I. Overall Procedure

Under University System policy, proposals for a new degree programs are made into two stages. The “Intent to Plan” is a conceptual document, while the “Program Proposal” presents a full curriculum and detailed justification for the degree.

Intents to Plan may originate with individual faculty, departments, ad hoc planning committees, or with academic administrators, and must be reviewed on campus by the faculty of the school or college that would house the degree. The Intent is then forwarded by the Dean with his or her recommendation to the Provost. The Provost then solicits the views of the Deans and Faculty Senate as well as the Graduate Council if appropriate. The Provost then includes his/her own recommendation and presents the Intent to the President, who decides whether to forward the Intent to the Chancellor’s Office. For both “Intents to Plan” and “Program Proposals”, the affirmative or negative recommendation by the Faculty Senate accompanies the President’s recommendation to the Chancellor.

The Chancellor’s Office seeks system-wide comment about all “Intents to Plan” through the Chief Academic Officers of the various campuses, and Intents are discussed at monthly meetings of the Chief Academic Officers. Approval of the Chancellor is required before degree planning can proceed further.

Full program proposals are subjected to a similar, but more extensive, process of on-campus review (see below). If accepted by the President, Programs Proposals are forwarded to the Chancellor, who submits them to the Board of Trustees for consideration.


II. The Intent to Plan

At the “Intent to Plan” stage, the proposal review should focus primarily on three questions:

A. Does the degree of this kind meet reasonable academic standards?
B. Is the degree justifiable within the context of USM’s mission and/or within the context of the University planning process?
C. Are there conspicuous obstacles to offering the degree (e.g. unreasonable duplication within or outside USM, unusual financial burdens, apparent lack of demand, etc.)?
Full curricula and detailed analyses of demand and financial costs are not necessary for the “Intent to Plan” stage. Therefore, it should be understood that endorsement of an “Intent to Plan” by the President is an “endorsement in concept” only. The approval of an “Intent to Plan” by the President does not necessarily imply approval of the final “Program Proposal”.

Please note that according to UMS Procedure Manual 305.1.6, a status report must be filed at the “end of a six-month period in order to keep the Intent to Plan active if a Program Proposal has not yet been submitted.” Program Proposals must be filed within one year of the approval of the Intent to Plan, otherwise it “will be automatically voided unless a specific request for an extension of time has been received and approved by the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs.”

III. The Program Proposal Review Process

A. Participants in Program Proposal Review

The primary guarantors of the academic quality of degree programs are the faculty and academic leadership of the University. For this reason, new degree programs are proposed and there curricula developed by faculty planning committees. All degree program plans (Program Proposals) are further reviewed for academic quality and curricula integrity by the relevant school or college faculty and Dean before they can be forwarded for University consideration. Proposals for graduate degrees should also be submitted for review to the Graduate Council.

Adherence to the University mission (and to Strategic Plan which represents current planning priorities within the broader mission) is a concern at each step of the review process.

Sound stewardship of the University’s limited resources increasingly requires that “Program Proposals” receive rigorous financial analysis, utilizing the expertise of those individuals who are best able to assess prospective demand, staffing, and operating costs and prospects for external financial support. These individuals include the Dean(s) of the relevant school(s) or college(s), the Chief Financial Officer, the Associate Provosts as appropriate, and the Vice President for University Advancement. This analytical effort will be coordinated by the Dean of the unit that will house the program and will be conducted in a timely manner (normally within a period of two months). These University individuals will constitute a standing committee to conduct financial analysis of all proposed new degree programs. The same group will also assess the less tangible costs and benefits of new programs to external relations. The proposers and planners of the program may, of course, suggest possible sources of funding.

The Faculty Senate represents University-wide faculty interest in the academic quality of degree programs, and in accordance with the Governance Document, may also elect to comment on the centrality, financial impact, or external relations values of new Program Proposals. These concerns, and the same privilege of review, are shared by the
Deans. As with other review bodies, the Senate and Deans should act in a timely manner with attention to the other deadlines that are imposed by the System and the Board. The Senate and the Deans should make every effort to conduct their reviews of new Program Proposals in a timely manner. In order to allow an orderly on-campus review and adequate time for the Chancellor’s Office to distribute documents, planners of new degree programs should allow six months from the time of approval of the school or college faculty to the desired date of hearing by the Chief Academic Officers (for Intents) or the Board (for Program Proposals). For strategic or other reasons, the President may elect to hold Program Proposals on-campus for longer periods.

Before bringing any proposed Program Proposal forward with a recommendation to the President, the Provost will ensure that the proposal has had the benefit of the appropriate analyses, and that it has been reviewed by the faculty of the originating school or college, by the Faculty Senate, and by the Deans. The recommendations of each of these bodies will be presented separately by the Provost in addition to his or her own recommendation. The final decision to forward a new Program Proposal beyond the campus is made by the President, who may also seek the advice of the President’s staff or others inside or outside the University.

B. Sequence of Program Proposal Review
   i. Planning committee, appointed by Dean, develops Program Proposal for review by school or college faculty, and by the Graduate Council in the case of post-baccalaureate degrees.
   ii. Financial analysis is conducted by University committee (defined above), which also considers implications for external relations.
   iii. All analyses and comments are forwarded to Provost, who consults with the relevant Dean(s) in preparation of a five-year program development plan and establishes five-year review/performance criteria. For programs which require new resources, the development plan will indicate the source of funding (e.g. growth in tuition or other revenues, savings from attrition in other faculty or staff positions, funding from grants/contracts/foundations, or increases in legislative appropriations to the University).
   iv. All material developed to this point is forwarded by the Provost to the Senate for advice and comment, and then to the Deans.
   v. The resulting analyses and comments, separately identified, are forwarded, along with the Provost’s recommendation, to the President. The President may consult with the President’s staff or may solicit advice from other University or external groups before reaching a solution.
   vi. All material developed to this point is forwarded by the Provost to the Senate for advice and comment, and then the Deans.
IV. Criteria for Review of Program Proposals

All of the following criteria should be considered in the review of Program Proposals. For comparative purposes, the following four major criteria are listed in priority order.

A. Academic Quality: No Program Proposal should be recommended unless it is designed with a view to standards and curricular integrity. The delivery of a high quality program requires the commitment of well-qualified faculty and appropriate operating support.

B. Centrality to mission and to current University planning: The University should only pursue new Program Proposals that demonstrably implement the University mission and/or contribute to strategic plans developed in the light of that mission. The Program Proposal should also characterize the anticipated pool of qualified applicants for the program and address the relationship between program design and the applicant pool.

C. Financial consideration: All Program Proposals should either:
   i. be designed to become financially self-sustaining within a foreseeable (2-4 year) period, taking into account staffing and operating costs, amortized capital costs, and projected new net revenue from tuition and fees, special program activities, research funding, and fundraising potential; or
   ii. meet a social or economic need in Maine that is sufficiently important to warrant offering the program even if it is not financially self-sustaining (the assessment of social or economic need should represent the President’s appraisal of the collective judgment of the University of the University community); or
   iii. play a necessary support role in other essential programs or activities of the University that will warrant offering the program even if it does not meet the two previously stated criteria.

D. External Relations: The role that a proposed program is likely to play in University relations with the broader community and with State government is a viable consideration in the assessment of new programs.

E. Implementation of Criteria: Reviewing bodies should only recommend programs which they consider to be of high academic quality, central to mission or planning, and which meet at least one of the three sets of criteria under (C) above.