

CHE  
Agenda Item 7.02.D.  
3/05/2009

March 5, 2009

## **MEMORANDUM**

**To:** Mr. Ken Wingate, Chairman, and Members, Commission on Higher Education

**From:** Dr. Bettie Rose Horne, Chair, Committee on Academic Affairs and Licensing, and Members

### **Consideration of Revisions to CHE's Policy and Procedures for the Approval of New Academic Program Approval and Termination**

#### **Background**

Given the financial exigencies confronting the state and the resulting negative impact on the colleges and universities and on the Commission in terms of financial resources, including significant staffing and travel reductions, Commission staff propose two substantive changes to the policy and procedures governing the approval of new academic programs. These changes are designed to streamline the approval process in two distinctive instances, thereby reducing the demands on diminishing faculty, staff and financial resources at both the institutions and the Commission.

#### **Discussion**

##### *Proposed Revision #1: New Program Requests Submitted by Technical Colleges*

South Carolina's technical colleges have had 28 programs approved by the Commission since July 2003. These programs can be classified as either being new to the Technical College System (SCTCS) as a whole or as being a pre-existing program in the System but new to the proposing institution. Each of these proposed programs has been subject to the full Commission approval process, regardless of whether or not it has been

approved previously for an institution in the System. As an example, in this time period the Commission has considered six proposals for new Emergency Medical Technology programs at the technical colleges. Due to accrediting body requirements, these six programs are essentially identical, yet staff from each of the six colleges has had to: submit a Program Planning Summary that was considered by the Advisory Committee on Academic Programs; submit a full New Program Proposal that was considered by the Advisory Committee in a second meeting; appear before the Committee on Academic Affairs and Licensing to answer questions about the program; and, finally, appear before the full Commission to answer questions that might arise in that venue. Under current policy, Commission staff reviews the Program Planning Summary for each of these programs, evaluates the new program proposal for each, and writes six separate summary documents for the use of the Commissioners. Each of these steps involves costs in some combination of staff time (both at the technical colleges and the Commission), Commission time, paperwork, and travel.

Unique to the technical colleges is the development of an approved standardized template for each degree program within the Technical College System. New programs proposed by the individual colleges to the State Technical College System Board must conform to this template. While there is some flexibility under this template, variations are limited, and, in general, programs proposed are very similar across different institutions. Thus, in response to this unique circumstance of the Technical College System, the budget and staffing pressures facing the Commission and the technical colleges, and the potential for savings at every step in the process, we propose to streamline the new program approval process for the technical colleges by recognizing in the approval process that there is a substantial difference between a program that is new to the system and one that is new only to the proposing institution. Such streamlining will require that the Commission members approve a new program approval process that will allow for approval of proposed programs which pre-exist within the technical college system but are new to the proposing institution. The proposed policy will be designed in such a way as to reduce time and travel costs while maintaining the Commission's legal mandate to approve new programs at the state's public colleges and universities.

#### Elements of the Proposed Policy

- Programs that are new to the SCTCS will be required to go through the full CHE approval process.
- Programs that pre-exist within the SCTCS but are new to the proposing institution will be evaluated by SCTCS staff to determine:
  - 1-if the proposed program is substantially the same as the existing program,
  - 2-if the proposed program meets applicable accreditation requirements,
  - 3-if the proposing institution has the capacity to support the program, and

4-if there is sufficient demand for the program.

- If SCTCS staff determines that the previously stated conditions are met, they will so certify to the Commission, such certification to be included with a brief program description and request for inclusion in the CHE's *Inventory of Approved Programs*.
- CHE staff will review the SCTCS request to determine if there are any substantive questions that remain unanswered.

If there are no substantive questions, Commission staff will notify SCTCS staff and the proposing institution that the proposed program has been added to the *Inventory*.

If CHE staff does have substantive questions, they will transmit them in writing to SCTCS staff for review and written response.

If questions are answered to CHE staff satisfaction, staff will notify the proposing institution and SCTCS staff that the proposed program has been added to the *Inventory*.

In the event that substantive questions remain unanswered, the SCTCS will have the options to withdraw the program from consideration, defer the program's consideration until the questions can be answered and the program resubmitted, or request that the program be submitted for consideration under the full program approval process.

CHE staff approvals of technical college programs will be communicated to the full Commission as a separate category in the annual *Informational Report on Approved and Terminated Programs*.

*Proposed Revision #2: Approval of Extending Programs to New Sites by All Colleges and Universities*

The regulatory relief that staff proposes as described below will not only reduce the demands on faculty and staff time and travel at the institutions and for the Commission and its staff, but it will have the added benefit of allowing our institutions to respond more quickly to requests for off-site program delivery and to become more competitive with the many for-profit institutions that continue to expand their program offerings in the state. The change to current policy is strongly supported by the Advisory Committee on Academic Programs, which discussed the proposed change in concept at its meeting on January 15, 2009. Precipitating this discussion was the request by Winthrop University to offer three existing programs off-campus at the invitation of school districts interested in providing enhanced professional development for a cohort of teachers and/or administrators.

