

New Academic Program Approval

The approval of new academic programs is one of the main responsibilities of state higher education coordinating boards. Reasons for approving new academic programs at the state level include determination of quality maintenance or improvement, need and demand, consistency with institutional mission, unnecessary duplication, cost efficiency and effectiveness, and consumer protection.

1. Background

Before postsecondary education reform, institutions notified the Council's predecessor, the Council on Higher Education (CHE), semi-annually of new programs under development. The institution then submitted a program proposal and a two-page executive summary after the proposal had completed all institutional approvals. Staff performed the preliminary review; a Programs Committee made up of CHE members had an active role in the review and approval of programs; and the full CHE acted upon the staff and Programs Committee recommendations.

In January 1995, staff suspended preliminary reviews as CHE members assumed a greater role in the review of new academic programs. In November 1997, the newly formed Council on Postsecondary Education (the Council) directed staff to review academic program policies. Until the new policies were established, staff was to consider a new academic program only if it documented an immediate, critical need.

KRS 164.003 links academic programming to economic development and emphasizes academic and fiscal responsibility. In light of this, a November 1997 Council agenda item posed this question: "What programs should be offered by which institutions and at what locations in order to provide appropriate access to quality programs for the citizens of the Commonwealth in the most efficient manner possible?"

The Council streamlined its academic policies at its September 1998 meeting by directing staff to develop new procedures that "enable institutions to respond quickly to changing market demands and place primary responsibility for quality assurance with institutional governing boards, within broad systemwide guidelines that address statewide needs and protect consumer interests."

As a first step in streamlining, in April 1999 the Council delegated to the KCTCS Board of Regents program approval authority for new certificate, diploma, associate in arts, associate in science, associate in applied science, and associate in applied technology degree programs at the KCTCS institutions. This delegation was reaffirmed in November 2000.

At the November 1999 meeting, the Council devolved its approval authority for new academic programs within designated program bands to each institution's governing board while retaining approval authority in the following areas:

- First-professional programs.
- Engineering programs at the comprehensive institutions and engineering programs at the doctoral level at the University of Kentucky and the University of Louisville.
- Teacher and school personnel preparation programs.
- Health-related programs above the baccalaureate level.
- Associate degree programs at the four-year institutions.
- Other programs falling outside each institution's negotiated program band.

An institution's approval authority for a new program depended on whether the program fell within its band. Proposals for new academic programs within an institution's program band were subject to a six-week public review by the chief academic officers of Kentucky's public institutions, the president of the Association of Independent Kentucky Colleges and Universities, and others. If there were no significant problems with the proposal after the six-week period, the institution was allowed to complete its internal process of program approval and subsequently implement the program without full Council approval.

In January 2000, the Council approved program bands for each four-year university. An institution's program band was based on its mission, existing programs, and disciplinary strengths. An institution or the Council could seek reconsideration of an institution's band at a later date if the nature, emphasis, or strength of its existing programs changed.

After a decade of operating under the streamlined policy, Council staff, after consulting with the institutions, determined it was time to review and update the program approval policy. Staff worked with representatives from each institution over the course of several months in 2010 and 2011 to review the policy and make changes that would provide staff with better information about proposed programs in order to make more informed decisions.

As part of this update, the following evaluation criteria, policy, and procedures will guide the approval of new academic programs.

2. Policy

- a. Institutions will notify the Council semi-annually of any new programs that they intend to develop on their campuses within three years of the notification. However, failure to notify the Council of intent to develop a program will not preclude an institution from undergoing the new academic program approval process.
- b. The academic program approval process consists of two stages. In the pre-proposal stage, institutions provide Council staff, among other information, justification for creating a new program; validation for creating a stand-alone program if similar programs already exist; and evidence that the program is aligned with an institution's mission, the state's postsecondary education Strategic Agenda, and the statewide strategic implementation plan. If Council staff approves the pre-proposal, the institution may submit a more in-depth program proposal. In the proposal stage, the institution submits a full program proposal that has been approved by the institutional governing board.

- c. An institution may not submit a pre-proposal or proposal unless it has achieved automatic eligibility status, or has obtained the appropriate waiver, under 13 KAR 2:060.
- d. Institutions should submit a pre-proposal to Council staff. Upon approval of the pre-proposal, the institution has up to 18 months to submit a full proposal to the Council. The full proposal should be approved by the institution's governing board before submission to the Council.
- e. After a program is approved by the Council, an institution has up to five years to implement the program. After that, the program must undergo the new program approval process.
- f. If a program has been suspended for fewer than five years, an institution may reinstate the program by notifying the Council staff.
- g. If a program has been suspended for five years, it will be closed.
- h. If a program has been closed and an institution wants to reopen the program, an institution must complete the new program approval process.
- i. Institutions may not advertise to the public or publish in institutional catalogs a new academic program prior to approval by the Council.
- j. The Council reserves the right to create special program approval processes for programs that require extraordinary consideration, such as responding to legislative requirements and administrative regulations.

