PROCEDURES FOR NEW ACADEMIC PROGRAM PROPOSALS
AND PROGRAM CHANGES
PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

MASSACHUSETTS BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Approved June 1992
(Amended July 1997)
INTRODUCTION

The 1991 legislation reorganizing public higher education in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts established the Higher Education Coordinating Council (HECC) as the successor agency to the Board of Regents of Higher Education and continued among its responsibilities statewide planning and coordination, including oversight of academic programs at the public institutions of higher education. In 1996, the legislature changed the name of the Council to the Board of Higher Education (BHE). The academic program approval authority of the Board of Higher Education is the same as that of the Higher Education Coordinating Council. Under Massachusetts General Laws, chapter 15A, the Board is responsible for authorizing all programs and degrees in the public system:

Section 9. The board shall have the following duties and powers:--(a) confer upon the boards of trustees the power to offer degree programs after taking into account, among other things, the need, resources and mission of the institution. The board shall confer the authority to award degrees to persons who have satisfactorily completed degree requirements; (b) in addition to the degrees authorized to be awarded under clause (a), the board may approve the awarding of certain other degrees and may define and authorize new functions or new programs, or consolidate, discontinue or transfer existing functions, educational activities and programs. The board shall act in writing on requests for program approval from boards of trustees within six months of said request, or said program shall be considered approved.

These Procedures for New Academic Program Proposals and Program Changes supersede any past policies or practices of the Higher Education Coordinating Council on the same subject matter. The Procedures apply to all Massachusetts public institutions of higher education (community colleges, state colleges, and the university). For the purposes of the Procedures, an academic program is defined as an undergraduate certificate of 30 semester credit hours or more, or a major or degree at the undergraduate or graduate levels, including a Certificate of Advanced Graduate Study.
NEW ACADEMIC PROGRAM PROPOSALS

Background

Effective academic planning takes account of options and alternatives, of resource considerations, and of continuing as well as new programs, at the institutional, segmental, and system levels. Academic planning is one component of long-range planning, which is a responsibility shared by the institutions and BHE. An institution should develop new program proposals through appropriate campus-based academic governance processes and within the context of its comprehensive plan.

The normal process for approval of new academic programs consists of two parts: Stage I: Proposal to Plan, which includes the Program Abstract; and Stage II: Proposal to Implement. The substantive review by BHE staff will occur at the Stage I submission, with action by BHE advisory in nature. The statutory six-month period for BHE to act on new program proposals applies to the Stage II application. BHE staff anticipate limiting their review of Stage II to verification of compliance with any stipulations accompanying BHE's action on Stage I and of the final structure of the proposed program. In addition, staff may recommend to the Board's Academic and Campus Affairs Committee that BHE act on a Stage II application through its "consent agenda."

An alternative process for approval of new academic programs is the submission of a Consolidated Stage I and Stage II Application (Consolidated Application). If an institution has developed a program proposal through its internal governance process which incorporates all the requirements of the Stage I: Proposal to Plan, and the Stage II: Proposal to Implement, it may submit a Consolidated Application. The statutory six-month period for the BHE to act on new program proposals applies to a Consolidated Application, which will be substantively reviewed by staff. Board action on a Consolidated Application will not normally occur through its "consent agenda."

An applicant institution should utilize the Consolidated Application process only in those instances where its submission reflects a mature proposal for a new academic program developed through an internal governance process in an academic area that would not require extensive evaluation and review. Examples of circumstances where an institution may realistically consider submitting a Consolidated Application include: the addition of a new degree program in an established area of study at the institution where, through planning and self evaluation, the institution has addressed the issues to be reviewed in Stage I and Stage II (e.g., an additional program in the Allied Health area which complements an institution's other Allied Health offerings); the consolidation or alteration of an existing degree program or programs into a related degree program or programs (regular nomenclature changes continue to be approved by staff following limited review; see page 11); or the addition of a new degree program in response to unexpected educational needs of the community, such as sudden loss of jobs where the proposed program would be useful for retraining. While the requirements for approval of proposals in this latter category are not altered, an institution may submit a Consolidated Application in seeking to expedite the approval process.
Review Criteria

An institution’s request for a new academic program is evaluated on the basis of: consistency with relevant academic standards; appropriateness to institutional, segmental, and system missions and priorities; need; ability to mount the program; resources; and quality.

