

See notes below, as per text box numbers in margins.

1. “Spin-off” option removed, as well as “facilitated.” See below in re process/timeline.
2. Regular pipeline toward approval: more predictable planning based on when institution wants the program to start. With one exception, all programs will come before Council. Institutions will have to do a bit more in re duplication—more on this in the guidance document.
3. Possible modification of “modification.” Still at issue is extent to which Council wishes to guard against backdoor creation of a very different program through gradual modifications. The change reflected here essentially follows D. Erwin’s recommendation by collapsing two categories of modification to one, and leaves institutions somewhat more leeway for changes to programs going forward. A main purpose of a “modification” provision is to prevent de facto alteration of a program into something that has a different purpose from what originally grounded approval of the program.

**ACADEMIC PROGRAMS AT PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS:
POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR PROGRAM APPROVALS AND CHANGES**

Effective: [Insert DATE]

I. Council's Statutory Duties Related to Academic Programs at Public Institutions

The Code of Virginia, Section 23.1-203, enumerates core duties of the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV). Those most directly related to academic programs at public institutions are listed below.

- Duty 1: Develop a statewide strategic plan that ... identifies a coordinated approach to ... state and regional goals, and emphasizes the future needs for higher education in the Commonwealth at both the undergraduate and the graduate levels and the mission, programs, facilities, and location of each of the existing institutions of higher education, each public institution's six-year plan, and such other matters as the Council deems appropriate.
- Duty 3: 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.
- Duty 5: Review and approve or disapprove all new undergraduate or graduate academic programs that any public institution of higher education proposes.
- Duty 8: Review the proposed closure of any academic program in a high demand or critical shortage area, as defined by the Council, by any public institution of higher education and assist in the development of an orderly closure plan, when needed.
- Duty 15: Adopt such policies and regulations as the Council deems necessary to implement its duties established by state law. Each public institution of higher education shall comply with such policies and regulations.
- Duty 27: Insofar as practicable, preserve the individuality, traditions, and sense of responsibility of each public institution of higher education in carrying out its duties.
- Duty 28: Insofar as practicable, seek the assistance and advice of each public institution of higher education in fulfilling its duties and responsibilities.

The Council has established the following policies and procedures related to academic programs at public institutions in answer to the duties referenced above, and as part of its obligation "to advocate for and promote the development and operation of an educationally and economically sound, vigorous, progressive, and coordinated system of higher education in the Commonwealth..." (Code of Virginia, § 23.1-200).

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II. Policy Statements on Academic Degree Programs at Public Institutions

A. Introduction

It is the intent of this policy and associated guidance documents to provide transparency and establish a context within which SCHEV and public institutions may work collaboratively to advance higher education. Council's goal is to ensure quality academic programming that answers to the economic and cultural needs of the Commonwealth while employing criteria and procedures that are as clear and efficient as possible. The policies and guidelines expressed here will help ensure that Virginia's public institutions continue to use resources efficiently, offer programming to address state needs, avoid unnecessary duplication, and contribute to the achievement of Council's strategic plan aspirations.

B. Degree Program Common Core Requirements

Each curriculum leading to the award of an associate's, bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree is identified by a separate CIP code in the SCHEV program inventory. Each curriculum under a given CIP code shall share a common core of courses according to the table below. Groupings of courses may be used to define a variety of related sub-areas that are not the formal degree program in which students are enrolled and graduated from. Sub-areas may be designated by varying terms, such as: concentration, emphasis, focus, major, option, or track. Sub-areas developed after a degree program has been approved by Council must maintain the focus of the degree program and the common core requirement of the degree program. Council approval is not required to add or remove sub-areas to an existing degree program. If a sub-area under a given curriculum becomes sufficiently different from the core as defined below, it may need to be approved by SCHEV as a program modification or new degree program; see also below under "Degree Program Modifications."

Common core requirements:

Bachelor's degree 25% of total credit hours required for the degree, excluding general education core

Master's degree 50%* of total credit hours required for the degree

Doctor's degree 25% of total credit hours required for the degree

*Consideration will be given to degree programs that adequately justify a core curriculum with less than 50%.

C. Operational Definitions of Key Terms

Certificate of Advanced Graduate Studies (C.A.G.S.) or Educational Specialist Degree (Ed.S.): curriculum leading to a formal award certifying completion of one year of study beyond the master's level in an academic or occupationally specific field of study. These programs are usually intended for professional licensure or professional development. Council approval is required to award the C.A.G.S. and the Ed.S.

Certificate program: curriculum leading to a formal award certifying completion of baccalaureate or post-baccalaureate degree-level work in an academic or occupationally specific field of study. Council approval is not required to award a certificate.

