# 300-2-1-.06 Reasonable Extensions and Alterations of Existing Programs of Instruction. NEW RULE

1. **Purpose**. The purpose of reviewing extensions and alterations to existing programs of instruction is to ensure that public postsecondary institutions can make reasonable changes to their program offerings without creating new programs of instruction.
2. **Commission Responsibility**. The Commission is responsible for reviewing changes to programs of instruction for academic credit at the state’s public postsecondary institutions in order to determine whether a proposed change can be considered a reasonable extension or alteration of an existing program of instruction or whether it constitutes a new program of instruction. In addition, the Commission’s responsibilities for data collection and research necessitate that it maintains an accurate and comprehensive record of for-credit program offerings in its Academic Program Inventory.
3. **Scope.** This rule shall apply to all programs of instruction offered for academic credit by public colleges and universities in Alabama. It does not apply to non-credit programs or other offerings that do not culminate in a postsecondary award.
4. **Definitions**. The following definitions shall apply:
   1. Academic Program Inventory (“Inventory”): List maintained by the Commission’s staff of programs of instruction offered by public postsecondary institutions in Alabama, with a record for each degree and certificate program.
   2. Alteration: A type of program change that modifies an existing academic offering within its previously defined scope. Such changes include modifications to program coursework, modifications to program requirements, including total number of hours, and updates to program titles or CIP codes.
   3. Credit Hour: A unit of measure representing the equivalent of an hour (50 minutes) of instruction per week over the entire term. It is applied toward the total number of credit hours needed for completing the requirements of a degree, diploma, certificate, or other recognized postsecondary credential. Alabama’s public postsecondary institutions typically use the semester credit hour, rather than quarter credit hour or other equivalent unit.
   4. CIP Code: A six-digit code in the form of xx.xxxx that identifies an instructional program specialty using the taxonomic coding scheme known as Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP), maintained by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) within the US Department of Education. A program’s CIP code should accurately reflect the content of instruction and allow for comparison of programs both within and between institutions.
   5. Curriculum: Body of coursework, assessments, or other requirements necessary to complete a program of instruction.
   6. Existing Program: An academic degree or certificate program listed in the Academic Program Inventory.
   7. Extension: A type of program change that expands an existing academic offering beyond its previously defined scope. Such changes include the addition of program options within a degree program, as well as the development of for-credit, non-degree certificate programs that are related to an existing program or unit of instruction.
   8. IPEDS: The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System is the postsecondary education data collection program for the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), a division of the Institute of Education Sciences within the US Department of Education. IPEDS is designed to collect standardized data from postsecondary institutions and educational organizations operating within the United States.
   9. Method of Delivery: Synonymous with “delivery modality,” refers to the means of delivering instruction within an academic program or assessing student progress toward program completion. There are three distinct types, though a single program may employ a combination thereof:
      1. Competency-Based Education: An educational program wherein student progress toward completion is measured through the attainment of competencies, whether within course-based units or through direct assessment of learning.
      2. Distance Education: A formal educational process using technological delivery in which instruction occurs where students and instructors are not in the same place. Instruction may be synchronous or asynchronous. Distance education, distance learning, and e-learning are recognized by the Commission as being synonymous terms.
      3. Face-to-Face Instruction: Also referred to as “in-person” instruction, occurs where students and instructors are in the same place at the same time.
   10. Nomenclature: Also referred to as “degree nomenclature” or “award name,” a designation for the specific type of award within a given level (e.g., Bachelor of Science, Master of Business Administration, or Doctor of Philosophy). In its official record of an award, an institution will identify the nomenclature followed by the program title using the following format: [Nomenclature] in [Program Title] (e.g., Bachelor of Science in Biology).
   11. Option: An extension of an offering that is closely related to the existing program and shares a common set of program coursework (“program core”) with all other options of the same program. Options can be referred to as concentrations, tracks, or specializations.
   12. Program Length: A measure of the amount of time required for a student to progress to program completion, typically represented in semester credit hours.
   13. Program of Instruction: A postsecondary course of study offered for academic credit that leads to one of the following types of postsecondary awards:
       1. Degree: An academic program approved by the Commission under the rules set forth in §300-2-1-.03.
       2. For-Credit Non-Degree Certificate: An academic program that leads to one of the following award designations as defined within the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS):
          1. Level 1a, Mini-Certificate (MINI): A for-credit certificate program consisting of at least six (6) but less than nine (9) semester credit hours of undergraduate coursework or the equivalent.
          2. Level 1b, Short-Term Certificate (STC): A for-credit certificate program consisting of at least nine (9) but no more than twenty-nine (29) semester credit hours of undergraduate coursework, or the equivalent.
