

BOARD OF REGENTS BRIEFING PAPER

Handbook Revision, Low-Yield Program Proposal

BACKGROUND & POLICY CONTEXT OF ISSUE:

In his initiative to improve effectiveness and efficiency across the Nevada System of Higher Education, the Chancellor is reviewing both academic and administrative areas where changes could be made to improve operations. For academic programs, the Chancellor seeks approval of a policy to ensure that all institutions have realistic parameters for a program's continuation, based primarily on its graduating students in sufficient numbers. While many NSHE institutions undertake such review on their own, it is recommended that a regular report on low-yield degree programs take place across the system to ensure that academic programs are effective and realistically serving the needs of students today.

In recent years, numerous states have adopted policies that require a consistent review of academic programs in terms of program productivity, typically defined by the number of students graduating from the program, number of students served by the program, evidence of the essential state need for the program, or unnecessary duplication of academic programs offered at other public institutions in the state. The adoption of such policies has been, in some cases, in response to budgetary concerns, but in more cases has been in an effort to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of institutions. Given the fiscal and economic challenges facing postsecondary institutions, states are becoming more aggressive in reviewing academic programs to ensure their continued relevance and in holding institutions accountable for investing in programs that produce graduates and/or serve critical educational needs.

If approved, this regular review of program productivity will provide institutional administrators with the opportunity to decide to strengthen or consolidate programs, initiate alternative strategies such as distance learning to improve productivity, identify programs that will benefit from collaboration or the consolidation of resources, or discontinue programs that are not productive. Institutions may request an exemption from the policy to retain degrees that do not produce a desired number of graduates but which 1) contribute to the general education curriculum in providing service courses or a research area essential to the central mission of the institution, 2) have a demonstrated increase in demand through a pattern of increasing majors, or 3) meet a demonstrated need in the institution's service area. This policy, if adopted, will be effective Fall 2012.

SPECIFIC ACTIONS BEING RECOMMENDED OR REQUESTED:

Approve a new Board policy (*Title 4, Chapter 14, new Section 5*) requiring the biennial review of academic programs with respect to the number of graduates produced in the prior three years (See attached Policy Proposal).

IMPETUS (WHY NOW?):

This proposal is brought forward in response to the Chancellor's ongoing efficiency and effectiveness initiative.

BULLET POINTS TO SUPPORT REQUEST/RECOMMENDATION:

If approved as recommended, the proposed policy to regularly review mature (at least 10 years old) academic programs for continuation will:

- Improve public accountability by demonstrating the Regents' monitoring of the productivity of all academic programs;

- Require compelling justification for continuation of low demand programs;
- Encourage institutions to increase the number of students graduating to ensure the continuation of a degree program;
- Inhibit the dedication of resources to programs that are not appropriately producing graduates; and
- Justify the dedication of resources to programs that are producing graduates.

POTENTIAL ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE REQUEST/RECOMMENDATION:

Adoption of the policy may be perceived by institutions and faculty as invading their traditional prerogative to review programs independent of Board oversight.

ALTERNATIVE(S) TO WHAT IS BEING REQUESTED/RECOMMENDED:

None have been brought forward at this time.

COMPLIANCE WITH BOARD POLICY:

- ☐ Consistent With Current Board Policy: Title # _____ Chapter # _____ Section # _____
- ☒ Amends Current Board Policy: *Title 4, Chapter 14, new Section 5*
- ☐ Amends Current Procedures & Guidelines Manual: Chapter # _____ Section # _____
- ☐ Other: _____
- ☒ Fiscal Impact: Yes _____ No *X* _____
- Explain: _____

Table 1
Low-Productivity Academic Programs: Degree Completion Criteria In Other States

