

**Office of the Chancellor  
Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education  
Procedures and Standards for University Operations**

**Procedure/Standard Number 2016-23-A  
Requirements for Initiation or Change of a Credit-Based Academic Program**

Approved by:  Date: 2/10/2025  
Chancellor

**History:** June 1, 2017-Original date of signature for Procedure/Standard Number 2016-23.

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**Additional History:** N/A

**Related Policies, Procedures, or Standards:**

[Board of Governors' Policy 1985-01-A: Requirements for Initiation or Change of Credit-Based Academic Programs](#); [Board of Governors' Policy 1990-06-A: Academic Degrees](#)

**Additional References:** The Procedure/Standard was reviewed and supported by the Chief Academic Officers (November 19, 2015), Statewide Meet and Discuss (December 16, 2015), and Council of Presidents (January 28, 2016).

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**I. Introduction**

The purpose of this procedure is to communicate the instructions, processes, and standards regarding the establishment of new academic programs or revisions to existing programs within Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education (as outlined in Section C of Board of Governors' Policy 1985-01-A: *Requirements for Initiation or Change of Credit-Based Academic Programs*).

The high-value and relevant academic programs of Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education universities prepare our students for success in their lives and careers in our global society. This procedure will ensure all new academic degree programs undergo a consistent, fair, and timely process to determine the need and appropriateness for the State System. Additionally, this procedure will ensure the accuracy of the State System's Academic Program Inventory as it relates to changes in both degree and non-degree programs.

This procedure does not reflect on the processes that occur at each university. It is understood that each university has local processes and procedures

## II. Definitions

**A. Academic Program Inventory (API):** Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education's official inventory of all active and non-active academic programs. Included in the inventory are all degree programs, associated concentrations, minors, certificates, and teacher certifications; as defined by Board of Governors' Policy 1985-01-A: Requirements for Initiation or Change of Credit-Based Academic Programs.

The API is not designed to store all historical information (e.g., past CIP code or program name) related to every program, rather its design and intent is to maintain an official and accurate listing of all current and historical programmatic offerings.

**B. Academic Program Review Committee:** A committee comprised of a cross-section of university administrators, staff, and faculty from a variety of disciplines that provide peer-reviewed feedback to the Office of the Chancellor.

**C. Program Proposal:** Criteria and associated form designed to ensure all proposed new academic degree programs:

1. are appropriate to the role and scope of the university and State System;
2. provide evidence of need for the program (tied primarily to the Commonwealth);
3. are consistent with the quality and academic integrity of the State System;
4. benefit from opportunities for coordination and collaboration within the State System and/or beyond; and
5. plan for and provide evidence of appropriate resources to successfully launch and sustain the program.

**D. Course Delivery Modalities:** Delivery modalities in which courses are designed to be delivered:

1. **Face-to-Face Instruction:** Delivery of instruction in real time, with the faculty member and students physically present in the same classroom. Face-to-face instruction is the default mode of instruction. A faculty member may incorporate distance education elements into a face-to-face course, provided that the amount of instructional time conducted via distance education does not exceed twenty-five percent (25%) and is for pedagogical reasons, exams or to accommodate other approved work responsibilities.
2. **Synchronous Distance Education (Online 100%):** The remote delivery of all instruction to individual students who participate simultaneously, in real time.
3. **Multi-Classroom Synchronous (Interactive TV):** Simultaneous delivery to multiple locations to students who are in a classroom(s) on a different campus/other teaching location participating via remote technology (for example, Interactive TV, Zoom, Teams, WeConnect, etc.), in real time while the faculty member may be teaching other students present in the same classroom.
4. **Asynchronous Distance Education (Online 100%):** Remote delivery in which the faculty member and all students participate entirely remotely, but not simultaneously (for example, recorded lectures, message boards, etc.).

5. Blended/Hybrid: A combination of face-to-face instruction with distance education elements, provided that more than thirty percent (30%) of the instructional time is conducted via distance education and is specified in the syllabus.
6. Simultaneous Modalities (Multi-Modal): Delivery via two (2) or more modalities, and students select the specific modality by which they will attend courses by no later than the end of the drop/add period.
7. Hyflex (Multi-Modal): Delivery via two (2) or more modalities, and students may choose modalities for each class period. The use of Hyflex must be strictly limited to unique circumstances requiring student flexibility, based upon a student population's requirements and no mere convenience. Such unique circumstances include, for example, a course targeted to students who are working professionals enrolled in graduate programs.
8. Mixed Remote (Online 100%): Entirely distance education delivery using a combination of non-simultaneous, synchronous and asynchronous instruction, as indicated in the syllabi (for example, a course that meets synchronously for 2/3 of the course with the remaining course time being conducted asynchronously).

