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Proposed Guidelines for Multi-Institutional Graduate Degrees in Collaboration with a Foreign Institution¹

Definition of a Multi-Institutional Graduate Degree

A **multi-institutional graduate degree program** is a collaborative partnership between two or more accredited institutions of higher education², based on a legal agreement, that aims to enhance the educational opportunities and perspectives contributing to graduate education. In a multi-institutional degree program, students are jointly accepted by partnering institutions into the degree program, complete a portion of the course work and other requirements for the degree while in residence at each institution, and obtain an enriched educational experience because of the synergistic intellectual and research resources available through such programs. Upon completion of all requirements within a multi-institutional degree program, the names of all partnering institutions appear on the diploma and academic record (transcript) issued to the student.

Although strong perspective broadening experiences are encouraged to enhance the educational value for all students, a multi-institutional degree program is different from joint degree or exchange programs. **Joint degree programs** are designed for students to pursue two distinct graduate degrees simultaneously wherein the minimum requirements for each degree are met, the interaction between the coursework and research experience in each degree is modest, and two separate degrees are awarded. **Exchange programs** allow students to experience a second institution of higher education by immersing themselves in the classrooms and/or research programs of different students and faculty and then apply this experience toward only the degree program awarded at the students' home institution. Such multi-institutional collaborations are encouraged to enhance the educational experience provided to students and it is on the basis of these strong, long-term associations wherein the value of multi-institutional degree programs can be realized. As such, short-term relationships should not be considered as the basis for a multi-institutional degree. Finally, such programs should only be considered when the educational goals and objectives of the partnering institutions are strongly facilitated by the formal multi-institutional degree program, as determined by a thorough initial evaluation consistent with that of new degree programs, and subject to ongoing periodic review.

¹ These guidelines pertain only to multi-institutional graduate degree programs in situations where two or more institutions offer and confer the degree. The guidelines do not implicate other kinds of partnerships such as campus joint degree programs or joint programs with other colleges and universities where only one of the partner institutions awards the degree. Finally, these guidelines refer to partnerships between the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and foreign institutions, which are defined as those located outside the United States of America.

² For the purposes of this document, an accredited institution of higher education is that deemed to meet the acceptable levels of quality, as recognized by the reliable and recognized authority within the institutions region or nation. The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign is accredited by the North Central Association (NCA) of Colleges and Schools and any partnership, including multi-institutional degrees, necessitate that the partnering institution meet the quality standards expected of this accrediting body and be subject to NCA review upon request.

Memorandum of Agreement (MOA)

A multi-institutional degree program is based on a legal agreement between the partnering institutions. A Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the partnering institutions is executed by the designated officers who are legally approved to commit the institution to a binding contract. The complete and fully negotiated MOA should accompany the program proposal that is reviewed by all levels of governance relating to program approval at the University of Illinois, but does not replace any of the information required by the proposal to the Senate Committee on Educational Policy for consideration and recommendation to the UIUC Senate.

The MOA clearly establishes:

- the nature of services to be performed by each party;
- the period of agreement;
- the conditions under which the agreement will be reviewed;
- the conditions under which the agreement will be renewed;
- the conditions under which the agreement can be terminated, including appropriate protection for enrolled students in such situations;
- the venue(s) for addressing perceived breaches of contract.

The MOA should explicitly define:

- educational courses, program(s), and services to be offered;
- the institution(s) awarding of credit;
- how the faculties of the accredited participating institutions will periodically review the courses and program(s);
- how student support services will be delivered, including in cases where the Americans with Disabilities Act is relevant;
- the application process;
- issues pertaining to student visas;
- how student academic support will be offered;
- how and by whom student disputes or grievances will be settled;
- how student access to learning resources requisite to the courses and program(s) will be assured;
- which campus research policies will be followed and enacted, with regard to intellectual property, course materials developed, research animal care, and human subjects.

The MOA will explicitly spell out the financial arrangements

- that specify the compensation and other considerations for the services provided by each of the partner institutions;
- that set forth a mechanism to account for the services provided by each partner institution;
- that meet all legal requirements for federal and state aid programs that might be used by students or the partner institutions.

