



MINNESOTA STATE

ACADEMIC PROGRAM APPROVAL PROCESSES AND CRITERIA

June 2020

Academic Programs and Quality Assurance Unit



ACADEMIC PROGRAM APPROVAL

Background

In creating the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system, the state legislature required that the Board of Trustees approve all decisions to add, revise, or delete programs of study at the 37 institutions of the system. The programs included within this authority are graduate and undergraduate academic programs, training in professional, semiprofessional, and technical fields, and adult education. The legislature further instructed the Board to avoid duplicate program offerings and place a high priority on ensuring the transferability of credit (MINN. STAT. ANN. 123.45 (2008)).

The Board of Trustees responded to this legislation by delegating this task to the chancellor in [Board Policy 3.36](#), Part 6. *Academic Program Approval*. This policy requires the chancellor to provide his or her approval for new academic programs, changes to existing academic programs, suspension of academic programs, and closure of academic programs at system colleges and universities. In order to fulfill this mandate, the chancellor enacted [System Procedure 3.36.1](#) to establish standards, processes, and conditions that enable consistent implementation of academic program policy. The Academic Programs and Quality Assurance unit within the Academic and Student Affairs division works with colleges and universities to implement Board Policy and System Procedure.

Minnesota State has recently adopted the goal of eliminating equity gaps across all campuses by 2030, an outgrowth of a yearlong Board of Trustees initiative to “Reimagine Minnesota State.” In order to eliminate the equity gap by 2030, the Academic Affairs Unit in the Division of Academic and Student Affairs has prioritized work to ensure the quality of our academic programming reduces the equity gaps in student learning outcomes.

Minnesota State’s colleges and universities offer approximately 4,000 academic programs leading to certificates, diplomas, and academic degrees at the undergraduate and graduate level. It is imperative that the Academic Affairs unit takes a new approach to the approval of academic programming from a quality assurance perspective that will improve program quality and equitable outcomes across our system. The Academic Affairs unit has designed and will implement a coordinated academic program approval process using a system-wide portfolio management approach.

At the core of this design is a common framework for the review and assessment of new academic program proposals that not only incorporates an equity lens but aligns with regional and program accreditation requirements. This framework is designed to assure and improve quality across all of Minnesota State’s academic programs and to provide equitable access to pathways and credentials in support of the Equity 2030 initiative.

Program NOI and Approval Process

Current Process	Proposed New Process
<p>Program Inventory</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Academic Programs and Quality Assurance unit works with the campus until a new program is approved and added to the Program Inventory or a program application is withdrawn by the campus or denied approval. 	<p>Program Inventory</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Academic Programs and Quality Assurance unit works with the campus until the new program is approved and added to the Program Inventory or the program application is withdrawn by the campus or denied approval.
	<p>Letter of Inquiry</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Six months to a year prior to the expected implementation date of the program, the campus must submit a Letter of Inquiry within Program Navigator. <p>An academic program director will respond to the Letter of Inquiry and be the point of contact throughout the program approval process.</p>
<p>Notice of Intent (NOI)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Once a plan for a new program is approved on campus, the Senior Academic Officer (SAO) announces the proposal by submitting a Notice of Intent for a new certificate, diploma or degree program in Program Navigator. When needed, the academic program director responsible for that campus will work with the campus to prepare the Notice of Intent for dissemination. Once ready, new program plans are announced to other Minnesota State campuses for a 10-day comment period that enables the campuses to offer suggestions or express concerns to the proposing campus and Academic Programs and Quality Assurance unit. 	<p>Notice of Intent (NOI)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The campus will submit a Notice of Intent for the proposed new program to the Academic Programs and Quality Assurance unit through Program Navigator. In addition to student interest, labor market information, and other data, the initiator will need to provide program learning outcomes and a description of how the proposed program addresses Equity 2030. The program NOI will be sent to SAOs and be posted for public comment for 20 days on ASA Connect and the Minnesota State Academic Affairs website.

Current Process	Proposed New Process
<p>Decision on Program NOI</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An academic program director will review, compile and report out public comments regarding the program NOI to the campus. • Based on the program NOI criteria and public comment data, the Academic Programs and Quality Assurance unit will determine if the campus is approved to submit a new program application. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Approved for application submission: If a program has been approved to submit a new program application, the initiator will work with an academic program director to submit/upload their new program application to Program Navigator. 	<p>Decision on Program NOI</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An academic program director will review, compile and report out comments received regarding the program NOI to the campus. • Based on the program NOI criteria and public comment data, the Academic Programs and Quality Assurance unit will determine if the campus is approved to submit a New Program application. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Approved for application submission: If a program has been approved to submit a New Program application, the program initiator will work with an academic program director to submit/upload their New Program application to Program Navigator. ○ Denied for application submission: If a program has not been approved, the college or university can appeal the decision. (See Appeal Process Guidelines).
<p>New Program Application</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full approval • Conditional approval • Denied 	<p>Decision on New Program Application</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full approval: The college or university may offer the program as requested. • Conditional approval: The college or university may offer the program under specified conditions • Denied: The college or university may not offer the proposed program. The college or university may appeal the decision. (See Appeal Process Guidelines).
<p>Notify Accreditors</p>	<p>Notify Accreditors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The college or university is responsible for notifying or receiving authorization to offer the program from the Higher Learning Commission, the U.S. Department of Education and/or appropriate program accreditors and licensing agencies/boards.

