

## UMass Boston – Overview of Governance Levels

Prepared by the Curriculum Working Group, AY 2021-22

### General Principles and the Purpose of Governance Review

The governance process at UMB serves two broad purposes: to ensure the quality and consistency of academic programs across the campus and to ensure the university is in compliance with state and system regulations regarding academic standards, student experience, and public records. As such, in addition to making sure that academic programs conform to general standards as defined by the university and its accrediting body, the governance process works to make sure that these programs are of high quality, sustainable, consistent with the university mission, and serve students well. To help achieve these goals, the governance process is guided by three key principles that are derived from the Standards for Accreditation laid out by the New England Commission for Higher Education:

1. The quality and integrity of academic programs and courses and the student experience within them
2. Coherence and consistency within and across various academic programs
3. Responsible stewardship of university resources

The governance process requires review at several different levels; issues related to curriculum are the purview of the faculty, so they are centered in this process. However, some administrative input is necessary for matters related to implementation. Each level of review focuses on a specific set of issues related to course and program development, but they all work together to help assure the quality, integrity, and sustainability of university curricula.

### Department/Program Review

**Possible Decision Makers:** Department/Program Curriculum Committee, Department/Program GPD, Department/Program Chair

The process of department/program review is specific to individual departments and programs. Larger departments and programs often have department/program curriculum committees that handle proposals before they are brought to the full department/program for review. Smaller departments/programs may omit the curriculum committee; in such departments/programs, proposals are typically developed by faculty in consultation with the chair or a designated person before being brought to a larger group of relevant faculty for review. However this review process is organized, departments/programs are expected to discuss and vote on all proposals before advancing them to the college. The expectation is that all faculty stakeholders in the originating department/program have been given the opportunity to offer feedback and vote on the proposal; once the proposal reaches the college, it has been endorsed by the department/program in which it originated.

The governance process emphasizes a balance of departmental/program individuality, faculty expertise, and priorities for curricular planning alongside stewardship of college/university principles, systems, and structures. Since departments/programs are the primary stakeholders in proposals, this stage of review should be the most involved level of governance. Here, departments/programs should evaluate all elements of the proposal and its place in the department/program curriculum.

For **changes to existing courses or programs**, review should consider:

- How the change will contribute to the department/program (impact on specific courses and/or larger department/program curriculum; how it connects to the larger mission and values of the department/program; how it serves students etc.)
- How the change may impact students and curricula beyond the department (across both the college and university)

Review for **new courses** should also consider:

- The quality of the course (the focus and aims of the course; the specific material covered and the amount; the underlying methodological and/or theoretical investments of the course; the structure and progression of the course week-to-week; the modes and amounts of assessment etc.)

- Course level and pre-requisites (suitability for its level; comparison in terms of challenge and workload with other courses in the department; suitable pre-requisites given department preferences and course level)
- Course title and WISER description (relationship to other courses in the department; clarity for and appeal to students; sufficiency as a description of the content of the course)
- The place of the course in the larger department/program curriculum (how it relates to other courses and the broad shape of the department/program; which students the course is aimed towards in the department and perhaps beyond)
- The relationship of the proposal to existing courses and programs in the college and across the university
- How the department/program will ensure that there is ongoing assessment of the quality and sustainability of the course

Departments/programs should also do their very best to ensure that Curriculog has been completed accurately and that all necessary supplemental materials have been uploaded and conform to governance requirements.

Undergraduate proposals require decisions by the Department/Program Curriculum Committee and the Department/Program Chair; graduate proposals also require decisions by the Graduate Program Director. Each decision maker for each decision is required to use the Curriculog comments function to briefly summarize the department/program conversation and results of the vote. Specifically, the comment should note any debate and the resolution of those debates and the number of no votes or abstentions (if any).

If multiple levels of review exist in the department/program, decision makers should be distinct and each provide their own comment. For departments/programs that do not have one of the listed levels of the review, the decision maker for the next highest existing level should make the decision in this place as well, noting in the comments for the non-existent level, “<name of signing body > has made the decision here because this <program/department> does not have <name of missing stage of review>.” However, there must be at least one level of substantial review within the department/program; proposals should not move to the next level of governance review without this discussion and approval having taken place.

#### College/School Review

**Potential Decision Makers:** College/School Curriculum or Program Committee, College/School Senate

The overall remit of this level of review is to consider the proposal within the context of the college or school, ensuring that all necessary documentation is included and correct and that the course meets the general standards of the college/school and is appropriate for its department and level. This level also considers how the proposal fits with existing courses, programs, and policies in the college/school to help foster connection between departments and avoid overlap or duplication.

In colleges/schools where there are two levels of college review – by a curriculum committee and by a governing body – the first is primarily responsible for ensuring that the proposal and all supporting materials are correct, complete, and accurate. The second primarily considers the proposal in relation to the college/school mission and curriculum and its existing programs. In colleges/schools where there is only one level of college review, this body will address all of these issues.

College/school review bodies should do their best to respect department/program expertise. Since proposals have been thoroughly vetted by the department/program prior to reaching the college/school, review bodies at this level should operate under the assumption that the originating department/school knows what is best for its discipline, program, and students. However, this does not mean that college/school review bodies should not ask questions about or offer suggestions on proposals. Indeed, given the interdisciplinary nature of many programs and the various levels of experience that make up these committees, it is likely that faculty reviewing courses at this level will have some knowledge – disciplinary, methodological, pedagogical, or institutional – that is relevant to the

proposal. When issues or questions arise, every effort should be made to resolve them as quickly as possible so as not to slow down the approval process.