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CIP code change: change made in an existing program's six-digit CIP code designation (as reflected in SCHEV's program inventory) to respond to changes in the field or to better reflect the intent of the program, provided no significant changes have been made to program requirements, content, or emphasis, and provided that the new CIP code replaces the current code. SCHEV staff approval is required for a CIP code change.

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Degree designation change: addition or change to an existing degree designation (as reflected in SCHEV's program inventory), provided no significant changes have been made to program requirements, content, or emphasis. Examples may include: adding a B.A. degree designation to an existing B.S. degree or changing from a B.A. degree to the B.S. or from the M.A. in Fine Arts to the M.F.A. SCHEV staff approval is required for a change in degree designation. For an institution seeking to remove a degree designation, see Program Discontinuance, below.

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First professional degree: curriculum that includes theory and practice of the basic body of knowledge and skills required to function as an entry-level professional in certain occupational fields recognized for reporting purposes by the U.S. Department of Education. These programs must meet the following criteria: (1) completion of the academic prerequisites to begin practice in the profession; (2) requires at least two years of college-level study prior to entering the program; (3) total registered time to degree, including both pre-professional and professional study, equals at least six academic years. First professional degrees, while sometimes called doctoral degrees, are distinguished from research doctorates in that they do not include a required component of original research. First professional degrees may be awarded in the following fields:

Chiropractic (D.C., D.C.M.) — Optometry (O.D.)
Dentistry (D.D.S., D.M.D.) — Osteopathic Medicine (D.O.)
Divinity/Ministry (M.Div.) — Pharmacy (Pharm.D.)
Law (L.L.B., J.D.) — Podiatry (Pod.D., D.P., D.P.M.)
Medicine (M.D.) — Veterinary Medicine (D.V.M.)
Rabbinical and Talmudic Studies (M.H.L., Rav)

Modified program: a simple or substantial change to the curriculum of an existing degree program in the SCHEV Degree Inventory requiring SCHEV approval. Modified programs must meet the minimum requirements for the common core (see page 2 of this document). The two types of modification are "simple" and "substantial" and require different documentation. Simple modifications to a degree program are reported to SCHEV. SCHEV staff approval is required for a "substantial" modification to a degree program. No change in the degree designation or CIP code is permitted for a modified degree program.

New program: curriculum leading to the award of a new degree that includes content in a discipline or field not currently offered by the institution; shares fewer than one-fourth of its courses (excluding general education core) with an existing program; and, requires a separate CIP code. Additional faculty, facilities, or funding may be required to initiate and operate the new program. Council approval is required to confer the new degree.

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Program discontinuance: action taken to close a program or to remove a degree designation (e.g., remove a M.A. from an existing M.A./M.S. degree program) by indicating in SCHEV’s program inventory the dates for which no new enrollments and no new graduates will be reported. Notification to SCHEV is required; notification prior to program closure or removal is suggested. The intent to close a program in a critical shortage area requires additional information. Institutions must seek Council approval for a new degree program if reactivation of a discontinued program is desired.

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Action taken to remove a degree designation from a program (e.g., remove a M.A. from an existing M.A./M.S. degree program) by indicating in SCHEV’s program inventory the dates for which no new enrollments and no new graduates must be reported. The intent to close a degree designation of a program in a Critical Shortage area requires additional information. SCHEV staff approval is required to remove a degree designation from a program.

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Degree program merger: consolidation of two or more existing degree programs into a single degree program, whether new or an existing program. The consolidated program must meet minimum requirements for the common core (see above under Degree Program Requirements). SCHEV staff approval is required for degree program mergers.

1. Merger of two or more programs into an existing program in the SCHEV program inventory. Merged programs must meet the minimum requirements for the common core (see page 2 of this document). Research-based graduate degrees (thesis and dissertation option) are different in kind from course work-based undergraduate and graduate degrees in that didactic work is chosen to provide specific background for the proposed research. For research-based graduate programs, the merged programs must share a recognized academic relationship and must have the same minimum requirements for credit hours in terms of didactic and thesis/dissertation work. SCHEV staff approval is required for this type of program merger.

2. Consolidation of two or more programs into a new degree program with a new CIP code and degree title. Existing programs and the consolidated new program must meet the minimum requirements for the common core (see page 2 of this document). For research-based graduate programs, see requirements above. SCHEV staff approval is required for this type of program merger.

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Program name/title change: change made in an existing program title (as reflected in SCHEV’s program inventory), provided no significant changes have been made to program requirements, content, or emphasis, and provided that the new program title replaces the current program title (e.g. from the M.F.A. in Arts to the M.F.A. in Visual and Performing Arts). SCHEV staff approval is required for a program name change.

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Spin-off program: curriculum that expands an existing degree program into a stand-alone degree at the same degree level and does not change its essential character, integrity, or objectives and shares at least the first two digits of the existing program’s CIP Code; shares at least three quarters of courses with the existing degree program; requires minimal or no additional faculty; and, is funded through internal reallocations or private funds and does not require additional state funding. SCHEV reserves the right to determine whether a proposal is considered a new program or a spin-off program, and SCHEV staff approval is required to confer a spin-off degree.