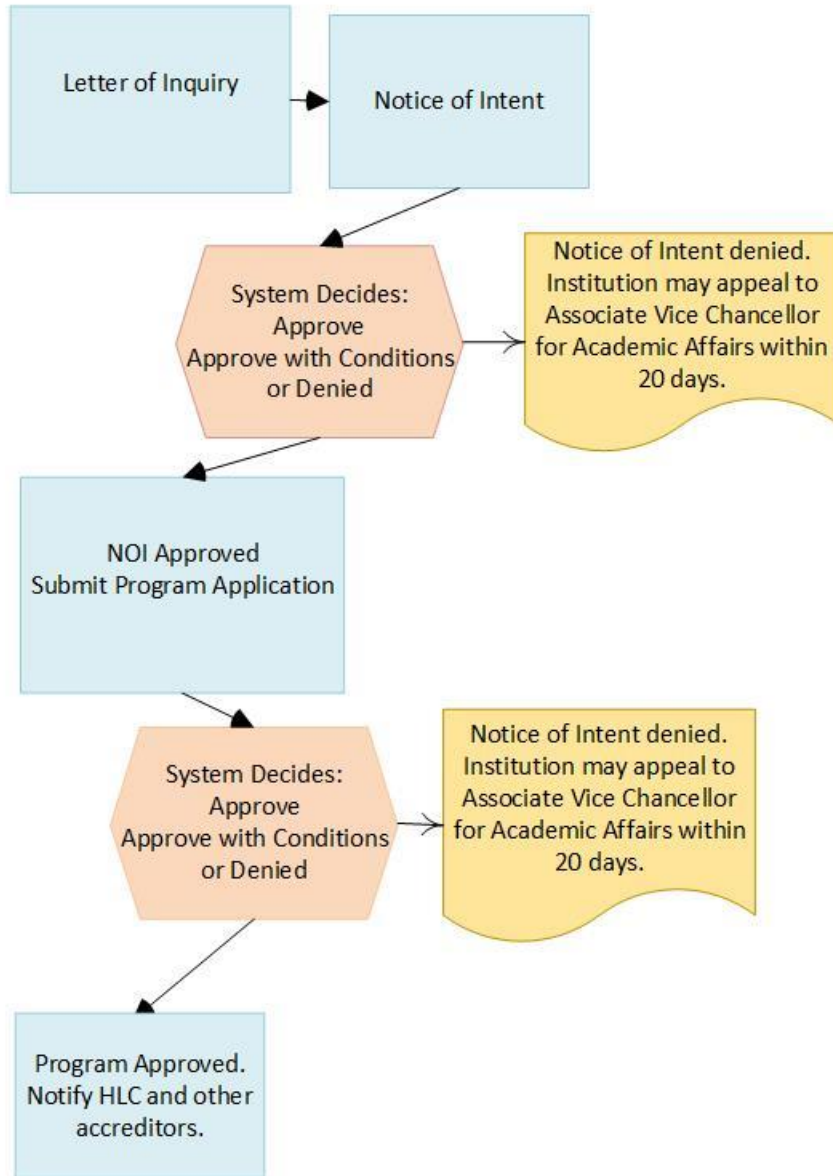
Appeal Process Guidelines

Colleges or universities not satisfied with the decision of the Academic Programs and Quality Assurance unit may submit an appeal to the associate vice chancellor for academic affairs within 30 days of the decision.

- Campuses must submit a Letter of Appeal and additional supporting documentation to the associate vice chancellor for academic affairs.
- Upon receipt of the Letter of Appeal, the associate vice chancellor for academic affairs will forward the Letter of Appeal and supporting documents to the chair of the Academic Affairs Council to bring together the Council's new program appeals sub-committee to review and make a recommendation to the senior vice chancellor for academic and student affairs.
- The Academic Affairs Council's sub-committee has up to 60 days to review the appeal. The review must be based on program replication, student interest, labor market need, program service area need, program justification and other relevant information. The Academic Affairs Council shall submit a recommendation to the senior vice chancellor for academic and student affairs.
- The senior vice chancellor for academic and student affairs shall make a final determination regarding disposition of the appeal within 30 days of receipt of the recommendation from the Academic Affairs Council's sub-committee. The decision of the senior vice chancellor for academic and student affairs is binding.

