

## **Academic Program Approval Structure**

Primary responsibility for providing academic degree programs rests with the colleges and schools, and these units thus form the foundation of the academic program approval process. Although shared governance means that many responsibilities are layered, college-level units are understood to bear primary academic and administrative responsibility for ensuring the overall quality and vigor of academic programs.

***Academic units considering establishing a new program or making a change to an existing program are strongly encouraged to contact the Office of the Provost administrative personnel to discuss the proposed change. Many actions have considerable lead times and early consultation may avoid delays. Contact information is provided at the end of this document.***

### **Structure**

George Mason University's basic academic program approval structure is illustrated below. A similar structure is followed for changes to the university's organizational structure, e.g., establishing a new department.

## **Procedure and Responsibilities**

Every summer the deans and directors submit to the provost any new degree programs for which they seek approval over the next academic year. The provost determines which programs should move forward through the approval process.

The faculty of the relevant academic units develop the program proposal, which must explain the need for the program, describe the curriculum, identify the faculty who will be associated with the program and resources that will be needed. Any new degree program will then go to the college-level curriculum committee and the appropriate dean's office. The college works with the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) compliance liaison in the Office of the Provost to ensure that the degree program meets all requirements for approval. It is advisable to contact the liaison as early as possible in the process to ascertain the information needed and to avoid any delays.

If the program is an undergraduate program housed wholly in one unit, the program proposal is then submitted to the provost, who will then present the proposal to the Board of Visitors for approval. If approved by the Board of Visitors, the proposal is then submitted to SCHEV. If the undergraduate program involves more than one academic unit, the program must also be approved by the Cross-Disciplinary Committee, which is responsible for reviewing new programs, changes to programs, and the dissolution of programs involving multiple academic units. The Cross-Disciplinary Committee is advisory to the provost and chaired by the vice provost for academic affairs; committee approval thus represents both university-level faculty and administrative approval. The committee meets on an ad hoc basis.

Additional approval is required at the university level for graduate programs. The Graduate Council, which includes representatives from all schools and colleges, must approve all new degree programs and courses. Agendas, minutes, and bylaws are published on the Graduate Council pages of the Office of the Provost website. Proposals for new programs follow the SCHEV format, which requires a detailed description of the proposed program, expected outcomes, measures by which the success of the program will be evaluated, and other information pertaining to the overall viability of the program. When appropriate, proposals discuss how the program relates to the standards established by discipline-specific accreditation agencies and other markers of program quality. Changes to or the dissolution of programs and courses are announced to the Graduate Council and a proposal is provided for review. In the course of review, the Graduate Council may make suggestions for improvement or for enhancing coordination of related programs across units. The Council meets monthly during the academic year and meetings are open to the George Mason University community. Typically, the vice provost for academic affairs, the registrar, the assistant dean for admissions, the SCHEV liaison, and other key staff also attend the meetings to address any issues that may arise. The Graduate Council is advisory to the provost; the signature of the vice provost for academic affairs or the associate provost for graduate education represents the formal approval of university-level administration.

External approval is also required for all new programs, certain kinds of changes to programs, and the dissolution of programs. Approval by the provost is required prior to any materials being submitted to these bodies. Depending on the specific types of actions involved, approval may be required by the Board of Visitors, SCHEV and/or SACS. The table below identifies the notification and approval required for academic program actions, based on the type of action.



## Contact Information

<b>General information</b> <b>SACS approval process</b>	Claudia Rector Assistant Provost for Academic Affairs (703) 993-8679 <a href="mailto:crector@gmu.edu">crector@gmu.edu</a>
<b>SCHEV approval process</b>	Robin Rose Parker Director of Compliance (703) 993-6220 <a href="mailto:rparkera@gmu.edu">rparkera@gmu.edu</a>
<b>Graduate Council</b> <a href="http://provost.gmu.edu/council/grad.html">http://provost.gmu.edu/council/grad.html</a>	Michelle Marks Associate Provost for Graduate Education (703) 993-1754 <a href="mailto:mmarks@gmu.edu">mmarks@gmu.edu</a>
<b>Distance Education</b> <a href="http://distance.gmu.edu/">http://distance.gmu.edu/</a>	James Goodlett McDaniel Associate Provost for Distance Education (703) 993-4563 <a href="mailto:jmcdanie@gmu.edu">jmcdanie@gmu.edu</a>
<b>Cross-Disciplinary Curriculum Committee</b>	Linda Schwartzstein Vice Provost for Academic Affairs Vice President for Enrollment Services (703) 993-8705 <a href="mailto:lschwar1@gmu.edu">lschwar1@gmu.edu</a>