The Office that supports formal linkages or contractual agreements between the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and any foreign institution is the office of Institutional & Faculty International Collaboration (IFIC) (<http://www.ips.uiuc.edu/ific/agreements.htm>). Before entering into discussions about these types of agreements, University staff and faculty must complete the Application to Establish an Exchange Agreement with a Foreign Institution (<http://www.ips.uiuc.edu/ific/application.doc>) and submit it to IFIC prior to an initial consultation with the director. The Director of IFIC will provide assistance for drafting the exchange agreement and, when desirable, for negotiating the terms of the agreement with the potential overseas partner. When the draft exchange agreement has been completed and approved by the sponsoring unit and the foreign partner, the Director of Institutional and Faculty International Collaboration will submit it to the relevant units for department- and college-level approvals.

In order for any agreement between the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and a foreign institution to be valid, it must be signed by:

- The Chancellor of the Urbana-Champaign campus
- The Secretary of the Board of Trustees, or a duly appointed proxy
- The Comptroller of the University of Illinois, or a duly appointed proxy
- The Office of University Counsel

Generally, we ask that the foreign partner sign the final Agreements first. The University of Illinois requires two signed original Agreement prints; one is archived in the office of IFIC, and the second is kept on file in the Office of Sponsored Programs and Research Administration. Foreign partners may request as many signed original prints of the final Agreement as they require.

Program Review and Approval

Multi-institutional degree programs proposals should be prepared and submitted to the appropriate college(s) for review using the Format for Presentation of Proposals to the Senate Committee on Educational Policy (<http://www.senate.uiuc.edu/ep/downloads/EPCPF.doc>) available at the UIUC Senate's website. Ideally, review of the proposal at the department and disciplinary college level should be intensive to enable expeditious review at subsequent levels, including the Graduate College, Provost's Office, and UIUC Senate, because all relevant supporting materials will have been developed and agreed upon in advance.

Review of multi-institutional degree proposals by the disciplinary college must include review by a task force that is constituted to provide both breadth of perspective, and international program and disciplinary expertise. This task force shall be appointed by the Dean of the disciplinary college, following consultation with the Graduate College and Provost's Office, to ensure that both disciplinary expertise and breadth of perspective are provided by the members of the committee to facilitate a rigorous review of the proposed institutional collaboration. The charge to the task force will be to evaluate the:

- educational rationale necessitating formal engagement in a multi-institutional degree arrangement, including reciprocal exchange of students;
- strength of ongoing collaborations that lend feasibility and sustainability to the proposal;
- full review of the partnering institution(s) by a task force involving individuals from across campus with relevant experiences.

At the conclusion of the task force review of the multi-institutional degree proposal, a summary document must be included as an appendix with the proposal documents.

Multi-institutional degree programs will undergo the rigorous, multiple level of review that is applied to any new degree program at the University of Illinois (see 'Understanding the Levels of Governance' for a complete overview at <http://www.provost.uiuc.edu/programs/cps/understandingLOG.html>). In addition to presentation of the multi-institutional degree program as a new degree program in the senate format, necessary appendices are: A) the fully negotiated MOA; B) report of the task force, and C) Illinois Board of Higher Education document. In many cases, other levels of review beyond the University (e.g., regulatory bodies of other countries/states, and accrediting agencies) may be required.

Rationale for the Program

The proposal shall provide a clear and full explanation for considering the desirability of a multi-institutional degree program. The rationale may address the following:

- appropriateness of the partners;
- fulfillment of campus mission, purpose, and priorities;
- fulfillment of college mission and priorities;
- expansion of global visibility;
- responding to market demand;
- seeking new market opportunities;
- establishing new or strengthening existing relationships with other universities or organizations;
- presentation of the benefit of this arrangement to students and faculty of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign campus;
- evidence of the longevity of the existing partnership and the proposed program, and;
- explanation outlining why the current collaborative arrangements are insufficient to meet the educational goals of the program.

