

**Ensuring Effective and Efficient Curriculum Processes –
An Academic Senate White Paper**

Approved by the Executive Committee

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2015-2016 Curriculum Committee

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Introduction

Curriculum is the driving force and foundation of all educational institutions. In the California community colleges, faculty assume primary responsibility not only for developing curriculum but also, through their local senates, for establishing effective local curriculum processes. Ensuring the effectiveness of local curricular processes is therefore a matter of faculty responsibility, and concerns about how well local curriculum processes function are often a source of discussion and concern at both the local and state levels. When development or approval of curriculum is stalled, inefficient, or otherwise not working properly, the entire institution suffers.

In recognition of this fact, the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges (ASCCC) adopted Resolution 9.01 S15:

Whereas, Colleges and districts have a variety of local curriculum processes, including timelines indicating when courses and programs are submitted to technical review committees, curriculum committees, academic senates, and governing boards;

Whereas, Timely curriculum processes are required for all disciplines and programs; and

Whereas, Colleges would benefit from a paper outlining effective practices for local processes on curriculum approval;

Resolved, That the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges survey curriculum chairs on the timeliness of their local curriculum approval processes by Fall 2015 and develop a paper on effective practices for local curriculum approval and present it to the field for adoption at the Fall 2016 Plenary Session.

With the release of the report of the Task Force on Workforce, Jobs, and a Strong Economy, which is focused on Career and Technical Education (CTE), and with the advent of the pilot baccalaureate degrees and the desire for certain pilot colleges to approve these degrees in spring 2016, effective and efficient curriculum approval processes are increasingly a subject of interest at the local and state level. Many of the task force recommendations relate directly to curriculum and, more specifically, to ensuring that local curriculum processes function in ways that allow for community college CTE programs to respond effectively and in a timely manner to changes in industry and the workforce as well as to the needs of the communities they serve.

Curriculum processes work best at colleges where sufficient resources are dedicated to ensure that local curriculum approvals and curriculum submissions to the Chancellor's Office occur in an efficient and timely manner. The need for resources and other matters important to ensuring effective local curriculum processes will be addressed in a position paper that is scheduled to be brought for approval to the Spring 2016 ASCCC Plenary Session. The purpose of this white paper is to provide to local senates and curriculum committees with more immediate guidance for reviewing and revising their local

curriculum policies and procedures as needed and to provide examples of effective practices for improving the effectiveness and efficiency of their curriculum approval processes.

The Curriculum Committee – Its Role and Authority

Curriculum committees derive their legal authority from the Education Code and the California Code of Regulations. Specifically, Education Code §70902(b)(7) gives local academic senates the right “to assume primary responsibility for making recommendations in the areas of curriculum and academic standards.” California Code of Regulations Title 5 §53200 identifies curriculum as an academic and professional matter under the purview of academic senates, while Title 5 §55002 requires colleges and/or districts to establish a curriculum committee either as a committee of the local senate or as a separate committee established by mutual agreement between the administration and the local senate. Furthermore, §55002 gives curriculum committees the full authority to recommend approval of new collegiate credit, non-degree applicable credit, and noncredit courses directly to the governing board. Finally, while Title 5 is silent about the authority of curriculum committees to approve new degree and certificate programs, educational program development is an academic and professional matter identified in §53200 and in partnership with academic senates, curriculum committees are generally given the responsibility for reviewing and approving new programs. Furthermore, local curriculum committees may be granted the authority to recommend approval of new programs directly to the governing board.

While colleges and districts have local policies and procedures that require additional steps between curriculum committee approval and governing board approval of new courses and programs, no legal requirement mandates such intermediate approvals. Local senates are permitted to delegate authority for course and program approvals to their curriculum committees. Education Code and Title 5 contain no legal requirement that new courses and programs be approved by deans, chief instructional officers (CIOs), or college presidents prior to submission to the governing board following curriculum committee approval.