The **College/School Curriculum Committee** is primarily focused on ensuring that the proposal and all materials are correct, thorough, and persuasive. Review at this level includes:

- Detailed review of Curriculog to ensure all information is correctly entered into the system
- Detailed review of the rationale for the proposal to ensure that it is thorough and persuasive
- Detailed review of forms and supplementary materials to ensure that they are correct, complete, and conform to all governance requirements

The College/School Curriculum Committee should also:

- Conduct a broad review of the proposal – does it make sense within the context of the college/school? Is it feasible and sustainable? For new courses, does it make sense as a course from the program in question and at the proposed level?
- Consider the proposal from a student perspective – how will it impact students in this program and across the college/school?

The **College/School Senate** is primarily focused on considering the proposal in relation to the mission, values, and curriculum of the larger college/school. Representatives from the originating department/program serving on this body should be able to answer questions about the proposal. Review at this level considers:

- How the proposal contributes to the larger college curriculum, broadly speaking and in keeping with the educational and pedagogical values of the college as a whole
- How the proposal potentially connects with existing programs, courses, and/or areas of existing faculty expertise
- Whether the proposal is feasible, sustainable, and carefully thought through
- Whether the proposal potentially overlaps with or duplicates existing programs or courses in other departments
- The suitability of the course for its level, in line with general college standards for lower and upper level undergraduate courses or graduate level masters and doctoral courses
- The proposed sequencing of the course, checking for pre-requisites for upper-level courses and suggesting possibilities if necessary
- Possibilities for cross-listing with or connection to other programs in the college
- The WISER course description and title – are they clear, adequately detailed, student-oriented, and typo-free?

For proposals for changes to existing courses and programs, only the proposed changes should be evaluated.

All proposals require decisions by the College/School Curriculum Committee and the College/School Senate Chair. For all decisions, decision makers are required to use the Curriculog comments function to briefly summarize the College/School conversation and results of the vote. Specifically, the comment should note any debate and the resolution of those debates and the number of no votes or abstentions (if any).

If two levels of review exist in the college/school, decision makers should be distinct and each provide their own summary. For colleges/schools that only have one level of review, the decision maker for the existing level should make the decision for both in Curriculog, noting in the comments for the non-existent level, “<name of review body > has made the decision here because this <college/school> does not have <name of missing stage of review>.” However, there must be at least one level of substantial review within the college/school.

#### Administrative Review (Dean’s Office and Provost’s Office)

Curriculum governance is the purview of the faculty, so the previous levels of review by faculty are what matter most for ensuring the integrity of the curriculum and the quality of student experience. However, administrative review is necessary to consider proposals in relation to larger institutional concerns, including implementation

constraints, and to the sustainability and viability of programs, both of which impact student experience. As such, the Dean's Office and Provost's Office evaluate proposals through logistical and institutional frameworks. Broadly speaking, they consider:

- Coordination across units (looking for points of overlap and/or connection across departments and colleges)
- Financial viability and sustainability
- Issues pertaining to facilities availability
- Logistical structures for implementation
- Compliance with NECHE accreditation requirements
- Preparation for off-campus curriculum governance processes, if relevant

#### Other Review Bodies

##### **Faculty Council: Gen Ed Committee Review**

The Faculty Council General Education Committee reviews proposals for General Education courses based on initial reviews by one of four GEC subcommittees: Distribution, Diversity, Quantitative Reasoning, or Seminars Assessment (that is, for First-Year and Intermediate Seminars). Proposals for Capstone courses are reviewed by the General Education Committee itself. General Education proposals are then reviewed by the Faculty Council and the Provost. The only exception to this is courses proposed to satisfy the World Languages requirement, which are submitted directly to the Provost by the respective language departments. General Education proposal reviews follow guidelines set by the Faculty Council (see "General Education Resources" at the bottom of this [webpage](#) for more information).

##### **Faculty Council: Graduate Studies Committee Review**

The Graduate Studies committee primarily considers proposals in relation to graduate education across the university, in accordance with its mission and values. Review at this level typically focuses on:

- The relationship to other graduate courses and programs, in particular whether the proposal potentially overlaps with or duplicates existing graduate courses or other graduate programs.
- The difficulty of a proposed course and whether it seems appropriate for graduate study
- Whether the proposal and additional materials meet quality standards and conform to the requirements of the governance process

##### **Faculty Council: Budget and Long-Range Planning Committee Review**

BLRP reviews budgetary issues related to new undergraduate and graduate programs, taking into account both access to promised resources and program outcomes. Broadly speaking, it focuses on whether the developers of the program have considered all the resources that they will need to launch the program successfully. This includes questions related to staffing (faculty to teach required courses and staff to support students and accreditation requirements), physical resources, and marketing materials. The committee also considers questions related to student enrollment: whether the anticipated number of students aligns with reasonable expectations given the size of peer institutions; and whether the program will bring new students to campus, retain existing undergraduate students in new graduate programs, or shift existing students into new programs.