



## Tennessee Higher Education Commission

**Section Title:** Academic Policies

**Policy Title:** Expedited Academic Programs: Approval Process

**Policy Number:** A 1.6

**1.6.1A Purpose.** The primary goal of an expedited approval process is to decrease the time of approval for new academic programs which meet workforce, economic, or other state needs while still assuring quality, student demand, uniqueness, and institutional capacity to deliver the proposed program.

**1.6.2A Programs Subject to Approval.** Academic programs considered in high demand will be eligible for an Expedited Academic Program Approval Process. Examples of high demand programs could include:

- Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) programs as identified via CIP classification in the Expedited Academic Programs Checklist available on the THEC website
- High demand programs as established in the THEC Academic Supply and Occupational Demand Report
- Programs created in response to demonstrated workforce needs

Doctoral programs and programs which require notification of substantive change to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) will not be eligible for expedited approval.

**1.6.3A Expedited Approval Process.** The process to develop a new academic program once approved as a high demand program is as follows:

- Expedited Letter of Notification
- Expedited New Academic Program Proposal
- External Review
- Institutional Governing Board Approval
- Commission Action

**1.6.4A Expedited Letter of Notification (ELON).** A formal request must be

submitted to the THEC Executive Director by the President/Chancellor of the institution or system office for a new academic program to be considered for the Expedited Academic Approval Process and should include justification as to why the program should be considered for expedited academic program approval. A response will be provided to approve, disapprove, or require additional information.

If approved, the proposed program will be posted on the THEC website for a ten (10)-calendar day period for comment by interested parties. At the close of the ten (10)-calendar day comment period, THEC will review all comments and documents in order to identify issues relative to criteria identified in Sections 1.0.2A1 "Criteria for Review" and 1.0.2A2 "No Unnecessary Duplication" in accordance with THEC Academic Policy A 1.0: New Academic Programs: Approval Process.

The ten (10)-calendar day public comment period may be extended to a maximum of twenty (20)-calendar days per the discretion of THEC staff.

#### **1.6.5A**

##### **Expedited New Academic Program Proposal (ENAPP).**

In accordance with THEC Academic Policy A 1.0: New Academic Programs: Approval Process, institutions are responsible for quality academic program development. The ENAPP is to be submitted in entirety to THEC and should follow guidelines as outlined on the checklist for Expedited Academic Programs posted on the THEC website.

#### **1.6.6A**

**External Reviewers.** External reviewers will be required to serve as expert evaluators for all proposed academic programs. THEC will select reviewers from the proposed institutional external reviewer list. Individuals used in the development stage as external consultants may not serve as external reviewers. External reviewers should be selected in alignment with criteria outlined in the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) Ethical Obligations of Evaluators Policy Statement.

In the event no external reviewers proposed by the institution are available or acceptable, THEC staff reserve the right to approve an exception or propose alternative external reviewers and may opt, when appropriate, to authorize a paper review of the proposed academic program rather than a visit to the campus by the external reviewer(s).

#### **1.6.7 A**

**External Review.** The institution or governing board will be notified

of the selected reviewers, the review modality, dates of availability of THEC staff (if relevant) and provided a list of questions for the external reviewer to address during the course of the review. Institutions may add additional questions to the THEC review questions. The external reviewer must provide a written report in response to the questions concurrently to the institution/governing board and THEC within 30 calendar days of the conclusion of the external reviewer's visit.

The institution will be responsible for inviting the external reviewer(s), all scheduling, expenses and contracting with the external reviewers. THEC staff will provide a summary of the required agenda sessions for the external reviewer's visit.

**1.6.8A**                    **Post-External Review.** After receipt of the external reviewer's report, an institution must propose to THEC solutions in keeping with best practices for all issues identified by the reviewer.

**1.6.9A**                    **Commission Action.** Proposed academic programs supported by THEC and approved by the institutional governing board will be presented to the Commission for action at the earliest possible scheduled meeting.

Programs may not be advertised by any public institution prior to approval by the Commission unless exceptional circumstances require special consideration. Requests for special consideration shall be submitted in writing and will only be accepted after a determination of support has been made following post-external judgment as described in paragraph 1.0.10A above. Requests for special consideration must be approved by the Executive Director. Students may not be admitted to any program prior to final approval by the Commission.

**1.6.10A**                    **Post-Approval Monitoring.** Performance of new academic programs, based on goals established in documentation submitted at the time of approval, will be evaluated by THEC annually. Post-approval monitoring is initiated when a new expedited program receives approval by THEC Executive Director or the Commission. The monitoring period will be three years for pre-baccalaureate programs, five years for baccalaureate and Master's programs, and seven years for doctoral programs. Upon completion of post-approval monitoring, academic programs will be evaluated via Quality Assurance Funding – a statewide supplemental funding incentive to encourage continuous improvement of programs. THEC staff may choose to extend the

monitoring period if additional time is needed for the program to demonstrate success on program benchmarks. Annually, the Commission will review post-approval reports on academic programs that are currently being monitored. If an academic program is deemed deficient, the Commission may recommend to the President/Chancellor that the program be terminated. Copies of such recommendations will be forwarded to the Education Committees of the General Assembly.

**Source:** THEC Meetings: July 23, 2020; and January 25, 2024.