

Approval of New Academic Programs: Policy and Procedures

History

Prior to the Postsecondary Education Improvement Act of 1997, 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 reviewed the proposals; and the full CHE acted upon the staff and Programs Committee recommendations.

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 considered a new academic program only if it documented an immediate, critical need.

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 Kentucky Community and Technical College (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 delegated its approval authority for new academic programs within designated program bands to each institution's governing board while retaining approval authority for 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 public universities; and other programs falling outside each institution's negotiated program 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, the institution was allowed to complete its internal process of program approval and subsequently implement the program without full Council approval.

The policy was significantly revised at the September 2011 Council meeting. Definitions were aligned to those of the U.S. Department of Education, the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). The program bands were eliminated, a notification of intent process was developed, and the program approval criteria were more closely aligned with that of the review of existing academic programs.

Between 2011 and 2016, there have been revisions to IPEDS and SACSCOC definitions. In addition, both CPE staff and institutional representatives have identified areas of the policy and processes that could use further clarification or alteration. CPE staff worked with institutional representatives to update the policy and procedures, which are outlined in this document.

Related Legislation

Numerous statutes and administrative regulations define the role of the Council as well as institutional authority in the area of academic programming.

[KRS 164.003](#) outlines goals for achievement by 2020, including a seamless, integrated system of postsecondary education strategically planned and adequately funded to enhance economic development and quality of life.

[KRS 164.020 \(15\)](#) empowers the Council to define and approve the offering of all technical, certificate, diploma, associate, baccalaureate, graduate, and professional degree at public postsecondary institutions. It also mandates that the Council expedite the approval of requests from KCTCS for new programs of a vocational-technical and occupational nature.

[KRS 164.020 \(16\)](#) authorizes the Council to eliminate, in its discretion, existing programs or make any changes in existing academic programs at the public postsecondary institutions, taking into consideration (a) consistency with the institution's mission and the strategic agenda; (b) alignment with the priorities in the strategic implementation plan for achieving the strategic agenda; (c) elimination of unnecessary duplication of programs within and among institutions; and (d) efforts to create cooperative programs with other institutions through traditional means, or by use of distance learning technology and electronic resources, to achieve effective and efficient program delivery.

[KRS 164.020 \(19\)](#) allows the Council to postpone the approval of any new program at a state postsecondary institution, unless the institution has met its equal educational opportunity goals as established by the Council. In accordance with administrative regulations promulgated by the Council, those institutions not meeting the goals shall be able to obtain a temporary waiver, if the institution has made substantial progress toward meeting its equal educational opportunity goals.

[KRS 164.125](#) allows the University of Kentucky, upon Council approval, to provide associate, baccalaureate, master's, and specialist programs. It also allows joint doctoral programs in cooperation with other public postsecondary institutions in the state; doctoral and postdoctoral programs; and professional instruction including law, medicine, dentistry, education, architecture, engineering, and social professions.

[KRS 164.295](#) allows comprehensive universities to provide, upon Council approval, associate and baccalaureate programs as well as master's-degree programs in education, business, and the arts and sciences. It also allows for specialist degrees and programs beyond the master's-degree level to meet the requirements for teachers, school leaders, and other certified personnel. It also allows for advanced practice doctorates. Comprehensive universities may also provide programs of a community college nature as provided in KRS 164.580.

[KRS 164.2951](#) encourages public postsecondary institutions to limit the credit-hour requirements to 60 credit hours for associate of science or associate of arts degree programs and to 120 credit hours for bachelor of arts or bachelor of science degree programs, except in situations in which the quality and content of the program would be negatively impacted or if required by external accreditor in order to meet specific program standards.

[KRS 164.296](#) states that no public postsecondary institution shall offer any new program of a vocational-technical-occupational nature below the associate degree level without the review of KCTCS board of regents and Council approval. The KCTCS board of regents, with Council approval, may contract with public postsecondary institutions for the operation of specific programs and projects.

[KRS 164.580](#) allows KCTCS, upon Council approval, to offer associate degree programs. Technical colleges, through their faculty and accrediting procedures, may develop degree programs that shall be considered for approval by the board of regents and the Council.

