5. Academic Programs

5.1. Major changes

Requests for organizational and degree offering changes are reviewed by the Office of the Provost prior to evaluation by the Faculty Senate. These changes include:

1. New departments, programs, and degrees.
2. Discontinuation of departments, programs, and degrees.
3. Change in the name of departments, programs and degrees.
4. Extension of existing degrees to another campus.
5. Moratorium and suspension of programs or degrees.

Because these changes potentially impact: student progress toward a degree they have been admitted to; federal financial aid; or substantial university resources, they must be reported to WSU’s accrediting agency and ultimately to the federal government. Thus they must undergo a more extensive evaluation than ordinary curricular proposals. Departments or initiating units should plan realistically for the length of the review process, as described in the degree changes manual.

Guidance regarding forms and process can be found on the provost’s office website: https://provost.WSU.edu/procedures/degree-approval/

5.2 Major changes and accreditation

WSU’s regional accrediting agency, the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, requires notification of major and minor changes as defined by NWCCU.

A Major Change has significant impact on the resources and capacity of the institution. A major change is of a magnitude to alter the institution’s mission, objectives, and supporting core themes; the scope or degree level of its offerings; its autonomy, sponsorship, or the locus of control; its offering of academic programs for credit through contractual relationships with external organizations; its offering of programs for credit outside the NWCCU region; or, its campus locations including a branch campus or the establishment of an additional location apart from the main campus at which the institution offers at least 50 percent of an educational program. Major changes include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Changing institutional mission, objectives, and core themes;
2. Changing legal status, form of control, ownership, or sponsorship of the institution;
3. Adding courses or a degree program at a new degree level not listed for the institution with the NWCCU;
4. Establishing a branch campus;
5. Acquiring, or merging with, another institution/organization, program or location of another institution;
6. Adding courses/program(s) for academic credit outside the NWCCU region;
7. Entering into a contractual agreement with a regionally accredited or non-regionally accredited organization to provide courses and program(s) for academic credit on behalf of the candidate or accredited member institution;
8. Adding program(s) for academic credit within the NWCCU region in a legal jurisdiction not previously reported and evaluated;
9. Establishing an additional location geographically apart (more than 20 miles) from the main campus at which the institution offers at least 50 percent of an education program;
10. Adding courses or programs that represent a significant departure from existing offerings of education programs or a significant departure in method of delivery from those that were previously reported and evaluated;
11. First time use of a distance delivery infrastructure, or, offering 50% or more to completion of program requirements by distance delivery;
12. First time offering of competency-based (or direct assessment) education programs;
13. Adding programs delivered through direct assessment or delivered through a “hybrid” direct assessment approach where not previously reported and evaluated;
14. Changing from clock hours to credit hours or vice versa, or a substantial increase or decrease in the length of a program or the number of clock or credit hours awarded for successful completion of a program; and/or
15. Adding a permanent location at a site at which the institution is conducting a teach-out for students of another institution that has ceased operating before all students have completed their program of study.

A minor change has minimal impact on the resources and capacity of the institution. Most changes, such as adding programs that are allied with existing offerings, or dropping programs, and changes in method of instructional delivery, are not major and therefore are categorized as minor changes. Minor changes include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Adding existing program(s) of one year (or more) in length to a previously reported and evaluated location where 50% or more of the program requirements are delivered (assuming minimal need for additional resources);
2. Adding a degree or certificate program using competency-based education;
3. Adding a site or location geographically apart from the institution’s main campus or existing site (within 20 miles) at which the institution offers at least 50 percent of an education program;
4. Adding a new degree program in the same level of accreditation and closely related to fields of study previously reported and evaluated; and/or
5. Placing in moratorium, suspending, or terminating a degree program of 30 semester or 45 quarter credits in length.

Changes in candidate or accredited institutions must be reported to the commission and approved in advance of implementation.

If an institution implements a change without prior written notice or if it proceeds to implement a substantive change denied by the executive committee or commission, the commission may issue an order for the institution to show cause as to why its accreditation or candidate status should not be terminated.” (NWCCU substantive change policy, 2016)

Departments and other units initiating major changes as defined by NWCCU should therefore be advised that programs cannot be implemented prior to having received approval from NWCCU.
5.3 Organizational changes

5.3.1 Policy

Substantial changes such as the creation or discontinuation of an academic department, degree or program, require submission of the appropriate form and supporting documentation to the Office of the Provost prior to submission to the Faculty Senate. This includes but is not limited to a full description and reasons for the proposed change, cost analysis (added cost or savings), facility needs, faculty/staff arrangements, enrollment data, and other special considerations.

5.3.2 Process

5.3.2.1 Department-initiated changes

Study committee and/or accreditation recommendations should also accompany the proposal when applicable. Once reviewed by the provost, the submission is routed through the Faculty Senate process.

