

State Council of Higher Education for Virginia  
New Degree Program Approval Guidance Document  
Effective: March 19, 2025

*This Guidance Document, and the accompanying New Degree Program Proposal Form, replace and supersede all guidance relating to documents for new degree program proposals in the “Academic Programs at Public Institutions: Policies and Procedures for Approvals and Changes” policy. The “Academic Programs at Public Institutions: Policies and Procedures for Approvals and Changes” policy remains in effect for all other academic program actions submitted to the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV).*

## **I. Council’s Statutory Duties Related to Academic Programs at Public Institutions**

The Code of Virginia, Section 23.1-203, enumerates core duties of the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV). Those most directly related to academic programs at public institutions are listed below. This Guidance Document relates directly to Duty #5.

- Duty 1: Develop a statewide strategic plan that ... identifies a coordinated approach to ... state and regional goals, and emphasizes the future needs for higher education in the Commonwealth at both the undergraduate and the graduate levels and the mission, programs, facilities, and location of each of the existing institutions of higher education, each public institution’s six-year plan, and such other matters as the Council deems appropriate.
- Duty 3: Study any proposed escalation of any public institution to a degree granting level higher than that level to which it is presently restricted and to submit a report and recommendation to the Governor and the General Assembly relating to the proposal. The study shall include the need for and benefits or detriments to be derived from the escalation. No such institution shall implement any such proposed escalation until the Council’s report and recommendation have been submitted to the General Assembly and the General Assembly approves the institution’s proposal.
- Duty 5: Review and approve or disapprove all new undergraduate or graduate academic programs that any public institution of higher education proposes.
- Duty 8: Review the proposed closure of any academic program in a high demand or critical shortage area, as defined by the Council, by any public institution of higher education and assist in the development of an orderly closure plan, when needed.
- Duty 15: Adopt such policies and regulations as the Council deems necessary to implement its duties established by state law. Each public institution of higher education shall comply with such policies and regulations.
- Duty 27: Insofar as practicable, preserve the individuality, traditions, and sense of responsibility of each public institution of higher education in carrying out its duties.
- Duty 28: Insofar as practicable, seek the assistance and advice of each public institution of higher education in fulfilling its duties and responsibilities.

The Council has established the following policies and procedures related to new degree programs at public institutions in answer to the duties referenced above, and as part of its obligation “to advocate for and promote the development and operation of an educationally and economically sound, vigorous, progressive, and coordinated system of higher education in the Commonwealth...” (Code of Virginia, § 23.1-200).

## II. Policy Statements and Requirements

### A. Board of Visitors/State Board for Community Colleges and Six-Year Plans

- All new degree program proposals submitted to SCHEV for approval must have been approved by the institutional board within **one (1) year** of the date of submission to SCHEV.
- As part of the approval process and action, the institutional board must be presented with information regarding (i) duplication with existing degree programs at Virginia public institutions of higher education, (ii) relation to existing degree programs already offered at the institution, and (iii) labor market information as required in the New Degree Program Proposal Form.
- All new degree program proposals submitted to SCHEV must have been included in either the most recent biennial six-year plan submission, or the most recent amended six-year plan submission, in accord with Code of Virginia § 23.1-306.

### B. Degree Program Common Core Requirements

Each curriculum leading to the award of an associate, baccalaureate, master's, or doctoral degree is identified by a separate CIP code in the SCHEV Degree and Certificate inventory. Each curriculum under a given CIP code shall share a common core of courses according to the table below. Groupings of courses may be used to define a variety of related sub-areas that are not identical to the formal degree program in which students are enrolled and from which they graduate. Sub-areas may be designated by varying terms, such as: concentration, emphasis area, focus, major, option, specialization, or track. Sub-areas developed after a degree program has been approved by Council must maintain the focus and common core requirement of the degree program. Council approval is not required to add or remove sub-areas to an existing degree program. If a sub-area under a given curriculum becomes sufficiently different from the common core, it may need to be approved by SCHEV as a new degree program.

