

**POLICY FOR THE REVIEW OF  
EXISTING ACADEMIC PROGRAMS  
Revised October 2008**

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Arkansas Code §6-61-214 requires the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board (AHECB) to establish standards for the academic programs offered by Arkansas colleges and universities and to create a 7-10 year review cycle for all existing academic programs. The existing academic program review policies (AHECB Policy 5.12) were adopted in 1988 and revised in 1995 and 1998.

In April 2008, the AHECB directed the Arkansas Department of Higher Education (ADHE) staff, in cooperation with the public colleges and universities to revise the existing program review process to ensure quality academic programs that support Arkansas's economic development goals; to identify and remove non-viable programs from the AHECB approved program inventory, and to reduce barriers to graduation.

The proposed policy includes the following:

- Institutions will schedule an external review for all existing programs every 7-10 years.
- External program reviews will employ out-of-state reviewers/consultants.
- Academic program viability standards will be increased.
- Academic programs that do not meet viability standards will be removed from the approved program inventory and will not be supported by state general revenue funds.

ADHE staff has met with the presidents, chancellors, and chief academic officers and has received extensive input on the proposed changes in the program viability standards and review process.

ADHE Executive Staff recommend that the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board approve the following resolution:

**RESOLVED**, That the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board approves the revised Policy for the Review of Existing Academic Programs (AHECB Policy 5.12) outlined in this agenda item, effective immediately.

**FURTHER RESOLVED**, That the Coordinating Board instructs the Director of the Arkansas Department of Higher Education to notify the presidents, chancellors, chief academic officers, and institutional board chairs of this action.

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Arkansas Code §6-61-214 requires that the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board (AHECB) review existing academic programs. The goals of existing academic program review are as follows:

1. To establish a process for the statewide review of academic programs.
2. To identify certificate and degree programs not meeting minimum standards of quality or viability and establish schedules for either resolving these concerns or removing the programs for the AHECB approved program inventory.

**Existing Academic Program Review Process**

All certificate and degree programs offered by public colleges and universities in Arkansas will be reviewed through the Existing Academic Program Review Process. This review process includes the following parameters:

1. All academic programs will be externally reviewed every 7-10 years. Each institution will submit its recommended program review cycle to ADHE. If changes in the review schedule are necessary, ADHE will be notified.
  - a. Accredited/licensed/state certified programs will follow the usual review practices and schedule of the accrediting/approval body. The site team's written evaluation and institutional response will be sent to ADHE within six weeks of receipt of the written evaluation.

Accredited/licensed/state certified programs failing to maintain accreditation/certification/licensure will be subject to further review by ADHE.

- b. Academic programs which are not program-specific accredited will be reviewed by external reviewers/consultants. Institutions will select a minimum of two out-of-state reviewers affiliated with programs that are similar in mission and scope to the program under review.
2. At least one consultant is required to conduct a site visit and meet with program faculty, students, and administrators.

Individuals selected as consultants will be well-qualified and without bias toward institutions under review.

3. The institution will complete a comprehensive self-study that is reviewed by the program consultants. Components of the self-study will include, but not be limited to, information related to: program need/demand, curriculum, faculty, resources, course delivery methods, student outcomes, and recent/planned program improvements.
4. The consultants will submit a written report of findings to the institution. Key information on continued program improvement will be included in the report submitted to ADHE. Specific contents of the consultants' reports will be determined by ADHE staff and Chief Academic Officers (CAOs).

### **Recommendations to Coordinating Board**

1. The consultant's written evaluation and institutional response will be sent to ADHE within six weeks of receipt of the written evaluation.
2. Findings from academic program reviews will be reported annually to the AHECB. ADHE staff will recommend that the AHECB receive the consultants' reports and acknowledge that the contents may be consulted as a resource when decisions must be made by the Board regarding institutional role and scope, budget requests, new program approval, and statewide funding issues. The staff may propose other general resolutions that address statewide issues.
3. A further resolution will encourage institutional administrators, faculty members, and boards of trustees to consider implementing the recommendations made by the consultants for program improvement.
4. If appropriate, a resolution will be offered concerning program deletions, modifications, and/or follow-up. A resolution recommending program deletions will place the program(s) on notice for removal from the AHECB approved program inventory. At the end of the two-year notice period, those programs still not meeting minimum standards will be deleted from the approved program inventory. In extraordinary cases, documentation of legitimate extenuating circumstances may prompt the Coordinating Board to extend the notice period. State general revenue funds may not be used for the operation of a program beyond the termination deadline set by the Coordinating Board. ADHE will not include SSCHs generated by major courses of programs removed from the approved program inventory in its funding formula calculations.
5. The president, chancellor, or chief academic officer may respond to ADHE staff recommendations in writing or request a conference to discuss the recommendations prior to consideration by the Coordinating Board. The discussions will be limited to those issues that concern the state's interests, i.e., program closings and broader statewide issues that the

Coordinating Board may wish to address. Any recommendations in the consultants' reports that are not included in the ADHE staff recommendations would pertain to matters of campus concern and, therefore, would represent suggestions to be considered locally.

