

**DATE:** January 29, 2015

**SUBJECT:** Policy Revisions: A1.0: *New Academic Programs: Approval Process* and A1.1: *New and Modified Academic Programs: Evaluation Criteria*

**ACTION RECOMMENDED:** Approval

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:** THEC Academic Policies A1.0 (*New Academic Programs: Approval Process*) and A1.1 (*New and Modified Academic Programs: Evaluation Criteria*) were last revised January 2011 in response to the 2010 Complete College Tennessee Act’s productivity directive. Since then, there has been extensive growth in the academic inventory across the state coupled with failing productivity thresholds. As a result, a 12 month moratorium on new academic programs was established July 1, 2014 in order to assess the health of academic offerings and make necessary adjustments to academic program policy.

The moratorium has enabled THEC to reflect on its current practices and propose policy revisions to expedite the approval process, while still maintaining academic quality and avoiding unnecessary duplication. Additionally, the Drive to 55 initiative (goal for 55 percent of adult Tennesseans to have earned postsecondary degrees or certificates by the year 2025) has implications for the development of new academic programs, and as a result, a more flexible and efficient approval process is needed.

New academic program proposals will follow the approval process outlined in Policy A1.0 which has only minor updates in order to reflect current practices. Such updates include granting the Executive Director of THEC approval authority for proposals of new academic units (divisions, colleges and schools), and a name change from the “letter of intent” to the “letter of application” regarding the notification of an academic program proposal.

The proposed policy revisions for Policy A1.1 consist of minor changes to the evaluation criteria that are to be included in the letter of application for new and modified academic programs. It also provides a more efficient approval process for modified academic program proposals by granting power of approval to the THEC Executive Director. There have been several examples of academic program modifications that were approved by the Commission, but would have been appropriate for the Executive Director to approve in order to save time and resources of the Commission. Examples of such modifications include:

- The Master of Fine Arts (MFA) in Creative Writing program at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville was approved at the July 2013 THEC meeting. This proposal changed the degree designation of the Master of Art in Creative Writing program to a MFA in Creative Writing as a result of curricular changes in order to redefine the program purpose.
- The Graphic Design program at East Tennessee State University was approved recently at the July 2014 meeting. This proposal was submitted in response to suggestions from the National Association of Schools of Art to develop a stand-alone program from the existing Graphic Design concentration within the Art BFA program.
- Middle Tennessee State University is currently developing a Master of Library Science program which seeks to separate the library science concentration from the existing Master of Education in Administration and Supervision academic program. Because the library science concentration has a steady enrollment and graduation history, and subsequent establishment into a free standing program will not compromise the existing Administration and Supervision M.Ed. program, this type of academic program modification should be eligible to be approved by the Executive Director of THEC rather than the Commission.

It should also be noted that proposed language exists in Policy A1.1 for the THEC Executive Director to elevate a program modification to a new program so that it may be considered by the Commission for approval.

THEC staff worked in consultation with the both the Tennessee Board of Regents and the University of Tennessee with these policy revisions. In summary, the revisions to academic policies A1.0 (*New Academic Programs: Approval Process*) and A1.1 (*New and Modified Academic Programs: Evaluation Criteria*) are as follows:

- Differentiate new academic program proposals from modified academic program proposals in the approval process.
- Update the evaluation criteria for the letter of application in order to reflect current practices in the academic policies, and ensure that new and modified academic programs seeking approval will meet the expectations outlined in Section 1.1.20 of policy A1.1.
- Expedite the approval process for modified academic program proposals in order to better meet the needs of colleges and universities and the State.