



More KY universities could award advanced degrees under new law

Veterinary, osteopathic medicine plans will be subject to review process

BY: **MCKENNA HORSLEY** - APRIL 9, 2025 5:50 AM





■ Murray State University is seeking approval to begin training veterinarians. (Murray State photo)

Legislation to create schools of veterinary and osteopathic medicine in Kentucky went nowhere in the recently-adjourned General Assembly, but lawmakers did open a path for more public universities to offer such professional and advanced degree programs.

[Senate Bill 77](#), which received bipartisan support in the General Assembly and was signed into law by Gov. Andy Beshear, allows the state's comprehensive universities for the first time to seek approval to start professional programs such as medicine or architecture and to offer doctor of philosophy degrees.

The new law also creates a framework for the Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) to review a university's proposal

and make a recommendation to the legislature about whether it is viable and should be funded.

Eastern Kentucky University wants to open a school of osteopathic medicine and aims to graduate its first class of physicians in 2034. Murray State University has been working to win approval to open a veterinary medicine school and got a boost last year when the legislature allocated \$60 million to construct a new veterinary sciences building now in the design phase.

Western Kentucky University wants to start research doctoral programs.

All of those proposals were introduced as [bills](#) during the recently concluded 2025 regular session. None received a committee hearing; instead, lawmakers created a process for deciding when the state needs such programs and to consider the costs.

Needs of students, state

The framework outlined in the law allows lawmakers to have in-depth information, particularly about the financial stability and viability of a proposal, before voting to fund a new program, said Sen. Matthew Deneen, an Elizabethtown Republican.



In an interview, Deneen said the legislation “was an opportunity to expand the opportunity” for comprehensive universities in the state to offer more doctoral programs.

 Sen. Matthew Deneen (LRC Public Information)

Besides EKU,
Murray and

Western, the comprehensive universities are Morehead State and Northern Kentucky universities.

“It’s important to have a framework like this and guidelines in place so that we can make better decisions for the people of the commonwealth, for our students, because ultimately the things that we’re doing here are going to impact the offerings at these comprehensive universities,” Deneen said. “And it’s going to allow them to meet the goals of not only their students but of the overall commonwealth.”

The new law directs CPE to review how the proposed program would align with the goals and mission of the university, the statewide or regional need for the program and demand by students and employers for the program. Universities must also show CPE how the program complements existing programs, provide a five-year budgetary analysis, possible curriculum and more.

Before submitting a new proposal, the law says that a comprehensive university must meet some student success measures such as having a first-to-second year retention rate and a six-year graduation rate that is in the 75th percentile of all comprehensive universities nationwide and the 80th percentile of all comprehensive universities within the Southern Regional Education Board.

Now, CPE is creating policies to determine the eligibility for the new professional programs. Travis Powell, vice president and general counsel of CPE, said the process will likely be similar to how CPE has approved other academic programs in the past.

“Right now we are in the process of determining initial eligibility ...

to see who is even eligible to offer programs based on the student success measures that have to be in place and the reserve funding they have to keep,” Powell said.

Under the new law, CPE can recommend if proposals that will include a funding request to the General Assembly should be funded, Powell said.

CPE already makes biennial

budget requests to the

legislature. The next state budget will be considered in 2026.

University plans

EKU’s plan to open an osteopathic medicine school would include asking the legislature for nearly \$50 million to meet accreditation requirements for reserve funds.

EKU President David McFaddin told the Lantern the university’s work starts this spring to verify data needed for CPE’s review of the proposal as well as gaining a pre-accreditation status with the [Commission on Osteopathic College Accreditation](#) (COCA). While McFaddin acknowledged it is an “aggressive timeline,” EKU plans to have the first class of students graduating in 2034.

The law does “open the door” for all of the state’s comprehensive universities to offer degrees that “may connect back with the overall needs of Kentucky,” McFaddin said.

“I think at the end of the day for our public institutions, making sure that we’re mapping those degree programs to our community



Travis Powell (CPE photo)

needs to our workforce needs to our economic needs are critically important,” he added.



EKU President David McFaddin. (EKU photo)

Murray State [recently praised](#) the passage of Senate Bill 77 as the university works toward opening a veterinary medical school.

In a statement to the Kentucky Lantern, Murray State said a task force will review the development of a course of study for the professional degree program and that the university is “very grateful” to lawmakers and the governor for supporting the bill.

WKU also praised the passage of the new law, “which moves WKU one step closer to offering PhD programs as we pursue Carnegie R2 status,” said Jace Lux, a university spokesperson in an email. The Carnegie Commission on Higher Education in 1970 created a [classification system](#) for institutions. R2 designates mid-level research universities. R1 is the highest level and includes the University of Kentucky and University of Louisville.

“The CPE is currently developing a process to review and approve new PhD programs,” Lux said. “Once that process is finalized and shared with us, we will begin seeking approval for our first PhD in the field of Data Science.”

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