3.4 ACADEMIC PROGRAM APPROVAL

3.4.1 Purpose

The State Regents recognize the primary role of institutional faculty, administrators, and governing boards in initiating and recommending needed changes in educational programs. Institutional faculty are discipline experts responsible for developing and teaching the curriculum. The institutional administrators and governing board view the proposed program in light of the institution's resources and priorities. The State Regents provide the system perspective and consider the need for each new program request. The State Regents ensure that requests and mandates are applied consistently.

3.4.2 Instructional Programs and Courses

Instructional programs that result in the awarding of a degree require State Regents' approval. Minors, micro-credentials, stand-alone certificates, and embedded certificates are a coherent set of courses in a discipline or interdisciplinary grouping other than a student's degree program, and are exempt from this policy.

The terminology for the aggregation of courses into different levels of academic offerings varies from institution to institution. For clarity, this policy will use the following terminology in referring to different levels of aggregation levels of courses.

A. Levels of Instructional Programs

1. Level I is the aggregation of courses that culminate in the awarding of an academic degree and defines the overarching degree designation. These are (inclusive): Certificate, Associate in Arts, Associate in Science, Associate in Applied Science, Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science, Bachelor of (Specialty), Graduate Certificate, Master of Arts, Master of Science, Master of (Specialty), Doctor of Philosophy, Doctor of (Specialty), and First Professional Degree.

2. Level II is the aggregation of courses that appear in the institutional catalog or on the student's diploma that specifically defines the academic degree designation. These may vary greatly from institution to institution and include, but are not limited to: Certificate, Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science, Bachelor of Fine Arts, Master of Education, Associate in Applied Science and Doctor of Engineering.

3. Level III is the aggregation of courses with an institutionally-unique instructional program code, as listed in the State Regents' inventory of degree programs, appear in the institutional catalog, and may be listed on the student's diploma. The nomenclature defines the discipline area and may be referred to as the major. Examples include: Horticulture, English, Physical Science, Cybersecurity Technology, Secondary Education, and Engineering.

4. Level IV is the aggregation of courses under an umbrella degree program (Level III) that reflect an area of study within a larger discipline, as listed in the State Regents' inventory of degree programs as options, appears in the institutional catalog, and may be listed on the student's diploma. These courses will usually share a common

core of related required courses or credit hours (approximately 50 percent) exclusive of general education, as well as having objectives consistent with the objectives of the Level III program. For example, a Bachelor of Business Administration in Business might have the following Level IV options: Finance, Management, Accounting, Information Systems, and General Business; or the Bachelor of Arts in English might allow options in Literature, Creative Writing, and English Education.

Levels I, II, and III, excluding all certificates, require approval from the institutional governing board and the State Regents. Substantive modifications to existing program requirements require approval from the institutional governing board and notification to the State Regents.

B. Addition, Modification, and Deletion of Courses

The State Regents recognize the primary role of the institution in initiating, reviewing, and authorizing course additions, modifications, and deletions.

C. Deletion, Suspension, and Reinstatement of Programs

Deletion of existing programs requires institutional governing board and State Regents approval. Requests for deletion must include: 1) the reason for the deletion, 2) a summary of the teach-out plan, if applicable, and 3) the number of students enrolled, when applicable, and an expected graduation date for the last cohort of students. Any request for an exception to this policy must be made in writing to the Chancellor.

The institution's President must notify OSRHE staff when a program is being suspended. While suspended, the program may not be advertised, no students may be recruited or admitted to the program, and the program will not be listed in the institutional catalog. Suspended programs will be noted in the State Regents Program Inventory and not displayed on the website. The institution's President must notify OSRHE staff prior to reinstating a suspended program, so that the State Regents Program Inventory can be updated.

D. Uniform Course Numbering

Pursuant to 70 O.S. § 3206.1, in order to provide for a more effective and efficient system of the transfer of student's credits among institutions of Oklahoma higher education, the State Regents adopted the following uniform system of numbering for identification of courses offered at all institutions in the State System. A course number will consist of four digits as follows:

1. The first digit will denote the course level.

2. The second and third digits will be used to identify the course within a department.

3. The fourth digit will denote the number of semester hours credit of the course.

All courses offered at institutions should be numbered consistent with the course numbering system unless they are exempt by State Regents' action.

