

Tennessee Higher Education Commission
Revised Policy - Academic Proposals

Approved: November 14, 2002

Section Title: Academic Policies

Policy Title: Academic Proposals

Policy Number: A1.0

General

1.0.10 **Scope and Purpose.** In accordance with Chapter 179 of the Legislative Act creating the Higher Education Commission in 1967, the Commission has the statutory responsibility to review and approve new academic programs, off-campus extensions of existing academic programs, new academic units and new instructional locations for public institutions of higher education in the State of Tennessee. These responsibilities shall be exercised so as to:

- promote academic quality
- maximize cost effectiveness and efficiency to ensure that the benefits to the state outweigh the costs and that existing programs are adequately supported
- fulfill student demand, employer need and societal requirements
- avoid and eliminate unnecessary duplication to ensure that proposed programs cannot be delivered through collaboration or alternative arrangements
- encourage cooperation among all institutions, both public and private

In order to ensure that these responsibilities are optimized, the Commission strenuously considers the following criteria in order to maximize state resources:

Need – evidence of program need that justifies institutional allocation/reallocation of state resources. Please refer to proposal format for criteria.

Program Costs/Revenues – evidence that program costs may be met from internal reallocation or from other sources, such as grants and gifts, instead of being met from additional Formula dollars will be viewed favorably. Institutional commitment

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should be consistent with the centrality and level of priority as described in the program proposal.

Quality – evidence should be provided based on required criteria that are identified on forms for new program proposals.

1.0.20 **Schedule.** The Commission will normally consider proposals for new programs, extensions of existing academic programs, academic units, and instructional locations only at its July and January meetings; however, in special circumstances, consideration may be given at other Commission meetings.

1.0.30 **Action.** Commission action on a given proposal must follow approval by the governing board and may take one of four forms:

- approval
- disapproval
- conditional approval
- deferral

Conditional approval may be granted in special cases. This type of approval is reserved for programs for which the need is temporary. Conditional approvals will identify a date that the program must be terminated.

1.0.40 **Funding.** Evidence must be provided on forms for approval of new academic programs relative to internal reallocation and/or other sources such as grants and gifts must be validated. The Commission will approve no special start-up funding (See 1.0.10, Program Costs/Revenue).

1.0.50 **Early Consultation/Notification.**

Upon consideration by an institution to develop a proposal for a new program, governing board staffs must provide the Commission staff with a copy of that institution's letter of intent to develop a program proposal. Programs that institutions intend to develop should be consistent with and reference the campus master plan or academic plan. This is necessary for programs requiring Commission approval in order to identify issues relative to the need for the program, program duplication, accessibility through collaboration or alternative means of delivery (distance education) and the need for reviews by external consultants.

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Upon consultation and approval to proceed, governing board staffs must share early versions of proposals with the Commission staff and provide the final proposal at least two weeks prior to notification of being placed on the agenda for consideration by a governing board (See also 1.1.20A in Policy A1.1 - New Programs).

- 1.0.60 **Articulation/Transfer.** Upon consideration of a new baccalaureate program, evidence must be provided to ensure adherence to the requirements of Chapter 795 of the Public Acts of 2000. “The university track program within the University of Tennessee and the Tennessee Board of Regents systems consists of general education courses and pre-major courses as prescribed by the Commission. Courses in the university track program shall transfer and apply toward the requirements for graduation with a bachelor’s degree at all public universities. Successful completion of the university track program shall meet the academic requirement for transfer to a public university as a junior.”
- 1.1.60A **Time to Degree.** The Commission recommends that credit hour requirements for new and existing undergraduate academic programs shall not be substantially more than 120 hours for baccalaureate degrees or 60 hours for associate degrees without justification. The principle intent is to reduce the time and costs of earning a degree for individual students and taxpayers and, over time, improve graduation rates and increase the higher educational attainment levels of Tennesseans. This excludes programs with accreditation or licensure requirements.
- 1.1.70 **Announcements.** Announcements of plans for new academic programs, extensions of existing programs, new academic units, and/or new instructional locations must await Commission approval, prior to implementation.