5.3.2.2 Changes initiated from the administrative level

Changes initiated by council of academic deans, the provost and executive vice president, or the president, should be submitted to the steering committee of the Faculty Senate. The steering committee is responsible to see that the appropriate senate committees investigate the proposal, giving deans, directors, chairs, faculty, and students an opportunity for timely and effective consideration and input. Except for the early coordination efforts of the steering committee, the process follows the current curriculum change procedures.

5.4 Policy for moratorium, suspension, or discontinuation of academic programs and certificate programs requiring 30 or more credits

5.4.1 Overview

This policy allows departments to propose a moratorium or suspension of a graduate-level academic degree program, or undergraduate, professional, or graduate certificates requiring 30 or more credits (see policy on certificates), or to discontinue any academic degree program or certificate on a permanent basis. A moratorium or suspension must be specific to the campus location(s) officially approved to offer the degree. Typically, undergraduate and professional degree programs are not placed in a moratorium or suspension status. Undergraduate programs may be limited through admission policies (see Academic Regulation #53 and #54; also EPPM Section 12.2).

5.4.2 Definitions

A moratorium is defined as a temporary suspension of admission to a graduate program for up to two calendar years. A suspension is defined as suspending admission to a graduate program for more than two calendar years, but not more than five calendar years, usually in anticipation of closing the program. Discontinuation is defined as the permanent closure of an academic degree program or certificate of 30 or more credits.

5.4.3 Purpose

The purpose of the policy is to ensure that all the necessary processes and notifications occur in a timely manner, and that the appropriate approvals are obtained when a program decides in advance that suspension, moratorium, or discontinuation is warranted. This policy is not intended to cover an atypical year in a graduate admissions cycle when a weak pool results in no admissions offers, or when unforeseen circumstances prevent offers of admission after applications have been accepted. Should the consequences of such a failed admissions cycle warrant a moratorium or suspension for the ensuing year, then this policy applies.

5.4.4 Process

The moratorium or suspension process is twofold: it includes (1) notification to the appropriate university offices and external bodies that the graduate program/certificate at one or more campus locations is not accepting new students for a defined period of time; and (2) provides the academic unit time to implement changes, address resource concerns, consider implications for the future, and plan for potential transitions. Both moratorium and suspension actions require review by the dean of the graduate school, approval of the provost’s office and notification to Faculty Senate and the board of regents. Suspension of a graduate-level academic degree program or any certificate of 30 or more credits also requires submission to the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) for approval.

Discontinuation of an academic degree program or certificate of 30 or more credits requires a formal teach-out plan, the approval of the provost, Faculty Senate, and board of regents, and notification to currently enrolled students. Discontinuation of an academic degree program or certificate of 30 or more credits also requires submission to the NWCCU for approval and notification to the Washington Student Achievement Council and US Department of Education.

5.4.5 Moratorium

A temporary suspension of admission to a graduate program or any certificate of 30 credits or more may be requested for up to two calendar years for any or all locations at which the program is offered. A moratorium may be requested to address a variety of short-term issues, including but not limited to:
1. Low demand for the program
2. Curricular changes as a result of program assessment or review
3. Temporary loss or reallocation of program resources
4. Over-enrollment in a given year

A program in approved moratorium status at a specific location may not admit new students at that location and must contain a prominent notice on its website that admissions have been placed in moratorium. The program must notify the graduate school and the provost’s office via the moratorium or suspension of a graduate degree program form. Moratoria are reported as information items to the Faculty Senate and board of regents.

At the end of the moratorium period, the academic unit must submit a moratorium or suspension of a graduate degree program form to the provost to reopen the program to new applications; the request must provide information regarding the academic unit’s capacity and resources to reactivate the program/certificate. A list of the faculty and their committee roles for participating in the graduate program must be approved by the graduate school and included with the reactivation form. If the academic unit does not take any action at the end of the moratorium period, the program automatically will be put into suspension status. The unit will be requested by the provost’s office to complete the required paperwork for NWCCU for a suspended degree.

5.4.6 Suspension

An academic unit may request suspension of a graduate degree program for more than two years but fewer than five years at any or all campus locations where the program is officially offered. A program/certificate at a specific campus in suspension status may not admit new students to that location; however, the program must continue to offer required courses until all students already admitted into the program complete their course of study within the maximum time allotted for the degree completion. The program website must contain a prominent notice that admissions have been suspended.

A suspension may be requested to address the following issues:

- Reassess the purpose and goals of the program/certificate
- Address declining and insufficient enrollment trends
- Design and implement major curricular changes
- Address deficiencies in resources and/or staffing

At the end of the suspension period, the academic unit must submit a moratorium or suspension of a graduate degree program form to the provost to reopen the program to new applications or submit a proposal to discontinue a degree program. The request to reactivate the program must provide information regarding the academic unit’s capacity and resources to reactivate the program/certificate. A list of the faculty and their committee roles for participating in the graduate program must be approved by the graduate school and included with the reactivation form.

