

## POLICY ON ACADEMIC PROGRAM REVIEW

Board of Governors for Higher Education  
State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations

Adopted: 04/21/03 (BG)

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### Policy

The Rhode Island Board of Governors for Higher Education (RIBGHE) has as its mission the promotion and operation of an excellent, efficient, affordable system of higher education from the community college through the graduate and professional school levels. As one means of fulfilling this mission, the RIBGHE's policy is that each academic program throughout the Rhode Island system of public higher education should be reviewed periodically to ensure not only the quality of the program but also its productivity. By ensuring that all programs are productive, the RIBGHE seeks to guarantee to the citizens of Rhode Island high levels of academic quality and the efficient use of public funds.

### Triggering of Academic Program Reviews

Academic program reviews can be triggered in three ways:

1. A program review may be triggered as part of an institution's **normal program review process** and as part of its institutional planning (no less frequently than every six years). Using the criteria for continuation described below, a program's productivity will be among the items considered in these reviews. Programs that do not meet most of the criteria for continuation (see below) should be reported by the institution to the board's Academic and Student Affairs Committee.
2. In order to update the **annual Degree Program Offerings Analysis**, the Rhode Island Office of Higher Education (RIOHE) will request enrollment and completions data for all degree programs annually and may request reviews for programs that for three consecutive years fall below the following specified completions thresholds:
  - Five or fewer degrees awarded at the associate's, bachelor's or master's level
  - Three or fewer degrees awarded at the doctorate level

Institutions will have the opportunity to use the criteria for continuation (see below) to justify the continuation of low-completion programs.

3. The criteria for continuation (see below) will also be used to determine the appropriateness of **program duplication** across Rhode Island's system of public higher education. Some duplicate programs are necessary to provide geographical access to high-demand programs and to meet the needs of students and the state. RIOHE staff will ask the institutions to use the criteria for continuation to justify new program proposals that appear duplicative.

Further, existing programs that appear to be duplicative may be reviewed in regard to the criteria. In instances where an existing duplicative program fails to meet most of the criteria for continuation, the institution will halt admissions, develop a plan for current majors to complete their programs, and notify the RIBGHE of the suspension. [Note: The *Regulations Governing Academic Changes in Rhode Island Public Institutions of Higher Education* specify that the board should receive a notice of change when admissions to a program has been suspended; the board should be asked to eliminate the program (or notified of the reasons for continued suspension) if admissions to the program are not reopened within a specified time (see page 4, item #3 in the regulations).]

### **Schedule of Reviews**

Institutions must conduct reviews of programs on a regular cycle of no less frequently than every six years. These reviews may be scheduled as follows:

- In response to trigger mechanisms (i.e., low completions or potential program duplication) as specified above. The institutions should report program enrollments and completions for the previous year to RIOHE each year by May 15<sup>th</sup>. After updating the *Degree Program Offerings Analysis*, RIOHE will notify the institutions by June 1<sup>st</sup> of any programs that must undergo reviews because of low completions.
- To correspond to the review schedule of the program's nationally recognized accrediting agency; or
- To correspond with regularly scheduled, cyclical institutional program reviews. An annual report should be submitted to RIOHE specifying the review cycle and the names of the programs to be reviewed during the coming year. This report should be submitted by July 1<sup>st</sup> each year along with the report detailing projected academic program changes required by the 2002 *Regulations Governing Academic Changes in Rhode Island Public Institutions of Higher Education* (Section II: Outline of Procedures, Item #1 [page 6].) (Note: Some of these programs may have been identified already by RIOHE on June 1<sup>st</sup> as programs requiring a review due to low completions.)

### **Criteria for Continuation**

The following criteria should be used in assessing a program's need, and a program that meets all or most of the following criteria will be deemed to be necessary:

- ***Mission:*** The program's objectives must be tightly coupled to the institution's mission, goals, objectives and strategic plan, and the program assessment should clearly illustrate this close match.
- ***Economic/Societal Need and Program Duplication:*** The program should serve the economic and/or societal needs of the state or region and not be unnecessarily duplicative of similar programs within Rhode Island's system of public higher education. The rationale for the program should include a discussion, as appropriate, of the following:
  - Current and projected workforce demands for the program
  - Employment opportunities for graduates of the program

- Societal needs addressed by the program
  - Differences from existing programs within Rhode Island’s system of public higher education
  - Needs not met by independent institutions of higher education in Rhode Island
  - Geographical availability of the program (emphasizing Rhode Island demographics)
  - Possible ways to consolidate the program with existing programs within Rhode Island’s system of public higher education
- ***Student Demand:*** Sufficiently large demand in terms of student interest must exist for the program. Student demand may be demonstrated by reporting the number of students served by the program, including:
    - Headcount of students majoring in the program
    - Headcount of students enrolled in parts of the program (to fulfill requirements of other programs, general education requirements, or electives)
    - Five-year enrollment trends for majors and non-majors
    - Number of credit hours generated
    - Average number of graduates from the program over the past five years
- ***Program Quality:*** Programs must maintain high quality, and the quality of a program may be demonstrated in several ways:
    - A variety of outcome measures may be used to reflect program quality (e.g., retention data, completion data, time-to-completion data, student outcome assessments, transfer rates, placement rates, pass rates on licensure/certification examinations, employer surveys, and student/alumni satisfaction surveys)
    - Positive assessments of the program from accreditation reports or from external reviewers may be used to support program quality
    - Program faculty and/or students produce significant, highly respected research
    - Program faculty perform significant service to the institution and/or the community
    - Program generates significant external support (e.g., grants, contracts)
    - Program generates significant state/national/regional recognition
- ***Resources:*** Programs must have adequate resources in order to maintain quality. An analysis of the resources required to operate (and to maintain the quality of) the program should include:
    - Number of FTE faculty positions used to maintain the program
    - Number of graduate assistants used to operate the program, if appropriate
    - Average student-faculty ratio for faculty in the program, taking into consideration other regular teaching duties in which these faculty may be engaged
    - Estimate of funds available for reallocation to support the program (faculty, personnel, facilities, instructional resources, supplies, etc.) including three-year budget projections. The estimate would identify the source(s) from which the funds will be reallocated.
    - Income generated by the program to support the program itself and to support other operations of the institution
    - Estimate of the actual savings if the program were eliminated (taking into account direct and indirect costs and income in terms of grant monies generated by the program as well as tuition and other income, as applicable)

## **Institution and Board Actions**

In the event that a program fails to meet most of the criteria for continuation either the institution or the RIBGHE may take action:

1. The institution may notify the RIBGHE of program suspension or request that the RIBGHE eliminate the program.
2. If the institution does not seek to suspend or eliminate the program, the RIBGHE, after consultation with the institutions during a regular meeting of the board, will consider taking the following actions:

***Retain:*** The program has sufficient centrality to mission, productivity, and quality to be retained.

***Eliminate:*** The program has insufficient quality, productivity, or merit to warrant continuation.

***Consolidate:*** The curriculum may be restructured to reduce the number of programs.

***Focused Review:*** The program is sufficiently close to meeting most of the criteria for continuation as to make it possible for the criteria to be met in two years, at which time a focused evaluation, possibly with the use of external consultants, will be scheduled to determine if the criteria for continuation have been met.