

Section 16-5-8

Review, coordination, establishment, etc., of programs; transfer of credits; Articulation and General Studies Committee.

(a)(1) The Commission on Higher Education is authorized to review periodically all new and existing programs and units of instruction, research, and public service funded by state appropriations at the state universities and colleges and to share with the appropriate governing board, through the president of the institution, and state Legislature, its recommendations.

(2) As a part of its program review process, the commission shall enforce, monitor, and report on minimum degree productivity standards for all existing programs of instruction at public two-year and four-year institutions of higher education. Productivity standards shall be based, primarily, but not exclusively, on the annual average number of degrees conferred during a five-year period for senior institutions and a three-year period for two-year institutions, as verified by the commission. Minimum productivity standards will vary by degree level. The annual average number of degrees conferred constitutes a productivity standard by which programs shall be deemed viable or non-viable. The data source for degrees awarded per category per institution will be the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) annual completions survey. The viability standard annual graduation rates shall be: A diploma, certificate consisting of 45-90 quarter hours; associate or baccalaureate degree program, 7.5 graduates per year; a masters degree program, 3.75 graduates per year; an education specialist degree program, 3 graduates per year; and a doctoral degree program, 2.25 graduates per year. In vocational and technical programs, a student who leaves the program for purposes of gainful employment, in the same field of study as the program, having obtained the skills in said program, shall count as a graduate. For two-year technical and vocational college programs, a student who completes 40 quarter hours or equivalent programs shall be deemed and counted as a graduate for purposes of viability standards. It is the responsibility of the institution to document and verify to the reasonable satisfaction of the commission that the student should be counted as a graduate as provided in this section. This documentation shall include the name of the specific employer and the point in said program that student obtained said employment. The commission shall identify non-viable programs and notify the institution in writing of that determination. The institution has three years from the date of that notification to meet the minimum productivity standard. Failure to meet the minimum productivity standard within the three years will result in the phase-out of the identified programs within three years. New programs approved by the commission within two years prior to May 20, 1996, shall not be subject to this subsection for a period of five academic years.

(3) An institution may request a waiver of the non-viability of a program that does not meet the minimum productivity standard due to the unique and extraordinary characteristics of that program. The request for a waiver must be made in writing to the commission and the justification for the waiver must be documented by the institution. Factors that the commission may consider in a decision to grant the waiver shall include, but not be limited to: The employment and placement of program enrollees in that program-related area of employment; the transfer of program enrollees to other institutions for purposes of educational advancement; the success of program graduates; the lack of duplication of that program in the state; market demands; other unique aspects of the program; and the objectives and requirements of Knight v.

Alabama. The commission shall grant or deny the request for the waiver and notify the institution and its respective governing board in writing of that determination.

(4) The commission shall annually report to the committee, the Governor, the State Board of Education, and the Council of College and University Presidents the status of programs determined to be non-viable. This report shall include information for each institution and its respective non-viable program offerings. The annual report shall also list any programs not meeting the minimum standard as set forth in this section which were granted waivers by the commission along with the commission's rationale for granting the waiver for said programs.

(b) The commission shall seek through the use of advisory committees to study needless duplication of education, research, or service programs and programs which are not adequately provided in the state, and shall make findings and recommendations to the institutions, the Governor, and the Legislature that would strengthen the total program of higher education in the state.

(c) The governing boards of public institutions of higher education in this state and the campuses under their governance or supervision shall not undertake the establishment of any new unit or program of instruction for academic credit with state funds before submitting plans for the new unit or program to the commission for its review, evaluation, and approval. No state funds shall be expended by any public institution on any new unit or program of instruction which has not been approved by the commission. Any plan submitted to the commission, or its staff, and not receiving final action by the commission within 10 months of submission shall be considered approved. The term "new unit of instruction," includes the establishment of a college, school, division, or institute, and includes the establishment of any new branch or campus. The term does not include reasonable extensions or alterations of existing curricula, or programs which have a direct relationship to existing programs. The commission may, under its rulemaking power, define the character of the reasonable extensions and alterations.

