



**MICHIGAN ASSOCIATION OF STATE UNIVERSITIES  
POLICY STATEMENT AND PROCEDURES  
FOR  
REVIEWING ACADEMIC PROGRAM PROPOSALS**

**Rationale for Voluntary Cooperation**

American higher education is justly acclaimed for its diversity and pluralism that have fostered responsible competition reflecting the free market of the society in which colleges and universities exist. Anticipated population trends, economic realities, and a desire to be good stewards of the public trust, however, require intelligent cooperation among educational institutions, particularly among those in the public sector. Such cooperation should be achieved without sacrificing the commitment to diversity, initiative and responsibility that our heritage of freedom and competition has sustained. Furthermore, the modern phenomenon of lifelong learning, made imperative by the dynamic of the information economy, with its demand for constant professional renewal and job upgrading, has conferred new responsibilities upon colleges and universities.

The special role of public higher education is to provide quality education at a reasonable cost and to make that education accessible to all income segments and geographic sections of the state's population. To fulfill this role in a responsible manner, the public universities of Michigan adopted and have utilized since 1974 a cooperative review process for all proposed new academic programs, significant modifications or combinations of existing programs, and the discontinuance of programs.

The purpose of the statewide review is two-fold: to maximize efficiency and to ensure high quality, which ensures that proposals account for the broader state education landscape while tailoring new programs to clearly identifiable needs. A statewide, external review of proposals also assists universities in dealing with increased program scrutiny from accreditors by providing evidence for the criteria for accreditation.

The Michigan Association of State Universities (MASU) delegates review of academic programs to the Academic Affairs Officers Committee of the Association. Since the 1970s, it has become standard practice that the program review allows for robust exchange regarding the nature and future of academic disciplines and programs in Michigan with great emphasis given to program quality and improvement. All programs approved during the review process will be reported to the legislature each March.

It is important to recognize that while MASU provides a formal mechanism of this review, each of our institutions rigorously reviews and approves each of their programs before submission to the Association. Equally, our campuses utilize a similarly rigorous review process for minors, certificates, and other academic programs that do not fall under the auspice of a formal degree program.

### **Considerations in the Review of Academic Programs**

In presenting new program proposals, institutions are expected to address the issues of need, adequacy of resources, academic quality and consistency with institutional mission and future directions.

***Institutional Mission and Future Direction.*** It is expected that new programs and modifications of existing programs will be aligned with the institution's mission and strategic goals. Therefore, how the proposed program is consistent with the institution's stated mission and plans for the future should be articulated.

***Need.*** With respect to the need for the proposed program, questions such as the following are examined: What is the rationale for the proposed program? How does the proposed program fill or address identified needs? Will the program serve a specified purpose in the local community, a particular region, the state as a whole or within a particular discipline, field, or profession? Are there similar programs offered by other institutions in the state or region? If so, how does the proposed program differ? Will the new program provide access to underserved constituencies?

***Resources.*** Faculty, infrastructure costs (space, renovations, etc.), lab & computer equipment/software/databases, administrative staff, and other needs (e.g., library, marketing, etc.) are recognized as being essential for quality academic programs. So in addition to consideration of program need, recognition is also given to the availability and source of funds to provide adequate support for the proposed new program. Does the program require one-time or ongoing infrastructure costs? How will the resources allocated to a new initiative impact funding for existing programs? Will new faculty need to be hired? Does the proposed program require extensive new expenditures for computers, laboratory space or equipment, and library holdings? Finally, will the addition of the proposed program represent an effective and efficient use of institutional resources?

***Quality.*** While each institution attends to the issue of quality control in the development of academic programs, the Academic Affairs Officers Committee systematically reviews proposals noting in particular curricular design, faculty qualifications, plans for learning assessment and support services. The objective is to assure that new programs are not only needed and can be adequately supported, but that high standards will prevail in all such academic endeavors.

All of the above criteria and considerations apply to both undergraduate and graduate programs. Additionally, for post-baccalaureate level programs, special attention is given to such matters as faculty quality, as indicated by publications, externally funded projects, and specialized expertise. Questions may include: What are the trends in the profession? Does the proposed program conform to existing accreditation standards? Do (or will) faculty have the requisite skill

and experience to provide a high quality opportunity? Does the proposed curriculum reflect the best thinking on the future of the profession?

