ACADEMIC PROGRAM APPROVAL PROCESSES AND CRITERIA

Online Program Manager (OPM) Pilot

Background – Academic Program Approval

Minnesota State's colleges and universities offer approximately 4,000 academic programs leading to certificates, diplomas, and academic degrees at the undergraduate and graduate level.

The Minnesota State Colleges and Universities Board of Trustees is authorized by the state legislature to approve all decisions to add, revise, or delete programs of study at system institutions. The legislature further instructed the Board to avoid duplicate program offerings and place a high priority on ensuring the transferability of credit (Minnesota Statutes 2022, section 136F.30).

In June 2019, we set a critical goal: By 2030, Minnesota State will eliminate the educational equity gaps at every Minnesota State college and university. It is a staggeringly ambitious goal and one that will require both intentional systems and culture change and innovation, as well as advocacy and leadership with partners and stakeholders across the state. While there is only one goal for Equity 2030 – closing the educational equity gaps across race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and geographic location by the year 2030 – achieving that goal requires:

- Intentional systems and culture change
- Coordination, innovation, and capacity building
- Steadfast focus of leadership and empowerment
- Collaboration with partners and stakeholders across the state

In order to assist in eliminating the equity gap by 2030, the Academic Affairs Unit in the Division of Academic and Student Affairs is prioritizing work to ensure the quality of our academic programming to reduce equity gaps.

The Program Approval process has been adopted to improve program quality and equitable outcomes across the system. At the core of this process is a common framework for the review and assessment of new academic program proposals that not only incorporates an equity lens but aligns with regional and program accreditation requirements.

Online programs, generally, and partnerships with OPMs, particularly, are important to reaching students who need or prefer distance education. However, OPMs are currently under increased scrutiny by accreditors and federal regulators. This necessitates oversight that aligns with Minnesota State's approval process for new programs. This process outlines the steps needed to enter into a new partnership with an Online Program Manager (OPM) for program delivery or to add programs to an existing OPM partnership. In particular this process aims to assure the following:

1. Documented process of shared governance and student engagement in decision-making
2. Evidence of quality markers assuring academic integrity, ethical student

engagement, and intellectual property safeguards throughout the partnership
3. Business model justifies the partnership; annual review and reporting confirms its value

1. Letter of Inquiry

The approval process starts with the submission of a Letter of Inquiry. **Six months to one year prior to a RFP for a new OPM partnership <u>or</u> OPM program expansion amended to an existing agreement,** colleges and universities must notify the system office of their intent to enter into an OPM partnership or expand programs offered through an OPM partnership by submitting an OPM "Letter of Inquiry."

The Academic Program Director will serve as the point of contact and will work with the campus until the new OPM partnership or OPM program expansion is approved or denied.

2. Notice of Intent (NOI)

A Notice of Intent (NOI) application will be developed by the campus staff in consultation with the Academic Program Director and should address all elements in the **New OPM Partnership/OPM Program Expansion Rubric** which will be used to determine approval.

In general, the NOI must include the following data: 1) student interest; 2) documented need for the program; 3) catalog description; 4) curriculum structure and required courses; 5) credit length; 6) award; 7) CIP Code recommendation; 8) delivery mode; 9) location, if applicable; 10) program learning outcomes; 11) Equity 2030 considerations outlining how the proposed program will support Minnesota State's work to close educational equity gaps across race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and geographic location. 12) summary of the proposed business model and completion of the financial pro-forma (see Appendix A); 13) full terms and agreements of the pending contract (new OPMs) or existing contract (program expansion); 14) vendor information required based on updated <u>federal guidelines</u> at the time of submission.

- Notices of Intent will be posted on the [Minnesota State](#) website in an accessible format for a 20-day review and comment period.
- Any comments or concerns submitted during the 20-day review and comment period must be addressed by the campus proposing the new OPM agreement or new programs within 10 days.
- Campuses who submitted the comments or concerns will have 10 days to respond to the additional information provided by the campus proposing the new OPM agreement or programs.

The Notice of Intent criteria along with the public comment data will be considered by the Academic Programs and Quality Assurance unit and finance division. The applicant will receive one of the following notifications:

1. The applicant may proceed with contract approval for a new OPM partnership or proceed with contract amendment for additional program(s). This approval is contingent upon the following additional requirements:
    a. Annual reporting and review of actual enrollment and revenue compared to enrollment and revenue projections outlined in the financial pro-forma
    b. Compliance with all federal regulations and reporting for OPM and third party servicers.
2. The applicant may not enter into an OPM partnership or add new programs at this time.

3. Appeal Process

Applicants may appeal the decision to the Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and the Vice Chancellor for Finance and Facilities within 30 days of the decision notification by submitting a **Letter of Appeal** and any additional supporting documentation.

