

September 9, 2015

MEMORANDUM

TO: State Board of Regents

FROM: David L. Buhler

SUBJECT: Benchmarks for Graduate Level Programming

Issue

As institutions within the Utah System of Higher Education (USHE) that have had limited or no graduate programming mature and respond to student demand by proposing selective graduate programs, they will need program review "infrastructure" in place to be able to properly consider new graduate program proposals and to offer quality graduate level programming. A set of guidelines or benchmarks for USHE institutions will assist in determining institutional readiness to offer proposed graduate programs.

Background

In 2015, the staff of the Division of Academic and Student Affairs in the Office of the Commissioner began to receive requests for graduate level programming from institutions having limited graduate level programming to date. Staff raised questions about whether the proposing institutions had the various committees and structure in place to successfully review and mount graduate level programming. Examples of questions raised included: (1) Does the institution have in place a process for deciding which faculty are graduate level faculty, appropriately prepared to teach graduate level course work?; (2) Are there processes in place at the institution that review graduate programs against appropriate graduate level standards?

The Chief Academic Officers were asked for input on what benchmarks or standards needed to be in place for an institution to propose new graduate level programming. While this question was raised relative to the newer universities in the system, it is an appropriate question for all USHE institutions with graduate level programs. After consideration of the standards for accreditation related to graduate programs of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) and the Carnegie classifications, a set of draft benchmarks, based largely on NWCCU accreditation standards, was prepared and reviewed by the Chief Academic Officers. Their comments were taken into account and the final set of graduate level programming benchmarks emerged.

Policy Issues

The set of benchmarks for graduate level programming that are consistent with those of the regional accrediting body responsible for colleges and universities in Utah provides good and consistent guidance to USHE institutions and clear standards for Commissioner's staff and Regent review of graduate program proposals. The benchmarks have been reviewed by the Chief Academic Officers and by the Council of Presidents and have received their support. There are no outstanding policy issues.

Commissioner's Recommendation

The Commissioner recommends the Regents review this item for their information on graduate program review. No formal action is necessary at this time.

David L. Buhler
Commissioner of Higher Education

DLB/EJH
Attachment

	A	B	C
1	Proposed Graduate Program Benchmarks		5.29.15
2			
3	Benchmark Area	NWCCU Standard	Proposed Evidence and Benchmark
4	Mission	1.A.1 The institution has a widely published mission statement—approved by its governing board—that articulates a purpose appropriate for an institution of higher learning, gives direction for its efforts, and derives from, and is generally understood by, its community .	Graduate Programming consistent with mission as described in Regents' Policy R312.
5	Governance	2.A.1 The institution demonstrates an effective and widely understood system of governance with clearly defined authority, roles, and responsibilities. Its decision-making structures and processes make provision for the consideration of the views of faculty, staff, administrators, and students on matters in which they have a direct and reasonable interest.	Graduate Faculty Council and/or Curriculum Committee described in policy and initiated. Policy describes roles and responsibilities for governance of graduate programs.
6	Policies and Procedures		
7	Graduate Program	2.A.12 Academic policies—including those related to teaching, service, scholarship, research, and artistic creation—are clearly communicated to students and faculty and to administrators and staff with responsibilities related to these areas.	Graduate program academic policies approved by Board of Trustees
8	Transfer Policy	2.A.14 The institution develops, publishes widely, and follows an effective and clearly stated transfer-of-credit policy that maintains the integrity of its programs while facilitating efficient mobility of students between institutions in completing their educational programs.	Graduate credit transfer policy approved by Board of Trustees