(d) The commission shall have the authority to authorize and regulate off-campus offerings, new or existing; except courses taught at business and industry sites intended exclusively for employees of business and industry. An exception to this off-campus authority is provided for the branch campuses of universities or branch campuses of junior colleges in existence at the time of passage of this chapter whose fall 1978 registrations exceeded 500 class enrollments and branch campuses of universities operating prior to 1960. For those branches which began operating since 1960, the commission shall present its recommendation for the continuation or termination of each branch with full findings of fact to the Legislature before a public joint meeting of the Education Committees of the House and Senate no later than the fifth legislative day of the 1981 Regular Session of the Legislature. In making the recommendation, the commission shall not use the ratio of full-time faculty to part-time faculty and/or a requirement to attend the main campus for degree completion as a part of its judgment of the quality of a program or branch campus. The education committee of each house shall report to its respective house with a concurrence or nonconcurrence on each recommendation of the commission. Debate on each recommendation shall be limited to one hour of continuous uninterrupted discussion for each recommendation and at the end of the time, it shall be mandatory that the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House shall in their respective houses call for a

recorded vote. The resolution by simple majority of both houses is required to affirm a commission recommendation. No more than one branch shall be continued or terminated in one resolution.

(e) The Computerized Advisement System for students operated by Troy State University which includes a comprehensive undergraduate program and course information for all public two-year and four-year institutions of higher education, existing on March 17, 1994, shall ensure students at each two-year institution accredited by the Southern Association's Commission on Colleges, the opportunity to enter into a contract with a four-year institution guaranteeing the transfer of credit earned for courses taken at the two-year institution pursuant to the terms of the contract provided the student is admitted to the four-year institution. Under this contract, all agreed upon credits transferred from a two-year institution to a four-year institution shall fulfill degree requirements at the four-year institution as if they were earned at the four-year institution. Information regarding this advisement and contracting program shall be included in the official catalog of each institution of higher education. All public two-year and four-year institutions in the state accredited by the Commission on Colleges shall participate in this system.

In addition, there is created an Articulation and General Studies Committee which shall consist of ten members composed as follows: Two representing the state's regional universities, three representing the state's two-year colleges (one of whom shall be Black), and one representing each of the following: Auburn University, the University of Alabama System, the University of South Alabama, Alabama State University, and Alabama A & M University. The Executive Director of the Alabama Commission on Higher Education and the Director of the Computerized Advising System operated by Troy State University shall serve as nonvoting members.

Unless provided by the governing board of the respective institution, the representatives to the Articulation and General Studies Committee shall be selected in the following manner: The presidents of the state's regional universities shall select the two representatives of these institutions on the committee. The State Board of Education shall select the representatives of the state's two-year colleges on the committee. The Chancellor of the University of Alabama System and the Presidents of Auburn University, the University of South Alabama, Alabama State University, and Alabama A & M University shall each select the representative of their institutions on the committee. It is the intent of the Legislature that women be represented on the committee. This committee, utilizing whatever resources and task forces it deems appropriate, shall develop no later than September 1, 1998, a statewide freshman and sophomore level general studies curriculum to be taken at all colleges and universities. Nothing herein shall be interpreted as restricting any institution from requiring additional general studies courses beyond the statewide general studies curriculum.

This committee shall also develop and adopt no later than September 1, 1999, for the freshman and sophomore years, a statewide articulation agreement for the transfer of credit among all public institutions of higher education. Under this articulation agreement, all applicable credits transferred from a two-year institution to a four-year institution shall fulfill degree requirements at the four-year institution as if they were earned at the four-year institution. The committee shall further examine the need for a uniform course numbering system, course titles, and descriptions.

A four-fifths vote of the entire voting membership of the committee shall be required for the adoption of the articulation agreement and general studies curriculum. Upon adoption of the articulation agreement and general studies curriculum, this committee shall continue its duty and authority prescribed herein. The committee shall meet at least annually, or at other times as convened by the chair. The committee shall elect annually a chair from its membership. The chair of the committee shall rotate annually between a representative of the four-year institutions and a representative of the two-year institutions.

In case of problems in the administration or interpretation of the articulation agreement or the general studies curriculum, institutions shall present the problem to the Articulation and General Studies Committee for resolution. A majority decision of the committee shall be final and binding.

The budget recommendation of the commission shall not include an appropriation for institutions of higher education violating the stipulations of this section.

(f) Nothing in this or any section, however, shall be construed to prohibit any institution of higher education in this state from seeking and securing by separate bill the approval of the Legislature for any new unit or program of instruction, research, or public service denied approval by the commission, in which case the action of the Legislature, when approved by the Governor or otherwise upon becoming law, is final.

(g) Colleges and universities conducting off-campus offerings on military reservations are exempt from the commission's regulatory review and approval authority for those offerings on the military reservation.

(Acts 1969, Ex. Sess., No. 14, p. 28, §6; Acts 1979, No. 79-461, p. 816, §8; Acts 1994, No. 94-202, p. 257, §1; Acts 1996, No. 96-557, p. 823, §1; Act 2000-409, p. 760, §1.)