### **ADHE Review of Program Viability**

The AHECB adopted program productivity standards in 1989 and established benchmarks of an average of 3 graduates per year over five years for undergraduate programs, 2 graduates per year for master's programs, and 1 graduate per year for doctoral programs. This policy revises those benchmark standards and renames them program viability standards.

Beginning in 2010, ADHE staff annually will identify existing certificate and degree programs that do not meet AHECB program viability standards. New certificates and associate degrees will be identified for program viability standards after three years, and bachelor's degrees and above will be identified after five years.

1. The viability standards, based on a three-year average, are as follows:
  - An average of four (4) graduates per year for career and technical education certificates (CTE) and career and technical associate degree programs (AAS);
  - An average of four (4) graduates per year for bachelor's degrees in science, mathematics, engineering, foreign languages, middle school education, and secondary education programs for licensure in science and mathematics;
  - An average of six (6) graduates per year for transfer associate degrees (AA, AS, and AAT) and bachelor's programs;
  - An average of four (4) graduates per year for master's, specialist and first-professional programs; and,
  - An average of two (2) graduates per year for doctoral programs.
2. Cognate, embedded and related programs will be considered one program for program viability purposes.

Cognate (coupled) programs are supported primarily by courses existing in and for other (viable) programs and should be certified as such by the offering institution through the provision of documentation to ADHE.

Each institution will submit to ADHE a list, with justification, of the certificate and degree programs that the institution believes are cognate programs. Common CIP Code classifications should serve as the base premise for determining cognate programs. Shared courses across majors and program levels also will be considered. Electives, general

education, and/or core courses will not be included in determining programs that can be considered cognate.

The ADHE Director will inform the campus president or chancellor of the programs that will be designated as cognate programs.

Awards of certificates that are embedded within an associate degree program will count toward program productivity standard. When calculating the three-year average of a degree program with embedded certificates, a student will only be counted once –either as certificate or an associate completer. If the highest award of an embedded program does not meet the graduate threshold and produces less than 50% of the graduates in the entire program (certificates and associate's degree), the highest award will be discontinued if the number of graduates does not meet the threshold within two years.

Programs that are required by programmatic accreditation to offer a higher level award may seek an additional two-year exemption from the 50% highest-award-viability standard by providing evidence from the accreditor of the need for the higher credential and a program-specific enrollment management plan for meeting the threshold at the higher level.

Programs identified as below the viability threshold will have two (2) years to meet the threshold or will be removed from the AHECB approved program inventory.

ADHE will not include SSCHs generated by major courses of programs removed from the approved program inventory in its funding formula calculations. SSCHs removed from the formula will be for courses within a major/program of study that are not required within another major/program of study.

General education courses listed in the Arkansas Course Transfer System (ACTS) will not be subject to loss of funding.

3. Programs discontinued can be reinstated via the new program approval process. Evidence of curricular revision, market demand/analysis, and a student recruitment plan must be provided for each program being reconsidered.
4. When an academic program is identified as below the viability threshold, the institution may request that ADHE reconsider decisions that identified the program as a low viability program. If the request is based on suspected data submission errors, the institution must provide the source, nature, and extent of the data error.

Career and technical education programs (CTE) with low degree production may be reconsidered by providing specific evidence of market demand for students who do not complete the degree. Evidence must include a history of high job placement rates at high wages for non-completers.

Institutions may also request a reduction in the viability targets for specific academic programs that are crucial to the institution's role, scope and mission. Evidence must exist that students can graduate in a timely manner (courses needed to complete an associate, bachelors or masters level programs are taught within a two year time frame and courses needed to complete a doctoral level program are taught within a three year time frame). Academic programs with a reduced viability threshold will be monitored based upon the revised threshold. The need for a reduced viability target will be reconsidered after five years.

Institutions submitting programs for reconsideration must follow the appeals process established by the ADHE staff in collaboration with the chief academic officers.