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March 2009

**Policy A-5 (New Degree Proposal) Revision to Accommodate
Moderate Degree Changes
Approved by the Board on March 26, 2009**

Text Added to the Current Policy

The following text is added before the first paragraph of policy A-5 in the *Program and Facility Approval Policies and Procedures* (September 2005):

New degree programs can have a variety of origins. Some evolve from an existing program or programs, and some develop independently. In recognition of this, the amount of information required by the new degree proposal policies and procedures (below) is a function of the extent to which a new program represents a significant departure from related existing programs, if any. In other words, the policies require more information from a proposal for a program starting from scratch than they do from a proposal for a program that evolved and differs only moderately from a high quality existing program with an established track record of responding to student, employer, and community need.

Accordingly, the Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) will consider two broad categories of new degree proposals:

- 1) Moderate degree change proposals (MDCP); and
- 2) Full proposals for new degrees.

For moderate changes to eligible programs, institutions may submit either a MDCP or a full proposal for a new degree, whichever they prefer. Eligible programs are existing options, concentrations, specializations, or degree programs that have enrolled and graduated students for at least five years. Moderate changes do not represent significant departures from eligible programs and include the following:

- Conversion of eligible options, specializations, or concentrations to degrees (such as the conversion of options within a Bachelor of Arts degree into separate BA degrees);

- Consolidation of two or more eligible degrees into a single new degree (such as the consolidation of two separate Ph.D. degrees into a single Ph.D. degree); or
- Certain changes in the level of an eligible program's degree designation (such as upgrading a professional bachelor's degree to a master's degree in response to a requirement by a licensing authority).

Generally, institutions must submit full proposals for new degrees for all other changes not specifically described above. However, the HECB recognizes that circumstances may arise under which an MDCP may be appropriate even if the type of change is not listed above, or if the type of change is listed, but the program(s) involved do not meet the eligibility requirements.

In such cases, an institution may submit an MDCP accompanied by an exception request letter:

- Summarizing the proposed change, including what is changing and why;
- Indicating what aspects of the proposed change make the exception letter necessary;
- Formally requesting the HECB to treat the proposed change as a moderate degree change; and
- Providing a brief summary explanation of why the HECB should do so.

Any such exception request letter must undergo all appropriate institutional review processes and be on institutional letterhead signed by the institution's chief academic officer. The MDCP and exception request letter will be posted to the HECB's Web site for 30 days for public comment.

An institution must submit each MDCP no less than nine months prior to the proposed start date of the program and no less than two months prior to the Board meeting it would like the HECB to consider the MDCP. Upon receipt of an MDCP, the HECB will follow the same public notice and other review process procedures employed for full proposals. Decisions regarding MDCP proposals include:

- Full approval of the change;
- Conditional approval of the change;
- Denial of the change; or
- Requirement of submission of a full proposal for a new degree.

If the HECB approves the moderate degree change, the institution must begin to enroll students in the revised program within three years, unless extended by the Board. If this does not occur, approval will sunset and revert to the original degree program(s). If the HECB requires submission of a full proposal for a new degree program, the MDCP will be considered to have satisfied the requirement for a Planning Notification of Intent, and the institution may immediately begin preparation of a full proposal.

Moderate Degree Change Proposals

To increase efficiency and decrease the time institutions spend preparing proposals, the HECB will allow each institution making a moderate degree change to choose to submit an MDCP, rather than a full proposal for a new degree. The MDCP is a questionnaire (Form 11) consisting of two parts, Part A and Part B. Part A is required for all MDCPs, but part B is not required for externally mandated changes that do not involve a degree level change. An institution's MDCP must undergo all appropriate institutional review processes and be signed by the institution's chief academic officer.

HECB staff will review all MDCPs and prepare an executive summary for the Board highlighting information about whether there is sufficient evidence to conclude the following:

- The option, specialization, concentration, or degree program targeted for change has met all eligibility criteria to the extent appropriate, given the facts and circumstances of the proposed change;
- The proposed change is either required by a regulating, licensing, or program-specific accrediting authority or is justified by other information provided in the MDCP;
- The proposed change is the result of an appropriate institutional analysis based on program review, program-specific accreditation review, or other institutional review;
- The proposed change is aligned with or implements the current *Strategic Master Plan for Higher Education in Washington* and is justified by the HECB's *State and Regional Needs Assessment* (such justification will be inferred from data provided in the forms listed above);
- The curriculum and faculty are changing only to a moderate extent;
- The proposed program demonstrates a coherent design, with appropriate depth, breadth, curriculum, degree level, and degree title; and
- The start-up and ongoing cost, if any, of the change is reasonable.

Full Proposals for New Degrees

At this point, the existing text in policy A-5 begins.