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New Programs

- 1.1.10 **Programs Subject to Approval.** New academic programs requiring Commission approval are those that differ from currently approved programs in level of degree or major offered, as reflected in the institution's catalog and the Commission's academic inventory, subject to specified provisions. A standard format is required to ensure that all proposals for new academic programs are submitted in a complete and consistent manner.
- 1.1.10A **Non-degree and non-certificate programs.** Commission approval is not required for non-degree and non-certificate programs, such as those offered at State Technology Centers.
- 1.1.10B **Undergraduate Certificates.** Commission approval for an undergraduate certificate program is required only when the program would be both free standing and consists of at least 24 semester hours.
- 1.1.10C **(Reserved)**
- 1.1.10D **Name Changes.** Renaming an existing program without an essential change in the originally approved curriculum does not require Commission approval; planned large-scale curriculum change in a program without a name change does require Commission approval.
- 1.1.10E **Reconfigurations.** A reconfiguration of existing programs without an essential change in the originally approved curriculum and without a net gain in the number of programs (e.g., a consolidation of two programs into one) does not require Commission approval.
- 1.1.10F **Sub-majors.** Additions, deletions, and revisions of sub-majors (options, concentrations emphases, tracks, etc.) without an essential change in the originally approved major curriculum do not require Commission approval.

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- 1.1.10G **Notice.** Before governing board consideration of the changes described in Provisions 1.1.10A - 1.1.10F above, a two-week notice should be given to the Commission staff. In the event the staff interprets the proposed change as one requiring Commission approval, prompt arrangements will be made to discuss the proposed change with the institution and its governing board staff for a determination of applicable policy.
- 1.1.10H **Special Areas.** For programs at baccalaureate or higher level in Agriculture, Education, and Engineering where there is great potential for unnecessary program duplication, no additional programs may be submitted for approval without exceptional determination of need. Such need must be demonstrated to and approved by governing board and Commission staff before the proposal or development of any new programs in these three areas.
- 1.1.20 **Criteria for Review.** The criteria set out in Provisions 1.1.20A - 1.1.20Q will generally be used in reviewing new program proposals. However, the stringency of individual criteria will depend on the specific program, and, in particular circumstances, other criteria may be added at the time of notification (see 1.0.050).

References to provisions of certain institutional policies, such as overall admissions standards, do not mean that such policies need to be approved by the Commission.

- 1.1.20A **Mission.** Proposed new programs must adhere to the role and scope as set forth in the approved mission of the institution.
- 1.1.20B **Curriculum.** The curriculum should be adequately structured to meet the stated objectives of the program, and reflect breadth, depth, theory, and practice appropriate to the discipline and the level of the degree. The undergraduate curriculum should also include a limited number of courses to satisfy General Education requirements and should be compatible with accreditation, where applicable, and meet the criteria for articulation and transfer (see 1.0.60).

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- 1.1.20C **Academic Standards.** The admission, retention, and graduation standards should be clearly stated, be compatible with institutional and governing board policy, and encourage high quality.
- 1.1.20D **Faculty.** Current and/or anticipated faculty resources should ensure a program of high quality. The number and qualifications of faculty should meet existing institutional standards and should be consistent with external standards, where appropriate.
- 1.1.20E **Library Resources.** Current and/or anticipated library resources should be adequate to support a high quality program and should meet recognized standards for study at a particular level or in a particular field where such standards are available.
- 1.1.20F **Administration/Organization.** The organizational placement and the administrative responsibility for the program should be clearly defined and designed to promote success of the program.
- 1.1.20G **Support Resources.** All other support resources--existing and/or anticipated, should be adequate to support a high quality program. This would include clear statements of clerical personnel or equipment needs, and arrangements for clinical or other affiliations necessary for the program.
- 1.1.20H **Facilities.** Existing and/or anticipated facilities should be adequate to support a high quality program. New and/or renovated facilities required to implement the program should be clearly outlined by amount and type of space, costs identified and source of costs. (Facility Master Plans F4.1)
- 1.1.20I **Need and Demand.** Evidence should be provided that a proposed new program contributes to meeting the priorities/goals of the institution's academic or master plan, why the institution needs that program, and why the state needs graduates from that particular program.