[KRS 164.815](#) allows the University of Louisville, upon Council approval, to provide associate and baccalaureate degree programs of instruction, master's-degree programs, specialist degrees above the master's-degree level, doctoral degree programs and joint doctoral programs in cooperation with other public institutions of higher education, and professional degree programs including medicine, dentistry, law, engineering, and social professions.

[13 KAR 2:110](#) outlines the criteria and conditions upon which an advanced practice doctorate may be approved at comprehensive universities.

[13 KAR 2:060](#) establishes the process for equal opportunity goal setting, measurement of progress, and attainment of a temporary waiver. It is related to KRS 164.020(19).

Policy Fundamentals

Depending on the type of program, the program approval process may consist of up to three stages: notification of intent (NOI), pre-proposal, and full-proposal.

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.

An institution may not submit a pre-proposal or proposal unless it has submitted all academic program reviews for the preceding academic year, per the Review of Existing Academic Programs Policy.

Institutions should choose the Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) code of the proposed program after careful consideration. The institution should choose the CIP code that most closely fits the curriculum content of the proposed program. After a program has been approved, requests to change

CIP codes will require the institution to submit a compelling rationale and CPE staff to conduct a curriculum review.

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 in limited other circumstances upon Council staff approval. Exceptions will also be made when curriculum requirements are mandated by a specialized accrediting agency or necessitated by Council strategic initiatives or state or federal law.

After a program is approved by the Council, an institution has up to five years to implement the program. If the program has not been implemented within five years, it must undergo the new program approval process.

Institutions may not advertise to the public or publish in institutional catalogs a new academic program prior to approval by the Council.

After a program has been approved and entered into the program inventory, it is the institution's responsibility to

ensure that all information is correct and up-to-date. Institutional staff may access program information in the Kentucky Postsecondary Education System (KPEDS) Program Inventory module.

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.

Merged and Separated Programs

If two academic programs are combined into one program, 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 to describe accurately the discipline of the combined program.

If an existing academic program is separated into two or more academic programs, 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 existing CIP code remains the best disciplinary descriptor of the program.

Collaborative and Joint Programs

If any partner institution does not currently offer the academic program, that institution must undergo the new academic program approval process and must provide a “Memorandum of Understanding” that clearly outlines program responsibilities and fiscal arrangements among participating institutions.

If two or more institutions create a collaborative or joint program with academic programs that are already offered at each institution, then the program does not need to undergo the new academic program process at either institution. The institutions should notify the Council of the arrangement and provide a copy of the “Memorandum of Understanding” through the KPEDS Program Inventory module.

Suspended and Closed Programs

If a program has been suspended for fewer than five years, an institution may reinstate the program through the program inventory system.

After a program has been suspended for five years, it will be considered closed, and this status will be updated automatically in the program inventory.

If a program has been closed and an institution wants to reopen the program, an institution must complete the new program approval process.

Program Approval Process for KCTCS Institutions

This section outlines the process for approving new diploma, certificate, and associate degree programs for KCTCS institutions.

New Diploma and Certificate Programs Not Considered a Substantive Change by SACSCOC

The institution will complete a New Diploma/Certificate Form. Programs will be approved upon receipt of the completed Form.

New Diploma and Certificate Programs Considered a Substantive Change by SACSCOC and Associate Degree Programs of a Vocational-Technical-Occupational Nature (i.e. AAS)

KCTCS will post to the online Notification of Intent system. The notification will be shared with the chief academic officers at all public institutions. If no issues are identified, KCTCS will then post a pre-proposal to KPPPS within six months. Institutions and Council staff will have 30 days to respond to the pre-proposal.

- *If no issues are identified with the pre-proposal*, the program will be approved by Council staff and reported as an information item at the next Council meeting.
- *If issues are identified with the pre-proposal*, the institution will address those via KPPPS, and the review period will be extended. Once the issues are resolved, the program will be approved by Council staff and reported as an information item at the next Council meeting. If concerns cannot be fully resolved, the Council staff will inform KCTCS that it should not proceed with its internal process of program approval.

As required by KRS 164.020 (15), the Council will expedite the approval of new programs of a vocational-technical-occupational nature by waiving the full proposal process for these types of programs.

