

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

WHY HAS SOU RELEASED THE VITALITY PLAN?

Southern Oregon University has released the Vitality Plan to address financial challenges and ensure the long-term sustainability of the university while continuing to serve students and the region. Like many public universities across the country, SOU is facing declining enrollment trends, rising operating costs, increased competition, and long-term funding challenges.

The Vitality Plan is designed to:

1. Strengthen the university's financial stability for the long term
2. Redesign the university's structure to best serve students and workforce needs
3. Improve how we operate and use resources
4. Define a clear, innovative, student-centered path forward
5. Support a long-term sustainable future for SOU and the region

IS THE VITALITY PLAN THE SAME AS THE DELOITTE PLAN?

No.

The Deloitte work served as an important analytical and consulting foundation for the process, particularly in identifying structural financial challenges and operational opportunities. However, the SOU Vitality Plan reflects the university's own decisions and priorities.

University leadership, faculty, staff, governance groups, and stakeholders reviewed, evaluated, modified, and prioritized recommendations over many months. Some Deloitte recommendations were adopted directly, some were adapted significantly, and others were not pursued.

The final Vitality Plan reflects SOU's values, mission, academic identity, regional role, and long-term strategic priorities.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR CURRENT STUDENTS?

The Vitality Plan reflects SOU's unique identity. Our university will continue to offer many educational pathways to minimize the impact to current students. We highly encourage all current SOU students to continue working toward their degrees, and we stand ready to assist.

If a program is affected, the university will work directly with students to ensure they have a clear and supported path to completion.

ARE ACADEMIC PROGRAMS GOING TO BE ELIMINATED?

There are three academic programs that will sunset. These include:

Human Service

The elimination of the Human Service program reflects a difficult but necessary realignment of institutional resources. We recognize the value this program has held for students and the community it has served. Importantly, related pathways remain available: Sociology/Anthropology (SOAN) and Psychology both continue, and we are pleased to introduce a new Pre-Counseling certificate. Rogue Community College will continue to offer the Associate of Arts degree in Human Service during the transition. In the months ahead, we will reassess regional needs with the goal of rebuilding programming, potentially in a new format, that allows us to continue meeting community demand in a sustainable way.

Music Industry and Production

While the Music Industry and Production program will be discontinued in its current form, we remain committed to our outstanding music offerings. The Music major and many of its connected ancillary programs will be retained, though the curriculum must be streamlined to ensure long-term viability. We will also maintain a significant presence in emerging media and design and in digital cinema, preserving meaningful creative pathways for our students.

Financial Mathematics

The discontinuation of the Financial Mathematics program allows us to concentrate resources within a strong, cohesive suite of offerings in Mathematics and Computer Science. Students will continue to have access to robust pathways including Applied Economics, Applied Mathematics, Data Analytics, and Computer Science.

Again, there are pathways for students in these majors. Students in these programs will be contacted directly by our Dean of Students Office.

WHAT WILL THE VITALITY PLAN MEAN FOR A FUTURE SOU?

The Vitality Plan proposes a new mission that codifies the Rogue Valley as the literal pedagogical classroom, structural mentorship as the delivery method, and practical, experiential portfolio work as the mandatory curriculum.

A proposed new vision clearly places SOU at the center of what a regional institution can look like in the changing higher education landscape. *Southern Oregon University will be the country's defining model of what a regional public university can be: small by choice, distinctive by design, financially resilient, and rooted in place, where every student graduates with real work, real mentors, and human capacities that no machine can replicate.*

IS THIS SIMPLY A PLAN FOR A SMALLER UNIVERSITY?

No. The Vitality Plan will serve as a roadmap to achieve fiscal solvency by the summer of 2027 through a profound restructuring of SOU's core identity. Rather than managing a smaller, diminished version of a generic regional university, the plan explicitly pivots SOU toward becoming a highly distinctive, place-based institution.

We intend to transform into an institution that:

1. Intentionally **connects to the communities** we serve using a bioregional approach
2. Provides **streamlined pathways** to degree completion in every academic discipline
3. Offers **flexible options** for students through innovative, interdisciplinary academic design models
4. Incorporates a **human-connected approach** to education that is cognizant of the rapid pace of emerging technologies

DID SOU TAKE COMMUNITY FEEDBACK INTO CONSIDERATION?

Absolutely. Community input played an important role in shaping the Vitality Plan, creating agency in the final plan.