While no legal requirement exists for administrative approvals of new courses and programs following curriculum committee approval and prior to submission to the governing board, academic deans and CIOs should still be involved in curriculum processes. In fact, curriculum development should be a collegial and collaborative process involving all college constituencies as appropriate because everyone has a stake in ensuring that the college offers the curriculum that best serves the needs of its students, and thus academic deans and CIOs should assist faculty in the curriculum development and review process. CIOs and academic deans, which should include CTE and noncredit deans, are knowledgeable about compliance requirements for courses and programs, and their involvement early in the process can prevent mistakes and delays later in the process. Such expertise provides valuable and complementary guidance to the faculty content experts. A final review—though not approval—by the CIO of the proposals approved by the curriculum committee ensures that that the governing board can be

confident that the proposals align with the college mission, comply with the requirements of Title 5 and the Program and Course Approval Handbook (PCAH), and fulfill validated college needs and that there are sufficient resources to support the new curriculum.

Input from students is also important. Under Education Code 70902(b)(7), students are afforded the right to participate effectively in college governance, and Title 5 §51023.7 “shall be provided an opportunity to participate in formulation and development of district and college policies and procedures that have or will have a significant effect on students,” including curriculum development. Thus, curriculum committees should include representatives from the local student senate leadership organization in order to afford students this opportunity to participate in curriculum development.

The final authority for approving new courses and programs always rests with the governing board or its designee. The CIO is often responsible for ensuring that proposals are forwarded to the governing board for approval. If the CIO, who has the ultimate authority on whether or not courses are offered in the schedule of classes, has serious concerns about curriculum proposals, those concerns will be brought to the governing board. If the CIO is included in the curriculum process before final approval of the proposals, such concerns may be addressed and resolved. Each governing board also includes at least one non-voting student trustee, and when the student voice is not considered—or is ignored—in the curriculum development process, the governing board will take notice and may often delay approval of new courses and programs when students raise serious objections. Therefore, students, deans, and the CIO should be involved throughout the curriculum development process. Such involvement will help the faculty identify potential problems with curriculum early in the process and minimize any concerns that may be expressed to the governing board when new courses and programs come before them for approval.

Local Curriculum Approval Processes: Review, Evaluate, and Improve

Stage 1 - Review and Evaluate the Process

Before implementing any change to the local curriculum approval processes, local senates and curriculum committees should first conduct a review and evaluation of the effectiveness and efficiency of those processes. Important questions to ask during such a review include the following:

- How long does it take to approve a new course or program, or to revise an existing course or program, from initiation of the process by the discipline faculty to approval by the governing board, and could this timeline be improved?
- Does the approval process contain redundant or unnecessary steps, and, if so, what steps could be eliminated without negative impacts?
- Does the process require too many approvals relative to what is actually required by Title 5?
- Does the process contain steps that could be completed simultaneously rather than sequentially?
- Are local course and program submission and deadlines too infrequent or restrictive?

- Is the process impeded by problems caused by ineffective technology, or even a lack of technology, at the local level?
- Does the process focus too much on complying with course outline formatting instructions and too little on course and program quality?

While academic senates and curriculum committees must lead the effort to review and evaluate their curriculum approval processes, CIOs, academic deans including CTE and noncredit deans, curriculum specialists, articulation officers and student leadership should be included in the conversation about the curriculum process. A good review process should also include input from the faculty at large, who can provide a perspective about the curriculum process that may not be readily apparent to curriculum leaders who are more closely engaged with the process on a regular basis. Regardless of how the local review and evaluation is done, since curriculum approval policies and processes are academic and professional matters, local academic senates are responsible for recommending revisions to curriculum policies and procedures directly to their governing boards or their designees as appropriate.

Stage 2. Make the Changes - Recommendations for Optimizing Curriculum Processes

1. Make sure the process for initiation of new curriculum and revisions to existing curriculum is clear.

Provide faculty with a clear description of the process and timelines. Effective practices for doing this include the following:

- Creating a curriculum calendar or a process flow chart that clearly presents important due dates and illustrates the process from initiation to approval.
- Create a curriculum website that allows easy access to local, district, and statewide curriculum resources.
- Create a curriculum handbook that includes all curriculum policies and procedures, a discussion of the importance of high quality curriculum and an explanation of its elements, and descriptions and instructions for all aspects of the curriculum process including instructions for using the curriculum management system.