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D. “New” Academic Degree Programs

Background

—By Council action in March 2002, distinctions were established between “new degree programs” and “spin-off degree programs” within SCHEV’s approval process.

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The purpose of this action was to clarify and streamline program approval procedures. As a result of this action, while the Council will continue to formally approve all new programs, SCHEV staff have been delegated the responsibility for approval of spin-off programs that meet the criteria specified in these policies and procedures. New and spin-off degree programs must be proposed to SCHEV using the guidelines, instructions, and forms contained herein.

By Council action in March 2011, all degree program proposals not recommended for approval by SCHEV staff shall be reported to Council's Academic Affairs Committee. The Academic Affairs Committee may elect to consider any proposal not recommended for approval and shall provide guidance to staff as to the final disposition of the proposal.

1. New Academic Degree Programs

A public institution's governing board must approve each proposal for a new academic program prior to its submission to the Council. Beginning with the updated policy approved by Council in 2019, the following procedures are adopted for new degree programs.

- New degree programs must first be presented to Council via a Program Announcement before the program can be presented for approval.
- Council action on new degree programs for approval will occur at two specific meetings during the academic year: January for programs beginning the next summer (or later); May for programs beginning the next fall (or later).
- Institutional officers must attest that certain information has been presented to the governing board prior to its approval of the new program (see the guidance document for new degree programs).

The new program approval guidance document shall provide a timeline for presenting new degree programs on Council agendas.

Board approval is the culminating step in a series of reviews by curriculum committees at the department, college, and university levels, as well as by each chief academic officer. For this reason, Council defers to the respective boards' authority for determining the appropriateness of proposed curricula, course descriptions, faculty credentials, and library resources, as well as student admission, continuation, and exit requirements. Meanwhile, the Council's consideration of proposals will center on system-wide aspects of each new program.

The Council is particularly interested in questions related to issues of "need" for new academic programs. These questions center around the state's need for the proposed program as well as the institution's need for it.

- **Why does Virginia need this program at this time?**
State Needs. Will the proposed program be an optimal use of state resources in light of state budget considerations and the contributions of any existing programs? What are the needs (justifications) for the state to initiate a new curriculum at this time?

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Employer Needs. Will the program fill demonstrable employer needs in the state? If so, what Virginia and/or non-Virginia market data indicate current unmet employer demand for graduates of such programs and the designated degree level? If not, will the program fill demonstrable non-employment needs in the state?

Student Needs. Will the program fill demonstrable student needs in the state? If so, what Virginia and/or non-Virginia market data indicate current unmet student demand for such curricula? If not, why does the institution anticipate student demand for the program?

Duplication. Will the program duplicate similar offerings in Virginia? If so, what are the needs (justifications) for the state to duplicate these efforts? How many similar programs are offered in the state; where? What is the enrollment strength and graduation rates of these similar programs?

- **Why does the institution need this program at this time?**

Institutional Needs. Will the program fill demonstrable institutional needs? (Does the institution need the program to fulfill its approved mission?) If so, how and how well will the program fit with the institution's SCHEV-approved mission statement? If not, what are the institutional needs (justifications) for the proposal at this time?

Resource Needs. Will the program affect the institution's budget? If so, how and how significantly? (Will changes be required in faculty, staff, facilities, etc.? Will the program be the optimal use of institutional resources in light of state budget considerations, as well as the contributions of any existing programs and the benefits of collaborative efforts?) If not, how will resources be internally reallocated to fund the program?

E. Degree Program Modifications

Some proposals submitted to the Council seek approval for programs that have modified degree requirements from the original degree program approved by SCHEV. Modified curriculum requirements may seek to address evolution in the discipline/field, respond to the needs of business and industry, or address changes mandated by discipline specific accrediting agencies. Council expects that institutions engage in continual processes of improvement that may result in a variety of modifications to existing programs; most do not require any SCHEV approval or reporting. In general, SCHEV approval of program modifications is restricted to instances that involve fundamental aspects of the original program as approved by Council. Modifications that require SCHEV approval include:

1. Changing or altering program requirements in a way that results in a fundamental change to the curriculum, purpose, focus, or identity of the program as approved by the Council or that alters the requirements for the common core as determined by Council (see page 2 of this document).
2. Converting a degree program to a new delivery format while ceasing to offer the program in the format in which it was approved by Council.

