

Policy on Academic Program Planning

I. Purpose. North Carolina citizens and institutions must be prepared to compete in a rapidly changing global environment. Consistent with this mandate, the University of North Carolina Board of Governors, the University System Office, and the constituent universities shall be guided by the needs of the people of North Carolina in their academic degree program development, approval, and discontinuation actions. Consistent with the statutory mission of the University, the needs of the state are understood to include but not be limited to ensuring graduates are equipped with the knowledge, values, and skills necessary to lead responsible, productive, and personally satisfying lives. Academic program planning and procedures must be nimble, efficient, and responsive to those needs at all levels. To do so, university leaders, including but not limited to chancellors and their leadership teams, faculty and staff senates, assemblies, and curriculum development committees, the President and System Office staff, and members of the Board of Governors and boards of trustees, should regularly assess the needs of the state and its people; identify, develop, and approve degree programs that will be beneficial to the state; and review existing academic degree programs to ensure continued alignment to state needs.

II. Roles and Responsibilities

A. Constituent institutions. Constituent institutions shall have a lead role in identifying academic program needs, in formulating proposals to meet those needs, and in evaluating the alignment of their own academic program inventory with the needs of the state.ⁱ

B. UNC System Office. The UNC System Office shall also engage in the identification of academic program needs across the University, shall be the principal advisor to the Board of Governors regarding academic program proposals received from constituent institutions, and shall evaluate the University-wide academic program inventory as described in this Policy. The UNC System Office shall develop procedures to regularly review workforce and societal needs and, on at least a biennial basis, identify degrees and programs beneficial to the state. The UNC System Office shall also periodically draw on the expertise of the faculty to identify longer-term emerging trends that may have implications for new degree programs. In its analysis, the UNC System Office shall always consider whether all regions of the state are adequately served by the University. As referenced in this policy, the needs of the state and its citizens are inclusive of requirements growing out of local, regional, national, and global challenges. The UNC System Office shall take a broad view of state needs that includes both current skill demands as well as the contributions that graduates make to the health, well-being, economic prosperity and quality of life in the state.

C. UNC Board of Governors. Per N.C. G.S. § 116-11(3), the Board of Governors shall determine the functions, educational activities, and academic programs of the constituent institutions, including the degrees to be awarded. The Board shall: consider the alignment between the University System's academic program portfolio and emerging workforce and societal needs at least every two years; review and approve all proposals for new degree programs put forward by constituent universities; and consider the productivity, quality, and efficiency of academic degree programs System-wide on a biennial basis.

III. Assessing the Needs of the State.

A. The UNC System Office shall, in consultation with the Board of Governors, regularly review workforce and societal needs and identify:

- i. emerging labor market demands;
- ii. the alignment between the System's academic program portfolio and the labor market demands;
- iii. trends in employment outcomes for graduates by program of study; and
- iv. new and expandable degree and credential programs that would be beneficial to the state.

B. The UNC System Office shall also periodically draw on experts, including academic leaders, faculty, and staff at constituent institutions, to identify longer-term emerging trends that may have implications for new degree programs.

C. In its analysis, the UNC System Office shall consider whether all regions of the state are adequately served by the University. As referenced in this policy, the needs of the state and its citizens are inclusive of requirements growing out of local, regional, national, and global challenges.

D. In April 2026 and at least every other year thereafter, the UNC System Office shall present a report to the Board of Governors that summarizes the emerging needs of the state.

IV. Academic Program Development and Approval.

A. Identification of academic program needs. Academic needs may be identified by the UNC System Office or by one or more constituent institutions.

i. Needs identified by the System Office. All constituent institutions shall have an opportunity to participate in a process for recommending the best way to address academic program needs identified by the System Office. Disciplinary and cross-disciplinary processes that utilize campus faculty and administrators shall be established to recommend whether expansion of a current degree program, collaboration between campuses on a program, an online degree program, or a stand-alone degree program is the best option. Campuses are urged to give high priority to collaborative program development. The System Office shall balance responsiveness with due diligence and a state-wide perspective. In achieving this balance, the System Office shall develop expedited program review processes for rapid response where warranted. The campuses' faculty and administration and the System Office shall assure a continuing commitment to academic excellence.

ii. Needs identified by constituent institutions. Constituent institutions may propose for consideration by the Board new academic programs, or changes to delivery modality

or delivery location of existing programs, designed to fill needs they have identified, in accordance with UNC Policy Manual section 400.1.1[R].

B. Presentation to the Board. Once academic program needs are identified by the campuses or by the System Office, the System Office, in consultation with the campuses, shall forward, after appropriate review, recommendations to the Board of Governors regarding how best to meet those needs.

