ensuring that its curriculum, content, skills, assessments, and materials stay relevant throughout its existence. To support program relevancy, in 2018, the UPL team formally implemented the Health of Program (HOP) process.

Health of Programs (HOP) has two types: Health Check or Program Review. The Health Check provides an effective

The Retire stage encompasses processes that allow the University to retire programs over time, including pre-retire planning, review processes for retirement, expiration, and obsolescence of programs. During the Retire stage, the institution ensures plans to teach out students in these programs enabling students in active attendance to complete their program even if it is in the Retire stage. The focus is on supporting current students in completing their academic goals in the current offering or if the student chooses, transitioning into the newest offered version and curriculum.

The University Program Lifecycle (UPL) process has consistently improved since it was established in 2012. In the beginning, it was a static process with minimal flexibility, but it structurally supported the development of programs. The build process was the first stage developed and deployed. In 2015, the team made improvements, and worked to incorporate MS SharePoint custom coding that created a program deployment dashboard generating stronger shared visibility across stakeholder groups. This work led to the development and deployment of the program retirement process in 2016, leading the way to 2018, when the program maintenance process deployed, encompassing the full lifecycle of the program management process. With a continued focus on supporting operational efficiency, mitigating institutional risk, and improving the student and stakeholder experience, in 2021, the UPL process incorporated Power Apps, a customizable product by Microsoft. The custom Power App provides the ability for internal documentation of the key program components and processes, which leads to a comprehensive repository of the program data, research, value proposition, and institutional alignment to its mission. The implementation of the Power App has created further empowerment for UPL stakeholders to partake in the process.



With a systematic process and focus on quality excellence, UPL has provided the University with support in successful execution of the below program launches, program reviews, retirements, and initiatives.

- Monitors and provides guidance and alignment across more than 100 active program offerings.
- Supported and aided in successfully releasing over 175 new and revised programs from 2016 to 2023.
- Administered over 275 program retirements from 2016 to 2023.
- Coordinated and initiated 300 Health of Programs from 2020 to 2023.
- Preserves over 3,000 supporting program documentation and artifacts.

The UPL process has consistently added value to the university's strategic goals, and the quality of its programs. UPL is a core process which feeds information and enables tools and resources for the entire university as a platform for continuous improvement.

The UPL team consistently provides unique insights on programs, provost strategies, and recommendations while focusing on embracing change and innovation. This specifically has led the way to support new large-scale initiatives, such as professional development offerings and the University's academic badge initiative.

The UPL process provided the structure to transition the academic program portfolio to the skills-mapped structure today. Since 2020, UPL provides core support for the process and structure needed to integrate skills into programs and courses by College leaders and the curriculum and assessment

teams. UPL provided a framework facilitated by the collaborative partnership built over the years with marketing research partners, university legal services, federal policy and reporting leaders.

The UPL process threads the university's mission and vision throughout the work and deliverables of managing academic programs, ensuring that each program meets internal as well as external standards and requirements and continuously improves. The robust UPL process described here represents the foundation for creating sustainable measures of operational efficiency in the university's program portfolio management. The UPL process and the teams that support it consistently demonstrate an emphasis on quality design, implementation, and improvement using sustainable measures mitigating institutional risk and improving the student and stakeholder experience.

The influence of UPL has gradually expanded over time as the process supports and drives newly developed initiatives and fosters ongoing process development. Each year the UPL process provides evidence of the work done across the institution to support accreditation criteria, student needs, faculty requirements and align to goals desired internally and externally for the institution. UPL will continue to support responsibility for consistent demonstration of quality academic programming aligned with institutional compliance in support of the growth and maintenance of the University's program and course portfolios. UPL provides the vehicle for incredible impacts, changes and thought leadership in higher education.

As University of Phoenix moves forward, the well-established process framework for UPL provides a poised approach to sustain and further elevate operational efficiency, ensuring responsible growth and maintenance of the institution while effectively mitigating risks associated with the program lifecycle.

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has been with University of Phoenix for 16 years and currently serves as the Senior Director Program Deployment, where she has leveraged her in-depth insights from her student support and process improvement background to develop, improve, and maintain the University Program Lifecycle (UPL) process. Halpern helps guide the evolution of the program lifecycle process at the institution to help ensure academic programs are aligned to external standards and regulations, as well as how they can be best leveraged using occupational codes and jobs to build an infrastructure to connect courses and programs to skills. Recognized as "Rookie of the Year" examiner award in 2017 from Southwest Alliance of Excellence (SWAE), Halpern also earned the 2017 President's Award from University of Phoenix for her contributions to the UPL process. She has served as a lead examiner for the SWAE and as a speaker on process improvement at regional and national conferences. Halpern has a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from Arizona State Univ