Consistency with Relevant Academic Standards. The Undergraduate Experience, adopted in 1989, sets forth general standards for associate and baccalaureate programs for the Massachusetts public higher education system. These standards establish minimum numbers of credits for degrees by level and for the general education component, and provide guidelines for the structure of the major and definitions for college-level work in the areas of English composition, mathematics, and reading. (See Attachment A for excerpts of the pertinent recommendations from The Undergraduate Experience.)

Accepted and prevailing practices within the public system and American higher education generally will also be considered. If the applicant institution intends to seek specialized accreditation for a proposed program or if a program has among its objectives the preparation of graduates for professional licensure, the relevant accreditation standards or licensure criteria will be utilized.

Appropriateness to Institutional, Segmental, and System Missions and Priorities. A proposed program must be consonant with, and in furtherance of, the missions and priorities of the institution, the segment, and the public system. For a proposed associate degree program designed to prepare graduates for continuing their education at the baccalaureate level, the transferability of the program is considered. For a proposed baccalaureate program, institutional plans for the acceptance of students in transfer are reviewed. Appropriateness also includes validation that the program makes sense academically, that it is a legitimate academic field, and that the curriculum proposed adequately covers the subject.

Need. Need encompasses student demand for the proposed program and social or employer demand for program graduates. It also encompasses the availability of similar programs and the accessibility of these programs to the public.

Ability to Mount the Program. The cogency and realism of the proposal itself are the first indications of an institution's ability to mount a program of appropriate quality. Campus experience with programs in similar fields or at the same degree level, and the base of quality upon which the proposed program builds, are also considered.
Resources. This criterion covers an assessment of the amount, nature, availability, and cost-effective use of the resources identified as necessary to support the proposed program.

No new academic program proposal will be approved until the proposing institution demonstrates that it has eliminated, or will eliminate, an existing program or program concentration with resource expenditures approximately equal to those that are needed for the new program.

Comprehensive data on the resource needs of the new program must be presented, including the number, type and costs associated with faculty and staff; instructional materials (including library resources); facilities and equipment; and field and clinical resources, if applicable. Data must be presented for the first year of operation and for a year of full implementation.

In addition, the campus must identify the existing program, or program concentration, that has been or will be discontinued and the data on the number, type and costs associated with faculty and staff, instructional materials, equipment and facilities.

Quality. This criterion builds on the preceding criteria yet it is more than their sum. It is the concluding assessment of the soundness and viability of the proposed program and of the ability and capability of the institution to initiate and sustain the program at an acceptable standard of quality. Standards for selection and promotion of faculty and, if appropriate, for professional accreditation are examples of items to be considered for assurance of continuing quality.

Application Procedures and Guidelines

Development of the Proposal. As noted earlier, an institution should develop new program proposals through appropriate campus-based academic governance processes and within the context of its comprehensive plan. The use of outside consultants or assistance from prospective professional accreditation groups in the program development phase is encouraged and will affect the extent of BHE staff review.

Staff Conference. Prior to the submission of a Stage I: Proposal to Plan, or a Consolidated Application, institutional representatives are strongly encouraged to meet with BHE staff to discuss the proposed program and the documentation and supporting information necessary for a timely review. The extent of the review process to be followed by BHE staff will depend on the nature of the new program requested. For example, an application for a new doctoral program will require a more detailed review, including the use of external evaluators, than an application seeking to
raise an existing minor to a major.

Circulation for Comment. The Program Abstract, which is part of the Stage I: Proposal to Plan application, will be circulated for comment on program need and feasibility to all Massachusetts public colleges and universities, to the Association of Independent Colleges and Universities of Massachusetts (AICUM), and to other appropriate parties. A minimum of 20 business days will be allowed for response. All responses will be shared with the applicant institution for its review and comment.

External Evaluators. For proposed doctoral programs and for other programs as necessary and appropriate, external evaluators will be used in the review of a Stage II: Proposal to Implement application or a Consolidated Application. Usually, evaluators will be selected jointly with the applicant institution. BHE reserves the right to determine the need for outside evaluators and to select them. The applicant institution will have 15 business days to respond to the evaluators’ report.

