

# *Creating and Changing Graduate-Degree Programs at Rice University*

## *Policy Proposal*

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### **General Provisions**

The approval of a new graduate-degree program by the Faculty Senate represents an endorsement by the whole faculty of the intellectual merit and academic rigor of a particular course of study. Further, the subsequent publication of the degree in the General Announcements confirms an on-going, long-term commitment by Rice University to the maintenance of the program.

As such, those proposing a new graduate-degree program should expect an exceptionally high level of scrutiny and discussion before any such proposal is approved. While proposers are at liberty to craft a proposal as they see fit, successful proposals will normally include all of the following:

1. **Rationale:** An explanation of the intellectual merit of and the rationale for the proposed program as a useful and appropriate focus of graduate education, given the mission of the university as it has been expressed by the President and the Board of Trustees including strengthening graduate programs. This includes (1) an explanation of the history and development of the subject area of the program as an object of organized intellectual inquiry; (2) a survey of how, if at all, the subject has been incorporated into the curriculum of Rice's peer institutions and how the proposed program compares to existing programs in those institutions; (4) an explanation how the proposed program strengthens Rice's educational and research mission (within the department, the School, and the university as a whole); (5) assessment of need for the proposed program; (6) information on career prospects for students completing the program; and (7) if the proposed program has a unique focus, this should be explained as well.
2. **Learning:** To comply with SACS accreditation requirements (see below), as well as best practices in curriculum design, the proposal must include (1) a description of student learning outcomes (SLO) that are clear standards for observable, measurable student-centered outcomes in terms of knowledge, skills, and behaviors; (2) a curriculum map that relates the components of the proposed program to the specified student learning outcomes; and (3) an assessment plan for measuring the success and effectiveness of the program after implementation. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness is charged with assisting proposers with the development of these elements.
3. **Faculty and courses:** Include a listing of current faculty members and their academic qualifications, at each academic rank, who will regularly teach courses and supervise students in the program, as well as any concrete plans for hiring of new faculty. Include a listing of existing courses that will serve the program, as well as a listing of new courses that will be

developed. Include an explanation of how the new program will be run on a sustainable basis and how it will impact existing degree programs and faculty workload. Explain what measures will be needed to compensate for reallocated resources.

4. Resources: Describe library and information resources that need to be put in place to support the new program. Describe physical facilities required to support the program. Describe staffing required to support the program. Assess the impact the new program will have on existing programs.
5. Financial support: Provide a business plan that includes the following: (a) start-up and ongoing costs; (b) projected income, expenditures, and cash flow; and (c) contingency plans in case projected resources do not materialize. A long-term budget (covering at least five years), developed in consultation with the Budget Office, must be included.
6. Administration: Include a description of how the program will be administered. This should include a description of the number of students who will be admitted (target enrollment), how students will be admitted to the program, how they will be advised, and how their progress will be tracked, reviewed, documented, and communicated to students.
7. Degree requirements: Complete and specific language describing the official name of the degree and the exact requirements for students to complete the program – as they would appear in the General Announcements and in program documents. This should include demonstration that the curricular requirements for the proposed program meet all applicable rules for graduate students and graduate degrees specified in the General Announcements. Additional departmental requirements should also be included, as well as a description of a typical path of a student completing the program.
8. Launch: A description, with time line, of the process of launching the new program.
9. Support: Letters of support from all relevant Deans and Department Chairs. These letters should indicate that the resources required to support the new degree program are available and will be available on an on-going basis. For Departmental Chairs or Deans (as appropriate), these letters should indicate whether or not the relevant departmental faculties have formally endorsed the proposal, and the specific nature of any such endorsement (e.g., majority vote).

Proposals for new graduate-degree programs should be submitted to the Speaker of the Faculty Senate and the Dean of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies. Faculty Senate will conduct a preliminary review of such proposal, and will forward to Graduate Council questions or issues to which Graduate Council should pay special attention. Proposals will then be evaluated by the Graduate Council, which will make a recommendation to the Faculty Senate. The Faculty Senate will make a final decision. The Graduate Council or the Faculty Senate may (1) ask the proposers to provide additional information not included in the proposal before acting on the proposal; (2) ask the proposers to revise the proposal; and (3) ask external experts to review the proposal.

## **Interdisciplinary Programs**

A departmental degree program is a program of study that draws almost all of its courses from a single academic department, is administered and monitored by that department, and is listed in the General Announcements in the section describing the department's curricular offerings. Departments may offer several departmental graduate programs. In contrast, an interdisciplinary program is a program of study that draws a substantial part of its course requirements from two or more academic departments.

In addition to the general requirements and provisions specific to departmental programs, an interdisciplinary program proposal must also demonstrate the interdisciplinary nature of the program; in particular, it should demonstrate that the program requirements are balanced between the participating departments. The proposal should also describe how the program will be administered and the mechanism for faculty oversight.

The proposal should designate a lead administrative unit for the program; this could be a department, a school, a center, or an institute. The lead unit is responsible for administering the interdisciplinary program, in consultation with the participating schools and departments, and subject to oversight by faculty.

The proposal should spell out how the resources required for the program will be divided among the participating departments and schools, with commitment from the relevant department chairs and deans.

## **Major Changes in Existing Programs**

The University recognizes the need for ongoing innovation in the curriculum and, as such, gives wide latitude to the faculty within each academic department to define and adjust the specific curricular requirements of the programs that they administer. This flexibility includes defining different academic "tracks" within a single program, as described in the General Announcements. Such adjustments do not, in general, require the approval of the Faculty Senate. In contrast, however, changes of a major nature in an existing graduate program, including, but not limited to, combining two graduate programs into a single program, splitting a graduate program into two separate graduate programs, dropping or adding a thesis requirement, or eliminating a graduate program, do require the approval of the Faculty Senate, after an evaluation by the Graduate Council. Proposals for major changes in degree programs must follow the format required for proposals for new degree programs.

The official name of a graduate program is the one that appears with and is used to label the specific set of requirements that define the degree program, as described in the most recent edition of the General Announcements. Changing the name of an existing program requires approval by the Faculty Senate, after evaluation by the Graduate Council. Proposals should describe the intended change and provide appropriate justification. Such justification might include a demonstration that

the change is in the interest of Rice students and faculty; that it is consistent with the relevant faculties' understanding of relevant changes in the wider academic community. When the name change is accompanied by major changes to degree requirements, these changes also require approval.

Changes to degree requirements for an interdisciplinary program require approval of all participating departments and schools. In the case of major changes, the lead unit is responsible for communicating with the Faculty Senate. A change in the lead unit must be approved by the Faculty Senate, subject to sufficient justification and the appropriate agreement of all participating departments and schools.

### **Accreditation**

Rice University is accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). The introduction of a new graduate-degree program or substantial changes to a current program requires that SACS be notified at least six months prior to implementation of the new or revised program. When a new or revised program significantly modifies or expands the scope of the University, then SACS requires notification, as well as prior approval, prior to implementation. Proposers of new or revised programs will be responsible for preparing the information required by SACS with assistance and guidance from Rice's Office of Institutional Effectiveness (which has the responsibility of interacting with SACS) and the Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies. SACS notification and approval of programs is necessary for recognition by US Dept of Education, which is required for federal funding (e.g., financial aid, grants, etc.).

### **Applicability and Scope of the Policy**

This policy shall apply to any and all proposals for the establishment of new graduate degree programs or major changes in existing graduate programs that have not yet been approved by the Faculty Senate previous to its adoption.