Community engagement and shared governance feedback were central to the development of the Vitality Plan. Over several months, the university gathered feedback through:

- Open forums and listening sessions
- Written feedback opportunities
- Recommendations through the Academic Portfolio Work Group
- Recommendations through the Administrative Footprint Work Group
- Recommendations through the Student Work Group
- Consultation with the Transformation Advisory Committee
- Meetings with individual campus colleagues
- Input from community organizations and individuals
- Consultation with union leaders and shared governance organizations
- Review of some 1,000 comments and recommendations generated during the process

Not every suggestion could be incorporated, and difficult decisions were unavoidable. However, the final plan reflects substantial refinement based on the feedback received.

HOW MANY STAFF FTE POSITIONS WILL BE ELIMINATED?

The Vitality Plan includes 65.65 FTE reductions in staffing levels across the campus to better align expenses with available resources. Position eliminations include those in the faculty, unclassified, and classified ranks. These decisions were based on the following:

- Reorganization of functions
- Operational streamlining
- Academic portfolio revisions
- Ability for self-sustaining revenue generation

University leaders recognize the human impact of these decisions. The Vitality Plan is marked by difficult but existentially necessary downsizing in order to live within our institutional means.

Additional information regarding implementation timelines and support resources for affected employees has already been and will continue to be shared directly with impacted individuals and campus constituencies, and in consultation with union partners for faculty and classified staff.

WILL FACULTY POSITIONS BE AFFECTED?

Yes. The Provisional Plan identifies 22.67 FTE faculty reductions.

The university remains deeply committed to maintaining a strong foundation of interdisciplinary education, meaningful student-faculty engagement, and high-quality academic experiences. The goal is to better align programs with student demand and long-term sustainability while maintaining strong academic quality.

WILL ADMINISTRATIVE AND STAFF POSITIONS AND FUNCTIONS BE AFFECTED?

Yes. The Vitality Plan identifies a reduction of 20.45 FTE unclassified positions and 22.50 FTE classified positions across administrative offices and auxiliary programs.

The Vitality Plan introduces several high-level administrative adjustments to compress the university's non-instructional footprint. It also resolves critical operational data deficiencies by merging several of its business services functions into a centralized Business Intelligence Office. Similarly, Information Technology will be compressed under a Chief Information Officer/Chief Information Security Officer (CIO/CISO). In Student Affairs, the university is dismantling the decentralized support matrix that previously embedded individual Student Success Coordinators (SSCs) within isolated academic schools.

For athletics, the goal is to move away from dependence on transfers from the university's Education and General Fund and toward self-sustainable by the start of FY 2029.

HOW WILL SOU GUARANTEE FINANCIAL STABILITY?

No university can guarantee financial stability in today's higher education environment. However, this plan is designed to significantly strengthen SOU's long-term financial position by:

- Substantially reducing longstanding structural deficits
- Aligning expenditures with realistic revenue projections
- Improving operational efficiency
- Substantially reorganizing longstanding operational silos to create data and financial transparency
- Strengthening enrollment and retention strategies
- Expanding external partnerships and fundraising
- Positioning the university for strategic growth opportunities

The university will continue to monitor financial performance closely and make adjustments as necessary. The Vitality Plan is intended to create a more adaptable, resilient institution capable of navigating future challenges successfully.

WILL SOU CONTINUE TO RELY ON STATE SUPPORT?

Yes. Continued partnership with and support from the State of Oregon remains important to SOU's future. We will continue working with legislators and the Higher Education Coordinating Commission as we implement this plan. SOU continues to advocate strongly for equitable public investment in higher education and for recognition of the university's significant economic, workforce, and cultural impact across Southern Oregon.

The university is grateful for the support of legislators, community leaders, alumni, donors, students, faculty, and staff who continue to advocate for SOU's future, which means a healthy future for southern Oregon.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Following the release of the Vitality Plan, the university will begin phased implementation over the coming year.

Implementation will include:

- Detailed operational planning
- Ongoing communication with campus stakeholders
- Shared governance consultation where appropriate
- Monitoring of financial and enrollment metrics
- Periodic public progress updates

University leaders recognize that implementation will require continued collaboration, transparency, and adaptability along with our shared governance and union colleagues. We plan to appoint a project director to directly focus on implementation.

WHAT REMAINS UNCHANGED AT SOU?

SOU remains deeply committed to providing a personalized, transformative public university education rooted in community and focused on the future. While the university must adapt to changing realities, those things that are at the core of SOU's mission remain unchanged:

- Student success
- Academic excellence
- Community connection and engagement
- Access and opportunity
- Creativity and innovation
- Belonging and inclusion
- Service to Southern Oregon and beyond

WHEN WILL THE PLAN GO INTO EFFECT?

The Vitality Plan will go into effect upon approval of a Final Plan by the SOU Board of Trustees.