New Transfer-Oriented Associate Degree Programs (i.e. AA, AS, AFA)

KCTCS will post to the online Notification of Intent system. The notification will be shared with the chief academic officers at the other public institutions. If no issues are identified, KCTCS will then post a pre-proposal to KPPPS within six months. Institutions and Council staff will have 30 days to respond to the pre-proposal.

- *If no issues are identified with the pre-proposal*, the Council staff will notify KCTCS that it may continue the process for developing the program. KCTCS should submit a full proposal, which has been approved by the board of regents, to the Council within six months of the approval of the pre-proposal. The proposal should address any issues identified in the pre-proposal stage.
 - Council staff will review the full proposal. If there are no issues, staff will recommend approval to the Council. If approved by the Council, the program will be subject to the 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.
 - 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. The Council, however, 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.
- *If issues are identified with the pre-proposal*, 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, KCTCS must submit that information within 30 days of the request.

- After concerns have been resolved, the Council staff will notify KCTCS 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.

Program Approval Process for Universities

This section outlines the approval process for all diploma, certificate, baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral programs at each public university.

New Diploma and Certificate Programs Not Considered a Substantive Change by SACSCOC

The institution will complete a New Diploma/Certificate Form. Programs will be approved upon receipt of the completed Form.

All Other Programs (Excluding Advanced Practice Doctorates at Comprehensive Universities)

The institution will post to the online Notification of Intent system. The notification will then be shared with the chief academic officers at the other public institutions.

- For associate degree programs, the program will only move forward 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.

If no issues are identified, the institution will then post a pre-proposal to KPPPS within six months. Institutions and Council staff will have 30 days to respond to the pre-proposal.

- *If no issues are identified with the pre-proposal*, 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 six months of approval of the pre-proposal. The proposal should address any issues identified in the pre-proposal stage.
 - Council staff will review the full proposal. If there are no issues, staff will recommend approval to the Council. If approved by the Council, the program will be subject to the 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.
 - 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. The Council, however, 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.
- *If issues are identified with the pre-proposal*, 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.

Advanced Practice Doctorates Programs at Comprehensive Universities

The process for approval of Advanced Practice Doctorate Programs is outlined in 13 KAR 2:110.

GLOSSARY OF DEFINITIONS RELATED TO ACADEMIC PROGRAM APPROVAL

Academic Programming

Academic Program - combination of courses and related activities organized for the attainment of broad educational objectives that lead to a certificate, diploma, associate's degree, bachelor's degree, master's degree, specialist degree, or doctoral degree.

Academic Program Implementation - occurs when the first student matriculates into a program and enrolls in any course specified in the program of study.

Area - primary field of study, typically consisting of more credit hours than a major that does not require a minor and can be completed in lieu of a major-minor combination.

Classification of Instructional Programs code (CIP code) - a six-digit code in the form of xx.xxxx that identifies instructional program disciplines and supports the accurate tracking and reporting of fields of study and program completions activity as required for federal reporting.

Closed Program - academic program that is no longer offered by an institution and has been removed from the institution's catalog and the program inventory.

Concentration - set of courses designed to develop expertise within a major or area at the master's level.

Core - set of courses required by all students within a major or area. It also refers to the set of courses required by all students within a track, concentration, or specialization.

Major - primary area of study defined by a set of course and/or credit hour requirements within a specified discipline or with a clearly defined multi-disciplinary focus.

Minor - secondary area of study that is separate from the major and is defined by a set of course and/or credit hour requirements within a specified discipline or with a clearly defined multi-disciplinary focus.

New Academic Program - a program not previously offered at an institution or one that was previously offered but has been suspended for five or more years or has been closed.

Program of Vocational-Technical and Occupational Nature - certificate, diploma, or associate degree programs (i.e. AAS) designed to prepare students to enter the workforce immediately after graduation.

Specialization - set of courses designed to develop expertise within a major at the doctoral level.

Suspended Program - academic program that no longer accepts new students as of a specified date but allows current or previously accepted students to complete the program. The program can be reopened within five years without going through the new academic program approval process. After five years, if the program has not been reopened, it will be considered a closed program.

Track - set of courses designed to develop expertise within a major or area at the undergraduate level.

Transfer-Oriented Degree - award (i.e., A.A. or A.S.) that normally requires at least 60 semester credit hours that prepares students for entrance into upper-division coursework associated with a bachelor's degree.

