

SOUTH DAKOTA BOARD OF REGENTS

Policy Manual

SUBJECT: External Review of Proposed Graduate Programs

NUMBER: 2.3.3

A. PURPOSE

Supporting BOR Policy 2.3.2 with new graduate program requests, this policy serves to ensure proposed new graduate programs are of the highest quality. Therefore, an independent assessment of the program's planned curriculum, structure, staffing, facilities, equipment, and resources will be conducted by one or more qualified independent external consultants. The findings from the external review will be used to refine the proposed program prior to its submission to the Board of Regents for consideration.

B. DEFINITIONS

1. **External Review:** A review of a new graduate program proposal by an independent external consultant.
2. **Graduate Degree:** A student's primary area of study at the master's, specialist's, or doctoral level:
 - 2.1. **Master's Degree:** A program comprised of advanced study and course work beyond the bachelor's degree, typically in academic fields or professional fields.
 - 2.2. **Specialist's Degree:** A program which requires a minimum of 60 credit hours beyond a baccalaureate degree or a minimum of 30 credit hours beyond a master's degree.
 - 2.3. **Doctoral Degree:** The program is the highest academic qualification and is typically in research fields or professional fields.
3. **Independent External Consultant:** A highly qualified expert in the discipline of the proposed new graduate program contracted by the Board of Regents on behalf of the university to evaluate the planned program.
4. **New Program:** This policy applies to all graduate/professional (master, specialist, doctorate) degrees.
5. **Site Visit:** The planned time in which the independent external consultant interviews campus stakeholders including university leaders, academic leaders, program faculty, and others as appropriate to fully understand the planned new graduate program as a part of the external review. The site visit should also present the independent external consultant the opportunity to evaluate the sufficiency of facilities, equipment, and resources necessary for the planned new graduate program, where appropriate. The site visit may be conducted on campus or virtually, based on the method most appropriate to the proposed new program and most feasible for the independent external consultant and university.

C. POLICY STATEMENTS

1. Board of Regents Policy 1.1.1, 1.1.2 and SDCL § 13-49 through § 13-53 provides the authority to govern academic programming.
2. Independent external consultants retained by the Board shall evaluate proposals for new graduate programs unless waived by the Executive Director.
3. The Board shall receive copies of all consultants' reports.
4. In the event a waiver is provided due to an accreditation review, then the report from that accreditation review will be submitted to the Board at their next regularly scheduled meeting following the final report.
5. The university shall where appropriate implement best practices, curriculum programming that enhances the overall program, and reflect recommendations where they advance student outcomes.

D. PROCESS AND TIMELINE

AAC Guidelines will provide more additional information on the process via the Graduate Program Guide.

1. Selection of Consultants

- 1.1. The university requesting the new graduate program shall compile a list of at least five (5) potential consultants and provide the list through the system academic affairs process. The system academic affairs designee shall recommend consultants to the Board of Regent Executive Director or designee.
- 1.2. At minimum of one consultant shall review all graduate program proposals.
- 1.3. An update will be provided to the Board of Regents Committee A.

2. Agreements, Fees, and Expenses

- 2.1. The system academic affairs staff shall inform consultants of evaluation expectations and required reports.
- 2.2. The system academic affairs staff will set the pricing and each consultant shall execute a written consulting agreement.
- 2.3. The university proposing the program shall pay consultant fees and expenses.

3. The Evaluation Process

- 3.1. The system academic affairs staff, in cooperation with the university, shall provide each consultant with materials related to the proposed program.
- 3.2. The system academic affairs staff shall schedule a visit to the university.
- 3.3. The visit can be virtual if all parties agree to this experience, setting.
- 3.4. Consultant(s) will conduct interviews and if in person, will examine facilities and equipment.
- 3.5. At least one member of the Board academic affairs staff shall accompany the

consultant(s) during the visit to the university.

- 3.6. The Board academic affairs staff present during a campus meeting/visit shall participate in an exit interview with the consultant(s).
- 3.7. Consultants shall meet with university staff at multiple levels of authority, including faculty proposed to teach in the new program, department and/or college leadership (e.g., dean(s), department head, program director, etc.) and university leadership (president, provost, dean(s), etc.).
- 3.8. The Board academic affairs staff shall arrange to receive a final written report from consultants within thirty days.
- 3.9. Board academic affairs may request an executive summary of major findings prior to thirty days as needed.
- 3.10. Consultants may prepare individual reports or a joint report that clearly indicates any differences in opinion.
- 3.11. Board academic affairs, upon receipt of the written report(s), shall provide a copy to the vice president of academic affairs and the president of the university.

4. The University Response

- 4.1. The university may prepare a formal written response to recommendations made by the consultant(s).
- 4.2. The university shall submit a revised proposal request if the consultant(s) recommend(s) significant changes in the program.
- 4.3. The university's response may include requests for new courses recommended by the consultant(s).

E. WAIVING THE EXTERNAL REVIEW

The Board of Regents Executive Director may waive the external review. This can occur for the following reasons.

1. In instances where the requesting university has a preexisting closely related program or specialization
2. And where the proposed new graduate program has limited curricular additions or modifications,
3. Or where the accreditation for the proposed new graduate program requires an external review as part of a site visit that would result in an equivalent written report to the university.
 - 3.1. Should the BOR external review be waived due to an external review conducted by the accreditor, the university must still comply with Board Policy 2.3.3, Section D.4, University Response.
 - 3.2. The university may use its formal written response (if necessary) to the accreditor as its formal written response to the Board of Regents.

- 3.3. The BOR may choose to approve a new program request before receipt of the accreditor's report and university response.

FORMS / APPENDICES:

None

SOURCE:

BOR June 1988; BOR June 1992; October 2014; BOR June 2022; October 2023 (Clerical).