

Academic Program Viability Policy

The AHECB adopted program productivity standards in 1989 and established benchmarks of an average of 3 graduates per year over five years for undergraduate programs, 2 graduates per year for master's programs, and 1 graduate per year for doctoral programs. This policy revises those benchmark standards and renames them program viability standards.

Beginning in 2010, ADHE staff annually will identify existing certificate and degree programs that do not meet AHECB program viability standards. New certificates and associate degrees will be identified for program viability standards after three years, and bachelor's degrees and above will be identified after five years.

1. The viability standards, based on a three-year average, are as follows:
 - An average of four (4) graduates per year for career and technical education certificates (CTE) and career and technical associate degree programs (AAS);
 - An average of four (4) graduates per year for bachelor's degrees in science, mathematics, engineering, foreign languages, middle school education, and secondary education programs for licensure in science and mathematics;
 - An average of six (6) graduates per year for transfer associate degrees (AA, AS, and AAT) and bachelor's programs;
 - An average of four (4) graduates per year for master's, specialist and first-professional programs; and,
 - An average of two (2) graduates per year for doctoral programs.
2. Cognate, embedded, and related programs will be considered one program for program viability purposes.

Cognate (coupled) programs are supported primarily by courses existing in and for other (viable) programs and should be certified as such by the offering institution through the provision of documentation to ADHE.

Each institution will submit to ADHE a list, with justification, of the certificate and degree programs that the institution believes are cognate programs. Common CIP Code classifications should serve as the base premise for determining cognate programs. Shared courses across majors and program levels also will be considered. Electives, general education, and/or core courses will not be included in determining programs that can be considered cognate.

The ADHE Director will inform the campus president or chancellor of the programs that will be designated as cognate programs.

Awards of certificates that are embedded within an associate degree program will count toward program productivity standard. When calculating the three-year average of a degree program with embedded certificates, a student will only be counted once –either as certificate or an associate completer. If the highest award of an embedded program does not meet the graduate threshold and produces less than 50% of the graduates in the entire program (certificates and associate's degree), the highest award will be discontinued if the number of graduates does not meet the threshold within two years.

Programs that are required by programmatic accreditation to offer a higher-level award may seek an additional two-year exemption from the 50% highest-award-viability standard by providing evidence from the accreditor of the need for the higher credential and a program-specific enrollment management plan for meeting the threshold at the higher level.

Programs identified as below the viability threshold will have two (2) years to meet the threshold or will be removed from the AHECB approved program inventory.

ADHE will not include SSCHs generated by major courses of programs removed from the approved program inventory in its funding formula calculations. SSCHs removed from the formula will be for courses within a major/program of study that are not required within another major/program of study.

General education courses listed in the Arkansas Course Transfer System (ACTS) will not be subject to loss of funding.

3. Programs discontinued can be reinstated via the new program approval process. Evidence of curricular revision, market demand/analysis, and a student recruitment plan must be provided for each program being reconsidered.
4. When an academic program is identified as below the viability threshold, the institution may request that ADHE reconsider decisions that identified the program as a low viability program. If the request is based on suspected data submission errors, the institution must provide the source, nature, and extent of the data error.

Career and technical education programs (CTE) with low degree production may be reconsidered by providing specific evidence of market demand for students who do not complete the degree. Evidence must include a history of high job placement rates at high wages for non-completers.

Institutions may also request a reduction in the viability targets for specific academic programs that are crucial to the institution's role, scope and mission. Evidence must exist that students can graduate in a timely manner (courses needed to complete an associate, bachelors, or masters level programs are taught within a two year time frame and courses needed to compete a doctoral level program are taught within a three year time frame). Academic programs with a

reduced viability threshold will be monitored based upon the revised threshold. The need for a reduced viability target will be reconsidered after five years.

Institutions submitting programs for reconsideration must follow the appeals process established by the ADHE staff in collaboration with the chief academic officers.