

Substantial Revisions to Existing Academic Programs: Definitions and Approval Process

The Faculty Senate Curricular Affairs Committee (CAC) is charged with reviewing proposals to substantially revise existing academic programs. This document defines criteria for substantial changes, and describes the approval process for such proposals. Academic programs includes majors, minors, undergraduate degrees, graduate degrees, undergraduate certificates, certificates of graduate study, and academic certificates offered as a collaboration between one or more departments and Continuing and Distance Education.

Purpose and Context

The goals of the review process for substantial revisions to existing programs are to 1) promote development of high quality programs based on best practices, and 2) promote awareness of curricular changes. Achieving these goals supports the core mission of the University to provide quality educational experiences, allows faculty to be more effective advisors, and fosters communication across departments and units.

Historically, a substantial revision to an existing program has been defined as a change involving 40% or more of the required content and/or activities. Curricula are, however, more than simply a list of required courses, making it challenging to apply the “40% rule.” There can be multiple pathways via which a student can complete a program, courses are frequently grouped to serve a specific curricular purpose, and it is difficult to determine the “weight” of an activity compared to standard coursework. Given these challenges, it seems important to consider curricula as more than the sum of their parts in defining substantial revisions.

Substantial Revision Definitions and Examples

Below are categories of changes that should be considered substantial revisions and undergo the approval process described in the section that follows. Examples/explanations are provided for further clarification. Note that all changes must adhere to the standards for the specific type of program (e.g. major, minor) described in the guidelines for new program proposals (see [here](#)).

❖ Alteration to ≥40% of the credit hours that count towards completion of a program

Courses that count towards the completion of a program include all required and elective courses students take in order to fulfill a program’s requirements. They do not include college/school or University requirements (e.g. distribution requirements; general education requirements). The percentage of credit hour changes should be determined based on the minimum number of credit hours necessary to fulfill the requirements for the program. Alterations include addition and/or removal of courses. Two situations that can lead to an alteration of ≥40% are noted below.

- *Restructuring of a curriculum:* For example, as an outcome of their APR process, a department restructures a major to provide greater coherence, a clear trajectory within the major, and a stronger foundation for majors in a particular area. Changes might include new requirements for specific course sequences and/or inauguration of a mandatory concentration with a corresponding set of new concentrations.

- *Addition or removal of a substantial curricular component:* Curricular components include activities, specific course sequences, or sets of courses that serve a specific curricular purpose such as distribution requirements or a requirement for a minor.

❖ Alterations in the delivery mode for a program

Programs can be offered on-campus, via distance learning, or through a blend of on-campus and distance learning coursework. Change from one delivery mode to another and duplication of a program through an alternative delivery mode are not considered substantial curricular changes as long as the curriculum itself does not change and students can take courses in either or both formats..

There are certain situations that do not reach a 40% change in the credit hours required for completion of a program, but are considered substantial changes that require review and approval by the CAC. In these cases, an abbreviated version of a proposal in the form of a memo is sufficient. Note that these changes must still undergo appropriate unit-level approval (see Approval Process section of this document). Examples of such situations and elements that should be included in the memo are provided below.

❖ Addition of a new concentration, re-naming of a concentration, or elimination of a concentration within an existing program**

The memo should include:

- a description of the program's curriculum including existing concentrations
- justification for inauguration of the new concentration, name change, or elimination
- requirements for completion of proposed new concentration(s) including the required and elective courses
- evidence of communication with other units affected by the change (may be included as separate documents in the form of e-mails and/or memos)

❖ Changes that could significantly affect other units

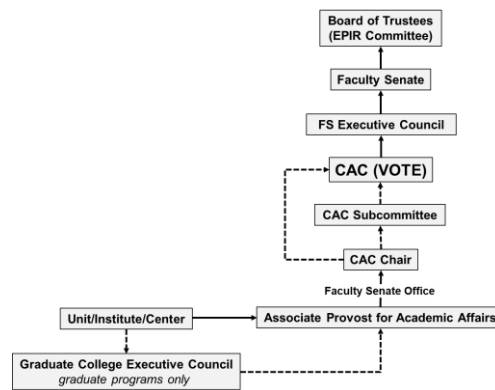
These are likely to be addition or removal of required courses taught by another unit that will significantly alter enrollments. It is important that the affected unit(s) is/are aware of the changes so that they can make appropriate staffing, section number, and enrollment cap decisions. The memo should include:

- a description of the program's current curriculum
- a description of the proposed changes
- justification for the changes
- a description of how the changes will affect other units
- evidence of communication with affected units (may be included as separate documents in the form of e-mails and/or memos)

***The only recognized curricular entities are academic majors, minors, certificates, and concentrations. Departments may choose to develop informal pathways of study for advising purposes (e.g. foci, tracks, specializations), however these are not formally recognized and do not need to be reviewed under the procedures described here.*

Approval Process

Following unit-level approval (see below), a Proposal to Substantially Revise an Academic or Research Endeavor must be submitted by the Dean's office of the program's home unit, or the Director if the program is not housed in a particular unit, to the Associate Provost for Academic Affairs. Guidelines for substantial revision proposals are posted on the Faculty Senate Curricular Resources webpage (https://www.uvm.edu/faculty_senate/curricular_resources). Proposals and memos should be submitted to the Associate Provost for Academic Affairs for initial review. The Associate Provost's office will assign a tracking number and forward the proposal to the Faculty Senate office with a request for review and recommendation. Proposal abstracts/memos will be circulated for a comment period of 30 days prior to being discussed and voted on by the CAC. Full proposals will undergo review by a subcommittee of the CAC before being brought to the full committee for a vote; memos may undergo subcommittee review or be presented by the CAC Chair. Approved changes are shared with the Faculty Senate Executive Council, the Faculty Senate, and the Board of Trustees, but do not require further approval at these levels. The diagram below illustrates the approval process.



Prior to submitting a proposal or memo, substantial revisions to curricula must be reviewed and approved by all units involved in the program. The CAC recognizes that units differ in their structures, and thus in their internal approval processes. The list below is an example of a typical unit-level review process. It is assumed that a proposal submitted by a dean's or director's office has undergone the appropriate unit-level review and approval. Documentation should be included in the proposal.

- 1) Department
- 2) Unit(s) Curriculum Committee(s)
- 3) Unit Faculty
- 4) Dean(s)/Director(s)*

**Changes to graduate programs must also be approved by the Graduate College Executive Committee.*