

# STATE COUNCIL OF HIGHER EDUCATION FOR VIRGINIA

## PROGRAM PRODUCTIVITY/VIABILITY AT PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS: POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR REVIEW OF ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

*(Adopted by the Council on March 19, 2003)*

**Effective: April 1, 2003**

### **I. Council's Statutory Obligations Related to Academic Programs at Public Institutions**

The Code of Virginia, §23-9.6:1, charges the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) with various responsibilities, authorities, and duties. Those obligations related to program review at public institutions are listed below.

#### **A. Responsibilities**

- To review and require the discontinuance of any academic program which is presently offered by any public institution of higher education when the Council determines that such academic program is (i) nonproductive in terms of the number of degrees granted, the number of students served by the program, evidence of program effectiveness, and budgetary considerations, or (ii) supported by state funds and is unnecessarily duplicative of academic programs offered at other public institutions of higher education in the Commonwealth. As used herein, 'academic programs' includes both undergraduate and graduate programs (§23-9:6.1.6).
- The Council shall make a report to the Governor and the General Assembly with respect to the discontinuance of any academic program. No such discontinuance shall become effective until thirty days after the adjournment of the session of the General Assembly next following the filing of such report (§23-9:6.1.6).

#### **B. Authority**

- To adopt such rules and regulations as the Council believes necessary to implement all of the Council's duties and responsibilities as set forth in the Code. The various public institutions of higher education shall comply with such rules and regulations (§23-9.6:1.14).

#### **C. Duty**

- The Council, insofar as practicable, shall preserve the individuality, traditions and sense of responsibility of the respective institutions. The Council, insofar as practicable, shall seek the assistance and advice of the respective institutions in fulfilling all of its duties and responsibilities (§23-9.6.1)

The Council has established the following policy and procedures related to program productivity/viability at public institutions as part of its obligation "to promote the development and operation of an educationally and economically sound, vigorous, progressive, and coordinated system of higher education in the State of Virginia" (§23-9.3[a]).

## II. Principles Guiding Review of Program Viability

### A. Overview

In 1974, language was adopted in the Code of Virginia assigning the Council responsibility to review and require discontinuance of any academic degree program that is nonproductive in terms of the number of degrees granted, the number of students served, or budgetary considerations. The General Assembly amended the Code in 1996 to add program duplication and effectiveness to criteria for productivity review. To reflect this broader focus on quality, resources, and unnecessary duplication, as well as quantitative standards for productivity, the Council uses the term *viability* rather than *productivity* review in establishing policy and procedures related to the review of academic programs.

### B. Principles

The Council undertakes review of program viability recognizing that institutions systematically evaluate programs to meet regional and professional accreditation requirements. The goal of SCHEV's review is not to duplicate these processes, which are focused on individual programs and institutions, but rather to examine program viability in the broader context of statewide planning to meet the needs of the Commonwealth. The following principles guide the development of policy and procedures for the review of program viability:

- Respect the autonomy and legal authority of the institutional Boards of Visitors and Trustees and the distinct missions of the Commonwealth's colleges and universities.
- Move toward greater decentralization and broader oversight in focusing on efficient use of resources and avoiding unnecessary duplication.
- Reduce the reporting burden on institutions by building on existing reporting processes and measures used to provide evidence of ongoing need and demand.
- Ensure meaningful results by using a systematic, collaborative process involving institutional faculty and administrators, Council and staff.

The Virginia Community College System systematically reviews programs and courses for all twenty-three community colleges to ensure their continued viability. The Council of Higher Education has delegated to the State Board for Community Colleges responsibility for review and discontinuance of any associate degree program that is nonproductive, contingent upon Council approval to ensure that VCCS policies and standards are consistent with SCHEV's system-wide policy. (See attached VCCS "Standards for Reviewing Degree Program Viability.") The Council will review associate degree programs at Richard Bland College based on quantitative standards developed for transfer associate degrees at community colleges.

### C. Policy Development

This policy and procedures related to program viability review were prepared by SCHEV staff in consultation with Council members, the Secretary of Education, and the chief academic officers of the state-supported institutions of higher education. Aligned with the Council's Policies and Procedures for Program Approvals and Changes, this policy will help to ensure that Virginia's public colleges and universities continue to make the most efficient use of state resources, avoid unnecessary duplication, and contribute to the goals identified in the 2002-2006 System-wide Strategic Plan.

