



## **Policies and Procedures for Academic Degree Program Productivity**

Revised August 2022

### **Background and Rationale**

In its enabling legislation, the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education (Commission or CHE) is charged with “examining the state’s institutions of higher education relative to...programs and missions,” including a review of program offerings with the objective of “reducing duplication, increasing effectiveness, and achieving economies” (§59-103-20 of the *South Carolina Code of Laws 1976 as amended*). Relative to academic programs at the public colleges and universities, the Commission meets this accountability mandate through the approval of new academic degree programs; by ensuring programs offered by the institutions are consistent with their mission; and by monitoring institutional compliance with statewide degree program productivity standards.

The Commission relies on student enrollment and completion data to help measure the effectiveness of existing academic degree programs for several reasons. Monitoring student enrollment and completion (degrees awarded) data in academic programs is one factor that may enable the Commission to determine if programs are meeting the needs of students and the state. Other factors may include the program’s centrality to the institution’s mission, program efficiency, whether the program performs a service function, and the program’s ability to meet state workforce needs. The enrollment and completion data, along with other information about the program, can provide information about retention, persistence, and success of students. Therefore, enrollment and completion data could be an early indicator of low productivity, but the program may be considered viable after further scrutiny. In addition, degree program productivity information can be used strategically by institutions and the Commission to help review current programs and guide new program development. Likewise, knowledge, maintenance and use of rigorous productivity standards by the entire higher education community shows a willingness to engage in thoughtful self-evaluation of a core mission area.

### **POLICY**

For Commission purposes, academic degree program productivity is defined as the capacity of an academic degree program to enroll majors and award degrees (completion) relative to the criteria established by the Commission. The policies in this document pertain to degree programs offered at public four-year colleges, universities and research institutions only. The Commission maintains separate program productivity policies for degree programs at public two-year institutions.

For purposes of this policy, degree programs are defined as active baccalaureate, master’s, specialist, doctoral–professional practice, and doctoral–research/scholarship programs. For example, an Ed.S. is a specialist degree program; Ed.D., D.N.P., J.D., Pharm.D., and M.D. are doctoral–professional practice programs; and a Ph.D. or DMA is a doctoral - research/scholarship program.



1. The following table displays the standards used for measuring academic degree program productivity. Degree programs must meet both standards to comply with Commission policy.

**Academic Degree Program Productivity Standards (Five-Year Average Benchmarks for Enrollment and Completion)**

Degree Level	Major Enrollment	Completion* (Degrees Awarded)
Baccalaureate	12.5	8
Master’s/ Specialist/ Doctoral – Professional Practice	6	3
Doctoral – Research/Scholarship	4.5	2

(\*The completion data capture the number of completers from double majors.)

2. The Commission will review institutional compliance with the program productivity standards on a biennial basis. Each degree program at each senior institution will be reviewed. Staff will use the Commission on Higher Education Management Information System (CHEMIS) and the Commission’s *Academic Degree Program Inventory* as data sources.
3. For purposes of calculating compliance with program productivity standards, the following policies will apply: 1) different degree designations within the same major/six-digit Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) code (e.g., B.S./B.A., A.B./B.A., M.S./M.A.) will be counted together; and, 2) jointly offered programs will be counted at each institution offering the degree.
4. The Commission will review active degree programs only. Programs for which the Commission has received official notification of termination prior to the commencement of the review will not be reviewed.
5. The Commission will begin review of new academic degree programs in the sixth year of operation for baccalaureate, doctoral-professional practice, and doctoral-research/scholarship programs and in the fourth year of operation for master’s and specialist programs to allow time to collect initial program and completion data. The first time a program is subject to the biennial program productivity review, it will receive an in-depth analysis to compare the program to the projections stated in the program proposal approved by the Commission (see the Policies and Procedures for the In-Depth Review of Recently Approved Academic Degree Programs). Academic degree programs that receive “met” on all sections of this analysis will receive continuing approval status from the Commission and be reviewed according to the criteria presented for the biennial review of existing programs for subsequent program productivity reviews.
6. Enrollment and completion data for existing off-site and distance education programs will be counted together with appropriate on-campus programs.