Submission of Applications. Stage I: Proposal to Plan, Stage II: Proposal to Implement, and Consolidated Applications must be approved by the applicant institution’s board of trustees prior to submission to the Chancellor of Higher Education. Excerpts of the relevant minutes from the board of trustees’ meeting are to accompany submissions. Three copies of a Stage I application, Stage II or Consolidated Application are to be forwarded to the Chancellor.

Stage I: Proposal to Plan applications may be submitted at any time during the calendar year. Institutions are encouraged to make these submissions in conjunction with their campus updates or new or revised five-year plans. A Stage I application normally will be scheduled for action by BHE within four months of submission, but this period could be as long as six months in the case of an application submitted in March, since BHE does not meet in July and August.

Stage II: Proposal to Implement applications and Consolidated Applications are to be submitted during the period August 15 through December 15. This annual application period is in recognition of the general unavailability of faculty during the summer and of the need to accommodate the statutory six-month review requirement within BHE’s schedule for regular meetings. Under justifiable circumstances, BHE staff may accept an application outside the application period.

It is the responsibility of the institution to submit an application for a new program that is complete and responsive to these Procedures. An institution's board of trustees may notify the Chancellor of Higher Education in writing at any time that it wishes to withdraw a Stage I: Proposal to Plan, Stage II: Proposal to Implement, or Consolidated
Application. This will not prejudice any subsequent application for the same or a similar program.

BHE Action on Stage I: Proposal to Plan. Action by BHE on a Stage I: Proposal to Plan application is advisory in nature. Actions that BHE may take include:

1. Recommendation to Proceed to a Stage II: Proposal to Implement. The institution may proceed with the development of a Stage II submission, which is to address any stipulations accompanying the recommendation.

2. Recommendation Not to Proceed to a Stage II: Proposal to Implement. The institution should not pursue further the development of the proposed program. The rationale for this determination will be shared in writing with the institution.

3. Deferral. Further development of the proposed program is neither recommended nor discouraged. Specific supplemental information, changes to the proposed program, or procedures which need to be completed will be identified in writing for the applicant institution.

BHE Action on Stage II: Proposal to Implement and Consolidated Applications. The statutory six-month review period applies to the submission of a Stage II: Proposal to Implement application and Consolidated Applications. The six-month timetable begins as of the date of determination of completeness of the application by BHE staff. This determination shall be made no later than 15 business days following receipt of a Stage II or a Consolidated Application submission. If the application is determined to be incomplete, the basis for this finding shall be included in the notification to the applicant institution.

In accordance with the statutory mandate, BHE, by Board vote, shall act in writing on a request for program approval from a board of trustees within six months of the determination of the completeness of a Stage II application or a Consolidated Application. Actions taken by BHE may include:

1. Approval. The institution, or campus if the request is for a campus of the University of Massachusetts, may offer the requested program no later than the second fall semester following BHE approval. (See page 10 regarding program implementation.) BHE staff may recommend that this action be through BHE’s "consent agenda."

2. Disapproval. The institution (or campus) may not offer the requested program.

3. Deferral. The requested program is neither approved nor
disapproved. Specific supplemental information, changes to the proposed program, or procedures which need to be completed will be identified for the applicant institution by BHE. BHE will then act on the program request during the next six months.

4. Acknowledgment of Institutional Waiver. If an applicant institution's board of trustees requests in writing a waiver of the statutory six-month period, BHE shall grant the waiver, extending the review period for an additional six months.

Stage I: Proposal to Plan

The Stage I: Proposal to Plan application must contain the information necessary for a substantive evaluation of the proposed program by BHE staff. An applicant institution is to provide at least the information requested below.

1. Program Abstract

The Program Abstract, which is part of the Stage I application, is the document that is circulated for outside comment on the need for, and feasibility of, the proposed program. It therefore is a free-standing, self-contained document. The Abstract (3-4 pages) should be a fair and concise summary of the proposed program, based on the information contained in the Stage I application. The program displays described below and on page 10 are included in the abstract mailing.


Provide an overview of the process for developing the proposed program, including any use of outside consultants or assistance provided by prospective professional accreditation groups.