### III. Frequency of Conducting a Review of Program Viability

- Through existing campus-based processes, institutions systematically examine each program approximately once every five years. Through the Strategic Plan Progress Reports, institutions will report to SCHEV once every four years any voluntary actions (program closures, mergers, restructuring) taken as a result of program review or assessment processes.
- Based on CIP code, SCHEV will systematically monitor FTE enrollments and numbers of graduates for all approved degree programs in SCHEV's inventory. SCHEV will examine trends and conduct a full review of all marginal programs once every four years.
- The VCCS will report to SCHEV at least once every four years the results of its program viability review and describe any proposed changes to its policies and procedures to ensure that the VCCS continues to meet the intent of SCHEV's policy for program viability review.
- SCHEV will prepare a summary report of discontinuances for the Governor and General Assembly at the end of each four-year cycle.

### IV. Procedures for Conducting Program Viability Review

- (1) By **October 1**, SCHEV will conduct the preliminary program viability review and provide for all public institutions a list of degree programs (by CIP code) that fail to meet SCHEV's quantitative standards for FTES enrollments or numbers of graduates.
- (2) By **October 15**, institutions will notify SCHEV, on the form provided in this document, whether they will
  - voluntarily close the program(s)
  - request an exemption from viability review
  - provide justification for continuing the program.
- (3) By **November 1**, SCHEV will notify institutions of the status of all requests for exemptions and acknowledge voluntary closures by the institution.
- (4) By **January 15**, institutions must demonstrate program viability in terms of
  - evidence of continued need and demand for the program
  - discussion of relative "health" of the program compared to like programs in the state
  - evidence of systematic use of assessment results to ensure quality and guide program improvement efforts
  - documented plan to increase program efficiency and effectiveness.

Sources of documentation may include, but are not limited to

- institutional program review and assessment reports
- professional (discipline-based) accreditation reports
- other reports produced by external consultants or review teams
- relevant sections of the latest reaffirmation of accreditation reports of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS).

Note: Reports used to demonstrate program viability must be recent, or no more than five years old.

- (5) SCHEV staff will submit to the Council recommendations for action on results of the program viability review process at the **March** meeting. Institutions may appeal Council action by filing a request with staff within 30 days of Council action. Council will consider all appeals at the **May** meeting. Final Council action may be taken at the time or deferred to the **July** Council meeting.
- (6) Following the July Council meeting, and no later than **July 31**, SCHEV will notify institutions of the Council's actions and submit a report on program closures to the Governor and General Assembly as required by the Code of Virginia §23-9.6:1 No program discontinuance shall become effective until thirty days after the adjournment of the session of the General Assembly next following the filing of such report (§23-9:6.1.6).
- (7) After adjournment of the General Assembly session following the filing of SCHEV's report, and no later than **May 1**, SCHEV will request from the institutions a teach-out plan for any program closed by the Council, including a date after which the institution will no longer report graduates from the discontinued program.

## V. Operational Definitions of Key Terms

### A. Identifying Academic Programs by Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) Codes

- Quantitative and qualitative standards for program viability will be applied to all associate's, bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degree programs: a particular grouping of courses that constitutes the majority of coursework in a designated area for which the institution has been given degree-granting authority, and which has been classified in SCHEV's program inventory by the appropriate six-digit CIP code.
- All curricula under a six-digit CIP code must share a common core of courses as defined in SCHEV's Policies and Procedures for Program Approvals and Changes.
- Educational Specialist (Ed.S.) and Certificate of Advanced Graduate Studies (C.A.G.S.) programs will be considered degree programs for the purposes of program viability review. Other undergraduate and post-baccalaureate certificate programs are exempt from viability review.
- Majors, minors, tracks, concentrations, and specializations are not degree programs for which institutions have degree-granting authority, so they are exempt from viability review.

### B. Aggregating CIP Codes for Program Viability Review

- For programs that offer more than one degree option at the same level, SCHEV will aggregate data for all options at that level (e.g. BA/BS in Sociology, or MA/MFA in Music) before quantitative standards for productivity are applied.
- For programs that are offered at both the master's and doctoral levels, quantitative standards for master's degrees and corresponding doctoral programs may be combined to meet the appropriate productivity standard. (e.g., the combined total of

graduates in the master's and doctoral programs in biology must meet the combined standard of 1+4 or 5 graduates)

- In the case of “double majors,” enrollments and graduates may be counted in both programs.