Credential Programs

- a. Certain types of undergraduate (pre-baccalaureate) certificates require Council approval. Institutions proposing new postsecondary certificates of at least one but fewer than two academic years and postsecondary certificates of at least two but fewer than four academic years must complete the pre-proposal stage only.
 - i. Postsecondary certificates of less than one academic year do not require Council approval. However, institutions shall notify Council staff on a quarterly basis of all new postsecondary certificates of less than one academic year.
- b. Proposals for new graduate certificates require Council approval. Institutions proposing new graduate certificates must complete the pre-proposal stage only.
 - i. For graduate certificates that do not meet the definitions of post-baccalaureate certificate, post-master's certificate, or first professional certificate, institutions shall notify Council staff on a quarterly basis of any new certificate programs that do not require Council approval.

Degree Programs

- a. Proposals for new associate degree programs not of a vocational-technical-occupational nature from KCTCS must undergo the program approval process (e.g., AA or AS).
- b. Pre-proposals for new associate degree programs not of a vocational-technical-occupational nature from comprehensive and research institutions must be reviewed by the KCTCS Board of Regents. If KCTCS determines that a community and technical college(s) in the proposing institution's area of geographic responsibility (1) does not have an interest in creating a similar program and (2) does not have the ability to implement the program in a more cost-efficient and effective manner, then the proposing institution should submit a full proposal for a new undergraduate program to the Council and will not be subject to the pre-proposal stage.
 - i. If KCTCS can demonstrate, through a pre-proposal, that a community or technical college in the proposing institution's area of geographic responsibility will implement a similar program within one year and can do so more efficiently and effectively than the proposing institution, this is a basis for Council denial of the proposed program at the comprehensive or research institution.
 - ii. If the proposing institution provides evidence that KCTCS will not create a similar program and/or cannot provide it in a more efficient and cost-effective manner, the Council may approve the program.
- c. Proposals for new bachelor's degree programs must undergo the program approval process.
- d. Proposals for new master's degree programs must undergo the program approval process.
- e. Proposals for new specialist degree programs above the master's degree must undergo the program approval process.
- f. Proposals for new doctoral degree programs must undergo the program approval process.
- g. For new collaborative or joint programs that involve development of a new academic program, a "Memorandum of Understanding" that clearly outlines program responsibilities and fiscal arrangements among participating institutions must be developed and approved concurrently with the program proposal at each institution and must be submitted with the final program proposal when it is submitted to the Council.
 - i. If any partner institution does not currently offer the academic program, that institution must undergo the new academic program approval process.
 - iii. If two or more institutions create a collaborative or joint program with academic programs that have already been approved at each institution, then the new collaborative or joint program does not need to undergo the new academic program process. The institutions should notify the Council of the arrangement and provide a copy of the "Memorandum of Understanding."

- h. If two academic programs are combined into one program, this constitutes a major academic program modification. The combined program will be considered a new academic program and must follow the policy and procedures related to new academic programs only if it requires a new CIP code (two-, four-, or six-digit level) to describe accurately the discipline of the combined program.
- i. If an existing academic program is separated into two or more academic programs, this constitutes a major academic program modification. At least one of the separated programs is considered a new academic program and must follow the policy and procedures related to new academic programs. The other program will not be considered a new academic program if the same CIP code remains the best disciplinary descriptor of the program.
- j. The combination of core courses within any major or area and core courses within a track or concentration should equal at least half of the credit hours required by the major or area at the undergraduate and master's levels. Exceptions to this policy will be made for individualized programs that vary depending on a student's previous education, training, and experience and what the institution determines a student needs to complete a degree program. Exceptions will also be made when curriculum requirements are mandated by a specialized accrediting agency or upon approval of other rationale presented by the institution.
- k. Advanced practice doctorates shall be approved pursuant to KRS 164.295. As required by KRS 164.295 (3), the criteria for approval includes a determination of the academic and workforce needs for a program, consideration of whether the program can be effectively delivered through a collaborative effort with an existing program at another public university within the Commonwealth, and the capacity of a university to effectively offer the program. A university requesting approval of an advanced practice doctoral program shall be required to provide assurance that funding for the program will not impair funding of any existing similar program at any other public university. Proposed applied doctorates should build upon a high-quality master's degree offered by the institution. Institutions must demonstrate that advanced practice doctorates are necessitated by new practice requirements or licensure in the profession and/or requirements by specialized accrediting agencies. Institutions should also demonstrate that a new advanced practice doctorate will not negatively impact undergraduate education.