Student Demand. Evidence of student demand, normally in the form of surveys of potential students and enrollment in related programs at the institution, should be adequate to expect a reasonable level of productivity.

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Employer Need/Demand. Evidence of sufficient employer demand/need, normally in the form of anticipated openings in an appropriate service area (that may be national, regional, or local), in relation to existing production of graduates for that service area. Evidence may include the results of a need assessment, employer surveys, current labor market analyses, and future workforce projections. Where appropriate, evidence should also demonstrate societal need and employers' preference for graduates of the proposed program over persons having alternative existing credentials and employers' willingness to pay higher salaries to graduates of the proposed program.

- 1.1.20J **No Unnecessary Duplication.** Where other similar programs may serve the same potential student population, evidence should demonstrate that the proposed program is sufficiently different from the existing programs or that access to the existing programs is sufficiently limited to warrant initiation of a new program. The proposal should explain why it is more cost effective or otherwise in the best interests of the State to initiate a new program rather than meet the demand through other arrangements. (E.g., collaborative means with another institution distance education technologies, Academic Common Market, consortia).
- 1.1.20K **Cooperating Institutions.** For programs needing the cooperation of other institutions (including government, education, health, and business), evidence of the willingness of these institutions to participate is required.
- 1.1.20L **Desegregation.** The program should not impede the state's effort to achieve racial diversity. A statement should be provided as to how the proposed program would enhance racial diversity.
- 1.1.20M **Assessment/Evaluation and Accreditation.** Evidence should be provided to demonstrate that careful evaluation of the program being proposed would be undertaken periodically. Information must be provided to indicate the schedule for program assessments or evaluations, (including program reviews associated with Performance Funding) those responsible for conducting them, and how the results are to be used. Where appropriate, professional organizations that accredit programs should be identified and any substantive change that may require a SACS review should be indicated.

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1.1.200 **Graduate Programs.** New graduate programs will be evaluated according to the principles set forth by the Tennessee Council of Graduate Schools.

1.1.200 **External Judgment.** The Commission staff may, in consultation with the governing board staffs, determine that review by an external authority is required before framing a recommendation to the Commission. Consultants will normally be required for new graduate programs. Consultants will not normally be required for new undergraduate and certificate programs, but there may be exceptions in cases of large cost or marked departure from existing programs at the institution.

1.1.20P **Cost/Benefit.** The benefit to the state should outweigh the cost of the program. Institutions should, in the program proposal, estimate the effect on funding caused by the implementation of the program. Detailed costs should be provided on forms required for consideration of new undergraduate and graduate programs (see 1.0.10, Program Costs/Revenues). These details should include reallocation plans, grants, gifts or other external sources of funding/partnerships.

1.1.30 **Post Approval Monitoring.** During the first five years (three years for pre-baccalaureate programs) following approval, performance of the program, based on goals established in the proposal, will be evaluated annually. At the end of this period, campus, governing board, and Commission staff will perform a summative evaluation. These goals will include, but not be limited to, enrollment and graduation numbers, program cost, progress toward accreditation, library acquisitions, student performance, and other goals set by the institution and agreed to by governing board and Commission staff. As a result of this evaluation, if the program is deficient, the Commission may recommend to the governing board that the program be terminated. Copies of such recommendation will be forwarded to the Education Committees of the General Assembly. The Commission may also choose to extend this period if additional time is needed and is requested by the governing board.

1.1.30A **Schedule.** At the July Commission meeting the Commission will review post approval reports on programs that have recently received approval.

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- 1.1.30B **Unfulfilled Productivity.** Institutions with programs that fall markedly short of projected goals as approved in program proposals, should submit, through their governing boards, an explanation of the shortfall and a discussion of the future expectations to accompany program progress reports.
- 1.1.30C **Further Action.** The Commission may request the governing board to take action on any program that is performing significantly below projections.