### **C. Determining Which Programs are Not Viable**

A program is not viable if it fails to meet standards for number of degrees granted and/or number of students served, program effectiveness, budgetary considerations, or if it is unnecessarily duplicative of other like programs in the state.

- Number of degrees granted: Standards for the average number of degrees awarded over the most recent five years for which data are available.
- Number of students served: Standards for the average FTE majors OR the average FTE enrollments in upper division courses over the most recent five years for which data are available.
- Program effectiveness: Based on institutional program review or accreditation reports, information on student achievement in terms of knowledge and skills, performance on licensure exams, employer and graduate satisfaction surveys, graduate school acceptance rates, or other evidence that assessment data are used for program improvement.
- Budgetary considerations: Based on institutional program review reports, information on resources required to support the program.
- Unnecessarily duplicative: A program that fails to meet quantitative standards and does not meet one or more of the criteria for exemption. All marginal programs, or programs that fail to meet quantitative standards for productivity, will be examined in the context of like programs offered by other public institutions in the Commonwealth to determine whether they are unnecessarily duplicative.

## **VI . Standards Used in Review of Program Viability**

### **A. Quantitative Standards for Graduates and Enrollments**

- Quantitative standards for number of degrees granted and number of students served will be used as an initial trigger to target programs for further review. Programs that meet the standard for either number of graduates or number of students served will be exempt. Those programs that fail to meet initial quantitative standards will be required to submit additional information for further review by SCHEV.
- Institutions may request that certain programs be exempt from viability review based on SCHEV criteria for continuing low productivity programs that meet specific needs for the Commonwealth. SCHEV may limit the number of low-productivity programs that an institution can maintain. In general, no more than 5% of an institution's degree program offerings would be exempt under these criteria.
- Based on recommended funding model ratios, standards for numbers of graduates and FTE enrollments will be tied directly to the resources required to support one FTEF in various disciplines at various levels.

- Five-year averages of graduates and enrollments will be used to account for varying patterns of student enrollment and time-to-degree, and to provide trend-line data. Allowances will be made for new programs -- no baccalaureate or graduate degree program will be targeted for closure until five years of data on enrollment and graduates are available.

**Formula for Determining Quantitative Standards Number of Graduates**

Bachelor's: 4 courses X 20 students X 3 credits = 240 SCH/FTEF; FTES = 15 SCH; 120 credits required

Master's: 3 courses X 10 students X 3 credits = 90 SCH/FTEF; FTES = 9 SCH; 36 credits required

Doctorate: 2 courses X 9 students X 3 credits = 54 SCH/FTEF + 6 credits for dissertation; FTES = 9 SCH; 60 credits required

Professional: 3 courses X 20 students X 3 credits = 180 SCH/FTEF; 90 credits required (Law)

5-year graduation rate = 50 %

**Formula:** SCH per FTEF X student/FTEF ratio = total SCH ÷ credits required for degree = graduates ÷ 5 years = standard for graduates (five-year average)

Example: Bachelor's degree in Business:  $240 \times 24 = 5760 \div 120 = 48 \div 5 = 10$