          3. Level 6, Post-Baccalaureate Certificate: A for-credit program consisting of at least six (6) semester credit hours of graduate coursework, or the equivalent. Most graduate certificates fall into the post-baccalaureate classification.
          4. Level 8, Post-Master’s Certificate: Apart from the Education Specialist degree defined above, a post-master’s certificate is a for-credit program consisting of at least six (6) semester credit hours of graduate coursework designed specifically for those already holding master’s degrees. Post-master’s certificates are typically offered in nursing or other fields where it is common for master’s degree holders to seek additional specialized training.
   14. Program Status: An indication of whether a program of instruction is actively enrolling new students. Program status is treated more fully below in §300-2-1-.07.
   15. Program Title: A name given by an institution to describe a program’s specific field of study and which is used alongside nomenclature in official records of the award, such as in student transcripts. The program title should accurately reflect the content of instruction and therefore should closely correspond to the standardized name within the Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) Code list.
   16. Programs that Lead to Professional Educator Certification: Academic degree programs at the baccalaureate, master’s, or education specialist level, that receive authorization from the Alabama State Board of Education and are considered “Approved Programs,” as defined under Alabama Administrative Code §290-3-3-.01.
   17. “Reasonable”: A reasonable extension or alteration of an existing ~~unit or~~ program of instruction is a modification which does not change the essential character, integrity, or objectives of the ~~unit or~~ program. ~~Such modifications do not create new units or programs of instruction. Reasonable extensions and alterations of existing programs are defined as substantive or non-substantive. Substantive changes that are determined by the staff not to be “reasonable” extensions or alterations will be submitted to the Commission for action, either as an extension or alteration or as a new program of instruction. Those considered to be “reasonable” require notification to the Commission by information item prior to implementation. (From Operational Definitions adopted by the Commission on 8/19/94.)~~
5. **Reasonable Extensions and Alterations of Existing Degree Programs.** Reasonable extensions and alterations of existing degree programs may be considered ~~substantive~~ substantive—requiring approval, substantive—requiring notification, or non-substantive. It is recommended that institutions consult ACHE staff prior to submitting documentation if there is a question regarding whether the proposed extension or alteration is ~~substantive or non-substantive~~ requires Commission approval or notification.
   1. Substantive Requiring Approval: Certain extensions or alterations must be approved by the Commission prior to implementation because the change to the Academic Program Inventory is similar in scope to the approval of new programs of instruction, described above at §300-2-1-.03. Unlike new programs of instruction, however, these substantive modifications will not require post-implementation monitoring:
      1. Consolidating Programs: Merging two or more degree programs into one consolidated program will result in the deletion of the existing program(s) within the Academic Program Inventory and may result in a new entry in the Inventory to better reflect the content of the consolidated program. For a substantive modification to be considered, the following conditions must be met:
         1. The proposed modification does not require any additional resources to implement.
         2. The existing program(s) and the consolidated program must have at least two-thirds of their courses in common.
         3. If the consolidated program is configured to have options corresponding to the previous degree programs, the options must share a program core comprising at least 50% of the coursework.
      2. Separating a Program: Splitting an existing program into two distinct degree programs will result in a new entry in the Academic Program Inventory, which is typically done through the process of proposing a new academic degree program in keeping with rule §300-2-1-.03 above. For a substantive modification to be considered, both of the following conditions must be met:
         1. The proposed modification does not require any additional resources to implement.
         2. Each of the existing options to be separated can show that its four most recent years of completion data would exceed the minimum program viability standard for graduates as defined above in §300-2-1-.04.
      3. Curricular Changes over 50%: Modifications to existing programs that will affect more than 50% of the curriculum may be considered for approval by the Commission only if the program exceeds its minimum viability standard for graduates as defined above in §300-2-1-.04. If less than one-third of the major of the proposed extension/alteration is in common with the major of the existing program(s), the change automatically will be considered a new program. Institutions are responsible for determining the percentage change and submitting documentation comparing the proposed modified curriculum to the existing curriculum.
      4. Certain Changes to Program Length: Commission approval is required when the total credit hours (or equivalent progress measure) increase or decrease by 25% or more, resulting in significant change in students’ time to degree.
      5. Certain Modifications to Doctoral Programs: Changes in award nomenclature or IPEDS level for doctoral programs will require Commission approval, particularly for programs seeking recognition as “research-focused doctorates,” such as the Doctor of Philosophy.
   2. Substantive Requiring Notification: Before any of the following changes may be implemented, they must be presented to the Commission as information items. If supporting documentation verifies that any conditions and requirements are met, the changes will be recognized by the Commission by information item. The Commission staff may request additional information if necessary:
      1. Addition of Options: An institution may request to add an option or options to an existing degree program under the following circumstances:
         1. The option must be in a field closely related to the existing program.