Under current policy, up to 50% of any existing degree program may be offered off-site without any Commission approval or notification. This flexibility allows institutions to “test the waters,” so to speak, and determine if there is sufficient demand to justify offering a full program off-site. Under current policy, as soon as more than 50% of a program is offered off-site, Commission approval is required. Recently, staff waived the required Program Planning Summary in favor of accepting directly a full program proposal. Under current policy, the Commission has already delegated to the staff the authority to approve on its behalf these proposals, thereby expediting approval by eliminating the need to submit the proposals to the Committee on Academic Affairs and Licensing and the full Commission.

Staff concurs with the Advisory Committee on Academic Programs that additional streamlining of the approval process for existing programs to be offered off-site is both desirable and feasible in order to reduce the time and monetary costs involved in extending programs to new sites. Thus, staff proposes to eliminate the requirement for a full program proposal and use the existing *Notification of Change* form already established under current policy and procedures. However, while staff fully supports the streamlining of the approval process for this type of program, staff also recognizes that offering a program away from the main campus involves certain issues that require additional reporting, which can easily be included on the *Notification of Change* form. In brief, these requirements include:

- a statement explaining the faculty requirements of the program change, the source of faculty for the location, and the impact on faculty course load;
- the source of funding to support the offering of the program at an off-campus site;
- the source of students for the program;
- the proposed date of termination of the program (if applicable since many off-campus programs involve cohorts of students and are not intended to be offered at the given site indefinitely); and
- a copy of the *Notification of Substantive Change* required by SACS’ Commission on Colleges for all such changes in an institution’s program offerings.

Because this information must already be prepared as an internal or SACS requirement, there will be no appreciable additional demand placed on institutional staff to provide this information.

In addition, because the offering of programs off-site may have an adverse effect on programs offered either on-site or off-site by other public institutions, staff believes that there should be an opportunity to allow other institutions to respond to the notification of change. To that end, as part of the proposed revised policy and procedures, staff will include the expanded *Notification of Change* form (see **Attachment 1**) in the mail outs for the quarterly meetings of the Advisory Committee on Academic

Programs with the request that institutions review the materials and request discussion of the proposed program extension to an off-site location at the subsequent meeting if there are any objections. Any such request will cause the proposed program change to be added to the meeting agenda for discussion and vote as per usual for new programs. In addition, if staff has concerns about the information provided on the *Notification of Change* form, staff may also remand the request to the Advisory Committee for discussion and approval. In the face of an adverse decision by either the staff or the Advisory Committee, the affected institution will have the right to appeal the decision to the Committee on Academic Affairs and the full Commission. Historically, there have been only occasional protestations of off-site offerings; in reality, many programs offered at locations other than the main campus are often requested as “contract” courses by school districts or by business and industry seeking to facilitate educational opportunities for their employees. The staff does not expect that this pattern will change to any significant degree.

As with *Revision #1* above, staff will report on all off-site program additions, and terminations, in the annual *Informational Report on Approved and Terminated Programs*.

### **Recommendation**

The Committee on Academic Affairs and Licensing commends favorably to the Commission two changes to the *Policies and Procedures for New Academic Program Approval and Program Termination* as described above favorably to the Commission for immediate implementation.

**Attachment 1**

**S.C. Commission on Higher Education  
Notification of Change in Academic Program Status or Organizational Unit  
After approval by Chief Instructional Officer,**

Four- year institutions please send completed form by mail to:

Director of Academic Affairs and Licensing  
S. C. Commission on Higher Education  
1333 Main Street, Suite 200  
Columbia, SC 29201

Or, fax to:

(803) 737-2297

Technical Colleges please send completed form by mail to:

Vice President for Academic Affairs  
South Carolina Technical College System  
111 Executive Center Drive  
Columbia, SC 29210

1. a. Institution \_\_\_\_\_

b. Implementation date for change: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Program Title including options, concentrations, tracks (See definition, p. 6)

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Designation, type, and level of degree (if a baccalaureate, please specify 4- or 5-year)

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Site of delivery \_\_\_\_\_

5. Delivery mode (See definition, p.4) and percentage of coursework offered by each mode \_\_\_\_\_

6. CIP Code (confirmed by CHE) \_\_\_\_\_; Site Code (assigned by CHE) \_\_\_\_\_

7. Nature of change and summary of the rationale for and objectives of the program  
(Please include the number of credit hours the change entails.)

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8. Curricular display: courses in the major (prefix, number, and title); information on general education and electives requirements; number of credits required for graduation

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**If the proposed change involves offering an existing degree program at a new site, complete items 9-14. If not, go to item 14:**

9. Provide a copy of the Notification of Substantive Change used to inform SACS COC of the proposed new program location.

10: Describe faculty resources required and the source of faculty for the program:

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11. Proposed termination date of the program (if applicable):

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12: Source of funding (e.g., student tuition, contract, grant):

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13: The proposed program will involve no request for additional state funding:

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

14:

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Signature of Institution's  
Chief Instructional Officer

Date