HSC OP: 60.11, New Degree and Certificate Programs, Implementing Significant Curricular Changes, and Degree and Certificate Program Termination

PURPOSE: The purpose of this Health Sciences Center Operating Policy and Procedure (HSC OP) is to outline the procedure for initiating, developing and implementing new degree and certificate programs; implementing significant curricular changes; and terminating or merging existing degree and certificate programs.

REVIEW: This HSC OP will be reviewed on August 1 of every even-numbered year (ENY) by the Dean of each school, the Vice President and Chief Financial Officer (VP/CFO) and the Executive Vice President of Academic Affairs (EVPAA), with recommended revisions forwarded to the President by September 15th.

POLICY/PROCEDURE:

1. Degree-granting Authority.

   Legal authority to confer undergraduate, graduate and professional degrees and certificates is granted to TTUHSC by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) and Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). Formal THECB and SACSCOC approval is often required before implementing new degree or certificate programs and significant curricular changes. In order to obtain THECB and SACSCOC approval of these changes, prior approval by the Texas Tech University System (TTUS) Board of Regents is often required.


   a. A proposal for a new degree or certificate program typically originates with the faculty at the department level. In those instances where the new program impetus originates at levels other than the department faculty, new program proposals necessarily rely on active faculty participation in all aspects of their development. New program proposals normally are developed and refined through an iterative process of collaboration among faculty, Department Chair and Dean. Issues related to mission congruence, resource availability, effects on existing programs and long-term market sustainability must be addressed early in the proposal development process by the Dean. The Dean will approve continued development of the proposal on the basis of school and institutional priorities, recognized strengths in the department, and an analysis of the expected benefits vs. costs of the program proposed. The Dean will obtain prior approval from the President, Board of Regents, THECB and SACSCOC, before implementing new degree and certificate programs.

   b. The Dean will prepare a formal new program proposal, in accordance with the guidelines of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, which are available on the THECB website. Program proposals must address the following THECB areas of priority:

   (1) Adequacy of faculty, facilities and funding to undertake the program;
   (2) Cost and relative impact on existing programs;
   (3) Need for the program and benefits that will accrue to Texas from approval and implementation of the program proposed;
   (4) Numbers and kinds of students who likely will enter the program;
   (5) Market relevance for the program; availability of existing or similar programs in the state and region;
   (6) Long-term market and educational sustainability;
   (7) Degree of fit with School and University missions; and
   (8) Degree of fit with THECB program and resource allocation priorities.
c. The School shall develop a five (5) year business plan to determine all financial requirements for a new degree, certificate programs and/or expansion of a program (i.e., development and expansion of a campus in new locations). The business plan shall include timing and expectation of the number of faculty hires and student enrollment projections that are needed for the development of certain revenue and expense forecasts. The intent of the business plan is to illustrate the financial needs that align with the accreditation and academic requirements for the new academic program and/or expansion of an existing program. The business plan shall address and include, but not be limited to, the following:

(1) All ongoing Revenues and Expenses.
(2) All one-time Revenues and Expenses.
(3) Timing of the establishment of the new program to ensure optimal revenues.
   a. Potential bridge funding to cover expense gaps until full formula funding is attained.
   b. Short-term institutional funding.
   c. Additional private gifts.
   d. One-time Special Item funding for operational support.
(4) Complete alignment of the business plan with the development of the academic plan.
(5) The Schools must work with the Budget Office and AVP for Budget to collaboratively develop a sound business plan before any further routing and approval.

The schools must provide the cost information requested in the Business Plan (Attachment A). The business plan is not intended to be the program’s full academic plan, rather its use is meant to be a strategic financial guide as the the academic programming is being developed. Any adjustments on the programming side of the academic plan will affect both the baseline revenue and expense side of the business plan and should be properly accounted for. A new academic program will not be approved without a completed business plan that has been approved by the EVPAA, VP/CFO, and the President.

d. Each school at TTUHSC is responsible for establishing a formal faculty review process to ensure that the amount and level of credit awarded for the school’s courses are compatible with sound academic practice in the given field. (Refer to HSC OP 60.05, Definition and Calculation of Credit Hours.) Minimum requirements for degrees and certificates are determined by discipline-specific curriculum committees in accordance with the relevant external accrediting organizations.

e. New program proposals and business plans, along with a signed routing sheet (Attachment B), will be forwarded by the Dean to the EVPAA. The EVPAA will forward the proposal to the following individuals for review: Asst. VP for Student Services, Registrar and Financial Aid; Director of Student Business Services; Director of Classroom Support; Executive Director of the Library; Vice President for Information Technology; and Vice President / Chief Financial Officer.

f. The EVPAA forwards the reviewed proposal to the President for review and signature.

g. Once approved by the Board of Regents, the EVPAA will submit the proposal to the THECB. The staff of the THECB requests a minimum of three months for review prior to Board action. This review process may take considerably longer, when site visits by external reviewers are required by THECB policy and procedures. The THECB requires institutions to notify peer institutions of their intent to offer new degree programs on and off campus. If necessary, the EVPAA will notify SACSCOC prior to the implementation of the degree program.

3. Implementing Significant Curricular Changes

a. For all significant curricular changes, including changes in the method of delivery of existing degree programs and changes in Semester Credit Hour length of programs, the SACSCOC Substantive Change Procedure, available on the SACSCOC website, will be consulted and followed. In addition, HSC OP 60.04, Substantive Change Reporting, establishes procedures for recognizing and approving substantive changes and ensuring timely notification of such changes to SACSCOC. Changes in method of delivery of existing degree programs that result in fifty percent or more of the degree program being offered via electronic telecommunications may require prior approval by the Board of Regents and subsequent
notification of the THECB. Additional significant curricular changes include those that need to be reported to the THECB as well as changes that impact registration and financial aid.

b. A description of all significant curricular changes should be forwarded to the EVPAA for review. The EVPAA will notify the THECB and SACSCOC, as necessary, prior to the anticipated implementation of the significant curricular change.

4. Termination or Merger of Existing Degree Programs and Certificates

a. A degree program may be terminated, or two or more programs may be merged, for various reasons. Such action will be preceded by full study and consultation by the department faculty, Chair, and Dean.

b. Before any degree program is terminated or merged with another program, the rationale for such action will be presented and considered by the department faculty, Program Director, Chair, and by the relevant Dean. After such review, the Dean will forward the recommendation to the EVPAA, who will forward the recommendation to the President who will render the final decision.

c. The Registrar, Financial Aid Officer, THECB, and SACSCOC will be notified by the EVPAA of any degree program termination or merger.