Programs of a Vocational-Technical-Occupational Nature

- a. Pre-proposals for new undergraduate (pre-baccalaureate) certificate and diploma programs of a vocational-technical-occupational nature at all postsecondary institutions must be reviewed by the KCTCS Board of Regents before submission to the Council for approval. The KCTCS Board of Regents must evaluate these proposals using all components of the pre-proposal form for undergraduate programs. If approved, the proposing institution may submit the pre-proposal to the Council. A full proposal is not required. If the KCTCS Board of Regents does not approve the program, the proposing institution may appeal to the Council and Council staff will decide how to proceed.

- b. As required by KRS 164.020 (15), the Council will expedite the approval of requests from the KCTCS Board of Regents relating to new certificate, diploma, technical, or associate degree programs of a vocational-technical-occupational nature. The Council will expedite this approval process by waiving the full proposal process for these types of programs. These types of programs require a pre-proposal only.

3. Procedures

Pre-Proposal Stage

Institutions must pre-post a proposed program on the Kentucky Postsecondary Program Proposal System (KPPPS) after it has been approved at the college level. Pre-posting a program upon initial approval at the college level allows more time for institutions to share information and create collaborative arrangements, including articulation agreements with KCTCS institutions.

As part of the pre-proposal, information about the program should be posted to KPPPS including:

- i. CIP code, program name, and degree level.
- ii. Proposed implementation date.
- iii. Program description and objectives and their consistency with institutional mission, statewide postsecondary education strategic plan, and the statewide strategic implementation plan.
- iv. Intended student learning outcomes and preliminary assessment plan.
- v. Justification, including a preliminary needs assessment.
- vi. Relationship with other programs within the institution.
- vii. Relationship with programs at other institutions.¹
- viii. Course delivery methods.
- ix. Faculty qualifications and resources.
- x. Preliminary cost estimates.

If the proposed program is an advanced practice doctorate, additional information will be required on:

- i. Availability of clinical sites (if applicable).
- ii. Feeder programs within the institution.
- iii. New practice, licensure, or accreditation requirements.
- iv. Impact on undergraduate education.

¹ Before submitting a pre-proposal, proposing institutions must contact institutions with similar programs, as defined by CIP and degree level, to initiate discussions about the possibilities for collaborative or joint programs. Similar programs can be identified through the Council's Registry of Degree Programs, also known as the program inventory. The program inventory can be found on the Council's website at <http://dataportal.cpe.ky.gov/AcadProg.shtm>.

After posting this information to KPPPS, the chief academic officers, or their designees, of other public institutions and Council staff will have 45 days to review and comment on the proposed program. If there are no unresolved objections to the proposed program, the Council staff will notify the institution that it may continue the process for developing the program. The institution should submit a full proposal, which has been approved by the institutional governing board, to the Council within 18 months of the approval of the pre-proposal.

If another institution or the Council staff expresses concerns about the proposed program, the Council staff will decide how best to proceed. In doing so, the Council staff may require additional information and may request review by the chief academic officers of public institutions. If additional information is requested, the proposing institution must submit that information within 30 days of the request.

After concerns have been resolved, the Council staff will notify the institution that it may complete the next stage of the academic program approval process. If those concerns cannot be fully resolved to the Council's satisfaction, the Council staff will inform the institution that the institution should not proceed with its internal process of program approval.

Proposal Stage

In the proposal stage, the institution submits a full program proposal that has been approved by the institutional governing board. Upon successful completion of the pre-proposal stage, institutions have up to 18 months to submit a proposal. If applicable, the proposal should address concerns and any possibilities for collaboration with other institutions that arose during the pre-proposal process. The proposal should address the following elements:

- i. Centrality to the institution's mission and consistency with the state's postsecondary education goals.
- ii. Program quality and student success issues.
- iii. Program demand and unnecessary duplication.
- iv. Cost and funding sources.
- v. Program review and assessment.

A principal purpose of the full proposal is to establish the criteria against which future program reviews will be gauged. Comments on the full proposal from other institutions will generally not be solicited by the Council; however, the Council reserves the right to confer with institutions that submitted comments during the pre-proposal process to establish the extent to which these comments have been adequately addressed.

Council staff will review the full proposal. If there are no issues, staff will recommend approval to the Council. If approved by the Council, new programs will be placed on provisional status and will be subject to an initial review process as outlined in the Review of Existing Academic Programs Policy. If staff has questions or concerns about the full proposal, staff will not recommend approval to the Council until all issues are resolved.