### **III. Procedure/Standard**

#### **A. General**

1. The Office of the Chancellor's Academic and Student Affairs office shall maintain a website of the business processes, procedures, and forms in accordance with Board of Governors' Policy 1985-01-A: Requirements for Initiation or Change of Credit-Based Academic Programs.
  - a. The website and associated resources shall be maintained on the Academic Programs section of the Academic and Student Affairs intranet site. The Academic Program intranet site is available to all State System personnel with an active State System account (username and password).
2. Processes and resources associated with the academic program initiation and change, as well as new program review committee websites will be reviewed with the university's Chief Academic Officers and updated as needed.

#### **B. New Degree Program Initiation**

1. Procedure for a New Degree Program:
  - a. At least thirty (30) days before submitting a New Program Proposal, the university will submit a Letter of Intent (LOI) to develop a new program to the Council of Chief Academic Officers for review.
    - i. The Council of Chief Academic Officers may recommend to approve, return to the university for changes, or reject proposals.
    - ii. LOIs that are recommended for approval will be submitted to the Office of the Chancellor to be added to the Executive Leadership Group (ELG) consent agenda and, if no objections are registered, reviewed by Academic and Student Affairs, who will notify the university whether or not to proceed with the full proposal.

- b. A university proposing to convert an existing robust concentration or minor to a degree program will submit an Expedited New Program Proposal to the Council of Chief Academic Officers for review.
    - i. The Council of Chief Academic Officers may recommend to approve, return to the university for changes, or reject proposals.
    - ii. Expedited Program Proposals that are recommended for approval will be submitted to the Office of the Chancellor for review by Academic and Student Affairs and action by the Chancellor, if approved by the university Council of Trustees.
  - c. Universities submitting a Program Proposal must use the templates provided by the Office of the Chancellor's Academic and Student Affairs office. The form details the information that must be submitted. Having standardized forms provides for an efficient and timely review process.
2. For doctoral programs, a specific process and procedures related to institutional and programmatic readiness are required.

- a. Documentation of *institutional readiness* is required for the first two doctoral programs in addition to documentation of *programmatic readiness*. An assessment of *institutional readiness* includes faculty experience and credentials as well as the university's equipment and facility capacity. To this end, documentation of *institutional readiness* must accompany a program proposal for the first two doctoral programs at a university. As a side note, Indiana University of Pennsylvania has been determined to have already met the criterion for *institutional readiness*.

Any institution interested in moving forward with a doctorate would, at their own expense, contract with an external reviewer to assess institutional capacity to offer a doctorate with attention to the quality of faculty and facilities. This reviewer will typically be external to the system and have knowledge of the discipline, experience involving similar doctoral programs at peer institutions, and familiarity with the field through various roles, including but not limited to accreditation or licensure.

A brief (assumed not more than five pages) assessment of institutional readiness will need to be written by the external reviewer and must address the following aspects of *institutional readiness*:

- Does a high-quality master's level degree in a relevant field already exist at the institution? If not, is this because no master's degree exists in the field?
- Does the institution have the capacity and logistical ability to mount and support the program?
- Has the institution demonstrated that it is ready to implement and sustain a high-quality program?
- Are sufficient numbers of qualified faculty available to meet the teaching, research, and service expectations of the program? Is the balance of tenured/tenured-track and temporary faculty appropriate?
- What levels of experience and what scholarly reputations do

program faculty currently have? How many relevant books, peer-reviewed publications, or other nationally recognized credentials do the faculty have?

- Are program faculty positioned to socialize and mentor doctoral students?
- Are institutional resources sufficient to implement and sustain the program?
- Is there evidence of administrative commitment to ensure adequate facilities, personnel, equipment, and other resources to maintain a high- quality program?

