



TENNESSEE HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION

REGULAR CALENDAR ITEM: VI.B.

MEETING DATE: January 27, 2023
SUBJECT: Academic Policies
A1.3 – New Academic Units
ITEM TYPE: Action
ACTION RECOMMENDATION: Approval

BACKGROUND

THEC Academic Policy A1.3 – New Academic Units establishes a process for approving new academic units and modifying existing academic units at public campuses across the state.

The proposed revisions were completed with a focus on streamlining the process; aligning with statutory language; and outlining required components. Additionally, sections were added to clarify the process for modifications to existing units, including name changes. These proposed revisions were developed in consultation with the Chief Academic Officers at each university as well as representatives from the University of Tennessee System and Tennessee Board of Regents.

Attachment A provides a redlined version of the policy and Attachment B provides a clean version of the proposed changes.

Attachment A: Redlined Version of Proposed Changes

Section Title: Academic Policies
Policy Title: New Academic Units
Policy Number: A 1.3

1.3.1A

Purpose. ~~In accordance with Chapter 179 of the Legislative Act creating Pursuant to Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-7-202(q)(2)(A), the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC), the Commission~~ has the statutory responsibility to review and approve new academic departments or divisions at public universities and community colleges. Pursuant to Section VII of the Rules of Procedure, the Executive Director shall be empowered to act for the Commission in the interim when the Commission is not in session. ~~units. The THEC Executive Director will have approval authority for new academic units. For purposes of this policy, new academic units subject to this policy include colleges, schools, divisions and departments.~~

- ~~College or School:~~ An instructional unit within a university that usually includes several academic departments and is usually administered by a dean or director. As defined here, the term “college” does not pertain to separate institutions known as colleges, such as community college or technical college.
- ~~Division:~~ An instructional unit that usually includes two or more departments within a college or university which may be administered by an assistant or associate dean.
- ~~Department:~~ An instructional unit encompassing a discrete branch of study or organized around common and similar academic areas and is usually administered by a department chair.

1.3.2A

Definition of Academic Units. Academic units include, but are not limited to, colleges, departments, institutes, schools, and other divisions that house at least one academic program including degrees, certificates, and minors.

1.3.32A

Approval Pprocess for Nnew Aacademic Uunits. ~~Upon approval of the institution's President/Chancellor or Chief Academic Officer and/or chair of the institutional governing board (dependent on institutional policy) Following proper institutional/system approval,~~ a public community college or university seeking to establish a new academic unit ~~must shall~~ submit a written request for a new academic unit to THEC's Executive Director. The request shall be in alignment with Section 1.3.4A and include all required materials as outlined in the New Academic Units Checklist available on the

THEC website, that addresses the following criteria to THEC for review and approval:

- Name of the proposed academic unit - Indicate the type of academic organizational structure as defined in Section 1.3.1A.
- Rationale for the proposed academic unit - Supporting documentation should be provided that the proposed new academic unit contributes to meeting the priorities and goals of the institution's academic master plan and a rationale as to why the institution needs the proposed academic unit.
- Inventory of academic program offerings - An inventory of current academic program offerings that will be housed in the new academic unit should be included in the proposal. Any future academic program offerings in the development stage at the institution should also be included.
- Updated organizational chart - The organizational placement and the administrative responsibilities for the new academic unit within the institution should be clearly defined and designed to promote success of the academic programs within the proposed academic unit.
- Cost-benefit analysis of the proposed academic unit - The benefit to the state should outweigh the cost of the academic unit. Institutions should estimate the effect on funding caused by the proposed change. Supporting documentation should be provided that cost will be met from internal reallocations or from other sources such as grants and gifts, if appropriate. The analysis should include the source of any institutional reallocation. The anticipated revenue from the new unit should be comparable to revenue generated by similar units within the institution.
- Existing and/or anticipated facilities for proposed academic unit - New and/or renovated facilities required for the new academic unit should be clearly outlined by amount and type of space, costs identified, and source of costs in the proposal, if appropriate.
- Letter of support - A letter of documentation from the institution's President/Chancellor or the Chief Academic Officer to support the new academic unit must be submitted. The proposed implementation date should be stated.

1.3.43A

~~**Criteria for Review.** The criteria set out in Provisions 1.3.2A will generally be used in reviewing requests for new academic units. However, the stringency of individual criteria may vary on the specific unit and additional information may be requested. Proposals for new academic units will be evaluated on the following criteria:~~

- ~~▪ Feasibility of the new academic unit~~
- ~~▪ Alignment with the Tennessee State Master Plan for Higher Education and institutional mission~~
- ~~▪ Required investment for new and/or renovated facilities~~
- ~~▪ Overall costs associated with the new academic unit~~

1.3.54A

~~**Name changes of academic units. Modifications to Existing Academic Units.** Any changes, with the exception of a name change, to existing academic units must be submitted to THEC for review and approval. Renaming an existing academic unit where there is neither a significant change in activity nor a significant change in organizational level does not require Commission approval.~~

1.3.5BA

~~**Reorganizations of academic unit Name Changes of Academic Units.** For purposes of maintaining accurate records, institutions renaming an existing academic unit shall submit written notification to THEC prior to the name change taking effect. Reorganizations involving more than one academic unit require THEC approval if, and only if, at least one of the following occurs:~~

- ~~• net increase in the number of academic units;~~
- ~~• existing academic unit will be placed at a higher organizational level (e.g., the upgrading of a department to a college or school);~~
- ~~• additional costs incurred (e.g., adding a new chairperson in addition to current administrative staff); or~~
- ~~• significant change in the activity of the academic unit with or without a name change.~~

1.3.6A

~~Policy will be reviewed every five years unless changes in eligible academic units are warranted.~~

Sources: THEC Meetings: April 22, 1988; January 29, 2015; ~~and~~ January 26, 2017; and January 27, 2023.

Attachment B: Clean Version of Proposed Changes

Section Title: Academic Policies
Policy Title: New Academic Units
Policy Number: A 1.3

- 1.3.1A** **Purpose.** Pursuant to Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-7-202(q)(2)(A), the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) has the statutory responsibility to review and approve new academic departments or divisions at public universities and community colleges. Pursuant to Section VII of the Rules of Procedure, the Executive Director shall be empowered to act for the Commission in the interim when the Commission is not in session.
- 1.3.2A** **Definition of Academic Units.** Academic units include, but are not limited to, colleges, departments, institutes, schools, and other divisions that house at least one academic program including degrees, certificates, and minors.
- 1.3.3A** **Approval Process for New Academic Units** - Following proper institutional approval, a public community college or university seeking to establish a new academic unit shall submit a written request to THEC's Executive Director. The request shall be in alignment with Section 1.3.4A and include all required materials as outlined in the New Academic Units Checklist available on the THEC website.
- 1.3.4A** **Criteria for Review.** Proposals for new academic units will be evaluated on the following criteria:
- Feasibility of the new academic unit
 - Alignment with the Tennessee State Master Plan for Higher Education and institutional mission
 - Required investment for new and/or renovated facilities
 - Overall costs associated with the new academic unit
- 1.3.5A** **Modifications to Existing Academic Units.** Any changes, with the exception of a name change, to existing academic units must be submitted to THEC for review and approval.
- 1.3.5B** **Name Changes of Academic Units.** For purposes of maintaining accurate records, institutions renaming an existing academic unit shall submit written notification to THEC prior to the name change taking effect.

Sources: THEC Meetings: April 22, 1988; January 29, 2015; January 26, 2017; and January 27, 2023.