
Docket Item: 11.4 – HECC Program Approval Process Overview

Summary:

Under Oregon law, all proposed new academic programs at community colleges and public universities, or significant changes to existing programs, must be approved by the HECC using prescribed criteria before they commence (ORS 350.075(g)).

For university programs, historically the Commission has relied on institutional Boards of Trustees and their administrations as best positioned to determine whether a market for students exists and whether it makes good financial and academic sense for an institution to pursue such programs. The HECC consults with the Statewide Provosts' Council and with individual institutions in a more rigorous review to help resolve any competitive dynamics between public universities and to make the program approval process transparent and efficient.

At the community college level, the Commission's program approval authority is focused primarily on proposed new CTE credentials, as the Commission has authorized colleges to offer transfer degrees without seeking unique approvals from the HECC. For proposed new CTE credentials, HECC staff identifies a point of contact at the college, who serves as a key resource for staff and other administrators for questions and issues related to CTE program approval. The college's point of contact is expected to contact HECC's Office of Community Colleges and Workforce Development (CCWD) early in the program conception, design, and development process. As soon as HECC receives this notification, a HECC staff member is assigned to work with the college. This is meant to ensure strong communication and collaborative efforts as the program enters into final approval stages.

Docket Material:

Public University Program Approval Process

The Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) is required by statute to review and approve any "significant change" in a university's academic program (see Docket Item 11.4a). HECC administrative rule defines "significant change" as "any new undergraduate or graduate degree program, or any existing undergraduate or graduate degree program that will be offered more than 40 miles from the site at which it is currently being offered." In reviewing significant change proposals, statute charges HECC with considering the following criteria:

1. Is the program consistent with the mission of the institution
2. Does the program unnecessarily duplicate academic programs offered by other Oregon public

institutions

3. Is the program located in a geographic area that will cause undue hardship to another public institution; and
4. Are programs allocated among public institutions in a manner that achieves statewide needs and requirements?

Of these four areas, the HECC has focused most heavily on the second and third. Historically the Commission has viewed Boards of Trustees and their administrations as best positioned to determine whether a market for programs and students exists and whether it makes good financial and academic sense for an institution to pursue such programs. The Commission does not generally attempt to independently assess those conditions. Although HECC staff include mission alignment (area 1) in review of proposals, university mission statements tend to be so broad they are generally not the basis for denying any new program approval.

In 2015, the Statewide Provosts' Council (SPC), a voluntary council that serves in an advisory capacity to the HECC, collaborated with HECC staff to develop a new program approval flow chart that was adopted in June 2015 by the Commission (Docket item 11.4d).

Subsequent experience with the growth of hybrid programs that are offered through a combination of online and face-to-face modalities led to an agreement among Provosts on protocols for notifications, triggering conditions, and cross-institutional collaboration in program development. Portions of that SPC agreement were ratified by the HECC on April 11, 2019, when the Commission formally established the conditions under which a hybrid program must be approved by the Commission before it is offered (Docket item 11.4b).

Among other things, this undertaking revealed the importance of requiring universities to notify the HECC and other universities earlier in their processes of developing new programs.

With guidance from the Oregon Council of Presidents (OCOP), the SPC subsequently developed a voluntary process that takes into consideration internal institutional governance guiding new program development, statutory requirements, and HECC's responsibility to be attentive to collaboration and potential competition (Docket item 11.4c). The new HECC approval process focuses on processes and timelines that promote early notification, consultation, communication, and collaboration. It also includes expectations for the quality of the evidence and analysis that institutions present on issues of duplication and undue hardship.

Proposals submitted to the HECC have generally been with the unanimous support of the SPC. HECC staff review submissions to ensure that institutions have included the external review for the proposal;

have the approval of their governing board; the proposal does unnecessarily duplicate academic programs offered by other Oregon public institutions; and is in a geographic location that will not cause undue hardship to another public institution. HECC staff are attentive that all provosts have signed on recommendations, in part as confirmation that these latter two conditions have been met. HECC staff generally support unanimous SPC recommendations and submit them as consent agenda items for the Commission's approval.

In cases when SPC support is not unanimous, HECC staff does not submit items for the consent agenda. Instead HECC staff conduct research focused on the areas of disagreement and assess these against statutory guidelines to generate informational material and recommendations for the Commission. As part of the process proposing institutions and/or non-supportive institutions may select to present before the Commission when that body makes a decision.

Community College Program Approval Process

For community colleges, program approval policy states that a change of 30% or more of the educational offerings within a previously approved program constitutes a significant change.

In 2002, the State Board of Education (SBE) charged CCWD to revise and update the program approval standards for Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs (formerly known as professional technical education) programs. Through the work of a statewide taskforce, five standards were identified and approved by the Oregon SBE. These standards were transitioned to and adopted by the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) in 2014. Currently the standards include:

- 1. Need: The community college provides clear evidence of the need for the program*
- 2. Collaboration: The community college utilizes systemic methods for meaningful and ongoing involvement of the appropriate constituencies*
- 3. Alignment: The community college is aligned with appropriate education, workforce development, and economic development clusters*
- 4. Design: The community college program leads to student achievement of academic and technical knowledges, skills, and related proficiencies*
- 5. Capacity: The community college identifies and has the resources to develop, implement, and sustain the program*

For additional information regarding the community college program approval standards:

<https://www.oregon.gov/highered/institutions-programs/ccwd/Documents/Academic%20Approval/HECC%20COMMISSION%20PROGRAM%20APPROVAL%20STANDARDS.pdf>

HIGHER EDUCATION COORDINATING COMMISSION

November, 10, 2022

Docket Item #11.4a

In addition to CTE program approval, CCWD staff approves community college courses on behalf of the Commission. These reviews are tailored to the type of course being offered (noncredit, credit, CTE, lower division transfer, etc.).

Transfer degrees such as Associate of Arts Oregon Transfer, Associates of Arts Transfer, and other transfer specific degrees are approved as a statewide degree, in which colleges are then allowed to confer without seeking individual transfer degree approval.

Individual community college program and course approval is conducted using an online system known as “Webforms”. This system houses a variety of information related to programs and courses, including associated credits, hours, outcomes, and other required approval components.

For additional information related to community college course and program approval, please visit: <https://www.oregon.gov/highered/institutions-programs/ccwd/Pages/community-college-program-approval.aspx>

Docket Item 11.4a Attachments:

11.4a University Program Approval sections of ORS and OAR

11.4b HECC staff analysis / and proposal for changes related to university hybrid program delivery (adopted by the Commission 4/11/2019)

11.4c Statewide Provosts’ Council Program Approval Process (May 2019)

11.4d University Program Approval Flow Chart

Staff Recommendation:

This is an informational and discussion item only

HIGHER EDUCATION COORDINATING COMMISSION

November, 10, 2022

Docket Item #11.4a