State	AA	BA/BS	MA/MS	PhD	Applicability	Source
Alabama	7.5	7.5	3.75	2.25	5-year averages at senior institutions	Code of Alabama 16-5-8
	7.5	7.5	3.75	2.25	3-year averages at two-year institutions	
Arizona	-	24	9	6	Main Campus: 3-year total	University of Arizona, Provost's Office, Academic Program Review Procedure Manual June 2010
	-	15	6	N/A	Non-main Campus: 3-year total	
Colorado	-	10	3	1	Most Recent Year total	Colorado Department of Higher Education, Academic Policy I.G
	OR					
	-	20	5	3	3-year total	
Kentucky	12	12	7	5	5-year average	Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, Academic Program Review Policy
Louisiana	-	8	5	2	Annual average	Louisiana Board of Regents, administrative memo dated April 22, 2009
	OR					
	-	40	25	10	5-year total	
Maryland	5	5	2	1	Most Recent Year Total	Maryland Higher Education Commission, Low Productivity Degree Program Report, August 2006
	OR					
	15	15	6	3	3-year total	
Nebraska	10	7	5	3	5-year average	Nebraska Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education, adopted June 26, 2008 meeting
North Carolina	-	19	15	5	Total for last 2 years	University of North Carolina Board of Governors, administrative memo dated February 5, 2009
	OR					
	-	10	9	2	Most Recent Year Total	

Table 1
Low-Productivity Academic Programs: Degree Completion Criteria In Other States

State	AA	BA/BS	MA/MS	PhD	Applicability	Source
Oklahoma	5	5	3	2	5-year average (alternative benchmarks for enrollments exist)	Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, Policy and Procedures Manual 3.7.7
Rhode Island	5	5	5	3	Annual total for 3 prior years	Rhode Island Board of Governors for Higher Education, Policy A-7.0
South Carolina	-	5	3	2	5-year average (alternative benchmarks for enrollments exist)	South Carolina Commission on Higher Education Policy, Section A-12
Tennessee	10	10	5	3	5-year average	Tennessee Higher Education Commission, Academic Program Productivity Procedures
Virginia	varies	12-6	7-4	4-2	Exact number depends on specific degree program; numbers for AA/AS programs depends on number of FTEs	Virginia State Council for Higher Education (Code of Virginia §23-9.6: 1.01)

POLICY PROPOSAL – HANDBOOK
TITLE 4, CHAPTER 14, *new* SECTION 5

Low-Yield Degree Program Elimination

Additions appear in ***boldface italics***; deletions are [~~stricken~~ and bracketed]

Section 5. Low-Yield Degree Programs

1. *Academic programs that are at least 10 years old shall be designated as low-yield if the number of degrees granted is below the following levels:*
 - a. *Associate degree programs must award at least ten degrees in the most recently reported year or at least twenty degrees total in the last three consecutive years, including the most recently reported year;*
 - b. *Baccalaureate degree programs must award at least ten degrees in the most recently reported year or at least twenty degrees in the last three consecutive years, including the most recently reported year;*
 - c. *Master's degree programs must award at least three degrees in the most recently reported year or at least five degrees in the last three consecutive years, including the most recently reported year; and*
 - d. *Doctoral degree programs must award at least three degrees in the most recently reported year or at least five degrees in the last three consecutive years, including the most recently reported year.*
2. *A report to the Board of Regents Academic, Research and Student Affairs Committee on all designated low-yield programs shall be made biennially. Low-yield programs will automatically be eliminated after two years on the list unless designated as exempt from the low-yield program list.*
3. *If a low-yield academic program is deemed essential to the central educational or research mission of the institution, the President may recommend that the Board of Regents Academic, Research and Student Affairs Committee designate the program as exempt from the low-yield program list.*
4. *If a low-yield academic program meets a demonstrated workforce or service need of the state or the geographical region served by the institution, the President may recommend that the Board of Regents Academic, Research and Student Affairs Committee designate the program as exempt from the low-yield program list.*
5. *If a low-yield academic program demonstrates an increase in student demand through a pattern of increasing enrollment of majors, the President may recommend that the Board of Regents Academic, Research and Student Affairs Committee designate the program as exempt from the low-yield program list for a period of two years to allow time for data to support its removal from the list of low-yield programs.*

RENUMBER SECTIONS 5 THROUGH 23 AS SECTIONS 6 THROUGH 24.
Effective Fall 2012.

Justification of changes to the Chancellor's Low Yield Policy Draft
prepared by Robin Herlands, Faculty Senate Chair at Nevada State College, in consultation with NSC
Senate and NFA leadership with input from leaders at other institutions.