3.4.3   Program Request Procedures

The following procedures will be followed by the submitting institution for the State Regents to consider a new academic program:

A.   Letter of Intent

1.   New Program Requests

The institutional President or designee must submit a Letter of Intent ("LOI") to initiate a new program to OSRHE staff, using the approved submission form.

OSRHE staff will then distribute the LOI as a notice to the other institutional Presidents and Chief Academic Officers. The institutions will have 14 calendar days (excluding holidays and breaks) from the date of the notice to provide comments, ask questions and/or protest.

2.   Letter of Intent Protests

a.   A protest must be made by a State System institutional President, or if delegated, by the Chief Academic Officer.

b.   If a protest is received in the allowable timeframe, the requesting institution and protesting institution will mediate in good faith. Mediation must take place within 30 days , or longer if mutually agreed and approved by OSRHE staff, of the receipt of the protest. The outcome of the mediation must be reported to OSRHE staff within 5 days after the mediation process is complete. If the protestor fails to respond to mediation requests, the protest is deemed moot. If resolution cannot be made through mediation the protest will be elevated to senior OSRHE staff to facilitate a meeting between the requesting institution and protesting institution. If a resolution cannot be determined through mediation with OSRHE staff, the protest will be considered by the Chair of the State Regents Academic Affairs Committee to determine if the requesting institution should develop a full proposal, collaborate with another institution, or discontinue efforts toward that program.

c.   Protests cannot be made from an institution within the same governing board system as the institution submitting the program. Protests from the same governing board system should be resolved before submitting the LOI to the State Regents.

d.   Protests will only be considered based on:

i.   Unnecessary duplication; or

ii.   Workforce demand; or

iii.   Student needs in the state.

Personal grievances about the program or faculty will not be considered.

The LOI does not entail a commitment on the part of an institution to

establish the program or on the part of the State Regents to approve the program.

  3. Contents of the Letter of Intent:

    a. Official degree designation and name of the program as it will appear on the transcript.

    b. A short description of the program.

    c. A summary of the market demand.

    d. A short narrative on how the program addresses an unmet need in the state.

    e. Indication of the locations or campuses where the program will be offered and the delivery method.

B. Governing Board Approval

The institutional governing board does not need to approve the LOI prior to submission to the State Regents. The institutional governing board must approve the program request prior to OSRHE staff formally submitting the program proposal to the Chancellor for the State Regents' consideration.

C. Submission of a New Program Proposal

A New Program Proposal ("NPP") must be submitted to OSRHE staff, using the approved submission form. The NPP does not entail a commitment on the part of an institution to establish the program or on the part of the State Regents to approve the program.

OSRHE staff will then distribute the NPP as a notice to all State System institutional Presidents and Chief Academic Officers. The institutions will have 14 calendar days (excluding holidays and breaks) from the date of the notice to provide comments, ask questions or protest.

Program requests must be completed using the provided Academic Program Request form on the State Regents' website, which contains the following required sections:

  1. Description of the Program

  2. Demand for the Program

  3. Unnecessary Duplication

  4. Program Review and Assessment Plan

  5. Indication of Modalities

  6. Location

D. Program Proposal Protests:

  1. A protest must be made by a State System institutional President, or if delegated, by the Chief Academic Officer.

  2. If a protest is received in the allowable timeframe, the requesting institution and protesting institution will mediate in good faith. Mediation must take place within 30 days of the receipt of the protest, or longer if mutually agreed and approved by OSRHE staff,. The

outcome of the mediation must be reported to OSRHE staff within 5 days after the mediation process is complete. If the protestor fails to respond to mediation requests, the protest is deemed moot. If resolution cannot be made through mediation the protest will be elevated to senior OSRHE staff to facilitate a meeting between the requesting institution and protesting institution. If a resolution cannot be determined through mediation with OSRHE staff, the protest will be considered by the Chair of the State Regents Academic Affairs Committee to determine if the requesting institution should develop a full proposal, collaborate with another institution, or discontinue efforts toward that program.