         2. Generally, the option comprises less than half of the total credits required for the existing program.
         3. Generally, the resulting program has a common set of coursework (“program core”) that constitutes at least 50% of the required program coursework, excluding general education core. Exceptions may be considered if the institution can present a convincing rationale that the 50% shared coursework requirement should be reduced.
      2. Updates to Program Inventory: An institution may request the following changes to how an existing degree program is listed in the Academic Program Inventory:
         1. Changes in award nomenclature at the same IPEDS level for existing programs listed in the Commission’s Academic Program, provided that no changes in program requirements, content, and objectives are made~~, and provided the new nomenclature replaces the current designation~~, except for doctoral awards as noted above. Prior to implementation, the institution must present an information item which provides sufficient evidence that the proposed nomenclature is more appropriate than the current designation.
         2. Changes to program titles or CIP codes if documentation is provided that no changes are made in program requirements, content, and objectives, and provided the new title or code replaces an earlier designation. Program title changes or CIP code changes should only be made when the proposed title or code more adequately reflects the nature and content of the program. The burden of demonstrating this is upon the institution.
         3. Changes to curriculum between 25% and 49%: Modifications to existing programs that will affect between 25% and 49% of the curriculum, except for changes to program length noted above, may be implemented after notification to the Commission at a regular meeting. Institutions are responsible for determining the percentage change and submitting documentation showing the percentage of the program to be modified.
         4. Changes to delivery modality that affect 100% of the program’s curriculum, especially in relation to adding a fully distance education program, as described below in rule §300-2-1-.10.
   3. Non-Substantive: The following program changes are considered non-substantive, and institutions do not need to notify the Commission or ACHE Staff prior to implementation. It is the responsibility of the institution to determine whether they must register the change with their accreditor or other entity.
      1. Dual degree: Dual degree programs sponsored by two different institutions or two departments, schools, or colleges within an institution, leading to the awarding of two separate degrees. Dual degrees are not discretely identified in the Commission's Academic Program Inventory. This definition assumes the existence of two degree offerings prior to an agreement for a dual offering. (Commission action 5/20/88).
      2. Changes to curriculum under 25%: Modifications to existing programs that will affect less than 25% of the curriculum, including changes to program length, may be implemented without notifying the Commission. Institutions are responsible for determining the percentage of the program’s curriculum to be modified.
      3. Changes to Existing Options: Once an option has been added following notification to the Commission, changes to option title or coursework do not need to be reviewed by the Commission, with the following exceptions:
         1. If an institution seeks to change an option in such a manner that affects more than 25% of the program’s curriculum, the change will be considered substantive—requiring notification.
         2. If an institution seeks to change the CIP code of an option apart from the existing degree program, the change will be considered substantive—requiring approval as noted above under “separating a program.”
      4. Most Changes to Delivery Modality: Changes to delivery modality that affect less than 100% of the curriculum are considered non-substantive. These include changes to the delivery modality of individual courses.
   4. Changes to Programs that Lead to Professional Educator Certification: Institutions seeking to modify a degree program leading to professional educator certification should consult with appropriate staff at the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE). Depending on the nature of the program change and ALSDE guidance, institutions may request that the Commission waive requirements for prior approval or notification. [Non-Substantive] ~~New Teacher Certification Programs. However, if a certification program involves the addition of a new degree program which will be added to the Commission's Academic Program Inventory and identified in the institution's catalog or other publications, Commission review and approval as a new academic program is required. (For example, if the institution is adding a teacher certification in English under an existing degree program in Secondary Education, Commission approval is not required. However, if a separate degree is to be offered in English Education, per se, then approval is required). (Commission Resolution, 1/14/83 and revisions to Operational Definitions adopted 6/21/91).~~

1. **Reasonable Extensions and Alterations of For-Credit Non-Degree Certificates**
   1. Substantive Requiring Notification
      1. Addition of new for-credit non-degree certificates

~~Non-degree programs of senior institutions including prebaccalaureate, postbaccalaureate, and postmasters certificates. Note: These certificates are not listed in the Commission’s Academic Program Inventory. (New Postbaccalaureate Certificate Programs of Senior Institutions exempted by Commission resolution, 7/8/83.)~~

~~Short-term certificate programs (44 quarter hours or less) in community, junior, and technical colleges designed for completion in less than one academic year (3 quarters) of full-time study or the equivalent. Note: These certificates are not listed in the Commission’s Academic Program Inventory. (Commission action on 5/20/88).~~

* + 1. Change in CIP Code
    2. Change in IPEDS Level
  1. Non-Substantive: All other changes to for-credit non-degree certificates, including option title, coursework, etc.

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**Statutory Authority:** Code of Ala. 1975, §§16-5-1, et seq., specifically §§16-5-7 and 16-5-8.

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**Repealed and New Rule**: XXX