C. Principles for academic program development. In these processes, faculty expertise is essential for sound academic decision making at the campus and system levels. At the campus, disciplinary, cross-disciplinary, University, and board levels, analysis, and recommendation of the need for a new academic program, the place for its establishment, and the method of its delivery shall be based on:

- i. number, location, and mode of delivery of existing programs;
- ii. the relation of the program to the distinctiveness of the campus and the mission of the campus;
- iii. student demand for the program in the locality, region, or state as a whole;
- iv. whether the program would create unnecessary duplication;
- v. detailed regional or state economic data on employment opportunities for program graduates at the degree level proposed;
- vi. faculty quality and number for offering the program;
- vii. the availability of campus resources (library, space, labs, equipment, external funding, and the like) to support the program, and five years of projected revenues and expenses associated with the program;
- viii. the number and quality of lower-level and cognate programs for supporting the new program;
- ix. impact of program decision on access and affordability, including a reasonable comparison of the expected earnings of graduates with the projected costs of earning the degree and/or the projected amount of debt a student may incur (return on investment);,
- x. the expected academic quality of the proposed degree program;
- xi. the feasibility of a joint or collaborative program by two or more campuses;
- xii. the contribution of the program to professions that are critical to the health, educational attainment, and quality of life of North Carolinians; and
- xiii. any other consideration relevant to the need for the program.

V. Review and Evaluation of Existing Academic Programs.

A. Campus-level review of academic programs. Primary responsibility for quality, efficiency, and productivity of academic degree programs rests at the campus level.

i. Academic Program Review. Chancellors shall regularly review their institution's academic programming to ensure the maintenance of a sound and balanced educational program that is consistent with the functions and mission of the institution. Chancellors shall be prepared to expand, contract, or discontinue programs based upon that review. To do so, chancellors shall review all academic degree programs at least once every seven years from the date of the preceding review or from the implementation date of a new academic program, or on such schedule as the President may prescribe by regulation.

ii. These Academic Program Reviews shall evaluate:

a. Current and projected student demand, as measured by enrollments in the majors and degrees produced;

b. Current and projected workforce demand, as measured by projected job growth and existing data on student employment outcomes;

c. Student outcomes, including persistence, graduation, time to degree, and, where possible, post-graduation success;

d. Program costs and productivity, including research, scholarship, and creative activity and student credit hours produced compared to the number and cost of faculty and staff;

e. The contribution of the program to professions that are critical to the health, educational attainment, and quality of life of North Carolinians; and

f. Any other considerations identified by the chancellor or by the President.

iii. Each campus must establish and publish clearly defined policies, procedures, and schedules for reviewing academic programs and for ensuring continuous program improvement. These policies shall describe the process by which the Chancellor, based on the results of an Academic Program Review, takes action to expand, contract, or eliminate an academic program. These policies must further account for the faculty's role in shared governance regarding the development and review of the curriculum consistent with the authority and expectations of the Chancellor articulated in section 502D of the Code of the University of North Carolina. Academic Program Review policies must be approved by campus Boards of Trustees and sent to the UNC System Office by January 1, 2025.

iv. Summary reports of all Academic Program Reviews shall be reviewed by Boards of Trustees and then submitted annually to the President. The first summary report, focused on the initial subset of programs reviewed by each campus, shall be due to the President by January 31, 2026.

- v. A review made for another entity, including but not limited to a programmatic accreditor or a professional licensing board, which satisfies section V(A)(ii) of this policy may be submitted to the President in lieu of a separate report. If a review made for another entity partially satisfies section V(A)(ii) of this policy, the institution may supplement that review so that it satisfies section V(A)(ii) of this policy and submit that supplemented review to the President.

B. System-level review of academic program productivity. The System Office shall be responsible for periodic reviews to determine whether productivity and quality review processes are followed, and benchmarks are met.

- i. Biennial Program Productivity Review. In collaboration with the campuses, the System Office shall identify standards for degree program productivity and, on a biennial basis, evaluate the full portfolio of academic programs across the System based on those standards.

- ii. The Biennial Program Productivity Review shall include data on key measures of productivity, including student demand, credentials produced, post-graduation employment and earnings, return on investment, and other considerations.

- iii. Each Biennial Program Productivity Review shall also evaluate the projections made by the campus and the System Office as to those matters found in section 4(c) of this Policy for programs approved by the Board in the preceding two years.

- iv. The Biennial Program Productivity Review shall be presented to the Board of Governors in April 2025 and every other April thereafter.

VI. Other Matters.

A. Effective date. The requirements of this policy shall be effective on the date of adoption of this policy by the Board of Governors.

B. Relation to state laws. The forgoing policy as adopted by the Board of Governors is meant to supplement, and does not purport to supplant or modify, those statutory enactments which may govern or relate to the subject matter of this policy.

C. Regulations and Guidelines. This policy shall be implemented and applied in accordance with such regulations and guidelines as may be adopted from time to time by the President.

ⁱ Because of the differences in institutional mission at the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics, that institution is exempt from the requirements of this policy. The North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics shall develop program review procedures appropriate for its respective secondary education program.