### **Program Definitions**

*New Academic Programs or Major Revisions* involve the introduction of (1) new majors; (2) new degrees including degree changes (for example, Ed.D. to Ph.D.); or (3) a major revision to an existing program. A new program in most cases will result in a new major or degree offering. In many cases, a new program will add new faculty and/or staff, may utilize existing campus resources, and reflect a new set of needs in professional practice and the regional workforce. Additionally, a new program or major revision will include either a substantial proportion of new courses or some significant combination of interdisciplinary offerings that do not currently exist within an existing degree program. The key distinction for a major revision is that it requires significant new curricular elements beyond what currently exists and is likely to require additional resources. A conversion of a minor or concentration to a stand-alone major is a new program.

*Program Modifications* represent new options, new combinations of existing curricula, and title changes. Program modifications may resemble new programs in a number of ways, but will differ in terms of the number of new courses and additional resources required for the offering of the program. In many cases, a program modification will simply reflect minor changes to existing programs, which adapt to evolving needs in the field of study.

Program modification proposals do not require full documentation and review; however, they must be channeled through the review process, even though such programs ordinarily refer to initiatives or developments too minor to require actions by the Academic Affairs Officers Committee.

Choosing between a program modification and a major revision for the purposes of review is a matter of professional judgment. Our suggestion is that if there is any question about whether a program is a major revision or a modification, it is better to submit as the former. In the event that a proposed program modification is challenged at a meeting of the academic officers, a majority vote, as defined under “Procedures,” shall determine whether the program will be considered a “major revision” program requiring resubmission with full documentation, discussion, and a vote.

*Phase Out of Programs* represent academic programs that an institution plans to eliminate from its suite of offerings. Institutions are expected to report all major program deletions and phase-outs for informational purposes only. Like approved programs, the phased-out programs will be reported to the legislature but are not included in the actual legislative language. Phase-out programs do not require formal approval from the Academic Affairs Officers committee.

*Programs not reviewed.* It has been established by the members of the Academic Affairs Officers (AAO) Committee that associate degree programs, minors, concentrations, and certificates are not to be reviewed by this body. Nor will they be reported to the legislature. Proposals for dual degrees that simply double-count or overlap existing curricula without

changes do not need to be reviewed. Core curriculum changes that affect the entire university or college catalog of programs do not need to be reviewed.

### **Procedures**

With the exception of program phase-outs, all new program proposals of any category must be submitted to the MASU academic program review (APR) website at least six weeks in advance of the meeting at which they are to be considered.

For each category – New Program/Major Revision, Program Modification, and Phase Out/Drop – there is an MASU cover sheet that needs to be completed, signed and included as the first two sheets of the PDF program proposal that is submitted on the APR online database. MASU staff will not approve a program for distribution that does not have a fully completed cover sheet.

New and Spin-Off programs can be submitted for review and AAO Committee approval prior to Institutional Governing Body (IGB) approval as indicated on the APR cover sheet. If the program is modified or not approved by the Institutional Governing Body, the university must notify MASU within two business days after the IGB's action and the institution must go through the APR process again.

Review of programs must be completed one week prior to the scheduled meeting of the Academic Affairs Officers Committee. The submitting university has no responsibility to respond to reviewer comments made after the one week deadline.

All universities must demonstrate that their institutional representative has reviewed the new/revised program. **At least one week prior to the AAO meeting, all representatives must log onto the system and indicate that their institution (1) “supports” (giving consent) or “non-support” (expressing concerns, reservations, or opposition) the program, or (2) does not have the degree program by stating “not applicable”.** The MASU staff will review all new programs in the system to make sure all fifteen university representatives have provided a response or vote. If an institution has not responded, then the staff will follow up with that institutional representative.

At the AAO meeting, the Academic Affairs Officers Committee will review the votes. A positive vote requires a majority of the fifteen Michigan public universities (8 votes) in support of the program. Each institution has one vote, whether that vote is exercised by the designated committee member or the individual in attendance representing that institution. Resource persons (i.e. MASU staff, proposed program faculty members) at a meeting do not have the power to vote.

Actions taken by MASU in support of new program proposals will be reported each year, generally in the month of March, to appropriate legislative committees, the State Budget Office, House Fiscal Agency, and Senate Fiscal Agency. Actions will include all approved programs (as defined in this document) and phased out programs.

It is encouraged that all AAO group members review and revise comments in a manner consistent with the goals and expectations of review. The focus of the review is on the quality

and feasibility of the program and the comments should necessarily be constructive in nature when possible. Given that most reviews are conducted by faculty members or program chairs familiar with the content of the proposal, it is essential to follow the updated timeline so that AAO members have adequate time to edit or refine comments, review feedback, and provide responses at the time of the review (or earlier when possible).