Describe the proposed program. Identify the number of credits required to complete the program. Provide a display of courses and a summary of credits by course category (the major, cognate areas, general education, and electives). Identify which courses are new or to be developed. Label this display Attachment A.

3. Purpose and Goals.

Describe the proposed program's purpose and the particular knowledge and skills to be acquired by program graduates.

Describe the program's goals to be achieved within its first five years of operation, identify in general the strategies for their achievement, and specify the measures to determine their accomplishment.
If applicable, provide information concerning certification, licensure, and specialized accreditation.


Describe the relationship of the proposed program to existing offerings of the institution and to approved institutional, segmental, and system mission and priorities. Explain the impact of expanding the institution's academic offerings through the addition of the proposed program and the potential effect of the new program on the quality of the institution's existing offerings.

5. Need.

Provide evidence of student demand and current career opportunities for program graduates.

Identify the availability of similar programs in the Commonwealth and the relationship (similarities and differences) of the proposed program to them.


Provide an estimate of full-time and part-time student enrollment for the first year of program operation and for the first year of full implementation.

Describe the students to be served (e.g., traditional/non-traditional, minority and non-minority, members of a particular profession). Identify admission criteria, recruitment strategies, student retention strategies, and other support services for the proposed program which are different from existing institutional practices and procedures.

New academic programs must conform with the terms of The Commonwealth Transfer Compact (Revised 1990). For a proposed associate degree program designed to prepare graduates to continue their education at the baccalaureate level, describe the steps taken to ensure the transferability of its graduates to a baccalaureate institution. For a proposed baccalaureate program, specify the terms under which associate degree graduates would be able to transfer with junior standing and describe any efforts that will be made to facilitate such transfers. Identify the parties and terms of any proposed transfer articulation agreements.

7. Program Diversity.
Describe any specific provisions to promote diversity among students and faculty in the proposed program. Aspects of the program intended to attract students from underrepresented groups into the field, or to prepare graduates for service to diverse populations should be noted.

8. Administration and Operation.

Describe the organizational structure for the administration and operation of the proposed program and strategies designed to ensure its continuing quality.

9. Resources.

Describe in a budget narrative the number, type and costs associated with faculty and staff; instructional materials (including library resources); facilities and equipment; field and clinical resources, if applicable, and anticipated revenues, for the proposed program as well as the existing program or program concentration that has been or will be discontinued. Include a budget display for the first year of operation and for a year of full implementation (see Attachment B for suggested format). Label this display Attachment C.

Stage II: Proposal to Implement

The Stage II: Proposal to Implement is a fully developed narrative of the proposed program and it is the document that would be used for any required review of the program by external evaluators. As noted earlier, the applicant institution will have 15 business days to respond to the evaluators’ report.

The basis for the Stage II application is the Stage I: Proposal to Plan, with the requested information reflective of a mature proposal for a new academic program. Information presented in the Stage I should be updated as necessary. At a minimum, it is usually necessary to update Item 5 (Need), Item 6 (Students), and Item 9 (Resources). Any stipulations accompanying BHE’s recommendation to proceed with the development of a Stage II submission also are to be addressed.

The format for the Stage II application follows that of the Stage I with the following additions.

For Item 1: Proposal Development and Program Curriculum.

Include a complete description of the curriculum and plans for the proposed program, including a display (label this display Attachment B) showing a semester by semester sequence of courses and other requirements. Include course numbers, credits, titles, and brief descriptions, indicating which courses are new or to
be developed.

If applicable, describe the procedures for any required independent exercise and for any required internship or clinical experience. In the latter case, describe the arrangements for the placement of students.

Identify the current faculty expected to teach the specialized courses (the major and cognate areas) and include copies of their current vitae. Display new faculty positions to be filled and the required qualifications.

For Item 5: Students.

Explain how the proposed admission requirements provide assurance of the likelihood of student success in pursuing the program to completion and project percentages of such degree completion rates and expected times from admission to graduation for successful students.

Consolidated Stage I and Stage II Application (Consolidated Application)

A Consolidated Application must include the information requested above for Stage I: Proposal to Plan and Stage II: Proposal to Implement applications.