Quantitative Standards for Program Viability  
Based on five-year averages

| Discipline                      | Bachelor's |             |       | Master's/Profess. |       | Doctoral |       |
|---------------------------------|------------|-------------|-------|-------------------|-------|----------|-------|
|                                 | FTE Majors | FTE Service | Grads | FTE               | Grads | FTE      | Grads |
| <b>Group 1</b>                  | 24         | 18          | 10    | 11                | 5     | 9        | 2     |
| Area Studies                    |            |             |       |                   |       |          |       |
| Business & Management           |            |             |       |                   |       |          |       |
| Interdisciplinary Studies       |            |             |       |                   |       |          |       |
| Library Science                 |            |             |       |                   |       |          |       |
| Military Science                |            |             |       |                   |       |          |       |
| Public Affairs                  |            |             |       |                   |       |          |       |
| Social Sciences                 |            |             |       |                   |       |          |       |
| Study Abroad                    |            |             |       |                   |       |          |       |
| <b>Group 2</b>                  | 20         | 14          | 8     | 10                | 5     | 8        | 2     |
| Communications                  |            |             |       |                   |       |          |       |
| Education                       |            |             |       |                   |       |          |       |
| Home Economics                  |            |             |       |                   |       |          |       |
| Letters                         |            |             |       |                   |       |          |       |
| Mathematics                     |            |             |       |                   |       |          |       |
| Psychology                      |            |             |       |                   |       |          |       |
| <b>Group 3a</b>                 | 18         | 11          | 7     | 9                 | 4     | 7        | 1     |
| Agriculture & Nat Resources     |            |             |       |                   |       |          |       |
| Architecture & Env Design       |            |             |       |                   |       |          |       |
| Computer/Information Sys        |            |             |       |                   |       |          |       |
| Fine & Applied Arts             |            |             |       |                   |       |          |       |
| Foreign Languages               |            |             |       |                   |       |          |       |
| <b>Group 3b</b>                 | 18         | 11          | 7     | 8                 | 4     | 6        | 1     |
| Biological Sciences             |            |             |       |                   |       |          |       |
| Engineering                     |            |             |       |                   |       |          |       |
| Physical Sciences               |            |             |       |                   |       |          |       |
| <b>Group 4</b>                  | 12         | 10          | 5     | 7                 | 3     | 5        | 1     |
| Health Professions <sup>1</sup> |            |             |       |                   |       |          |       |
| Pharmacy                        | -          | -           | -     | 6                 | 3     | -        | -     |
| <b>Other</b>                    | -          | -           | -     | 17                | 7     | -        | -     |
| Law                             |            |             |       |                   |       |          |       |

<sup>1</sup> Excludes medicine, dentistry, and veterinary medicine

## **B. Qualitative Standards for Program Effectiveness**

Institutions gather evidence of program effectiveness through campus-based assessment, program review,<sup>2</sup> and regional and professional accreditation processes. Nonproductive programs targeted for further review will submit to SCHEV the executive summaries of findings from the most recent assessment, program review, or accreditation reports. SCHEV will evaluate programs for possible closure based on criteria of particular interest to the Council: systematic use of assessment results for improvement, evidence of continued need and viability of the program, strength of the program relative to like programs in the state, and a documented plan to increase program effectiveness.

## **C. Standards Related to Budgetary Considerations**

- Budgetary considerations will be built into the standards by using funding ratios as the basis for establishing quantitative standards for enrollments and graduates.
- Nonproductive programs targeted for further review will submit to SCHEV a description of the resources needed to maintain viability of the program.

## **D. Standards for Determining Unnecessary Duplication**

- The issue of unnecessary program duplication is addressed at the time of initial program approval or subsequent requests for program changes through SCHEV's Policies and Procedures for Program Approvals and Changes.
- For programs targeted as nonproductive, quantitative data will be compared to other like programs in the state to determine the relative "health" of the program and whether trends are evident in the statewide data.
- Unnecessary duplication will be of particular concern in occupational, graduate, and professional programs where staff can determine that they no longer meet specific workforce needs or that they require significant state resources to maintain.

## **VII. Options for Council Action**

Based on results of the program viability reviews, Council may act to:

- Continue the program without stipulations.
- Continue the program with stipulations (e.g. merge with another program, collaborate with another institution) and direct staff to conduct a follow-up evaluation within three years.
- Place the program on inactive status for a period not to exceed five years. No new students would be admitted until the institution developed and implemented a plan for meeting program viability standards.

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<sup>2</sup> The 1996 restructuring reports required institutions to have "rigorous, systematic program review processes capable of distinguishing between programs and providing data useful for determining whether or not a program should be developed, maintained, or discontinued."

- Discontinue the program. Program closures would become effective thirty days after the adjournment of the General Assembly session next following submission of SCHEV's report on program discontinuances.