5.4.7 Responsibilities

The dean of the college in which the graduate program or certificate resides should discuss the moratorium or suspension, along with potential impacts to the program and its students, with the dean of the graduate school before submitting a moratorium or suspension of a degree program form to the provost. Appropriate campus administrators impacted by the action will be notified. Once the form is reviewed by all appropriate parties and submitted to the provost’s office, the provost will notify the program director/chair, campus administrators, college dean, and dean of the graduate school of the moratorium or suspension decision. If the request is approved, the provost’s office will also notify the Faculty Senate along with the dean of the graduate school for graduate programs/certificates. If there is no request to reactivate a program already in moratorium status, the provost’s office will automatically put that program into suspension status for up to 5 years, and will notify the program, campus, college, graduate school and Faculty Senate. The program will be required to complete paperwork for submission to the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities.

Before the end of the moratorium or suspension period, the dean of the college should submit a moratorium or suspension of a graduate degree program form to the provost for reinstatement to active status or take action to close the suspended program. The provost will notify the program, college, campus, graduate school and Faculty Senate if the program is reinstated. If the academic unit decides to discontinue the program or certificate, the dean of the college should submit a proposal to discontinue a degree program to the provost’s office in accordance with the Faculty Senate memorandum of understanding (2014) and the provisions of the Faculty Manual.

The provost’s office will notify all appropriate offices and external agencies if a closure is approved. It is the responsibility of each academic unit to notify the affected students appropriately and to ensure the timely offering of essential courses in the program/certificate so current students can complete their requirements, per NWCCU’s teach-out policy and in accordance with the statement of institutional responsibility to current students when an academic program or degree is discontinued.

Faculty Senate 3/31/2022

Related policies:

WSU Faculty Senate, Statement of Institutional Responsibility to Current Students When an Academic Program or Degree is Discontinued (3/31/83, 1996; 2017)

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) Between the Provost and the Faculty Senate Regarding the Creation, Consolidation, New Location, Renaming or Elimination of Degree Programs (2014, updated 2018)

WSU Faculty Manual 2016-17, section III.E.3.b, Discontinuation of a Program.

NWCCU, Substantive Change Policy (2017) and application form identify moratorium, suspension and discontinuation as reportable actions.

NWCCU, Standard 2.D.4: in the event of program elimination or significant change in requirements, the institution makes appropriate arrangements to ensure that students enrolled in the program have an opportunity to complete their program in a timely manner with a minimum of disruption.
5.4.8 Statement of institutional responsibility to current students when an academic program or degree is discontinued

Undergraduate students who have been admitted to the major, graduate students accepted to degree candidacy, and matriculated professional students can expect that a degree will be granted if they are currently enrolled and meet all requirements as listed in Academic Regulations 110-118. However, because of serious reductions in financial support, loss of faculty, or for other significant reasons, the university may find it necessary to discontinue a degree.

When an undergraduate or professional degree is discontinued, further admission to the major will cease with the effective date of the degree's discontinuation. Further matriculation will cease for professional programs with the effective date of the professional degree's discontinuation. For graduate degree programs, admissions will be suspended with the filing for discontinuation, and terminated with the effective date of the discontinuation. Every effort will be made to allow currently enrolled and continuously enrolled students as defined above to complete their degrees, but from Academic Regulation 111 students will only have eight years to complete any degree, major, minor, or other academic award that has been discontinued, following the last inclusion in the WSU catalog.

Academic leadership of the college and campus has the obligation to provide for individual needs of currently enrolled students so that they may complete their degrees within a reasonable time period, typically no longer than four years. Possible options include the following:

1. Departments and programs may waive or substitute departmental degree requirements in order to award a degree (approval of the graduate school is required for graduate students) when accreditation or licensure allows;
2. The Provost’s Office may substitute or waive university-level undergraduate graduation requirements by petition;
3. When necessary, students may be advised to complete their requirements in similar or related degree programs;
4. Undergraduate and professional students may be allowed to complete remaining requirements at another institution; and
5. Graduate students may be allowed to take courses or conduct research at another institution when approved by the student’s graduate committee and the graduate school.

In all cases, all financial obligations are the responsibility of the individual student involved, except as otherwise noted in the Washington State University Catalog or the Graduate Studies Policies and Procedures Manual.

Students having questions or concerns about degree programs that have been discontinued should contact the college dean or campus chancellor. The Provost’s Office and University Ombudsman are also available at any stage for advice or assistance.

Faculty Senate 3/31/83; 1996; 2017; 2022

Related policies:

NWCCU, Teach-Out Plans and Teach-Out Agreements Policy (2017)

Degree Changes Manual, Discontinuation of a Degree Program

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) Between the Provost and the Faculty Senate Regarding the Creation, Consolidation, New Location, Renaming or Elimination of Degree Programs (2014, updated 2018).

WSU Executive Policy 29: Policies, Responsibilities, and Authorities for the Operation of Multi-Campus Academic Programs