Core coursework must meet Council core requirement

Bachelor's degree	25% of total credit hours required for the degree, excluding general education core
Master's degree	50%* of total credit hours required for the degree
Doctor's degree	25% of total credit hours required for the degree (excluding the dissertation; dissertation research is not included in the exclusion.)

\* Consideration will be given to degree programs that adequately justify a core curriculum with less than 50%.

### C. Certificate of Advanced Graduate Studies

Certificates of Advanced Graduate Studies (C.A.G.S.) or Educational Specialist Degrees (Ed.S.): curricula leading to a formal award certifying completion of at least one year of study beyond the master's level in an academic or occupationally specific field of study. These academic programs are usually intended for professional licensure or professional development. Council approval is required to award the C.A.G.S. and the Ed.S. See the SCHEV document "Certificate Program Definitions" for more specific information related to the C.A.G.S. award.

### D. Community College Transfer Associate Degree Programs

By Council action in January 2023, all community colleges are authorized to offer Associate of Arts (AA) and Associate of Science (AS) degree programs according to 10 Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) codes specified in the following list:

#### Associate of Arts (AA)

Liberal Arts (CIP 24.0103)

#### Associate of Science (AS)

General Studies (CIP 24.0102)

Business Administration (CIP 52.0201)

Computer Science (CIP 11.0701)

Education (CIP 13.0101)

Engineering (CIP 14.0101)

Health Sciences (CIP 51.000)

Information Technology (CIP 11.0103)

Science (CIP 30.0101)

Social Sciences (CIP 45.0101)

For community colleges intending to initiate one of the above listed transfer associate degree programs, the VCCS academic vice chancellor must submit to SCHEV a cover letter and completed SCHEV Cover Sheet. To initiate any other transfer or applied associate degree program, a full new degree program proposal must be submitted as per the rest of this guidance document.

### E. Doctoral Degree Programs and External Site Review

- Proposals for new doctoral degree programs will be presented for Council decision as to whether the proposed degree program may move to an external site review by a team of experts.
- Institutions must arrange, in consultation with SCHEV staff and fund a site visit for an external review team to conduct an evaluation of the degree program proposal and institutional resources. At least two qualified external reviewers and SCHEV staff will attend the external review. The site visit must be completed at least eight (8) weeks in advance of the date of expected Council action of approval, disapproval, or table for future action. None of the external reviewers may have an affiliation, past or present with the institution; no more than one of the external reviewers may reside within Virginia. The external reviewers must be provided with copies of the degree program proposal and faculty Curriculum Vitae (CV's) prior to the visit and should be charged with preparation

of a written report, which must be submitted to the SCHEV staff. Institutions must provide written documentation to SCHEV and to the external reviewers when addressing any recommendations or significant issues indicated by the external review team. Hard copies of reviewers' CV's must be sent to SCHEV.

#### F. Statement on Institutional Authority to Offer Doctoral Degree Programs

Doctoral degree programs normally will be offered by the major research universities. Under SCHEV policy, six (6) institutions are the major public research institutions in Virginia: George Mason University, Old Dominion University, The College of William and Mary in Virginia, University of Virginia, Virginia Commonwealth University, and Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. Each of the institutions awards Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degrees in many fields.

Other institutions may have "limited authority" to offer doctoral degree programs under certain conditions: (1) if another institution has a special capacity to offer a doctoral degree program, usually a professional sort as distinguished from a research degree program; (2) if there is strong demand from place-bound professionals for a proposed degree program and the demand cannot be met in any other way via an existing degree program or alternate academic program such as certificate program or a minor; or (3) if there are special circumstances that support a proposed degree program.

James Madison University, Norfolk State University, Radford University, and Virginia State University each have "limited authority" to offer doctoral degree programs. "Limited authority" generally entails:

- limitation to 10 or fewer doctoral level degree programs;
- doctoral degree programs focused on applied areas of study as opposed to fundamental research in disciplinary areas such as the arts and sciences; and
- any new doctoral degree program proposed under this authority must be supported by compelling evidence of state need and absence of duplication with already existent doctoral degree programs at Virginia public institutions.

