

## GUIDELINES FOR CHANGE IN DEGREE-LEVEL AUTHORITY FOR STATE INSTITUTIONS

**Effective Date: July 1991**  
**Amended: May 1994**  
**October 2006**

### Authority

§ 23-9.6:1.3 of the Code of Virginia authorizes the Council of Higher Education "to study any proposed escalation of any public institution to a degree granting level higher than that level to which it is presently restricted and to submit a report and recommendation to the Governor and the General Assembly relating to the proposal. The study shall include the need for and benefits or detriments to be derived from the escalation. No such institution shall implement any such proposed escalation until the Council's report and recommendation have been submitted to the General Assembly and the General Assembly approves the institution's proposal."

### Purpose

It is the intent of this review process to determine an institution's ability to offer and support degree programs at a more advanced level. The review will focus on (a) the general capacity of the institution to operate at a new degree-granting level, and (b) its readiness to offer a particular proposed degree program at the new level. Approval of both is necessary in order for the Council to recommend to the Governor and General Assembly that the institution be granted authority to offer degrees at a higher level.

This review will focus, at both the institutional and program levels, on such issues as (a) the need for degree-granting authority at the proposed new level in the institution's region and the state, (b) *the fit/relevance of the proposed degree program and degree-granting level with/to the institution's current or to-be-amended statement of mission*; (c) student and employer demand for the proposed degree program, (d) the adequacy of the proposed curriculum for the new program, (e) the strengths of support curricula throughout the institution, (f) the strengths of the faculty, especially in the proposed degree program and support areas, (g) the availability of financial resources, (h) the adequacy of the library, and (i) the adequacy of space to house the proposed program. The institution must address these issues by providing the documentation as listed below in items 2, 3 and 4 of the procedures section.

### Procedure

1. In order to initiate the review leading to a recommendation from the Council to the Governor and the General Assembly, the institution's chief executive officer must submit a letter of intent to seek approval for a new degree level designation to the director of the Council of Higher Education; *the chair of the State Council and of its Academic Affairs Committee must be copied on this letter*. The letter must specify the degree level and the degree program(s) being proposed and the proposed date of implementation. The institution's notification of intent should be submitted in conjunction with its preliminary list of proposed programs as specified in the Council's Policies and Procedures for Program Approval.

2. As partial evidence of the ability of the institution to grant degrees at a higher level, the institution must submit its most recent Southern Association of Colleges and Schools' (SACS) self-study for reaffirmation of accreditation if it is no more than three years old. In addition, the institution must submit a copy of the SACS reaffirmation report that details its findings and recommendations. If the SACS reaffirmation visit has been longer than three years ago, the institution must submit a copy of its application to SACS requesting a substantive change. This application must adhere to SACS's Policy, "Substantive Change Involving the Initiation of Certificates or Degrees at a Level Different From that Validated at the Time of the Most Recent Official Action of the Commission on Colleges."
3. An institution's proposal for a new degree level designation will be considered in conjunction with the degree program(s) proposed for the new level. In preparing a degree proposal for review, the institution must submit its request in accordance with the criteria established in the Council's document, Policies and Procedures for Program Approval.
4. The institution also must submit copies of the self-study report and the findings and recommendations of accrediting agencies for any existing degree program(s) with programmatic accreditation, if they are in the area of the proposed degree program. These materials should be submitted even if the next degree level does not require programmatic accreditation.
5. Following receipt of eight copies of the above documents, the Council staff will appoint, in consultation with the institution *and the Council's Academic Affairs Committee*, a review committee. The principal tasks of the review committee will be to determine whether the institution has the ability to support the proposed degree status change without adversely affecting the existing programs and operations and whether the proposed program meets the standards for approval as set forth by the Council. The review committee will be accompanied by staff members from the Council. The staff will assist in organizing the campus site visit, assist in interpreting Council guidelines, and provide additional information about the institution and the educational character of the state. The committee will select a chair from among its members. At the end of the review committee's visit, the committee shall conduct an exit interview with institutional representatives, in which it will detail its preliminary findings and proposed recommendation.
6. The review committee, with the support of the Council staff, will prepare a written report of its findings and recommendation. The committee shall recommend to the Council that it approve or deny the institution's request for both the proposed degree program and the authority to offer the degree at the appropriate level. The Council staff will send a copy of the committee's report to the institution for its review and correction of factual errors prior to submitting the report to Council.
7. The Council staff will make its recommendation to the Council based on the recommendation of the review committee and its review of the proposed program. The staff reserves the right to concur or not concur with the recommendation of the review committee. The staff will recommend that a request be approved, denied, or deferred. The staff will notify the institution of its recommendation prior to Council action.

Addendum to July 1991 policy:

On May 10, 1994, the Council of Higher Education adopted the following general policy about doctoral programs:

Doctoral degrees normally will be offered by the major research universities. Exceptions will be considered (1) if another institution has a special capacity to offer a doctoral degree, usually of a professional sort as distinguished from a research degree; (2) if there is a strong demand from place-bound professionals for the proposed program; or (3) if there are other special circumstances that support the proposed program. Institutions shall not divert resources from undergraduate instruction to support new doctoral programs.