7. Academic degree programs that meet both the enrollment and completion standards receive continuing approval status from the Commission.
8. Unless exempted by the Commission, academic degree programs that fail to meet the productivity standards detailed above are placed *under review* for a maximum of three biennial program productivity review cycles (six years), during which time institutions will be expected to enhance degree program enrollment and completion. Programs will be recommended for termination if they fail to meet the productivity standards at the end of the six-year period.
9. For programs placed *under review*, institutions must provide a plan for meeting the degree program productivity standards within the *under review* period. If this improvement plan is not submitted by the institution by the date requested, the Commission will not accept any new program proposals or program modification proposals until the plan is received.
10. For programs recommended for termination, institutions must provide a plan for complying with the Commission's recommendation within a mutually agreed upon phase-out period.

The Commission may award an exemption to the academic program productivity standards for a specific program, for three program productivity review cycles, unless an institution decides to terminate the program. In most cases, programs granted an exemption should be considered essential to the basic mission of the institution and deemed so unique in their subject matter **and** value to the higher education community in South Carolina as to make them essential. Programs that do not meet the enrollment standards but have the service function to provide required courses for undergraduate foundation courses across the university community might be granted an exemption. In addition, the Commission reserves the right to consider unprecedented or extenuating circumstances when granting an exemption. Programs that undergo curricular changes requiring Commission degree program modification approval will lose their exempt status and be reviewed in the next program productivity review. The Commission will monitor and track the programs on exemption status on an ongoing basis.

11. Programs that fall into the following special categories are exempted for review and reported in the category of "Special Programs". The programs shall not be considered as non-compliant.
  - a. Programs fully funded by federal support.
  - b. Stop-out Master's degree programs established only to enroll students in parallel doctorate programs.



## PROCEDURE

During the academic year in which a review occurs, the Commission will distribute to each institution the academic degree program productivity data specific to its array of active degree programs. These data will identify the programs complying with the program productivity standards, those programs failing to meet the standards, and those programs already *under review* that failed to meet the standards. Institutions will then have the opportunity to respond in writing to program productivity data for those programs that fail to meet the standards. For each noncompliant program, within 30 calendar days of receiving the degree program productivity data, institutions must provide information for Commission staff to use to determine whether to place the program on *under review*, recommend termination of the program, or grant an exemption for the program. This information may address the following:

- a. The economic viability of the program, including costs and revenue generated by the program;
- b. Program efficiency or efficiency in the department/college supporting the program (e.g., sharing of faculty and other resources);
- c. The program's ability to meet state workforce needs, including but not limited to licensure/certification exam passage rates;
- d. Whether the program performs a service function (i.e., courses offered in the program are general education courses or the courses serve students from other majors; such an argument should be supported by data about credit hour generation);
- e. Whether the program is purposely designed for low enrollment (e.g., studio or performance programs or programs requiring significant field experience);
- f. Information about specialized accreditation status of applicable programs;
- g. Any additional information about the viability of the program;
- h. National and regional trend enrollment and completion data for a specific program; or
- i. Institutional mission and identity.

Failure to provide this information will result in Commission staff making a recommendation based solely on enrollment and completion data.

2. Using the information provided by the institutions, Commission staff will prepare the program productivity report that will include staff recommendations for continuing approval for compliant programs and the following recommendations for noncompliant programs: *under review*, termination, or exemption.
3. The Commission's Committee on Academic Affairs and Licensing will consider the biennial report on degree program productivity as drafted by the Commission staff. Pending a favorable recommendation, the Committee will then forward the report to the full Commission for consideration.
4. Pending a favorable review by the full Commission, status recommendations for continuing approval, under review, and exemption will take effect immediately (i.e., from the date of the Commission meeting at which the report was approved).



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5. For programs placed *under review*, institutions must provide a plan for meeting the degree program productivity standards. This report must be sent within 90 calendar days from the date of Commission action on an initial under review status. At the end of the under review period, the Commission will recommend continuing approval status for programs meeting the program productivity standards and termination of programs that again fail to meet the standards. The Commission will remove programs from the under review status no sooner than the next degree program productivity review. In addition, subsequent reports will recognize any improvements made to programs under review, including those that have made exceptional progress toward meeting the standards.
  
6. Programs granted an exemption will be exempt for three program productivity biennial review cycles. When the program is again subject to program productivity review, Commission staff will inquire about any changes in the program that would affect its exemption status. If the reasons for initial exemption still apply, the program will again be recommended for exemption.
  
7. The Commission will forward to the respective chief academic officer of the institution recommendations for the termination of programs that have failed to meet degree program productivity standards after the six-year under review period. The Commission will request that institutions respond to the agency's executive director within 90 calendar days after a recommendation for termination to detail the institution's plan for complying with the Commission recommendation within a mutually agreed upon phase-out period.