- I. Designation of a program as low-yield should take into considering the size/cost of program and mission of institution.
 - a. The current model of blanket numbers that identify low-yield without considering enrollment possibly over-identifies programs at small institutions and under-examines programs at large institution. Examining graduation rates based on the specific number of students who enroll in a program eliminates this bias.
 - i. Example of Bias: If an institution with 20,000 students is expected to graduate 10 students a year per program, should an institution with 2,000 students be expected to graduate that same number? This simply doesn't make sense.
 - ii. Small programs at large institutions: Even large institutions have programs of varying sizes. For example, at UNLV, 294 students graduated from hospitality management in 2009-2010, and 1 undergraduate graduated from Jazz Studies. Even large institutions such as UNLV would have ~30% of their programs designated "low yield" under the current draft.
 - b. A sliding scale based on "program size" or "program cost" could also be implemented, and would set up system wide standards so that no institution could claim there was bias in the formulation of targets. Program size/cost will have to be defined, one way to do it could be # of full time faculty in the program. Examples of this exist in other states, for example the Rhode Island Board of Governors for Higher Education Policy A-7.0 states that the "Resources Required" should also be valued in the process of obtaining exemption from designation as Low Yield. This evaluates the size of the program, resources (personnel, facilities, external or internal funding), and sustainability of the program.
 - c. Ideally, mission and program size will both be included determining the number of graduates required to have appropriate vs. low yield. One reason for considering mission is that community colleges do not just exist to generate degree-holders. Other Higher Ed governing bodies have made extra allowances for community colleges to include students completing a set number of credits prior to returning into employment as "graduates" (see Alabama Code 16-5-8). In this kind of policy, the institution must document and verify *to the satisfaction of the Board* that the credits were completed and that the student achieved employment based upon successful completion of courses at the community college. Similarly at the State College, several students that have declared a biology major depart prior to degree completion due to acceptance into pharmacy school. These are not degree recipients, but should not be counted as failures of a department.
- II. The numbers of graduates for undergraduate and graduate degrees must be made more reasonable, and program quality should be another rationale for exemption.
 - i. Lower the number of awarded degrees demanded.
 1. Of all the state policies provided as examples, the average size of institution in these states is proportionally much higher than the average size of institution in Nevada. **On average**, the institutions outlined in the draft policy would designate programs as low yield if they had less than 4.8 degrees awarded per year, but this ranged from 2/year to 12/year.

Nevada should be on the lower end of the spectrum due to having a lower student population within the higher education system.

- ii. Change the "most recent year" language to a language that represents an average or a total over a period of years.
 - 1. Most policies utilize an average over a block of time (for example Nebraska and Tennessee require 10 bachelor's degrees average over a 5 year period). Hardly any look at most recent year alone. Events that occur in a single year could drastically affect the number of graduates in a year and should not be used.
- iii. Add to the exemptions
 - 1. Program Quality
 - a. Modeling Rhode Island Board of Governors for Higher Education, Policy A-7.0, Program Quality should be valued in the process of obtaining exemption (or permission to continue)
 - i. Program Quality- evaluates performance of a program, including the impact of that research on the state, the notoriety of the research produced, and the external dollars being brought in to fund the research. In addition, it is well known that some of the more difficult programs will be less popular because of the higher rigor demanded by the curriculum. These programs should not be penalized for their high standards, and assessing the success of a program should not rely on degrees awarded alone.

III. Alter language about automatic termination

- a. As written, programs considered low yield for 2 consecutive years are automatically terminated. This is problematic for multiple reasons
 - i. The reports on low yield programs are only delivered biennially, so it will be impossible to have this designation in 2 consecutive years.
 - ii. If a program were designated low yield in one year, the program will have less than 365 days to attempt to pull the graduation rate up. This is not enough time to make any significant changes to the enrollment and graduation rates of a program.
- b. Termination should only be considered if a program is low yield for a longer time frame, such as over the course of two biennium (4 years).
- c. Academic Review prior to automatic termination would be a way to more deeply assess the viability of a program.