

The Academic Leadership Learning Collaborative Assists Franklin College in Examining the Viability of its Physical Education Program

Challenge:

Franklin College had launched a search process for a new department head for its undergraduate Physical Education program; however major questions regarding the quality and viability of the program were unresolved. While there were many stakeholders suggesting the program was of high quality and the market was strong, members of the leadership team were looking for evidence to support these claims.

Solution:

To provide Franklin College with the data they needed, the Academic Leadership Learning Collaborative (AL-LC) research team examined the market for physical education programs and trends in program curriculum through two methodologies:

- Interviews with relevant professional associations and physical education program directors.
- Review and analysis of secondary data sources for physical education programs

Results:

The research findings highlighted the need to restructure and update the current physical education curriculum. As a result Franklin College deferred the search for a new tenure-track faculty member until important changes in the curriculum were implemented.

About Franklin College:

Location: Franklin, IN

Carnegie Classification: Baccalaureate

Ownership: Private Institution

Size: 1,018 Undergraduate (2008)

About the Academic Leadership Learning Collaborative:

The AL-LC assists provosts and other senior academic leaders by providing data and insight to help increase managerial effectiveness at both a school and program level and help better measure and improve the success of students and faculty.

Identifying the Need for Hard Data

In the fall of 2008, Dr. David Brailow, the Vice President for Academic Affairs at Franklin College was facing a challenge. The department chair of the physical education program had recently retired and Dr. Brailow was supervising the search process to find a tenure-track replacement. A Search Committee had been formed, composed of the Head of the Education Division, faculty and staff. However as they had begun the search process, a series of key questions had emerged from other stakeholders, including the Athletic Director, regarding the design, relevancy and market demand of the current physical education program. While some department members suggested the market was adequate and the current design was appropriate, there was no evidence to support these assertions.

In the midst of this discussion, Franklin College had joined the Academic Leadership Learning Collaborative (AL-LC). Recognizing the need for hard data on this issue Dr. Brailow and other committee members quickly recommended that the search process be suspended while the AL-LC research team conducted a market and program analysis to provide them with the analysis and insights needed to base future decisions on this program.

Conducting a Program and Market Review

To help Franklin College better understand the market environment and trends in curriculum design for the physical education program, the AL-LC research team conducted research in several areas. First, data from the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) and the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) were analyzed to examine labor trends in physical education occupations and program offerings on a national level. Second, a series of interviews were conducted with physical education program directors and directors from the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) to develop insights on best practices in curriculum design and on trends and needs in the physical education field.

Research Findings Challenge Planning Assumptions

“This study was widely circulated across our campus, including the President’s Office. What we all realized after reviewing it was that we were looking at a product that we could never produce on our campus...in terms of thoroughness, quality, clarity and insight”

Dr. David Brailow
Vice President for Academic Affairs
Franklin College

The results of the research changed the direction of the search process and provided the evidence to support the need to make changes in the program curriculum. The interviews with program directors and officials from NASPE provided key insights reinforcing a need to revise the current curriculum. Specifically, the research illustrated that trends in physical education program design support a more holistic approach that incorporates wellness whereas traditional physical education programs have been activities-based, where students are evaluated on their competency in a series of sports activities. As Franklin College’s current program was based on the principles of traditional curriculum design this demonstrated that significant changes to the program were necessary.

In addition, the market environment data presented troubling news as it did not illustrate a significant demand for undergraduate physical education majors. However, the data also provided some positive news - Franklin College had begun to offer minors in coaching for physical education programs which the data suggested would lead to a stronger interest in the program and a more sustainable enrollment demand over time.

Search Halted; Changes Made in Program Curriculum

After sharing the research with the Search Committee, and the Department Faculty, the decision was made to halt the search process for a replacement faculty member until the necessary changes were made to the program itself. Said Brailow “When we looked at what the job description said and what the study revealed, it suggested to us that we really needed to go back and take a very serious look at the program and re-think what our goals were, and how we wanted the program to evolve”.

Included in the research report was a program viability model. The leadership team used this model to conduct a review of this program, examining key metrics of a program’s success including program quality, financial impact, market demand and mission fit. Dr. Brailow stated that using this model was extremely effective in ensuring the institution was doing its due diligence using a structured, responsible approach.

The evidence in the report provided the objective analysis that helped effect change and gain buy-in from faculty to move forward and implement the necessary and recommended changes to the program. One of the first changes made to the program design was an update in the basic course requirements that included methods courses for elementary, middle and secondary educational levels. To provide the institution with the appropriate amount of time to reflect and plan a new search process, a one-year faculty appointment has been made. This provided the leadership team with a window of time to make the program more contemporary in its design and focus and create a faculty job description that will help recruit the most qualified candidates for the revised program. The search for a tenure track faculty appointment will occur in the following year.