

SECTION I

PART G POLICY AND PROCEDURES FOR THE DISCONTINUANCE OF ACADEMIC DEGREES WITH LOW PROGRAM DEMAND

1.00 Introduction

This policy specifies the Commission's expectations for academic programs with low program demand, that is, those with low student enrollment and graduation. Governing boards are responsible for taking appropriate action, including program closure, for such academic degree programs. The policy does not limit the Commission's authority to act or conduct other studies of academic degree programs that might result in program closure.

The policy applies to baccalaureate and graduate degree programs. It complements the other Commission policies that pertain to academic degree approval, including CCHE Policy I-B: *POLICY AND PROCEDURES FOR THE APPROVAL OF NEW ACADEMIC PROGRAMS IN STATE-SUPPORTED INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN COLORADO*, and CCHE Policy I-C: *POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR THE REVIEW OF ACADEMIC PROGRAMS*, and CCHE Policy I-S: *POLICY AND PROCEDURES FOR THE ANNUAL FOLLOW-UP OF NEWLY APPROVED DEGREE PROGRAMS*.

2.00 Statutory Authority

By statute, the Colorado Commission on Higher Education has the responsibility to define criteria and ensure that governing boards discontinue those academic degree programs that do not satisfy state criteria. The statute (C.R.S. 23-1-107 (2)) reads:

- a) The commission shall establish, after consultation with the governing boards of institutions, policies and criteria for the discontinuance of academic or vocational programs. The commission shall direct the respective governing boards of institutions, including the board of regents of the University of Colorado, to discontinue an academic or vocational degree program area, as program area is defined in commission policies.
- b) The governing board of a state-supported institution of higher education directed to discontinue an academic or vocational degree program area pursuant to this subsection (2) shall have not more than four years to discontinue graduate and baccalaureate programs and not more than two years to discontinue associate programs following the commission's directive to phase out said program area.
- c) If the commission directs the governing board of an institution to discontinue an academic or vocational degree program area, and the governing board refuses to do so, the commission may require such governing board to remit to the general fund any moneys appropriated for such program area.

- d) Each governing board of the state-supported institutions of higher education shall submit to the commission a plan describing the procedures and schedule for periodic program reviews and evaluation of each academic program at each institution consistent with the role and mission of each institution. The information to be provided to the commission shall include, but shall not be limited to, the procedures for using internal and external evaluators, the sequence of such reviews, and the anticipated use of the evaluations.
- e) Prior to the discontinuance of a program, the governing boards of state institutions of higher education are directed, subject to commission approval, to develop appropriate early retirement, professional retraining, and other programs to assist faculty members who may be displaced as a result of discontinued programs.
- f) The commission shall assure that each institution has an orderly process for the phaseout of the programs.

3.00 Goals, Principles, and Terminology

3.01 Policy Goals

The goals of CCHE's Discontinuance Policy include:

- To establish state criteria that guide the review and discontinuance of academic degree programs with low student enrollment and graduation.
- To ensure that higher education institutions have an appropriate program array that reflects state priorities and needs, specifically that the programs respond to the current market environment in Colorado.
- To reaffirm the governing boards' statutory responsibility to discontinue degree programs that fail to meet the adopted state criteria.
- To assure that enrolled students have a reasonable opportunity to complete the degree requirements of a discontinued program.
- To foster sound academic planning by linking planning, evaluation, and budgeting decisions.

3.02 Principles

The Policy and Procedures for the Discontinuance of Academic Degree Programs With Low Program Demand is based on the following principles:

1. A degree program consists of an approved curriculum that meets academic standards, leads to an academic degree, and is approved by the Colorado Commission on Higher Education.

2. The legislature specified three levels of access to degree programs: broad access to baccalaureate degree programs, limited access to masters' degree programs, and highly selective access to doctoral degree programs.
3. The Commission is accountable to the General Assembly and the taxpayers of Colorado for wise stewardship of state resources and protecting the rights of students who pursue degree programs in the public system of higher education.
4. The governing boards are accountable to the state and the public to review degree programs regularly and discontinue those that fail to meet the state criteria.
5. An appropriate degree program array may include offering a limited number of low enrollment programs that are central to an institution's role and mission.

3.03 Evaluation Criteria and Documentation

The governing boards may examine low demand programs (i.e., those that exhibit nonexistent or low student demand) for possible exemption under this policy. In exemption decisions, the role of the governing boards is to protect only those programs that clearly demonstrate that student access will be substantively impacted in the State. Therefore, the governing boards shall use the following criteria for exemption decisions:

- 3.03.01 Centrality of the Program to the Institution's Role and Mission. Based on clear evidence that a degree program is critical to the institution's statutory mission.
- 3.03.02 Student Access. If a student does not have access to the degree program at other institutions in Colorado, including access to on-line delivery of the degree program, student access is a valid rationale for exemption. In the context of this policy, convenience is insufficient to justify student access.

3.04 Definition of Policy Terms

Academic year is the period extending from the first day of summer term of a calendar year and ending on the last day of spring term of the succeeding year.