*STATE COUNCIL OF HIGHER EDUCATION FOR VIRGINIA*  
**INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE TO PRELIMINARY  
PROGRAM VIABILITY REVIEW AND REQUEST FOR EXEMPTIONS**

|                  |   |         |
|------------------|---|---------|
| 1. Institution   |   |         |
| 2. Program title |   |         |
| 3. CIP Code      | 4. Degree designation (e.g. AA, BS, MBA, PhD) | 5. Date |

**PLEASE CHECK ONE OF THE FOLLOWING TO DESCRIBE ACTION THE INSTITUTION WILL TAKE  
CONCERNING THIS PROGRAM AND ATTACH REQUIRED DOCUMENTATION:**

\_\_\_\_\_ Institution voluntarily (*will close*) (*has closed*) the program (*Submit SCHEV program discontinuance form.*)

\_\_\_\_\_ Institution will submit evidence of program viability and request program continuation

\_\_\_\_\_ SCHEV data are inaccurate; program meets quantitative standards for productivity (*Document discrepancies in data and identify source.*)

\_\_\_\_\_ New program approved within the past five years and exempt from viability review process (*Program initiation date \_\_\_\_\_*)

\_\_\_\_\_ The institution requests an exemption based on the following. (*Please check all that apply and attach required documentation.*)

Program is central to the institution's mission (*Provide justification.*)

Program courses support general education and/or professional programs (*Provide five-year average of FTE enrollments for lower and upper division courses.*)

Interdisciplinary program (*Provide evidence that no more than 25% of the required courses in the curriculum are unique to this program.*)

Program shares a substantial number of courses and faculty with other similar programs (*Provide CIP codes for other programs and evidence of shared resources.*)

Student or employer demand, or demand for intellectual property is high and external funding for research will be jeopardized by program closure (*Provide evidence and cite sources of demand or funding.*)

Program provides access to an underserved population or geographical area (*Provide justification.*)

- Q Program meets a unique need in the region, Commonwealth, or nation (*Provide justification.*)
  
- Q Joint/consortium program in which combined enrollments or graduates meet standards (*Provide copy of consortium agreement and enrollments in other programs.*)
  
- Q Other (*Explain.*)

*Virginia Community College System*  
Standards for Reviewing Degree Program Viability

The Virginia Community College System systematically reviews programs and courses for all twenty-three community colleges to ensure their continued viability. The Council of Higher Education has delegated to the State Board for Community Colleges responsibility for review and discontinuance of any associate degree program that is nonproductive, based on the following:

- Through existing campus-based processes, each community college will systematically review each degree program at least once every four years;
- Based on CIP code and standards congruent with SCHEV’s minimum standards for productivity, the VCCS will systematically monitor FTE enrollments and numbers of graduates for all approved associate degree programs;
- For any program that does not meet standards, colleges will submit to the VCCS: (1) a plan to phase out the program; (2) justification for continuing the program; or (3) strategies to enhance the program’s viability.
- Consistent with SCHEV’s procedures for productivity review, the VCCS will report to SCHEV at least once every four years the results of its program viability review and describe any proposed changes to its policies and procedures.

SCHEV and the VCCS have agreed to the following standards for associate degree programs:

**Quantitative Standards for Associate Degree Programs**

| Institutional Size        | Degree Program             |       |  |       |  |       |                               |       |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|-------|--|-------|--|-------|-------------------------------|-------|
|                           | Transfer<br>(AA, AS, AA&S) |       | AAS<br>Agriculture &<br>Natural Resources,<br>Business, Arts &<br>Design, Public<br>Service Technologies |       | AAS<br>Engineering,<br>Mechanical, and<br>Industrial<br>Technologies |       | AAS<br>Health<br>Technologies |       |
| FTES <sup>3</sup>         | FTES                       | Grads | FTES   | Grads | FTES   | Grads | FTES                          | Grads |
| Under<br>1800             | 17                         | 12    | 13   | 8     | 9  | 6     | 7                             | 5     |
| 1800-<br>4999             | 22                         | 15    | 16   | 11    | 12   | 8     | 9                             | 6     |
| Over <sup>4</sup><br>5000 | 24                         | 17    | 18   | 12    | 13   | 9     | 10                            | 7     |

<sup>3</sup> To determine number of FTES and graduates, a factor of .7 was used for institutions under 1800 and .9 was used for institutions with 1800-4999 FTES (VCCS efficiency ratio).

<sup>4</sup> SCHEV will continue to review programs at Richard Bland College using standards of 24 FTES and 17 graduates for transfer associate degree programs.