## **Policies and Procedures for the In-depth Analysis of Recently Approved Academic Degree Programs**

### **Background and Rationale**

The first time a program is subject to the biennial program productivity review, it will receive a more in-depth analysis to compare the program to the projections stated in the program proposal approved by the Commission. Similar to the beliefs of most professional accrediting agencies, the Commission regards program review as the single best means to ensure academic program quality. Program review also can facilitate program improvement and assist in achieving the best use of institutional and state resources. The in-depth analysis for recently implemented programs allows institutions to demonstrate due diligence and explain to internal and external stakeholders how well newer programs are serving students, the campus community, and the state. The analysis also provides an opportunity to examine the pertinent data associated with such programs so that any necessary changes or adjustments can be made to help guarantee the success and strength of the program in the future. Such an analysis allows institutions to identify and correct any potential issues with recently implemented programs. This analysis helps pinpoint a program's ability to respond to future challenges and opportunities, shed light on strengths and weaknesses, and determine future priorities so as to better serve students' and the state's needs.

### **POLICY**

These policies pertain to recently approved degree programs offered at all public colleges and universities.

1. The Commission will request institutions submit the implementation date of all recently approved new programs in the last three years in October of every year.
2. The Commission will conduct an in-depth analysis of recently approved academic degree programs the first time they are subject to the Academic Degree Program Productivity Review (i.e., by the end of year six of implementation for baccalaureate, doctoral, and first professional programs and year four for master's and specialist programs<sup>2</sup>).
3. To complete the review, Commission staff will require data about program personnel, student performance, finances, curricular and other programmatic changes, programmatic assessment, and accreditation and licensure information (if applicable). Staff will also use the Commission on Higher Education Management Information System (CHEMIS) as a data source. Any discrepancies in data must be reconciled prior to the report being sent to the Committee on Academic Affairs and Licensing.

Recently approved academic degree programs will be reviewed only once for this in-depth analysis unless the programs are placed *under review* as a result of the analysis.

4. Academic degree programs that receive "met" on all sections of the review receive continuing approval status from the Commission and will be reviewed according to the criteria presented for the biennial review of existing programs for subsequent program productivity reviews.



5. Academic degree programs that receive an “unmet” on any section of the analysis are placed on Under Review for a maximum of two biennial program productivity review cycles (four years). This under review period is shorter than that of existing programs to ensure that new programs can be adjusted more rapidly to provide the best chance for success of the program.
6. For programs placed under review, institutions must follow up in writing with a longer and more detailed explanation of the program’s perceived weaknesses and provide a plan for meeting the program analysis metrics of the deficient section(s) within the under review period. If this report is not submitted by the institution by the date requested, Commission staff may refuse to accept any program proposals from that institution until the report is received.
7. At the end of the under review period, a follow-up analysis will be conducted of the deficient section(s) and if at that point there is insufficient improvement, the program will be recommended for termination.
8. For programs recommended for termination, institutions must provide a plan for complying with the Commission’s recommendation within a mutually agreed upon phase-out period. The following table displays the rubric used for reviewing academic degree program performance.



**Academic Degree Program Review Rubric**

Section of Review	Unmet	Met
Personnel	Actual full-time equivalent (FTE) exceeds projections without a qualifying rationale; projected new faculty were not hired; no supervisor identified; program has fewer faculty than originally reported; or qualifications appear suspect (i.e., some program administrators or faculty hold less than the highest terminal degree and have less than 18 hours of graduate coursework in field)	Program accurately projected FTE & has successfully maintained programmatic anticipated FTE levels; projected new faculty hired; full-time faculty teaching in program with sufficient faculty to deliver program; and program administrator and faculty all hold highest terminal degree in field or can document a minimum of 18 hours of graduate coursework in the field. A rationale is provided for any increase or decrease in FTE when this number is compared to the original proposal approved by the Commission.
Student Enrollment and Performance	Actual enrollment is less than projected with no upward enrollment trend; graduate placement and employment prospects are not tracked or are poor with less than 60% of graduates finding employment or placement in graduate school; or placement trends are generally negative.	Actual enrollment matches or exceeds projections; enrollment numbers are increasing; initial graduate placements are tracked and available with 60%+ of graduates each year employed or placed in graduate school; and placement rates remain steady or increase over time
Finances: Actual Costs and Sources of Financing	Program costs diverged from those stated in the proposal and insufficient justification is given for this divergence; or the program has a negative fiscal impact on the institution and insufficient support is provided to explain maintaining a program with negative fiscal impact.	Actual costs are equal to projections, or the program has a positive fiscal impact on the institution, or justification is provided for any divergence in program costs, or in rare instances, the program has a negative fiscal impact and the institution provided sufficient justification to explain maintaining the program.





