Duplicative Graduate Degree Program Proposal Evaluation Guidelines

OVERVIEW

When an academic unit proposes to create a new graduate degree program or modify an existing program, the proposed program may bear significant resemblance to an existing program in another unit in terms of program content, outcomes, or title. This occurs more often between programs on separate UW campuses, but it can also occur between programs on the same campus. This document will refer to these programs as *duplicative graduate degree and certificate programs.*

In cases when the Graduate School determines a proposed program may be duplicative of an existing program, the proposing academic unit must address the criteria below in the official proposal documentation. The Graduate School, the Graduate School Council, and the Office of the Provost evaluate these criteria to ensure consistency and quality of programs across the University.

PROCESS FOR EVALUATING DUPLICATIVE PROGRAMS

As dictated by standard protocol for new graduate degree programs, faculty across the institution are invited to submit stakeholder feedback during the notice of intent phase (PNOI). When the Graduate School receives feedback regarding potentially overlapping content or degree title, the standard procedure is to ask the proposers to communicate and coordinate with the commenting units and to include information on what differentiates it from other UW programs as part of the final proposal. This proposal is considered by the Graduate School Council. In some cases, the Graduate School may ask for additional steps and may request guidance from the Provost's Office in evaluating a duplicative program proposal.

PRIMARY BASIS FOR CONSIDERING DUPLICATIVE GRADUATE DEGREE AND CERTIFICATE PROGRAMS

Does the duplicative program respond to a demonstrated local or state need? A proposed program's duplicative nature will not prevent it from being considered for approval <u>if the proposing unit demonstrates the presence of a local or state workforce need that is unmet by the existing program (e.g. in a particular region or providing accessibility for a target student audience).</u> This may include analysis of state and local labor statistics, market analysis, and/or admissions data from the existing program.

> *Context:* The University of Washington Mission Statement, as well as those of UW Tacoma and UW Bothell, emphasize the institution's role as a public institution serving the common good and the economic vitality of the state and region. As a

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result, graduate degree programs often respond to workforce needs at state and local levels.

Academic units across the three UW campuses have long offered duplicative programs, including the MBA, MEd, MN, and MSW. Some of these programs are delivered in close coordination (such as Nursing, which is jointly accredited) while others have limited coordination across campuses.

In recent years, several new duplicative programs have been developed:

- o Master of Science in Electrical Engineering (at UW Bothell)
- o Doctor of Education (Educational Leadership) (at UW Tacoma)
- o Educational Specialist (School Psychology) (at UW Tacoma)
- o Doctor of Philosophy (Computer Science and Systems) (at UW Tacoma)

SECONDARY FACTORS FOR CONSIDERATION (MAY VARY BASED ON CIRCUMSTANCES)

Even in cases where a program does meet the criteria above, some characteristics of the proposed duplicative program may require further discussion. The following must be outlined in the program proposal for further evaluation. None of these factors alone will prevent a proposed program from advancing, but may merit consideration as they arise in combination:

1. **Degree Program Title:** In some cases, proposed duplicative graduate degree programs have a degree title identical to an existing program. Faculty in an existing program with high national rankings, for example, may take exception with a separate degree program being developed with the same exact name in another academic unit. However, if a proposed program is responding to a workforce need or special accreditation, it may be important to conform to the industry-recognized standard. In most cases, this should be the discretion of the faculty and care must be taken to ensure the duplicative programs are clear in their marketing, communications, and recruiting to avoid confusing prospective students.

2. **Specialized Accreditation:** If a proposed duplicative program will also require application for a specialized accreditation, it may require further discussion between programs. Some specialized accreditations can be obtained by multiple academic units independently of one another, but some may require joint accreditation.

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3. **Program Length, Credits, and Curriculum**: While possessing similar degree title or content areas, a duplicative program may vary in terms of length, total credits, or other features such as internships or research opportunities. A duplicative program is not required to match the existing program in these areas, although significant differences may be further examined as part of the approval process.

4. **Fee Structure**: Fee-based programs often carry higher costs to students than state-supported programs. When two or more duplicative programs exist with different financial structures, faculty in one academic unit may express concern that another unit is undercutting and competing for the same students.

5. **Mode of Delivery**: Programs delivered via distance learning are uniquely positioned to avoid geographical limitations and reach a different audience. However, this also means a duplicative program delivered via distance learning can be perceived to compete for the same students while offering a different educational experience than an in-person program.

6. **Highly Specialized Programs:** Faculty at UW are global leaders and innovators in their disciplines. Some research-intensive or doctoral degree programs draw on this expertise to such an extent that the degree program may be valued by the institution as a form of intellectual property that should not be duplicated. In these cases, extra scrutiny is warranted, even if the proposing unit presents a compelling justification driven by workforce needs.