2. Make sure the technical review process is streamlined and effective.

A common criticism of local curriculum processes is that they are too slow. Local senates and curriculum committees should work on developing ways to minimize the time between curriculum development, technical review, and curriculum approval without sacrificing quality. Ideally, once a new course or program is submitted for review and approval, it should come to the curriculum committee for first reading within one month of submission, provided the curriculum developer responds to requests for corrections to the course or program submission during the technical review and other stages. Some examples of ways to make technical review more efficient include the following:

- Make technical review simultaneous with the curriculum development process so that the curriculum developer is receiving constructive input by technical reviewers prior to submission for formal or official technical review.

- Limit the technical review committee to the most critical individuals, such as the curriculum chair, articulation officer, librarian, SLO coordinator, distance education expert, curriculum specialist, and the CIO or designee, and allow them to conduct their review simultaneously rather than sequentially.
- Create criteria, submission schedules, and approval processes that allow minor changes to courses and programs to undergo an expedited or streamlined technical review rather than a full technical review.

3. Make sure curriculum committee meetings are run efficiently.

Once the technical review of new curriculum is completed, proposals move to the curriculum committee for review and approval. Curriculum committee members must be well prepared and curriculum committee meetings should be run as effectively as possible. Curriculum committees should focus on the content of the curriculum rather than on technical minutiae during meetings. Focusing too much on minutiae can render a curriculum committee ineffective and result in delays to the approval and offering of new curriculum. Some effective practices that can be employed to ensure curriculum committees complete their business in a timely and effective manner include the following:

- Prepare a well-organized agenda that includes the pertinent information such as course number, title, and whether the proposal is for a revision or new course.
- Assign several curriculum committee members to each proposal as readers that will provide prepared responses to the curriculum developers and help the curriculum committee from becoming too overwhelmed, particularly when a large number of new curriculum proposals are submitted.
- Use a consent agenda for non-substantial changes to curriculum.
- Engage in detailed review of new curriculum during first readings and use consent calendars for approval at the second reading.
- Allow CTE proposals that are the result of a statutory or external accreditation requirement to be approved without a second reading by the curriculum committee.
- Consider giving curriculum committee members access to the curriculum management system so that they can make reviewer comments prior to the first reading by the curriculum committee.

4. Streamline the approval process.

While governing boards must approve new courses and programs, colleges may grant their curriculum committees authority for final approval of minor revisions. Again, no legal requirement exists for boards, CEOs, CIOs, or even local senates to approve minor revisions to courses and programs. Effective technical review processes should eliminate the need for further approvals beyond the curriculum committee.

Colleges may also consider expedited approval for time-sensitive curriculum proposals. Some new courses may not need to go through all of the steps of curriculum adoption; certain time-sensitive cases, particularly in CTE, may require more immediate action. In addition to approval by the governing board, new CTE degree and certificate programs require separate review and action by the appropriate regional consortium prior to

submission to the Chancellor's Office (Title 5 §55130). At the same time, any expedited approval must not come at the expense of the quality or rigor of the curriculum.

Examples of methods for expediting approval of new curriculum include the following:

- Give curriculum committees full authority to make recommendations on new courses and programs directly to the governing board and remove any intermediate approval steps.
- Give curriculum committees full authority to approval non-substantial changes—as defined locally—to courses and programs without any additional approvals, including from the governing board.
- Limit the requirements for curriculum submissions to the governing board to approval of new courses and programs.
- Submit new CTE program proposals to the regional consortium simultaneously with submission to the curriculum committee for local program approval and prior to submission to the governing board.¹
- Expedite technical review for course revisions that only involve changes to course attributes such as content and objectives or for changes to courses and programs that are required as a result of changes to statutory or external accreditation requirements;
- Multi-college districts may consider giving college curriculum committees the authority to grant final approval for adoption at one college of courses that already exist at other colleges within the district, since those courses have already been approved by the governing board.²

5. Increase the frequency of curriculum approvals by the curriculum committee and the governing board.

The frequency of curriculum approvals among the California community colleges varies widely. No matter how efficient and timely the technical review process is, if the rate of review and approval by the curriculum committee and governing board is slow, then approval of curriculum will be slow. Some curriculum committees meet weekly or biweekly, while others meet only monthly. Given that many curriculum committees use a first reading/second reading model for curriculum approvals, new course and program approvals by curriculum committees that meet monthly can take two months. Likewise, some governing boards consider curriculum at every meeting, while others consider it only once per term or even once per academic year. Such limitations in frequency of approvals by governing boards are local practices that have no legal basis and can be changed. Recommendations for improving the frequency of curriculum approvals include the following:

¹ Regional consortia establish their own procedures for submission and review of new program proposals. Be sure to check the requirements of the regional consortium to determine if it does allow submissions of proposals prior to local curriculum committee or governing board approval.