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Curriculum and/or Other Programmatic Changes	Many and varied changes made in curriculum; unclear explanations for changes; or major changes have diverted the program from its original form	Very few and/or minor changes made to curriculum; no fundamental change from the original proposal; and if any changes are made, they are more than adequately justified.
Programmatic Assessment	Assessment shows the program is not meeting its objectives; data is not reviewed regularly; or changes made to the program are not supported by the programmatic assessment data.	Assessment shows the program is meeting or exceeding its objectives; data is reviewed annually; and any improvements to the program are made based on the programmatic assessment data (connection is evident).
Accreditation	Accrediting body finds flaws in the program; accreditation has been unnecessarily delayed or no movement toward accreditation; or there is insufficient explanation of status or justification for lack of action	Accreditation is on track and on time; evidence of progress available; accrediting body supports program and is positive in its reviews; and status is clearly explained, and progress is evident
Licensure/Certification Exam Passage Rates	Number of graduates becoming certified is low and unsatisfactory; the percentage of those who pass on the first try is less than the expectations or benchmarks set by the licensure/accrediting body; or program does not seem to prepare students well for certification	Number of graduates receiving certification is appropriate; the percentage of those passing on the first try meets the expectations or benchmarks set by the licensure/accrediting body; and program matches expectations



## PROCEDURE

1. To complete the in-depth program analysis, the Commission will distribute a form to each institution to assess recently approved academic degree programs subject to review that year. These data will be used to evaluate the programs by comparing the projections in the program proposal to the actual productivity of the program.
2. Using the information provided by the institutions, Commission staff will evaluate the programs according to the rubric identified in this policy. This evaluation will be included in the biennial program productivity report and will include staff recommendations for continuing approval for academic degree programs that receive “met” on all sections of the review and under review for academic degree programs that receive an “unmet” on any section of the review.
3. The Commission’s Committee on Academic Affairs and Licensing consider the biennial report on degree program productivity as drafted by the Commission staff. Pending a favorable recommendation, the Committee will then forward the report to the full Commission for consideration.
4. Pending a favorable review by the full Commission, recommendations for continuing approval status and under review status will take effect immediately (i.e., from the date of the Commission meeting at which the report was approved).
5. For programs placed under review, institutions must submit a report explaining the unmet section(s) and the improvement plan for meeting the section(s) within the under review period. This report must be sent within 90 calendar days from the date of Commission action on initial under review status. The information will be included in a subsequent report to be reviewed by the Commission’s Committee on Academic Affairs and Licensing and the full Commission. At the end of the under review period, staff will request information about the unmet section(s) to conduct a follow-up review; this information about the follow-up review for unmet sections for programs Under Review will be included in that year’s program productivity report. If at that point there is insufficient improvement, the program will be recommended for termination. If the program has made sufficient improvement, staff will recommend continuing approval for the program.
6. For programs recommended for termination, Commission staff will contact the respective chief academic officer of the institution to request that institutions respond to the agency executive director within 90 calendar days to detail the institution’s plan for complying with the Commission recommendation within a mutually agreed upon phase-out period.



## Program Review for Recently Approved Programs

In accordance with the *South Carolina Commission on Higher Education Policies and Procedures for Academic Degree Program Productivity*, this *Program Review* is an assessment that compares a new, approved program's proposed productivity at the time of its application to its outcomes by the end of year six for baccalaureate, doctoral, and first professional programs and year four for associate's, master's and specialist programs. The assessment requests data about program **personnel, student performance, finances, curricular and other programmatic changes, programmatic assessment**, and **accreditation and licensure information** (if applicable) to better assess and assure quality programmatic delivery to students. Specific instructions accompany each section.

### Name of Institution / Degree Name and Level

Date Program Approved by the Commission:

Proposed Program Implementation Date:

Actual Program Implementation Date:

If the actual implementation date differs from the proposed implementation date, provide an explanation for the change in implementation date.



