



## TENNESSEE HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION

---

**REGULAR CALENDAR ITEM:** I.B.

**MEETING DATE:** January 25, 2024

**SUBJECT:** Academic Policies  
Academic Policy A1.6 – Expedited Academic Programs: Approval Process

**ITEM TYPE:** Action

**ACTION RECOMMENDATION:** Approval

---

### BACKGROUND

Pursuant to Tennessee Code Annotated § 49-7-202(q)(2)(A), the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) has the statutory responsibility to review and approve new degree programs for public institutions of higher education in the state of Tennessee.

The proposed changes to THEC Academic Policy A1.6 – Expedited Academic Programs: Approval Process are in alignment with the proposed changes to THEC Academic Policy A1.0 – New Academic Programs: Approval Process. Based on conversations with the Commission, along with system and campus representatives, THEC staff are recommending several changes that are designed to provide additional flexibility to campuses regarding the timing of the external review process. Additionally, language concerning the expedited approval process has been updated to match the essential steps in the new academic program approval process. Lastly, several sections have been updated to match language that was changed in THEC Academic Policy A1.0 on July 28, 2022.

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

## Attachment A: Redlined Version of Proposed Changes

**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:

- ~~1.~~ Expedited Letter of Notification
- ~~2.~~ Expedited New Academic Program Proposal
- External JudgmentReview
- ~~3.~~ Institutional Governing Board Approval
- ~~4.~~ Post-External Judgment
- ~~5.~~ 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 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 ~~at the time the campus seeks to request an external review~~ and should follow guidelines as outlined on the checklist for Expedited Academic Programs posted on the THEC website. ~~Once the ENAPP is submitted to THEC, the institution may initiate the site visit for the proposed program.~~

#### 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) In keeping with the SACSCOC's Ethical Obligations of Evaluators pPolicy Sstatement. ~~external reviewers should ideally:~~

- ~~• be a subject matter expert in the proposed field;~~
- ~~• be a tenured faculty member with associate or higher academic rank, teaching and a record of research experience;~~
- ~~• no prior relationship with either the institution or close personal or familial relationship with the potential faculty involved in the proposed academic program;~~
- ~~• not be employed within the state of Tennessee;~~
- ~~• not have been a consultant or a board member at the institution within the last ten years;~~
- ~~• not have been a candidate for employment at the institution within the last seven years;~~
- ~~• not be a graduate of the institution; and~~

- ~~not have any other relationship that could serve as an impediment to rendering an impartial, objective professional judgment regarding the merits of the proposed academic program.~~

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 Judgment 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 Judgment Review.** ~~After receipt of the external reviewer's report, an institution must propose solutions to THEC in keeping with best practices for all issues identified by the reviewer. Within 30 calendar days of receipt of the external reviewer's report, the institution must propose to THEC solutions in keeping with best practices for all issues identified by the reviewer. Based upon the proposed revisions, THEC may opt to take one of three determinations:~~

~~Support – The THEC Executive Director supports the proposed program and notifies the president/chancellor of the institution in writing.~~

~~Not Support – The rationale not to support will be provided in writing to the institution within 15 calendar days. The institution may appeal the determination by responding to all identified issues within 15 calendar days of receiving notification of THEC's determination for denying support. THEC will make a final determination within 15 calendar days of the receipt of any institutional appeal and notify the institution whether the proposed changes are sufficient for a support determination. If the institution does not respond within 15 calendar days, the determination not to support the~~

~~proposed academic program for implementation is final.~~  
~~Defer Support - The rationale to defer support will be provided in writing to the institution within 15 calendar days of receipt of the institution's response to the external report. The institution may choose to submit a revision of the proposed academic program within 60 calendar days and seek further external review or rescind the proposed academic program.~~

#### 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.

#### 1.6.11A

~~Policy will be reviewed every five years unless changes in the evaluation process are warranted.~~

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

## Attachment B: Clean Version of Proposed Changes

**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 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 solutions to THEC 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.