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3	Benchmark Area	NWCCU Standard	Proposed Evidence and Benchmark
9		2.C.8 The final judgment in accepting transfer credit is the responsibility of the receiving institution. Transfer credit is accepted according to procedures which provide adequate safeguards to ensure high academic quality, relevance to the students' programs, and integrity of the receiving institution's degrees. In accepting transfer credit, the receiving institution ensures that the credit accepted is appropriate for its programs and comparable in nature, content, academic quality, and level to credit it offers. Where patterns of student enrollment between institutions are identified, the institution develops articulation agreements between the institutions .	
10		2.C.13 Transfer of credit is evaluated according to clearly defined policies by faculty with a major commitment to graduate education or by a representative body of faculty responsible for the degree program at the receiving institution.	
11	Student Rights and Responsibilities	2.A.15 Policies and procedures regarding students' rights and responsibilities—including academic honesty, appeals, grievances, and accommodations for persons with disabilities—are clearly stated, readily available, and administered in a fair and consistent manner.	Statement of graduate student rights and responsibilities (if different from those for undergraduate students) approved by Board of Trustees
12	Admission, Placement and Continuation/Termination/Readmission	2.A.16 The institution adopts and adheres to admission and placement policies that guide the enrollment of students in courses and programs through an evaluation of prerequisite knowledge, skills, and abilities to assure a reasonable probability of student success at a level commensurate with the institution's expectations. Its policy regarding continuation in and termination from its educational programs—including its appeals process and readmission policy—are clearly defined, widely published, and administered in a fair and timely manner.	Graduate student admission, placement, and continuation/termination polices in place approved by Board of Trustees

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3	Benchmark Area	NWCCU Standard	Proposed Evidence and Benchmark
13	Graduate Student Organizations	2.A.17 The institution maintains and publishes policies that clearly state its relationship to co-curricular activities and the roles and responsibilities of students and the institution for those activities, including student publications and other student media, if offered.	Policies and procedures regarding graduate student co-curricular activities approved by Board of Trustees
14		2.D.11 Co-curricular activities are consistent with the institution's mission, core themes, programs, and services and are governed appropriately.	
15	Graduate Faculty	2.A.18 The institution maintains and publishes its human resources policies and procedures and regularly reviews them to ensure they are consistent, fair, and equitably applied to its employees and students.	Graduate faculty status conditions approved by Board of Trustees and published
16	Intellectual Property	2.A.24 The institution maintains clearly defined policies with respect to ownership, copyright, control, compensation, and revenue derived from the creation and production of intellectual property.	Intellectual property policies and procedures approved by Board of Trustees
17	Contractual Agreements for Partnerships	2.A.26 If the institution enters into contractual agreements with external entities for products or services performed on its behalf, the scope of work for those products or services—with clearly defined roles and responsibilities—is stipulated in a written and approved agreement that contains provisions to maintain the integrity of the institution. In such cases, the institution ensures the scope of the agreement is consistent with the mission and goals of the institution, adheres to institutional policies and procedures, and complies with the Commission's Standards for Accreditation	Agreements as described in NWCCU policy approved by the Board of Trustees and Board of Regents for graduate programs involving partnerships with entities outside the Utah System of Higher Education
18	Finance	2.A.30 The institution has clearly defined policies, approved by its governing board, regarding oversight and management of financial resources—including financial planning, board approval and monitoring of operating and capital budgets, reserves, investments, fundraising, cash management, debt management, and transfers and borrowings between funds.	Budget and finance are approved by Board of Trustees and Board of Regents during the program approval process for each graduate level program.

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19		2.F.1 The institution demonstrates financial stability with sufficient cash flow and reserves to support its programs and services. Financial planning reflects available funds, realistic development of financial resources, and appropriate risk management to ensure short-term solvency and anticipate long-term obligations, including payment of future liabilities.	For each graduate program presented, there is clear and compelling evidence that there is appropriate financial support to operate a quality program.
20	Human Resources		
21	Graduate Program Staff	2.B.1 The institution employs a sufficient number of qualified personnel to maintain its support and operations functions. Criteria, qualifications, and procedures for selection of personnel are clearly and publicly stated. Job descriptions accurately reflect duties, responsibilities, and authority of the position.	Description of administrative structure and staffing for graduate programming functions described and adequate for the number and types of graduate level programs.
22	Graduate Faculty Status and Appointment	2.B.4 Consistent with its mission, core themes, programs, services, and characteristics, the institution employs appropriately qualified faculty sufficient in number to achieve its educational objectives, establish and oversee academic policies, and assure the integrity and continuity of its academic programs, wherever offered and however delivered. 2.B.6 All faculty are evaluated in a regular, systematic, substantive, and collegial manner at least once within every five-year period of service. The evaluation process specifies the timeline and criteria by which faculty are evaluated; utilizes multiple indices of effectiveness, each of which is directly related to the faculty member's roles and responsibilities, including evidence of teaching effectiveness for faculty with teaching responsibilities; contains a provision to address concerns that may emerge between regularly scheduled evaluations; and provides for administrative access to all primary evaluation data. Where areas for improvement are identified, the institution works with the faculty member to develop and implement a plan to address identified areas of concern .	Graduate faculty definition (including procedures for conferring and continuing graduate faculty status) approved by Board of Trustees. For each graduate program, graduate faculty sufficient in number and appropriately qualified to achieve program objectives.