New Academic Program Implementation

Implementation of a new academic program normally will occur no later than the second fall semester following BHE approval. If implementation is delayed beyond that time, the institution is to provide an explanation to the Chancellor of Higher Education and either request a new implementation date or indicate the institution’s decision not to offer the program. BHE shall act by vote on a new implementation date.
ACADEMIC PROGRAM CHANGES

A public college or university expecting to offer (a) new certificate programs under 30 credits, or (b) new minors, concentrations, tracks, or options within existing programs is to notify the Chancellor of Higher Education in writing at least 60 days prior to announcing such program changes. These changes do not require action by BHE.

Changes in the name of an existing program require approval by the Vice Chancellor, as the Chancellor’s designee, upon limited staff review. In submitting a name change request, the institution should include curriculum information and reason for the request.

An institution is to notify the Chancellor of Higher Education in writing if it suspends or discontinues an academic program. When a program is suspended or discontinued, it will be removed from BHE’s inventory of active, authorized programs. A program suspended or discontinued may be reactivated only with the approval of BHE.

An institution is to notify the Chancellor of Higher Education in writing if it suspends or discontinues, or reactivates a suspended or discontinued, minor, concentration, track, or option within an existing program.
EXCERPTS OF PERTINENT RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE UNDERGRADUATE EXPERIENCE

17. Criteria for Granting Course Credit Toward the Degree. The Board of Regents shall establish the following systemwide criteria for granting course credit toward the associate or baccalaureate degree:

(a) **English Composition**: College-level English composition courses should involve the development of complex and abstract ideas for different writing situations and emphasize the different steps of the writing process leading to fluent, effective expression. Courses that are concerned primarily with grammar, usage, punctuation, or grammatical sentence and paragraphs should not receive credit toward the degree.

(b) **Mathematics**: College-level mathematics courses should build upon the competencies acquired during the equivalent of at least three years of high school algebra and geometry. Courses covering computational concepts only should not carry credit toward the degree. Courses designed to teach students how to apply mathematics to specific fields, such as those offered in community college occupational programs, may be offered for credit toward the degree to be earned in those programs but will not be considered equivalent to college-level mathematics for the purpose of transfer of credit to baccalaureate institutions.

(c) **Reading**: Reading assignments in courses carrying credit toward the degree should be college-level material. Courses dealing primarily with general reading skill, such as word identification, the ability to identify and comprehend the main and subordinate ideas, to use reference materials, to summarize the ideas in one's own words, and other technical aspects of reading should not receive credit toward the degree.

18. **Basic Study Skills**. Courses to improve students’ basic study skills and work habits should not be offered for credit toward the degree.

19. **Degree Standards**. The Board of Regents shall establish the following minimum standards for associate and baccalaureate degrees:

(a) For the Associate in Applied Science degree:

   completion of a minimum of 60 semester hours, or the equivalent, of
college-level work with a cumulative grade point average of 2.0 or higher at the institution granting the degree;

completion of at least 16 semester hours, or the equivalent, of general education consistent with recommendations 23 through 26 of this report; and

completion of a substantial amount of coursework at the institution awarding the degree;

b) For the Associate in Science degree:

completion of a minimum of 60 semester hours, or the equivalent, of college-level work with a cumulative grade point average of 2.0 or higher at the institution granting the degree;

completion of at least 20 semester hours, or the equivalent, of general education consistent with recommendations 23 through 26 of this report; and

completion of a substantial amount of coursework at the institution awarding the degree;

c) For the Associate in Arts degree:

completion of a minimum of 60 semester hours, or the equivalent, of college-level work with a cumulative grade point average of 2.0 or higher at the institution granting the degree;

completion of at least 33 semester hours, or the equivalent, of general education consistent with recommendations 23 through 26 of this report; and

completion of a substantial amount of coursework at the institution awarding the degree;

d) For a baccalaureate degree:

completion of a minimum of 120 semester hours, or the equivalent, of college-level work with a cumulative grade point average of 2.0 or higher at the institution granting the degree. Students must complete all degree requirements within ten years in order to be assured of the opportunity to fulfill the requirements in effect when they entered the institution.

completion of at least 36 semester hours, or the equivalent, of general education consistent with recommendations 23 through 26 of this report;
satisfactory completion of at least one college-level English course in expository writing;

completion of the institution's requirements for the major; and

completion at the institution awarding the degree of a minimum of 30 credits, a minimum of one-half of the credits in the major, and a minimum of 30 of the final 40 credits for the degree.

e) A student must attain a minimum grade point average of 2.0 for coursework in the major. Individual institutions or programs may set higher requirements.