- b. After approval of the first two doctorate programs, universities need only submit evidence of *programmatic readiness*. To this end, documentation of *programmatic readiness* written by an external reviewer must accompany a program proposal for a new doctoral program.

Any institution interested in moving forward with a doctorate would, at their own expense, contract with an external reviewer to assess programmatic readiness to offer a doctorate. This reviewer will typically be external to the system and have knowledge of the discipline, experience involving similar doctoral programs at peer institutions, and familiarity with the field through various roles, including but not limited to accreditation or licensure.

A brief (assumed not more than five pages) assessment of *programmatic readiness* will need to be written by the external reviewer and must address the following:

- Does a high-quality master's level degree in a relevant field already exist at the institution? If not, is this because no master's degree exists in the field?
- Are sufficient numbers of qualified faculty available to meet the teaching, research, and service expectations of the program? Is the balance of tenured/tenured-track and temporary faculty appropriate?
- What levels of experience and what scholarly reputations do program faculty currently have? How many relevant books, peer-reviewed publications, or other nationally recognized credentials do the faculty have?
- Are program faculty positioned to socialize and mentor doctoral students?
- Are college/departmental resources sufficient to implement and sustain the program?

3. Prior to the Chancellor's approval, the university's Council of Trustees must approve the program to move forward to the Chancellor for final approval. The motion should read:

*MOTION: "That the Council of Trustees at (insert name) University of Pennsylvania approve the (insert name of program) to move forward to the Chancellor of the State System of Higher Education for final approval."*

4. Office of the Chancellor Responsibilities:

1. Academic and Student Affairs will review all proposals and provide an official response within 30 business days.
2. Academic and Student Affairs will also obtain peer reviewed feedback for each proposal from the Academic Program Review Committee. This feedback will be incorporated into the official response described above.
3. Academic and Student Affairs shall maintain a website to provide the committee and Chief Academic Officers with the processes, procedures, and forms for this peer review.

### **C. Changes to Existing Programs**

1. Changes Requiring Approval

- a. Universities seeking approval to reorganize an existing degree program (active or in moratorium) must use the associated reorganization form and receive approval prior to the implementation of the changes.
  - i. Board of Governors' Policy 1985-01-A: *Requirements for Initiation or Change of Credit-Based Academic Programs* defines reorganized programs as changes that reflect curricula and/or credentials that have been significantly revised to meet new market demands or revised program accreditation requirements.
  - ii. Post-reorganization, only the reorganized program exists in the API; the pre-reorganized program is inactive and, as such, enrollments and completions are reported for the reorganized program only.

2. Changes Requiring Notification

- a. Universities that have added a new concentration, minor, certificate, letter of completion, or teacher certification must use the associated notification form and ensure its completeness for the change to be reflected in the State System's API. Universities must receive acknowledgment that the API has been updated prior to enrolling students.
- b. Notification of changes to a program's delivery method (i.e., offering an existing program online) must be submitted on the Notification of Change of Delivery form for the change to be reflected in the State System's Academic Program Inventory. Universities must receive acknowledgment that the API has been updated prior to students taking courses delivered with the new method.
- c. Universities reorganizing an existing non-degree program (minor, certificate, concentration, or teacher certificate) must notify Academic and Student

Affairs using the appropriate form. Universities must receive acknowledgment that the API has been updated prior to the implementation of the changes.

- d. Universities requesting to reactivate a degree program currently in moratorium must use the associated reactivation form. Degree programs that will be reorganized and reactivated should use the reorganization form. Degree programs that have been discontinued cannot be reactivated. Universities desiring to reactivate a degree program that has been discontinued must utilize the new degree program process as if the degree program is a new degree. Universities must receive acknowledgment that the API has been updated prior to enrolling new students.
- e. Notification of a program to be placed in moratorium or discontinued should be done via email or in writing and include the program name, award, and CIP code.

#### **D. Proposal Review**

Proposal reviews are conducted by the Office of the Chancellor – Academic and Student Affairs, Finance and Administration (budget assumptions and projections), – and university peer reviewers from the program review committee. University peer reviewers are recruited from areas responsible for analysis of similar information (e.g. enrollment services) as well as academic members (faculty, deans, associate deans, provosts, associate provosts, etc.).

Feedback is sent within 30 business days after receipt of the final document/version.

#### **IV. Attachments: None**

#### **V. Implementation: Immediately**