Common Issues in Substantive Change Proposals

This list identifies the most commonly cited areas of revision in substantive change proposals. The first section lists issues commonly caught in the preliminary staff review done by WSCUC staff. Other sections identify common issues specific to undergraduate, graduate and distance education programs. Sections where the issues appear in the proposal have been mapped to the two most commonly used proposal templates:

- New Degree Program (Assoc, Bach, Masters)
- Doctoral Program

Unless specified, the sections numbers refer to both templates. Where they differ, the first reference is to the New Degree Program template and the second reference is to the Doctoral Program template.

Relevant CFRs for commonly identified issues have also been included.

Preliminary Reviews

WSCUC staff conduct a preliminary review of all substantive change proposals before they are forwarded to the review panel. This list identifies the most common requests for additional information or clarification.

Institutional Accrediting History (Section I.B.) (CFRs 1.7, 1.8)

- Is sufficient information provided about relevant issues raised in past substantive change reviews at the institution, even if the reviews were for programs at a different degree level and/or in different departments or colleges?

- Does the proposal provide responses to relevant issues raised in past Commission or Committee action letters? (For instance, were concerns raised about assessment or educational effectiveness?)

Program Need (Section II.A.) (CFRs 2.1, 4.1, 4.5, 4.6, 4.7)

- Is the need for the program clearly documented beyond the institution's desire to offer the program?

- Does the evidence of need for the program include specific data about the institution and the region, in addition to national trends and employment outlook statistics?

- What activities has the institution undertaken to help assess need, e.g. student or graduate surveys, documenting the number of inquiries, business or professional indications of interest, etc.?

- Are the enrollment projections for the first three years provided?

Marketing (Section II.A.) (CFRs 1.7, 1.8, 2.12)

- Is the geographic scope of the program clearly identified?

- Does the marketing plan contain adequate outreach to the target population?

- Are the marketing costs included in the budget?

Planning and Approval Process (Section II.B.) (CFRs 1.6, 1.8, 3.10, 4.1, 4.4)

- Is proof of program approval included (minutes or letter of approval from President and/or system-wide office) along with the description of the institution's process?

- If a CSU campus, is the Chancellor's office letter of approval attached to the proposal?

External Partners (Section II.B.) (CFRs 1.7, 2.3, 3.7, 4.5)

- Are signed MOUs attached for any arrangements with an external partners participating in the program (subcontractors, internship placement sites, off-campus facilities, etc.)?

- If the program has yet to develop arrangements with external partners, is there a sample signed MOU or a MOU template?

- Do relationships with external partners comply with WASC's Policy on Contracts with Unaccredited Organizations?

Curriculum (Section III.A.) (CFRs 1.6, 2.1, 2.2)

- Does the list of courses for the major indicate which courses are required?

- Is a sample schedule provided that shows how a student might progress through the program from semester to semester?

Syllabi (Section III.A.) (CFRs 2.2, 2.3 – 2.5)

- Do the syllabi contain course learning outcomes linked to program learning outcomes, a course schedule including all assignments, expectations about use of the library, and relevant university policies?

- Do all syllabi reflect the credit hours awarded and expectations for student work time (in and out of class) consistent with WASC's and the institution's Credit Hour Policy?

- Are the syllabi adapted to the modality or timeframe of the course?

- Is the syllabus for the capstone or culminating experience provided, in addition to three course syllabi?

- Does the syllabus for the capstone or culminating experience contain the rubrics for its evaluation?

- Are there qualitative as well as quantitative rubrics?

Credit Hour Policy (Section III.C.) (Policy on the Credit Hour, CFR 2.1)

- Is the institution's credit hour policy attached?

Educational Effectiveness (Section III.B., Doctoral template: Section III.A. and IV.A.)

(CFRs 2.1 – 2.6, 2.10, 3.1, 3.3, 3.7, 3.10, 4.1 – 4.5)

- Does the curriculum map show progression of learning from introductory to advanced levels?

- Are all learning outcomes in the curriculum map achieved at an advanced level by the time the student has completed all courses in the program?
- Does the assessment plan clearly outline the annual plan for assessing the program, as well as the individuals responsible for conducting the assessment and ensuring that information learned from the assessment is used to make improvements to the program?
- Does the assessment plan include direct and indirect measures and does it include both formative and summative assessment?
- Is achievement of all program learning outcomes assessed?
- Is the program included in the institution's program review process?
- Does the institution have a clear process for follow-up with sufficient accountability?
- Is teaching effectiveness evaluated in any means other than a student evaluation?

Faculty (Section IV.A., Doctoral template: Section V.A.) (CFRs 2.12, 3.1 – 3.3)

- Is the number of FT and PT faculty dedicated to the program clearly identified?
- Are plans for faculty hires included as enrollment grows?
- Does the proposal indicate how many students each faculty member will advise?
- Does the proposal explain the faculty workload expectations and the impact the proposed program will have on faculty workload?
- Are faculty CVs limited to no more than 5 pages each?

Library/Information Resources (Section IV.C, Doctoral template: Section V.C.)

(CFRs 2.2, 2.3, 2.6, 3.5)

- Are information literacy competencies clearly articulated (for undergrad programs only)?
- Is the assessment of information literacy competency explained?

Finances (Section V.A., Doctoral template: Section V.F.) (CFRs 3.1, 3.3, 3.4)

- Does the budget cover the first three years of the program?
- Are assumptions included in the budget?
- Does the budget include student and faculty number and FTE projections? Is a realistic student retention rate identified?
- Does the budget reflect true costs of launching and sustaining the program in areas such as marketing, IT, library, student support services, especially where increases in these areas are anticipated to be needed?
- Is the budget specific to the program being proposed?

Teach-Out (Section VI.A.)