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23	Graduate Faculty Workload	2.B.5 Faculty responsibilities and workloads are commensurate with the institution's expectations for teaching, service, scholarship, research, and/or artistic creation.	In those cases where graduate programs have a research component, graduate faculty workload for that component is defined.
24	Program Rigor	2.C.1 The institution provides programs, wherever offered and however delivered, with appropriate content and rigor that are consistent with its mission; culminate in achievement of clearly identified student learning outcomes; and lead to collegiate-level degrees or certificates with designators consistent with program content in recognized fields of study	Graduate programs presented for approval demonstrate academic rigor appropriate to the graduate level.
25		2.C.12 Graduate programs are consistent with the institution's mission; are in keeping with the expectations of their respective disciplines and professions; and are described through nomenclature that is appropriate to the levels of graduate and professional degrees offered. They differ from undergraduate programs by requiring greater depth of study and increased demands on student intellectual or creative capacities; knowledge of the literature of the field; and ongoing student engagement in research, scholarship, creative expression, and/or appropriate high-level professional practice.	
26	Program Quality and Admission and Graduation Requirements	2.C.4 Degree programs, wherever offered and however delivered, demonstrate a coherent design with appropriate breadth, depth, sequencing of courses, and synthesis of learning. Admission and graduation requirements are clearly defined and widely published.	1. Graduate programs presented for approval demonstrate a coherent design appropriate to the graduate level. 2. Admission and graduation requirements for each graduate program presented for approval are clearly defined and widely published.

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27		2.C.13 Graduate admission and retention policies ensure that student qualifications and expectations are compatible with the institution's mission and the program's requirements	
28		2.C.15 Graduate programs intended to prepare students for research, professional practice, scholarship, or artistic creation are characterized by a high level of expertise, originality, and critical analysis. Programs intended to prepare students for artistic creation are directed toward developing personal expressions of original concepts, interpretations, imagination, thoughts, or feelings. Graduate programs intended to prepare students for research or scholarship are directed toward advancing the frontiers of knowledge by constructing and/or revising theories and creating or applying knowledge. Graduate programs intended to prepare students for professional practice are directed toward developing high levels of knowledge and performance skills directly related to effective practice within the profession.	
29	Faculty Authority and Responsibility for Program Design and Quality	2.C.5 Faculty, through well-defined structures and processes with clearly defined authority and responsibilities, exercise a major role in the design, approval, implementation, and revision of the curriculum, and have an active role in the selection of new faculty. Faculty with teaching responsibilities take collective responsibility for fostering and assessing student achievement of clearly identified learning outcomes	1. University-wide graduate curriculum committee or similar structure in place 2. Faculty in the departments where graduate programs are proposed have a role in departmental faculty selection and evaluation 3. Faculty teaching in approved graduate programs collaborate in assessing student attainment of program graduation standards.

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30	Prior or Experiential Learning Credit	2.C.7 Credit for prior experiential learning, if granted, is: a) guided by approved policies and procedures; b) awarded only at the undergraduate level to enrolled students; ...	Approved university policy should expressly prohibit the award of experiential or prior learning credit at the graduate level. No graduate program presented for approval should allow for such award.
31		2.C.15 Graduate credit may be granted for internships, field experiences, and clinical practices that are an integral part of the graduate degree program. Credit toward graduate degrees may not be granted for experiential learning that occurred prior to matriculation into the graduate degree program. Unless the institution structures the graduate learning experience, monitors that learning, and assesses learning achievements, graduate credit is not granted for learning experiences external to the students' formal graduate programs.	
32	Student Support Resources		
33	Graduate Student Support and Resources	2.D.1 Consistent with the nature of its educational programs and methods of delivery, the institution creates effective learning environments with appropriate programs and services to support student learning needs.	Services specific to the learning needs of graduate students are identified and provided.
34	Graduate Student Recruitment and Advising	2.D.3 Consistent with its mission, core themes, and characteristics, the institution recruits and admits students with the potential to benefit from its educational offerings. It orients students to ensure they understand the requirements related to their programs of study and receive timely, useful, and accurate information and advising about relevant academic requirements, including graduation and transfer policies.	Methods by which graduate students will be advised are clearly defined and widely published.