#### G. Degree Level Escalation

An institution wishing to offer one or more degree programs at a new degree designation level must simultaneously submit the degree program proposal(s) and follow the procedures outlined in Council's policy on "Escalation of Degree-Level Authority at Public Institutions." Negative action on the request to confer degrees at a new degree designation level results in the denial of the request for the degree programs proposed. However, approval of the new degree designation level does not automatically result in approval of any specific proposed degree program. Each proposed new degree program will be considered individually.

#### H. Approval Considerations

Council's consideration of new degree program proposals will focus on specific factors. Council is particularly interested in questions related to issues of "need" for new degree programs, in accord with the following questions/issues.

- **State Needs.** Will the proposed degree program be an optimal use of state resources considering the state budget and the contributions of any existing degree programs? What are the needs (justifications) for the state to initiate a new degree program at this time?
- **Employer Needs.** Will the degree program fill demonstrable employer needs in the state? If so, what Virginia market data indicates current unmet employer demand for graduates of such degree programs and the designated degree level?
- **Student Needs.** Will the degree program fill demonstrable student needs in the state? If so, what Virginia data indicates current unmet student demand for such a degree program? If not, why does the institution anticipate student demand for the new degree program?
- **Duplication.** Will the degree program duplicate similar or related degree programs at public institutions in Virginia? How many similar degree programs are offered and by which public institutions? What are the student enrollment and graduation data for the existing degree programs?
- **Resource Needs.** Will the new degree program affect the institution's budget? If so, how and how significantly? (Will changes be required in faculty, staff, facilities, or other resources need to initiate and sustain a new degree program? How will resources be internally reallocated to fund and support the proposed new degree program?
- **Return on Investment.** Will the new degree program provide students with a return on the investment for pursuing and obtaining the degree? What evidence shows a return on investment will occur? Is the time frame of the return on investment equal to the student's investment in the degree program?

### III. Process

- New degree program proposals are submitted via a single email to [programsubmissions@schev.edu](mailto:programsubmissions@schev.edu). Email submission must include at minimum, the following files: (1) the Word document of the new degree program proposal form, (2) the Word document for the SCHEV Cover Sheet, (3) the Excel file of the SCHEV budget form, (4) the VOEE Degree Program Labor Market Profile, and (5) a PDF of the full new degree program proposal comprising a signed cover letter and certification statement page, SCHEV cover sheet, and new degree program proposal form with appendices. **Note.** A PDF of the full document with signatures is submitted on a flash drive upon final approval.
- SCHEV staff will conduct an initial review of documentation to ensure it meets basic SCHEV policy requirements; the proposal will then be acknowledged.
  - Following acknowledgment, SCHEV staff will evaluate the proposal for completeness and coherence and provide feedback once. Circumstances permitting, feedback will be provided within eight (8) weeks of acknowledgment. Following SCHEV staff feedback, an updated proposal addressing SCHEV staff feedback must be submitted within four (4) weeks, otherwise the degree program proposal is removed from active evaluation.

- Following submission of an updated proposal, the proposed new degree program will be placed on the next feasible Council agenda for action.
- New degree program proposals that are not complete, or that otherwise do not adhere to SCHEV requirements, will not be placed on the Council agenda for action. Any information or procedure specified in the New Degree Program Proposal Form that is not specifically listed above is also to be understood as a SCHEV requirement.
- Approval to initiate a new degree program does not imply conferral or endorsement of any other approvals that may be required by other SCHEV duties or policies, including (but not necessarily limited to) mission statement changes, organizational changes, or student enrollment projections.
- Approval to initiate a new degree program may also require a substantive change review by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) if the new degree program modifies or expands the scope of the institution's current/existing degree program degree designation level(s), disciplinary areas of study, and/or courses. SCHEV recognizes that SACSCOC review does not necessarily apply to the same academic program actions, nor does the review address the same factors that constitute the focus of SCHEV's academic program approval policy or this new degree program guidance document.