3. Protests may not be made by an institution within the same governing board system as the institution submitting the program. Protests in these cases should be resolved at the governing board level before being submitted to the State Regents.

4. Protests will only be considered based on:

   a. Unnecessary duplication; or

   b. Workforce demand; or

   c. Student needs in the state.

   Personal grievances about the program or faculty will not be considered.

E. State Regents' Staff Review of the Program Request

   1. OSRHE staff will review the institution's program request and submit a recommendation for State Regents' action. The State Regents may take one of four actions:

      a. Disapprove the program;

      b. Defer the program request until the institution meets specified criteria or provides additional information;

      c. Provisionally approve the program subject to specific criteria that must be met in order for the program to continue beyond a specified date; or

      d. Approve the program without qualification.

      If the State Regents defer or disapprove the program, the institution may resubmit a program proposal for reconsideration at a future date.

   2. Institutions must notify OSRHE staff of new certificates, in a timely manner, so they may be added to the official degree inventory.

3.4.4 New Programs Request Criteria

A. Demand for the Program

   The institution should demonstrate demand for the program.

   1. Student Demand

      Evidence of student demand should be adequate to expect a reasonable level of enrollments and degree production.

   2. Employer Demand

Evidence of employer demand shall be provided. Such evidence may include employer surveys, labor market analyses, and future workforce projections.

B.   Unnecessary Duplication

Preventing and eliminating unnecessary program duplication is a priority of the State Regents. Where other similar programs may serve the same potential student population, evidence must demonstrate that the proposed program is sufficiently different from the existing programs or that access to the existing programs is sufficiently limited to warrant a new program. Where appropriate, technology will be used to reduce or eliminate duplication of effort and use existing resources more efficiently.

Normally, proposed programs in undergraduate core areas would not be considered unnecessarily duplicative. Unnecessary duplication is a more specific concern in vocational/technical, occupational, and graduate and professional programs which meet special manpower needs. The institution submitting the new program request shall provide evidence that the proposed program is not unnecessarily duplicative of similar offerings in the state.

In considering a program whose title or content implies duplication, the proposed program will be examined to determine the extent to which it duplicates existing programs. If duplication is found to exist, then the proposed program will be evaluated to determine whether the duplication is necessary. In making this determination, the following criteria will be evaluated:

1.   Demand for the Program

Evidence should be presented demonstrating that there is sufficient unmet demand for the program in one or more of the following areas to justify duplication:

a.   Student Demand

Present evidence demonstrating how the new program will meet student demand not being served by existing programs.

b.   Employer Demand

Present evidence demonstrating how the new program will meet employer demand not being served by existing programs.

2.   Alternative Forms of Delivery and Consortial, Dual, or Joint Degree Programs

The new program request should address the feasibility of meeting the demand for the program through alternative forms of delivery, including electronic and on-site delivery of the program. When duplication is evident, the new program request should address the feasibility of consortial, dual, or joint degree approaches, including through electronic means.

C.   Program Review and Assessment

The institution must provide program evaluation procedures, which may include evaluation of courses and faculty by students, administrators, and departmental personnel as appropriate, and review of enrollment data and graduation data.

3.4.5   Micro-credential

Institutions may create and issue micro-credentials for completing a specific set of activities and/or courses. Institutions wanting to include a micro-credential on the statewide inventory must adhere to the following process:

A.   Micro-Credential Authorization

Institutions seeking to participate in the micro-credentials statewide inventory must first be authorized as having met the State Regent quality criteria listed in the Academic Affairs Procedures Handbook.

B.   New Micro-Credential Process

An institution that has been authorized to participate in the State Regent micro-credential inventory will notify OSRHE staff of new micro-credentials or digital badges to be added to the inventory using the approved online form.