Academic Program Delivery Methods

100% Distance Learning Program - academic program in which all of the required courses in a program occur when students and instructors are not in the same place. Instruction may be synchronous or asynchronous.

Accelerated Course - course that can be completed in less than a traditional semester.

Accelerated Program - use of accelerated courses, credit for prior learning, and/or other methods to allow students to complete the program in less than the usual amount of time.

Collaborative Program - academic program under the sponsorship of more than one institution or organization and contains elements of resource sharing agreed upon by the partners. None of the participating institutions delivers the entire program alone, and the partnering institutions/organizations share responsibility for the program's delivery and quality. The credential awarded may indicate the collaborative nature of the program.

Competency-Based Educational Program - outcome-based program that assesses a student's attainment of competencies as the sole means of determining whether the student earns a degree or a credential. Such programs may be organized around traditional course-based units (credit or clock hours) that students must earn to complete their educational program, or may depart from course-based units (credit or clock hours) to rely solely on the attainment of defined competencies. (SACSCOC)

Cooperative (Work Study) Program - academic program that provides for alternate class attendance and employment in business, industry, or government. (IPEDS)

Correspondence Education - education provided through one or more courses in which the institution provides instructional materials and examinations by mail or electronic transmission to students who are separated from the instruction. Interaction between the instructor and the student is not regular and substantive and is primarily initiated by the student. (IPEDS)(Similar to SACSCOC)

Credit for Prior Learning - college credit for the college-level knowledge and skills gained from non-college instructional programs or life experiences, including but not limited to employment, military experience, civic activities, and volunteer service. Credit is evaluated through nationally standardized exams in specific disciplines, challenge exams for specific courses at individual institutions, evaluations of non-college training programs, and individualized assessments.

Credit Hour - an amount of work represented in intended learning outcomes and verified by evidence of student achievement that is an institutionally established equivalency that reasonably approximates not less than: (1) one hour of classroom or direct faculty instruction and a minimum of two hours of out of class student work each week for approximately 15 weeks for one semester or trimester hour of credit, or 10 to 12 weeks for one quarter hour of credit, or the equivalent amount of work over a different amount of time or (2) at least an equivalent amount of work as required in (1) for other academic activities as established by the institution including laboratory work, internships, practica, studio work, and other academic work leading to the award of credit hours. (34 CFR 600.2)

Direct Assessment Competency-Based Educational Program - instructional program that, in lieu of credit hours or clock hours as a measure of student learning, uses direct assessment of student learning relying solely on the attainment of defined competencies, or recognizes the direct assessment of student learning by others. The assessment must be consistent with the accreditation of the institution or program using the results of the assessment. (SACSCOC)

Distance Learning Course - formal educational process in which the majority of the instruction in a course occurs when students and instructors are not in the same place. Instruction may be synchronous or asynchronous.

Distance Learning Program - formal educational process in which the majority (more than 50%) of the instruction (interaction between students and instructors and among students) in a course occurs when students and instructors are not in the same place. Instruction may be synchronous or asynchronous. A distance education course may use the internet; one-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communications devices; audio conferencing; or video cassettes, DVD's, and CD-ROMs if used as part of the distance learning course or program. (*SACSCOC definition of distance education*)

Dual Degree Program - academic program in which students study at two or more institutions and each institution grants a separate academic award bearing only its name, seal, and signature. (*SACSCOC*)

Embedded Program - consists of required courses of a lower-level degree or credential that are part of a higher-level degree or credential. Such programs usually do not admit students directly, and therefore, students may not be enrolled in these programs. Students are awarded a lower-level degree or credential as these programs serve as an exit option for students who do not complete the requirements for the higher-level degree or credential.

Extended Campus Program - academic program offered at any center, branch, campus, or other site at which postsecondary degree or nondegree work is offered, in addition to the parent campus. It refers to locations both within and outside an institution's area of geographic responsibility.

Joint Program - academic program in which students study at two or more institutions and the institutions grant a single academic award bearing the names, seals, and signatures of each of the participating institutions. (*SACSCOC*)

Modularized Program - academic program in which the majority (more than 50%) of the coursework is offered in modules. (*SACSCOC*)

Module - standalone segment/component of a parent course for which content (description, requisites, outline, competencies, and activities/experiments) has been determined and credit assigned. The sum of constituent segments is equal to the credit of the parent course. Credit is awarded upon successful completion of all modules comprising the parent course.