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Some proposals submitted to the Council seek approval for degree programs that are extensions or outgrowths of existing curricula (minors, majors, tracks, options, or concentrations). Such "spin-off" degree programs use predominantly existing courses, existing faculty, and reallocated institutional resources. The Council has delegated the authority for approval of such proposals to SCHEV staff. This spin-off designation and its associated procedures are expected to expedite approvals of such programs while also supporting institutional flexibility, responsiveness to the needs of business and industry, and entrepreneurial initiatives. Both new and spin-off programs must be proposed to SCHEV using the guidelines, instructions, and forms contained herein.

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Changes in the degree program delivery format from what was in the originally proposal approved by SCHEV.
Changes to licensure qualifying status of a course of study.
Significant changes to the core curriculum, purpose, focus, or identity of the program.
Total credit hour changes to a degree program.

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Modifications of degree programs are classified as simple or substantial. Simple modifications are revisions that are within the original justification for Council's approval, and which are reported to SCHEV. Substantial modifications involve revisions that are beyond the scope of the original justification(s) for Council's approval, and which require approval by SCHEV.

Simple modifications to a degree program include:
Adding an on-line delivery format to an existing site-based program or adding a site-based program to an existing on-line program while maintaining the delivery format of the program as approved by Council.
Increasing or decreasing the total credit hours of a degree program by fewer than six credits.
Substantial modifications to a degree program

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3. Increasing or decreasing the total credit hours by more than three (3) from what was originally approved by Council, or in the case of a bachelor degree, any change to more than 124 credits.
4. Changing the licensure-qualifying status of a degree program as approved by Council, i.e., adding or removing a licensure-qualifying option.

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Bachelor and Associate level degree programs must demonstrate strong evidence to increase or decrease the total credit hours. Modifications that increase or decrease the total credit hours of a degree program by more than twelve (12) credits may be treated as a new degree program proposal and require following the process for new degree programs.

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The Council has delegated the authority for approval of program modification proposals to SCHEV staff. Institutions considering a modification to a program that fits one of the above criteria should consult SCHEV staff for guidance.

F. Technical Changes, Program Mergers, and Intent to Discontinue Programs

Institutions may propose program actions such as technical changes (CIP code, degree designation, name/title) to existing programs and program mergers. Requests for such changes necessitate the submission of information and forms using the guidelines, instructions, and forms contained herein. Council has delegated approval authority for such changes including degree designation closures to SCHEV staff. Final authority for all program actions remains with the Council.

Institutions may close programs or propose to close degree designations. Notifications or requests are submitted to SCHEV using the guidelines, instructions, and forms contained herein. BOV approval is required to close a degree program.

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G. Additional Policies Related to Academic Programs at Public Institutions

1. Policy on Doctoral and First-Professional Programs

Doctoral degrees normally will be offered by the major research universities. For the purposes of this policy, the following institutions are considered to be the major research institutions: the College of William and Mary, George Mason University, Old Dominion University, the University of Virginia, Virginia Commonwealth University, and Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. Each institution awards doctoral degrees in many fields.

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According to SCHEV's policy on "Escalation of Degree-Level Authority at Public Institutions," other institutions may be authorized to offer doctoral degrees under certain conditions: (1) if another institution has a special capacity to offer a doctoral degree, usually a professional sort as distinguished from a research degree; (2) if there is strong demand from place-bound professionals for the proposed program; or (3) if there are special circumstances that support the proposed program.

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James Madison University, Norfolk State University, Radford University, and Virginia State University each have "limited authority" to offer doctoral degrees. "Limited authority" generally entails:

- limitation to ten (10) or fewer doctoral level degree programs;

- doctoral programs focused on applied areas of study as opposed to fundamental research in the arts and sciences; and
- any new doctoral program proposed under this authority must be supported by compelling evidence of state need and absence of duplication with already existent doctoral programs at Virginia public institutions,

2. Policy on Programs at a New Degree Level

An institution wishing to offer one or more programs at a new degree level must simultaneously submit the program proposal(s) and follow the procedures outlined in the Council's policy on "Escalation of Degree-Level Authority at Public Institutions." Negative action on the request to confer degrees at a new level results in the denial of the request for any programs at that level. However, approval of the new level does not automatically result in approval of the requested degree program(s). Each proposed program will be considered individually.

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3. Governing Board Approval Expiration

Any request that requires governing board approval must be formally submitted to SCHEV within two years of the BOV approval date.

3. Policy on the Review of New, Spin-Off, Modified, and Merged Programs

Institutions must conduct in-depth reviews of new, spin-off, modified, and merged programs in the year following the first graduates to determine whether these programs should continue. A program that does not meet its enrollment goal by the target enrollment year may be closed immediately or given a specified period, not to exceed two years, to meet its enrollment goal or be closed.

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H. Appeal of Council Action

Final authority to approve and disapprove degree programs and program actions resides with Council. If Council disapproves a degree program, an institution may appeal the Council action. An appeal filed within the designated time period shall be considered by the Council at its next meeting. Any institution filing the appeal may be invited to present the appeal at a Council meeting.