



UTAH SYSTEM OF
HIGHER EDUCATION

MEMORANDUM

June 6, 2024

Cyclical Program Reviews within the Utah System of Higher Education

Cyclical Program Reviews

Once a program has been approved by either an institution's board of trustees or the Utah Board of Higher Education, it must undergo regular cyclical program reviews to ensure it is performing adequately. [State code 53B-16-102 \(6\)](#) calls for two cyclical reviews.

- 1. Cross-system Disciplinary Reviews:** State code requires the Board of Higher Education to conduct "a qualitative and quantitative review of academic disciplines across the System, including enrollment, graduation rates, and workforce placement, ensuring that the Board of Higher Education conducts a review of all disciplines within the System at least once every seven years." A possible outcome of these cross-system disciplinary reviews is to help the Board of Higher Education determine where there may be detrimental, unnecessary duplication of programming or to identify programs that may not be justified in light of enrollment, completion, or workforce placement patterns. State code requires the Board of Higher Education to review each discipline every seven years.
- 2. Individual Program Review:** State code also requires the Board of Higher Education to conduct a more qualitative review of "each program of instruction at an institution of higher education, including a program of instruction funded by a gift, grant, or contract" at least once every seven years. These more extensive reviews include internal institutional assessments based on criteria established by the Board of Higher Education. Institutions are also required to solicit and forward evaluations performed by external evaluators from non-USHE institutions and any special reviews required by program accreditors.

Recommendations on Program Oversight

Program reviews are a key tool for the Board of Higher Education's ability to oversee instructional programs at the institutions under its governance and to ensure the quality of the instructional programs, adequate access to instructional programs across the state, alignment with the institutional role, and the judicious use of state resources.

The Board of Higher Education is mandated to address unnecessary and unwise duplication of instructional programs, particularly within shared geographic service regions. It is also responsible for

ensuring that programs in high demand by students, employers, and communities across that state are adequately available to provide students with access to comprehensive education and broad access to high-yield and high-demand programs that offer a wide range of employment opportunities. The Board of Higher Education aims to strike a careful balance of more specialized programs with specific, less widely available, or geographically focused employment outcomes.

In 2019, the Utah Legislature commissioned the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) to draft guiding principles for program reviews in light of the merger of technical colleges with degree-granting institutions into one system. The report encouraged the Board of Higher Education to carefully consider regional demand in its strategic efforts to address higher education program capacity. It notes that Utah's rapid population growth has been uneven across the state, leading to some regions facing "serious shortages in postsecondary capacity" and areas where higher education needs may be "neglected" (4). It also noted that occupational needs may be clustered in particular geographic regions rather than widespread across the state. It emphasized the critical need in rural communities for broadly trained workers, as through traditional liberal arts programs, rather than being focused too narrowly on specific occupational skills. It suggested that "programs should strike an appropriate balance between the specific and the general, reflecting the fact that occupations in remote locations are likely to demand a broader range of skills, knowledge, or expertise from fewer workers, as opposed to highly specialized occupations in more populated areas." The report also highlighted the state's demand for academic programs that will help individuals grow and build small businesses (NCHEMS 30).

In addition, the report encouraged the Board of Higher Education to address the flat production of certificates and sub-baccalaureate associate degrees (NCHEMS 4; 19). It encouraged the Board of Higher Education to more clearly distinguish between "technical education" certificates and academic certificates, address duplication of technical certificates at degree-granting institutions to ensure the best use of state resources and affordability for students through the technical education tuition programs, and simultaneously increase the production of academic certificates and associate degrees at degree-granting institutions (NCHEMS 21-22).

Cyclical program reviews will provide the Board of Higher Education with the data needed to meet its statutory responsibility to ensure an appropriate range of program and degree offerings at USHE institutions, thereby providing Utahns with access to comprehensive educational offerings wherever they may live.

Commissioner's Recommendation

This is an information item only; no action is required.

Attachment

- NCHEMS Utah Final Report