**Personnel**

1. Provide information about the qualifications of faculty who oversee and/or teach primarily in the program to help the Commission compare projections for administration and faculty needed to support the program to the actual personnel supporting the program. List program supervisor positions first; highlight faculty identified in the original program proposal approved by the Commission; and place an asterisk (\*) next to the rank of new faculty hired for the program following Commission approval. Add and delete rows as needed.

<b>Administration and Faculty Personnel</b>				
<b>Rank</b>	<b>Full- or Part-time</b>	<b>Courses Taught or To be Taught, Including Term, Course Number &amp; Title, Credit Hours</b>	<b>Academic Degrees and Coursework Relevant to Courses Taught, Including Institution and Major</b>	<b>Other Qualifications and Comments (i.e., explain role and/or changes in assignment; if new faculty, provide hire date)</b>



2. Identify and explain in detail any differences between the faculty listed in the program proposal approved by the Commission and the faculty currently teaching in the program. For example, if there are more or fewer faculty currently supporting the program than stated in the proposal, provide a rationale for this change.
  
3. State the total projected and actual annual FTE needed to support the proposed program (i.e., the total FTE devoted just to the program for all faculty, staff, and program administrators). (Note: provide FTE, not headcount)

<b>Category</b>	<b>Projected FTE</b>	<b>Actual FTE</b>
<b>Administration</b>		
<b>Faculty</b>		
<b>Staff</b>		

4. Explain any differences between the projected FTE needed to support the program and the actual FTE.



**Student Enrollment and Performance**

1. Provide the estimated enrollment from the original proposal and the actual enrollment in the program from the first year through year five.

Enrollment (Headcount)						
Year	Fall		Spring		Summer	
	Projected	Actual	Projected	Actual	Projected	Actual
FY						
FY						
FY						
FY						
FY						

2. If enrollment projections were not met, explain the reasons why the projections were not met.
3. Provide available information/data for graduate placement rates, including employment and matriculation to graduate school.

Year	Total Number of Graduates	Graduates Employed	Graduates Matriculating to Graduate School	Other (Specify what "Other" is, for example, Military Commission)	Total Percent Employed, in Graduate School, or Other
FY					
FY					
FY					
FY					
FY					



4. Include any additional information about graduate placement rates, if applicable.
5. Describe the methods used to track these graduates.

#### **Finances: Actual Costs and Sources of Finances**

1. Since the program's implementation, explain instances where actual costs diverged from those projected, whether positive or negative.
2. Explain how the program has a negative or positive fiscal impact on the institution overall (i.e., is the program supported by the revenue of other programs, is it self-supporting, or does the revenue generated by the program support other programs at the institution?).

#### **Curriculum and Other Programmatic Changes**

1. Attach a sheet showing the current curriculum for the program. Describe any changes from the curriculum provided in the proposal approved by the Commission and the rationale for these changes. Include any increases and decreases in credit hours; course additions, deletions, or modifications; the addition, deletion, or modification of any clinicals, field experiences, internships, or capstone courses; etc.
2. Identify any other changes made to the program since its implementation and explain the rationale for these changes (e.g., changes to the admissions requirements, mode of program delivery, instruction sites, etc.).



### **Programmatic Assessment**

1. Provide the results of the programmatic assessment for the past three years (attach reports if available). Include results for all evaluation measures identified in the proposal originally approved by the Commission; if evaluation measures have changed, explain the changes while providing the results of the new evaluation measures.
2. Describe how often and by whom the programmatic assessment data is reviewed.
3. State whether changes have been made to the program as a result of this assessment; and, if so, describe the changes.

### **Accreditation** (if applicable)

1. Describe the program's accreditation status, including an explanation of delays in seeking or earning programmatic accreditation. Also, attach any reports or recommendations received from the accrediting body regarding the program.





**Licensure/Certification Exam Passage Rates (if applicable)**

1. Provide information about licensure/certification exam passage rates.

**Licensure/Certification Exam Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total Number of Graduates</b>	<b>Passage Rate</b>
<b>FY</b>		
<b>FY</b>		
<b>FY</b>		
<b>FY</b>		
<b>FY</b>		

Note: Repeat this table if there are multiple licensure/certification exams applicable to the program.

2. Identify the expectations or benchmarks in passage rates set by the licensure/accrediting body. Also include the source of this information.
3. Include additional information about Licensure/Certification Exam Passage Rates, if applicable.