² An example of this process exists in the Los Rios CCD. The Los Rios CCD is a four-college district and allows colleges to adopt courses upon curriculum committee approval if those courses have already been approved by the governing board for adoption at another college in the district. The Chancellor's Office only requires the original approval date of the course by the governing board when the college submits the newly adopted course to the Curriculum Inventory.

- Schedule biweekly, or even weekly, standing meetings of the curriculum committee, particularly in the fall when curriculum approval workload is often the heaviest.
- Change local policies and procedures so that the governing board can approve curriculum at every meeting.

6. *Consider giving colleges in multi-college districts autonomy over their curriculum.* Multi-college districts present additional challenges. For example, some districts have aligned or partially aligned curriculum that requires district-wide review before new courses and programs are approved or even before approval of substantial changes to existing courses and programs. No legal requirement exists for colleges in multi-college districts to have identical or aligned curriculum. While alignment of curriculum in multi-college districts can certainly be of benefit to students, curriculum alignment requirements can also make curricular improvement at colleges much more difficult. Furthermore, accreditors hold colleges, not districts, responsible for the quality of their curriculum and the effectiveness of their curriculum approval processes, and if a district-wide process is identified as not meeting the accreditation standards, then all of the colleges in the district will be sanctioned for not meeting the standard. If district-wide processes are identified as reasons that curriculum is not approved in a timely manner, then local senates should strongly consider changing their district-wide processes.

Considerations include the following:

- Eliminating district-wide approvals or requirements for achieving consensus among the colleges in the district.
- Give each college in the district full autonomy over its curriculum, including attributes such as units and contact hours.
- If alignment is a concern, use C-ID or articulation agreements as means to ensure alignment of curriculum rather than using rigid district-wide alignment requirements.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Local academic senates and curriculum committees should work together to review, evaluate, and revise the college's and/or district's curriculum approval policies and procedures. The release of the *Report of the Task Force on Workforce, Jobs, and a Strong Economy*, along with the need for some pilot colleges to approve new baccalaureate degrees by spring 2016, has created a new sense of urgency for local senates and curriculum committees to ensure that their curriculum approval processes are effective and efficient so that new courses and programs as well as course and program revisions can be approved in a timely manner to meet community and industry needs.

Recommendations for local senates and curriculum committees include the following:

- Review and evaluate the effectiveness of local curriculum processes.
- Make certain the process for the initiation of new curriculum and revisions to existing curriculum is clear.
- Make certain the technical review process is streamlined and effective.
- Make certain curriculum committee meetings are run efficiently.

- Streamline the curriculum approval process, including increasing the frequency of curriculum approval by the curriculum committee and the governing board.
- Consider establishing an expedited approval process for time-sensitive proposals.
- Consider giving colleges in multi-college districts autonomy over their curriculum.

In addition to providing the recommended effective practices provided in this white paper, the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges is also available to work with colleges and districts that may need additional assistance in revising their curriculum processes. Assistance from the Academic Senate may be requested at <http://asccc.org/contact/request-services>.

Resources

California Community Colleges Task Force on Workforce, Jobs and a Strong Economy: Report and Recommendations, August 14, 2015

http://doingwhatmatters.cccco.edu/Portals/6/docs/SW/2015_08_22%20BOG%20TF%20DRAFT%20report%20v5.pdf

Program Course and Approval Handbook, 5th Edition,

http://extranet.cccco.edu/Portals/1/AA/ProgramCourseApproval/Handbook_5thEd_BOG_approved.pdf

The Course Outline of Record: A Curriculum Reference Guide, Academic Senate for California Community Colleges (adopted spring 2008).

http://asccc.org/sites/default/files/publications/Curriculum-paper_0.pdf

Sacramento City College Curriculum Handbook (2009 Edition)

https://dms.scc.losrios.edu/alfresco/d/d/workspace/SpacesStore/93b14b61-3541-4dc8-8366-ddf2bdaa1d03/SCC_Curriculum_Handbook_2009.pdf