Upon receipt of the Letter of Appeal, the Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs will forward the letter and supporting documents to the Chair of the Academic Affairs Council for review.

The Academic Affairs Council has up to 60 days to review the appeal. The **New OPM Partnership/OPM Program Expansion Rubric** will be used for this review.

The Academic Affairs Council will submit their recommendation to the Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs.

Within 30 days of receipt of the recommendation from the Academic Affairs Council, the Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs and the Vice Chancellor for Finance and Facilities shall agree upon a final determination regarding disposition of the appeal.

The decision of the Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs and the Vice Chancellor for Finance and Facilities is binding.

New OPM Partnership/Program Expansion Approval Rubric	Met	Met with Concerns	Not Met	Notes:

Aligned with Minnesota State mission, strategic goals, board policies and procedures, including but not limited to:
• Vision and mission statements, Board Policy 1A.1, Part 2.
• Access and accommodation for individuals with disabilities, Policy 1B.4
• Equity 2030 lens for program development
   o By race and ethnicity
   o First Generation Status
   o Socioeconomic status
Identify equity gaps in student populations and a plan to address gaps. Curriculum created is inclusive and course outlines reflect the inclusive curriculum development.				

Aligned with institution mission and statutory authority: ▪ Proposed program complies with Board Policy 3.24 and System Procedure 3.24.1				
Transfer considerations: • Signed articulation agreement • Elaboration of program/course transferability • Draft semester-by-semester program guide				
Shared governance decision making: ▪ AASC/Curriculum Committee minutes documenting approval of the proposed OPM partnership, OPM program expansion, or program modification ▪ Program advisory committee minutes documenting the recommendation to engage in or expand an OPM partnership to the proposed program				
Student involvement in decision-making (Board Policy 2.3 and System Procedure 2.3.1) ▪ Documentation of student committee participation, or ▪ Letter from the student association president affirming the program proposal				

Proposed program meets workforce and community needs, if applicable:
▪ Labor market supply/demand data supporting the need for the proposed program
▪ Occupations in Demand star rating
   ▪ MN Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) projection of rate of growth-average, above average, etc.
   ▪ Supply of graduates compared to DEED projections of occupational demand and other input from offering institution on local employment levels
▪ Market share data
▪ High proportion of graduates from private colleges and universities for region or service area
▪ Evidence of industry partner needs (statements of support from key industry partners)
▪ Projected demand in the MN Economic Development area served by the institution
▪ Occupational demand that outpaces current supply for programs in the region or service area				

OPM Partnership/Program Expansion Approval Rubric	Met	Met with Concerns	Not Met	Notes:
Institutional capacity to support the proposed program. ▪ Completion of the required pro-forma (Appendix A) that the institution has the capacity to support the proposed OPM partnership or expansion/modification and that the partnership improves the financial position of the institution; this should be extensively detailed with the revenue-sharing or fee-for-service financial model ▪ As appropriate, plan for additional faculty, staff, equipment, technology purchases and maintenance, and other resources needed to develop and sustain the OPM partnership				
Statewide and Regional planning: ▪ Meeting minutes documenting statewide and regional discussion/decisions regarding impact of the proposed OPM partnership or expansion. ▪ Indication of objections, support, resolutions, and other documentation demonstrating the results of statewide and regional dialogue				

Program duplication:
▪ Institution service area
Online programs aggressively marketed across the state can be assumed to impact all Minnesota State institutions with similar programs and will be reviewed accordingly
▪ Enrollment data for existing programs
  ▪ Current programs fully enrolled and/or able to take on capacity
  ▪ Projected enrollment for proposed program
▪ Existing program completion data
▪ Impact on supply/demand data and potential for significant oversupply
  ▪ Related program completions by other institutions within Minnesota State
  ▪ Justification for adding a duplicate program, if applicable
  ▪ Demonstrated niche for program in its content, delivery, and associated student market				

Note: Expedited program approval is not an option for OPM Partnerships

OPM Partnership/Program Expansion Approval Rubric	Met	Met with Concerns	Not Met	Notes:

Student interest:
▪ IPEDS data:
  • Program enrollments
  • Related course/program waiting lists
  • Course enrollments
  • Program completions
▪ Other data:
  • Current student surveys
  • Employee needs surveys
  • Employer needs surveys
  • Entering student surveys				

• Graduate follow-up surveys • High school counselor surveys • High school student surveys • Undeclared student surveys • Attendance at information sessions • Website analytics • Student clubs that represent an interest in a potential program or discipline • Published reports on emerging markets				
Program learning outcomes ▪ Outcomes should provide a framework for determining the more specific educational objectives of a program ▪ Assessment plans demonstrating connection through the program learning outcomes				
Professional accreditation/certification requirements, if applicable				

Minnesota State is an affirmative action, equal opportunity employer and educator.