- Is the institution's teach-out or program discontinuation policy attached?

In addition to the items noted above, the following are issues related to specific types of programs:

Undergraduate Programs

General Education (Section III.A.) (CFRs 2.1 – 2.2a)

- Is information provided about the General Education program, including a link to the GE web page?

Curriculum (Section III.A.) (CFRs 2.1, 2.2a)

- Is the curriculum appropriate to the degree level?

Syllabi (Section III.A.) (CFRs 2.1, 2.2)

- Are the assignments of appropriate rigor and expectations for the degree level?
- Are the number of credit hours earned and expectations for how those hours are earned both in an out of class provided?

Faculty (Section IV.A., Doctoral template: Section V.A.) (CFRs 2.2b Guideline, 2.4, 2.8, 3.1, 3.2, 3.10)

- Who will actually be assigned to teach in the program? (full or part time?)
- How does the institution ensure faculty ownership of the program, especially in online programs and/or those that rely heavily on adjunct faculty?

Graduate Programs

Curriculum (Section III.A.) (CFRs 2.1, 2.2, 2.2b)

- Is the curriculum appropriate to the degree level?

Syllabi (Section III.A., Doctoral template: Section III.A. and IV.A.) (CFRs 2.2b, 2.8)

- Are guidelines for the dissertation included?
- Are guidelines and rubrics for the qualifying exam included?
- Is it clear how the quality of the thesis/capstone is assessed?

Faculty (Section IV.A., Doctoral template: Section V.A.) (CFRs 2.2b Guideline, 2.4, 2.8, 2.9, 3.1, 3.2, 3.10)

- Do faculty teaching in the program have advanced degrees that qualify them to teach at the level being proposed?
- Are faculty qualified to teach and support all aspects of a doctoral program? Do their CVs reflect an appropriate history of research and scholarly activity for the proposed program?
- How will faculty be selected, inducted, mentored, and evaluated for the proposed program? What is the professional development plan to support faculty as instructors, advisors, and scholars?
- Who will actually be assigned to teach in the program? (full or part time?)
- Are faculty workload issues clearly outlined, including release time for advising theses or dissertations?

Graduate Culture (Section I.B., III.A., IV.A., Doctoral template: Section I.B., III.A., IV.A., V.A., V.B.) (CFRs 2.1, 2.2b, 2.8)

- How will a graduate culture be developed and sustained?

- For doctoral programs, how does the institution propose to develop or sustain an appropriate doctoral culture (professional or research doctorate?) How is the nature of the research environment and expectations for both faculty and students described and is this appropriate to the doctoral level?

- How will the institution support faculty scholarship?

- Are opportunities for research and professional development available for students as well as faculty?

Distance Education Programs

Curriculum (Section III.A., III.B., III.C., III.D., IV.D., Doctoral template: III.A., III.B.., III.C., V.D.)

(CFRs 2.1, 2.2, 2.5, 2.11 – 2.13)

- How are students qualified and prepared for the online program?

- Is the plan for developing the 100% online program clear, including prerequisites and electives?

- How will a graduate culture be developed and sustained in an online environment?

- Are technology requirements for students clearly outlined?

- For undergraduate programs, are all of the General Education courses available online?

Syllabi (Section III.A., III.C., III.D.) (CFRs 2.1, 2.2, 2.12, 3.5)

- Have syllabi been fully adapted to an online learning environment, including faculty/student interactions, student/student interactions and use of a variety of resources available online?

- What are the expectations of student participation in online discussions and how are they evaluated?

- Do syllabi for online courses reflect "on-line-ified" F2F syllabi, or has there been considerable reworking to truly reflect the online delivery modality, including outcomes specific to online delivery?

- Do the syllabi reflect the institution's credit hour policy regarding the amount of time required to complete the course?

Faculty (Section IV.A., Doctoral template: Section V.A.) (CFRs 3.1 – 3.3, 3.5, 3.10)

- Do faculty CVs show previous online teaching experience?

- What training and support is provided for the faculty to teach in the online modality, initially and ongoing?

- Who will actually be assigned to teach in the program? (full or part time?)

- Is there a recognition in determining faculty workloads that online courses require additional time as compared to F2F?

- Has the institution developed guidelines for distance education?

Assessment (Section III.B., IV.A., Doctoral template: Section IV.A., V.A.) (CFRs 2.1 – 2.7, 2.10, 4.1 – 4.5)

- Do the assessment plans specifically address the modality, including the course management system?
- Is information included about what has been learned from other distance ed programs in other Schools and programs in earlier reviews?
- How will faculty be assessed in the online environment other than student evaluations?
- How has the use of online technologies been incorporated in the program's learning outcomes?
- Are there plans to compare on-campus and distance ed models of the same program?
- How will the program monitor student attrition?

Support Services (Section IV.B., IV.C., Doctoral template: Section V.B., V. C, V.D.) (CFRs 2.11, 2.13, 3.5)

- Are support services for distance education students available at a level comparable to those provided to F2F students (library resources, advising, financial aid, career services, etc)?
- How will the institution respond to students who appear to be struggling with learning in the online environment?
- Are helpdesk services available to remote or working students at hours that are convenient to them? Is there a student handbook specifically geared to the online student?
- Is the technology support at the institution sufficient to support an on-line modality?

Budget (Section V.A., Doctoral template: Section V.F.) (CFRs 3.1, 3.3, 3.4)

- Does the budget include the expense of converting F2F courses to the online modality?
- Is the expense of technology support for the program included in the budget (direct or indirect)?

Credit Hour Policy (Section III. C.) (Policy on the Credit Hour, CFR 2.1)

- Does the institution's credit hour policy adequately outline the amount of time students are expected to work on-line and off-line for the number of credit hours awarded?
- Is the institution's credit hour policy included in the proposal?

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