Assurance of Educational Quality

The educational quality of the multi-institutional degree program should be comparable to that of programs offered by the University of Illinois. A proposal for a multi-institutional degree program must demonstrate the basis for the quality of the proposed program as offered by all of the partner institutions, including:

- appropriateness of level and content of courses;
- modes of delivery of program courses;

- qualifications of the faculty and teaching assistants;
- use of regular vs. adjunct faculty;
- appropriate level of accreditation, and;
- disciplinary quality of the partnering institution.

Demand for the Program

The proposal must demonstrate that there is a demand for the proposed program and the prospects for short- and long-term sustainability of the program. This should include discussion regarding options and partnerships that have been tried and have not been satisfactory and why the multi-institutional degree program will overcome these shortfalls, making the multi-institutional aspects of the program desirable.

Program Description

The proposal should provide a detailed description of the program content and how each institution will contribute to the proposed program, including:

- course requirements (required core and electives);
- required examinations;
- thesis or project options;
- what courses will be delivered by which partner institutions and the timing of the offerings;
- identification of the partner institution to maintain academic records of enrolled students;
- what percent of the program will be residential at each campus;
- how the examination committees will be composed and which institution's policies will be followed with regard to the preliminary exam and final defense;
- deviations from campus, college, and Graduate College policies, and;
- confirmation that program recruitment materials will clearly and accurately describe the nature of the multi-institutional degree program.

Program Resources and Funding

A proposed program must demonstrate clear evidence of adequacy and accessibility of resources to support the program, including the following:

- partner institutions understand their responsibilities (i.e., what portion of the total cost is being assumed by the partner institutions);
- administrative/operations costs;
- where and how key administrative tasks will be carried out;
- how revenue will be separated between the partners;
- how tuition rates will be established;
- faculty compensation;
- student financial support;
- infrastructure costs (i.e., computers, Internet and other distant learning connections);

- travel and accommodation costs associated with the program for both students and faculty;
- how the costs of student research at partnering institutions will be provided for, and;
- library and laboratory facilities.

Admission to the Program

Policies and procedures governing acceptance of a student into the proposed multi-institutional degree program must be thoroughly outlined regarding responsibility of each participating institutions. Admission requirements should be jointly agreed upon and clearly delineated to include the following:

- determination of baseline admission standards;
- requirements for admission into the proposed program;
- efforts should be made to identify and reduce duplication of actions required of students during the application process;
- consistency of admission standards across partner institutions;
- explanation and justification for deviations from campus approved admission standards;
- process for selecting applicants;
- policies and procedures for maintaining student privacy, and;
- mechanisms to ensure diversity among the students accepted to the program.

Continuation in the Program

The standard and expectations that will determine if a student will continue in the program must be outlined. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Achieving a satisfactory grade point average;
- List of specific faculty led approved courses for oversight of experiential credit activities (such courses will be approved only if there is scholarly academic activity associated with the experience);
- Successful completion of all program requirements;
- Maintaining good academic standing at all partner institutions;
- Exhibiting honesty and integrity;
- Adhering to all rules, regulations, and policies of the partner institutions.

Matriculation Issues

Matriculation issues must be clearly spelled out, including the following:

- how and where students register for courses;
- how tuition is paid by students;
- which partner institution is designated as the custodian of academic records;
- how transfer credit is handled;
- what wording will appear on the transcript in reference to the multi-institutional degree;

- how the diploma will read, including provision for it to include the seals of the partnering institutions;
- what financial aid issues need to be addressed;
- what arrangements need to be made for visas, housing, healthcare insurance, and disability accommodations in the event students must travel to one of the partner institutions to complete work;
- handling of student grievances and discipline.

Evaluation of the Multi-Institutional Degree Program

An ongoing assessment program should be outlined for implementation and review at specified intervals, such as every 5 years, by the disciplinary college. This program should assess the quality of the multi-institutional degree program as it relates to program content, faculty collaborations, student success and educational objectives. Ultimately, the ongoing need for the multi-institutional degree format, rather than a less formal educational collaboration, should be evaluated, with a summary report provided to Graduate College.