Central to Role and Mission means those degree programs that define an institution's statutory role and mission without which it ceases to operate as a research university, polytechnical college, liberal arts college, or community college. Usually, degree programs central to an institution's role and mission are those programs with the highest enrollment levels.

Compatible with Role and Mission in this policy context means those degree programs that support the institution in meeting its mission statement but are not by themselves indispensable.

Discontinuance refers to a governing board or Commission action to formally close a degree program.

Graduation number is defined as the number of degrees conferred under a specific program name during an academic year. A student that completes the graduation requirements of two different degrees will count in the graduation numbers of both degree programs.

Phase-Out Period is the time during which currently enrolled students may complete the degree graduation requirements for a discontinued program. Colorado statute limits this period to no more than four years for graduate and baccalaureate programs and no more than two years for associate degree programs. The phase-out period begins at the end of the academic year in which the discontinuance action occurs.

Program Closure is defined as the official date after which students may not enroll in the degree program and the institution may not confer a diploma bearing the program name. The official date of program closure is the last day of the degree program's allowable phase-out period.

Program Need is demonstrated by student demand and market demand. Student demand, the number of students who enroll and graduate from a program, shows whether a program attracts sufficient numbers to justify its existence. Market demand, the undersupply of qualified individuals by job title, shows the significance of the program to Colorado's market environment and the value of the program to the individual student.

4.00 Process and Procedures

4.01 Governing Board Policies

By October 15, 1997, governing boards will submit to the Commission their discontinuance policies. The policies will:

- Comply with the guidelines defined in this policy;
- Identify the governing board criteria that supplement the state criteria;
- Specify the governing board's discontinuance procedures;
- Specify the institution's responsibilities during the four-year phase-out period (Section 4.02).

The Commission may accept or ask the governing board to modify its policy. The governing boards shall resubmit any subsequent changes to board policies for Commission acceptance.

4.01.02 Statutory Responsibilities During the Phase-Out Period

The Commission shall exercise its statutory responsibility to establish an orderly process for the phase-out of degree programs through governing board policies. The governing board policy shall specify that the institution is accountable to implement the following process as soon as the governing board or the Commission acts to close a degree program. The governing board policy may specify additional procedures according to its bylaws and procedures.

- 4.01.02.01 Notify all affected students and faculty members that the program has been discontinued and will be phased-out and closed.
- 4.01.02.02 Cease admitting new or transfer students into a discontinued program and notify the admission office of this action.
- 4.01.02.03 Counsel students in the discontinued program into alternative programs when completion of the program prior to the final discontinuance date is not possible.
- 4.01.02.04 Ensure that an institution offers the required courses of the discontinued program to the greatest extent possible before the closure date so that currently enrolled students have a reasonable opportunity to complete the degree requirements.
- 4.01.02.05 Implement institutional reduction-in-force plans.

4.02 Commission Identification of Degree Programs for Examination

The Commission will notify the governing boards of low demand academic degree programs, that is, those programs that fail to meet the minimum enrollment and graduation standards specified in this policy. The group of degree programs will consist of those degree programs that are under the governing board review policies and not included in the Commission's annual follow-up of newly approved degree programs.

- 4.02.01 CCHE staff will identify low demand academic programs by compiling a three-year history of degrees conferred and identify all degree programs that fall below the following parameters:
 - 4.02.01.01 Baccalaureate degrees must graduate ten (10) students in the most recently reported year or a total of 20 students in the last three years.
 - 4.02.01.02 Masters degree programs must graduate three (3) students in the most recently reported year or a total of five (5) in the past three years.
 - 4.02.01.03 Doctoral degree programs must graduate at least one (1) student in the most recently reported year or a total of three (3) in the last three years.

4.02.02 In November of each year CCHE staff will notify the governing boards of all degree programs that fail to meet the criteria specified in Section 4.02.01.

The Commission expects the governing boards to discontinue degree programs that fail to meet the graduation criteria for three consecutive years, unless compelling evidence exists.

4.03 Governing Board Examination and Action

The governing board will review the programs forwarded by the Commission according to its approved policies and procedures.

4.03.01 Governing Board Review

The governing board shall monitor all programs identified as low demand degree programs and intervene where necessary to assist the degree programs in meeting their program enrollment and graduation goals and the state productivity goals.

4.03.02 Governing Board Examination

The governing board shall examine the low demand degree programs that have performed below the specified productivity criteria for three consecutive years using the criteria specified in Section 3.03 of this policy.

In keeping with the Commission's undergraduate priority, each institution may exempt no more than five (5) low-demand baccalaureate degree programs from closure. The Commission intends this exemption privilege to offer certain baccalaureate degree programs that may have low demand but are central to the institution's role and mission or where access is not available elsewhere in the State. The exemption applies only to baccalaureate degree programs, but excludes any degree program that did not graduate at least three students in the past three years.

The exemption privilege is designed primarily to support institutions with relatively low enrollment level (i.e., less than 5,000 undergraduate FTE).