23. **Minimum Requirements for General Education.** The general education component of undergraduate degree programs should include a balance of required study and/or restricted electives in the liberal arts and sciences in such disciplines as the humanities, arts, natural and physical sciences, mathematics, and social sciences. This component should account for at least 16 semester hours, or the equivalent, for the Associate in Applied Science degree; 20 semester hours, or the equivalent, for the Associate in Science degree; 33 semester hours, or the equivalent, for the Associate in Arts degree; and 36 credits, or the equivalent, for a baccalaureate degree (see recommendations 19 [a] through [d] of this report). These are the lowest acceptable proportions and institutions are strongly encouraged to exceed them. In addition, an institution's requirements should not preclude opportunities for experimental curricula and honors programs.

24. **Principles to Guide Continuing Review of General Education.** Each institution should review the general education component of its undergraduate curriculum and specify expected outcomes, using the following set of principles as a guide and basis of reference. The institution's general education requirements should be revised as needed, keeping in mind the level and scope of student attainment of abilities and knowledge that the institution determines to be appropriate to its mission and the degrees it offers.

The general education component of the undergraduate curriculum should aim to develop in the student ability to:

- reason abstractly and think critically and creatively;
- use oral and written language effectively and critically as listener, reader, speaker, and writer;
- reason quantitatively, using numerical data and symbolic representations as appropriate;
- make aesthetic and ethical judgments; and
learn independently and adapt to change;

and knowledge of:

the uses of languages and literatures in shaping and sustaining culture;

the history, traditions, and values of one's own and other cultures, and the role of the past in shaping the present and the future;

the nature, development, and role of social institutions;

the fine and performing arts;

the scientific method of creating new knowledge;

the modes of inquiry that characterize different disciplines and the connections among them; and key technological applications of the sciences.

25. General Education and Integrated Learning. Since general education is defined more by its goals than by a set of courses, institutions should integrate their general education component with the student's entire program of study.

28. Structure of the Baccalaureate Major. The structure of the baccalaureate major should:

Contain a central core of method and theory that serves as an introduction to the explanatory power of the discipline, provides a basis for subsequent work, and unites all student who join in the study in a shared understanding of its content, character, and aims; its history and contemporary problems; its social and economic implications; and its ethical and moral dimensions;

Ensure that students experience the range of topics that the discipline addresses and the variety of analytical tools that it uses;

Ensure that any prerequisites are intellectually defensible, clearly identified, and offered on a regular basis; and

Have a sequence of courses that presumes advancing sophistication.

29. Culminating Experience. An undergraduate education is more than the sum of its parts or the number of credits required for graduation. For the baccalaureate degree, it is desirable that the student's mastery of the complexity of study in a major be demonstrable through some type of culminating experience, such as a project, thesis, comprehensive exam, seminar, or internship. Institutions are encouraged to incorporate such an experience in their baccalaureate programs.

30. Relationship of General Education and Major Components. The major, while
defined by its own special characteristics, should not be isolated from the other components of the undergraduate curriculum. The identified general education abilities and knowledge should be incorporated into a student's major, as appropriate, and "across the curriculum" as well as interdisciplinary initiatives are strongly encouraged.

31. Completion of Baccalaureate Degree. The baccalaureate degree program (including electives, general education, the major, and prerequisites) should be designed so that the students can complete all requirements in four years of full-time equivalent study, exclusive of developmental education and conditioned upon satisfactory academic progress. Exceptions should be few and individually justified, and the relationship of any work beyond the fourth year to graduate study should be described.

32. Extent of Majors. Majors accounting for less than 25% or more than 50% of the total number of credits required for graduation should be individually justified. For the purposes of this accounting, a major consists of all the courses in the major department and related departments required for the major but does not include general education, free electives, and prerequisites.
GROWTH BY SUBSTITUTION BUDGET FORMAT

Campus: ___________________________ Proposed Program: ___________________________
Discontinued Program(s) or Concentration(s): _______________________________________
Date of discontinuation ___________________________

Proposed Program

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