Degrees and Credentials

Advanced Practice Doctorate - program of study beyond the master's degree designed to meet the workforce and applied research needs of a profession. It requires close cooperation between institutions and employers to ascertain employers' needs. The degree may or may not be necessary for the recognition, credential, or license required for professional practice. It can be classified as either *doctor's degree—professional practice*, if it meets those criteria, or *doctor's degree—other* for IPEDS reporting.

Associate's Degree - award that normally requires at least 60 semester credit hours or the equivalent.

Bachelor's Degree - award that normally requires at least 120 semester credit hours or the equivalent. This includes all bachelor's degrees conferred in a five-year cooperative (work-study) program and degrees in which the normal four years of work are completed in three years.

Degree - award conferred by a college, university, or other postsecondary education institution as official recognition

for the successful completion of a program of studies. *(IPEDS)*

Doctor's Degree – highest award a student can earn for graduate study. *(IPEDS)*

Doctor's Degree – Other – doctor's degree that does not meet the definition of a doctor's degree-research/scholarship or a doctor's degree-professional practice. *(IPEDS)*

Doctor's Degree – Professional Practice – doctor's degree that is conferred upon completion of a program providing the knowledge and skills for the recognition, credential, or license required for professional practice. The degree is awarded after a period of study such that the total time to the degree, including both pre-professional and professional preparation, equals at least six full-time equivalent academic years. *(IPEDS)*

Doctor's Degree Research/Scholarship - a Ph.D. or other doctor's degree that requires advanced work beyond the master's level, including the preparation and defense of a dissertation based on original research, or the planning and execution of an original project demonstrating substantial artistic or scholarly achievement. *(IPEDS)*

Master's Degree - requires the successful completion of at least 30 semester hours beyond the bachelor's degree. *(SACSCOC)*

Professional Science Master's Degree - consists of two years of non-thesis academic training in science, mathematics, or technology and contains a professional component that may include internships and cross-training in business, management, regulatory affairs, computer applications, and communications. The program is designed with the input of one or more employers.

Postbaccalaureate Certificate - requires completion of an organized program of study beyond the bachelor's level. It is designed for persons who have completed a baccalaureate degree, but does not meet the requirements of a master's degree. Even though Teacher Preparation certificate programs may require a bachelor's degree for admission, they are considered subbaccalaureate undergraduate programs, and students in these programs are undergraduate students. *(IPEDS)*

Post-Doctor's Degree-Professional Practice Certificate – provides advanced training and enhances knowledge in important areas of clinical or research specialization and specialty practice for individuals who hold a professional degree.

Post-master's Certificate - requires completion of an organized program beyond the master's degree, but does not meet the requirements of academic degrees at the doctoral level. *(IPEDS)*

Postsecondary Certificate or Diploma (at least one but fewer than two academic years) - requires completion of an academic program below the baccalaureate degree in at least one but fewer than two full-time equivalent academic years, or is designed for completion in at least 30 but fewer than 60 semester or trimester credit hours, or in at least 45 but less than 90 quarter credit hours, or in at least 900 but less than 1,800 contact or clock hours. *(IPEDS)*

Postsecondary Certificate or Diploma (at least two but fewer than four academic years) - requires completion of an academic program below the baccalaureate degree in at least two but fewer than four full-time equivalent academic years, or designed for completion in at least 60 but less than 120 semester or trimester credit hours, or in at least 90 but less than 180 quarter credit hours, or in at least 1,800 but less than 3,600 contact or clock hours. *(IPEDS)*

Postsecondary Certificate or Diploma (less than one academic year) - requires completion of an academic program below the baccalaureate degree in less than one academic year, or designed for completion in less than 30 semester or trimester credit hours, or in less than 45 quarter credit hours, or in less than 900 contact or clock hours. *(IPEDS)*

Specialist Degree - normally requires 60 semester hours of concentrated and approved graduate coursework beyond the bachelor's degree. It is generally offered in the field of education to acknowledge completion of advanced graduate study designed to help individuals meet licensure requirements or develop additional knowledge and skill beyond the master's degree but not at the doctoral level.