In developing this policy, the Commission has empowered the governing boards to play a central role in ensuring that all its existing degree programs are market responsive and that exemptions are used with discretion. In exercising the exemption privilege, the Commission strongly encourages governing boards to ensure that large institutions limit their exemptions to three or fewer exemptions. If a governing board exempts more than three degree programs at a large institution, the Commission may review the exempted degree program data, including but not limited to, conducting a performance evaluation of the exempted degree programs and will share its findings with the governing board.

A degree program carries the exemption designation until the governing board acts to remove it. The governing board may replace a degree program on the exemption list with a new program. However, a low-demand degree program replaced by another is subject to immediate governing board review if it does not meet the program demand criteria specified in Section 4.02.01.

4.03.03 Governing Board Action

The point of governing board action occurs during the third year that a program graduates fewer than the minimal number of students specified in this policy. The governing board will vote whether to discontinue the degree program under examination.

4.03.04 Governing Board Report

By March 31 of each year, the governing board shall inform the Commission of the degree programs it discontinued, the degree programs it exempted, and any appeals for extensions. Any low demand degree program that is not on the governing board's discontinued, exempted or appeal list will be closed without further Commission action.

4.04 Action on Appeals for Extensions and Exemptions

At its April meeting, the Commission will review appeals filed by the governing board for low-demand degree programs that the governing board did not discontinue.

4.04.01 CCHE staff shall evaluate the appeals for one- or two-year extensions for low demand degree programs not discontinued by the governing boards, examining the probability that the program can meet its graduation goals. CCHE staff may request additional information from the governing board staff.

4.04.02 No more than five exemptions are permitted under this policy. If a governing board chooses to submit more than the maximum number of exemptions allowed under policy, the Commission shall determine which programs are exempt.

4.04.03 CCHE staff will prepare a recommendation. The Commission will act on the staff recommendations at a Commission meeting. Prior to the Commission action, the governing board filing an appeal will have an opportunity to testify before the Commission.

If the Commission denies an appeal, the Commission in effect is voting to discontinue the degree program. No formal action by the Commission or the governing board is required to discontinue the degree program.

4.04.04 If an academic program meets the relevant CCHE benchmark in years two and

three following its identification as low demand, the program will be removed from the low demand list. As outlined in 4.04.03, CCHE staff will prepare a recommendation for Commission action to remove the program from the low demand list.

- 4.04.05 If an academic program meets the relevant CCHE benchmark in the third year following its identification as low demand, the program shall be placed on probation for an additional (fourth) year. If the program fails to meet the appropriate CCHE benchmark in the fourth year, the program will be discontinued according to the process outlined in section 5.00.

5.00 Implementation of Governing Board or Commission Discontinuance

Under this policy, a degree program may be closed either by governing board or Commission action. The only difference between the two actions is the formal notification process. All other guidelines apply regardless of which board initiated the action. Each discontinued program will enter a phase-out period, followed by full discontinuance.

5.01 Program Discontinuance by Governing Board Action

When a governing board discontinues a degree program, it shall notify the Commission of its action by letter and the final date it intends to confer degrees in the program. A governing board may choose to close a program sooner than the date allowed under statute, but it may not exceed the four-year statutory limitation.

It shall also notify the institution that it is responsible to implement immediately the phase-out procedures specified **in statute and** the governing board's discontinuance policy.

5.02 Program Discontinuance by Commission Action

The Commission shall notify a governing board if it has discontinued a degree program. The governing board shall carry out the Commission's decision immediately in accordance with the statutory limits.

5.03 Notification of Discontinuance to Other Agencies and Organizations.

The Commission shall notify the appropriate accrediting and credentialing agencies, including WICHE and the Colorado Department of Education, of discontinued degree programs.

6.00 Commission Responsibilities

6.01 Monitoring of Discontinued Degree Programs During the Phase-Out Period.

- 6.01.01 CCHE will monitor the enrollment data submitted to the Commission to determine if the institution is following its governing board's policies regarding admission to discontinued programs.
 - 6.01.02 CCHE staff will alert the governing board staff if its institutions are ignoring the governing board's discontinuance policies. The governing board staff is responsible for resolving the situation, including informing the institution of potential consequences for failing to follow the phase-out plan specified in policy.
 - 6.01.03 The Commission may choose to table new degree program proposals submitted by institutions that are not in compliance with CCHE's or a governing board's discontinuance policies.
- 6.02 Monitoring of Discontinued Degree Programs After the Closure Date
- 6.02.01 CCHE will monitor the enrollment and graduation of students in discontinued degree programs. It will use the SURDS data, submitted to the Commission and verified by the institution, to detect whether an institution is operating a discontinued program beyond its closure date.
 - 6.02.02 If an institution operates a discontinued program beyond its closure date, the governing board is liable for the cost of the FTE generated by the discontinued program. The cost of an FTE for this policy shall be the institution's average General Fund per resident FTE cost (Format 30 Report) times the total FTE required to meet the degree requirements. The board will return this amount to the state through an enrollment adjustment in the next funding period.

HISTORY: CCHE Agenda Item IV, B – March 4, 2005