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35		2.D.10 The institution designs, maintains, and evaluates a systematic and effective program of academic advisement to support student development and success. Personnel responsible for advising students are knowledgeable of the curriculum, program requirements, and graduation requirements and are adequately prepared to successfully fulfill their responsibilities. Advising requirements and responsibilities are defined, published, and made available to students.	
36	Publication of Graduate Program Information	2.D.5 The institution publishes in a catalog, or provides in a manner reasonably available to students and other stakeholders, current and accurate information that includes: a) Institutional mission and cores themes; b) Entrance requirements and procedures, c) Grading policy, d) Information on academic programs and courses, including degree and program completion requirements, expected learning outcomes, required course sequences, and projected timelines to completion based on normal student progress and the frequency of course offerings, e) Names, titles, degrees held, and conferring institutions for administrators and full-time faculty, f) Rules, regulations for conduct, rights, and responsibilities, g) Tuition, fees, and other program costs, h) Refund policies and procedures for students who withdraw from enrollment, i) Opportunities and requirements for financial aid, and j) Academic calendar.	Full program information on graduate programs and policies is available in published form and identified clearly when it differs from undergraduate program information.
37		2.D.6 Publications describing educational programs include accurate information on: a) National and/or state legal eligibility requirements for licensure or entry into an occupation or profession for which education and training are offered; b) Descriptions of unique requirements for employment and advancement in the occupation or profession.	

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38	Graduate Student Records	2.D.7 The institution adopts and adheres to policies and procedures regarding the secure retention of student records, including provision for reliable and retrievable backup of those records, regardless of their form. The institution publishes and follows established policies for confidentiality and release of student records.	Processes and procedures for creating and securely retaining graduate student records of academic progress are in place. Graduate student records are clearly differentiated from undergraduate student records consistent with standards for university registrars.
39	Graduate Student Financial Support and Publication of Available Sources	2.D.8 . . .Information regarding the categories of financial assistance (such as scholarships, grants, and loans) is published and made available to prospective and enrolled graduate students.	Publications clearly describe the financial support available to graduate students and the methods by which students qualify for scholarships, grants and loans.
40	Identity Verification Process (Distance Education)	2.D.14 The institution maintains an effective identity verification process for students enrolled in distance education courses and programs to establish that the student enrolled in the distance education course or program is the same person whose achievements are evaluated and credentialed. The institution ensures the identity verification process for distance education students protects student privacy and that students are informed, in writing at the time of enrollment, of current and projected charges associated with the identity verification process.	Identity verification process for graduate programs offered via distance education are in place and rigorous.
41	Library and Information Resources		
42	Graduate Level Resources	2.E.1 Consistent with its mission and core themes, the institution holds or provides access to library and information resources with an appropriate level of currency, depth, and breadth to support the institution's mission, core themes, programs, and services, wherever offered and however delivered.	For each graduate program presented for approval, there is convincing evidence that sufficient library and information resources appropriate to graduate level programming in the discipline are available to enrolled students.

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43	Physical and Technological Infrastructure		
44		2.G.1 Consistent with its mission, core themes, and characteristics, the institution creates and maintains physical facilities that are accessible, safe, secure, and sufficient in quantity and quality to ensure healthful learning and working environments that support the institution's mission, programs, and services.	For each graduate program presented for approval, there is clear and compelling evidence that there are sufficient physical facilities appropriate to operate a quality graduate program.
45		2.G.5 Consistent with its mission, core themes, and characteristics, the institution has appropriate and adequate technology systems and infrastructure to support its management and operational functions, academic programs, and support services, wherever offered and however delivered.	