**Checklist of Elements to Address:** Each program must have a MASU cover sheet. The Association does not require a common format for each proposal, as each campus has its own guidelines, but this only reinforces the necessity of the cover sheet for reviewers.

At minimum, each *New Program/Major Revision* proposal should address the following checklist of elements:

1. What related programs exist?
2. Rationale
3. Curriculum Design
4. New Course Descriptions
5. Projected Enrollments
6. Scheduling Plans
7. Program Costs
8. Description of Available/Needed Equipment
9. Statement on faculty qualifications
10. Internal Status of Proposal
11. Planned Implementation Date
12. Library and Other Learning Resources
13. Specialized Facilities, Including External Sites as Required
14. Accreditation Requirements

At a minimum, Program Modification proposals should address the following checklist of elements:

1. Related Programs – own and other
2. Rationale
3. Curriculum Design
4. New Course Descriptions
5. Planned Implementation Date
6. Accreditation Requirements

### **Consultation Process for Programs Not Supported**

Proposed undergraduate, graduate, or professional programs that do not receive a supporting vote by the Academic Affairs Officers Committee may be resubmitted after revision to the Academic Affairs Officers Committee or submitted without revision to the MASU Board of Directors by the proposing institution for additional review and potential endorsement. Given that the primary benefit of the review process is the feedback on the content and quality of the program, it is encouraged that institutions submit their programs as early as institutional policy allows. The appeal process is described in the document entitled MASU Board of Directors *Consultation Procedure* (Appendix).

Approved by the MASU Board of Directors  
May 22, 1984  
Revised May 4, 1989  
Revised October/November 1993  
Revised February 27, 2004

Revised August 8, 2008  
Revised June 4, 2009  
Revised June 30, 2014  
Revised June 2, 2016  
Revised June 7, 2018

## Appendix

### MASU BOARD OF DIRECTORS CONSULTATION PROCEDURE\*

1. Proposed undergraduate, graduate, or professional programs not satisfactorily resolved on the level of the Academic Affairs Officers may be submitted to the Presidential consultation procedure.
2. A Board member may initiate the Presidential review procedure by filing a declaration with the Chairperson of the MASU Board of Directors (copy to the CEO of MASU). The declaration must contain:
  - a. A clear statement of the question or issue being submitted to this review procedure, sufficiently specific to allow clear identification of and response to the problems raised.
  - b. Evidence that the chief executive officer filing the declaration has previously discussed and attempted to resolve the matter with the chief executive officers of such other institutions as may be involved. No issue will be entertained from a Board member without such evidence.
3. The Presidential review procedure shall proceed as follows:
  - a. Upon receipt of such an inquiry, the Chairperson shall appoint a three-member panel of Board members to meet with the chief executive officers of the institutions in question. (The chief executive officers of the involved institutions may submit lists of six nominees each for the panel and may indicate an order of preference among the nominees. The Chairperson shall appoint the panel members from these lists of nominees.) Inasmuch as the special three-member panels provided for in this agreement may be required to deal with questions of program duplication in their review procedure, the following guidelines are established:
    - “Duplication” shall be considered the delivery of essentially the same instruction to comparable students at different classrooms in the same geographical area at approximately the same time.
    - The duplication defined above becomes “unnecessary duplication” when the cumulative cost of the instruction could be significantly reduced by merging instruction unless it yields an unacceptable loss of instructional quality or significantly diminishes student access to instruction.
  - b. Following the meeting between the panel and the executives of the involved institutions, the panel shall prepare draft recommendations which shall be furnished to the involved institutions.
  - c. In the event the draft recommendations resolve the issue, no further steps shall be taken.
  - d. In the event an issue remains, the panel will prepare a final report with copies to the involved institutions and other members of the Board.
  - e. Upon receipt of the panel report, the Board shall invite the involved institutions to appear before it and comment on the report.
  - f. Following the above, the Board shall issue its recommendations to the involved institutions.

- g. In accord with the constitution or autonomy granted each institution, acceptance or rejection of the recommendations remains within the discretion of the involved institutions, as does the question of whether the recommendations are to be made public.
- h. It is hoped that an institution will decline to accept the judgment of the Board of Directors only for the most compelling reasons. Such reasons will be included in the minutes of the Board.

\*Adopted by the Presidents October 15, 1974  
Revised June 2, 2016