New Academic Program Approval Process Diagram

Academic Program Approval Process



New Program Approval Rubric	Met	Met with Concerns	Not Met	Notes:
<p>Aligned with Minnesota State mission, strategic goals, board policies and procedures, including but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vision and mission statements, Board Policy 1A.1, Part 2. • Access and accommodation for individuals with disabilities, Policy 1B.4 • Equity 2030: Demonstrate how the program development and design support in eliminating and/or addressing equity gaps with the following populations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ By race and ethnicity ○ First Generation Status ○ Pell Eligibility Status <p>Consideration(s):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Is the curriculum inclusive and do course outlines reflect the inclusive curriculum development?</i> 2. <i>Does the curriculum link to the everyday lives of a diverse student body?</i> 3. <i>Does the curriculum bring relevant world issues into the classroom?</i> 4. <i>Does the curriculum promote respect for different perspectives?</i> 5. <i>Does the curriculum allow for learning within the context of culture?</i> 				
<p>Aligned with institution mission and statutory authority:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Proposed program complies with Board Policy 3.24 and System Procedure 3.24.1 				
<p>Transfer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signed articulation agreement • Elaboration of program/course transferability • Draft semester-by-semester program guide 				
<p>Shared governance decision making:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AASC/Curriculum Committee minutes documenting approval of the proposed program • Program advisory committee minutes documenting the recommendation to add the proposed program (Board Policy 3.30 and System Procedure 3.30.1) 				
<p>Student involvement in decision-making (Board Policy 2.3 and System Procedure 2.3.1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documentation of student committee participation, or • Letter from the student association president affirming the program proposal 				

New Program Approval Rubric	Met	Met with Concerns	Not Met	Notes:
<p>Proposed program meets workforce and community needs, if applicable:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Labor market supply/demand data supporting the need for the proposed program • Occupations in Demand star rating • MN Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) projection of rate of growth-average, above average, etc. <i>Supply of graduates compared to DEED projections of occupational demand and other input from offering institution on local employment levels</i> • Market share data <i>High proportion of graduates from private colleges and universities for region or service area</i> • Evidence of industry partner needs <i>Statements of support from key industry partners</i> • Projected demand in the MN Economic Development area served by the institution <i>Occupational demand that outpaces current supply for programs in the region or service area</i> 				
<p>Institutional capacity to support the proposed program.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Written confirmation by the chief financial officer that the institution has the capacity to support the proposed program <i>As appropriate, evidence of up-to-date facilities, plan for equipment purchase and maintenance, and financial resources to develop and sustain the program</i> 				
<p>Regional planning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Meeting minutes documenting regional discussion/decisions regarding the proposed program. <i>Indication of objections, support, resolutions, and other documentation demonstrating the results of regional dialogue</i> 				
<p>Program duplication:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Institution service area <i>Identified service area as based on origin of students in similar programs</i> ▪ Enrollment data for existing programs <i>Current programs fully enrolled and/or able to take on capacity</i> ▪ Projected enrollment for proposed program 				

New Program Approval Rubric	Met	Met with Concerns	Not Met	Notes:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Existing program completion data <i>Impact on supply/demand data and potential for significant oversupply</i> <i>Related program completions by other institutions in the service area</i> ▪ Justification for adding a duplicate program, if applicable <i>Demonstrated niche for program in its content, delivery, and associated student market</i> 				
<p>Expedited program approval:</p> <p>Program is characterized by one or more of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First of its kind generally or for the identified region or service area • Responds to an emerging and/or unique opportunity • Addresses academic outcomes for students identified in the Equity 2030 Framework (1st generation, Pell eligible and/or students of color) • Responds to a critical industry need • Expands potential market of institution or system • Existing workforce need not being met by current programs in service area 				
<p>Student interest:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. IPEDS data: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program enrollments • Related course/program waiting lists • Course enrollments • Program completions 2. Other data: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current student surveys • Employee needs surveys • Employer needs surveys • Entering student surveys • Graduate follow-up surveys • High school counselor surveys • High school student surveys • Undeclared student surveys • Attendance at information sessions • Website analytics • Student clubs that represent an interest in a potential program or discipline • Published reports on emerging markets 				

New Program Approval Rubric	Met	Met with Concerns	Not Met	Notes:
<i>Possible data sources depending on program</i>				
Program learning outcomes <i>Outcomes should provide a framework for determining the more specific educational objectives of a program</i>				
Professional accreditation/certification requirements, if applicable				

For further information contact: Dr. Jon K. Dalager, System Director for Academic Programs and Quality Assurance, Jon.Dalager@minnstate.edu, Phone: 651-201-1684.

Minnesota State is an affirmative action, equal opportunity employer and educator.