State Council of Higher Education for Virginia

Guidance on Accurate Representation of Approved Degree Programs and Certificates

July 14, 2017

1. All academic degree programs of Virginia public institutions must be approved by SCHEV (§ 23.1-203, Code of Virginia). Although certificate programs are reported, not approved, documentation must fall within parameters described in the SCHEV program approval policy and meet SCHEV Certificate Definitions. The only official state roster of approved academic degree programs and certificates is the SCHEV Degree/Certificate Inventory, online at http://schev.edu/index/students-and-parents/explore/degree-inventory. All descriptions and representations in any "public-facing" context should be consistent with this inventory.

2. Given that SCHEV-approved degree programs and certificates are the only approved programs according to § 23.1-203, it is important that public-facing materials not appear to elevate sub areas (support areas), such as concentrations, emphases, focuses, majors, options, tracks, or majors to the status of a standalone degree program. All sub areas should be represented clearly as falling under a specific, accurately described, approved degree program. The following advisements are meant to cover the majority of circumstances under which ambiguity or inaccuracy may arise when programs are represented in catalogs, on websites, or in other advertisement materials:

- The officially approved degree program—award/designation level and name/title—should always be listed first and accompanied by a description of the focus of the degree program.

- Where sub areas under a degree program are being presented, it should be clearly stated that such sub areas fall under a given degree program and that the student will receive the officially approved degree (award and title) upon graduation.

- Links should not take students to pages that appear to treat a sub area as an approved standalone degree program. Websites should be structured so that students are generally directed to a "landing page" that indicates the officially approved degree program and any sub areas as opposed to pages that appear to treat sub areas as standalone degree programs.

- Curriculum requirements for the approved degree program should be listed first. Sub area requirements should be listed and clearly related to the overall degree program requirements. Significant differences (e.g., in total required credit hours) among sub areas within the same degree program should be clearly articulated and accessible to prospective students seeking information.

- The same principles should apply, as relevant, to certificate programs. Details (e.g., purpose and focus, and total number of required credit hours) of the officially approved certificate should be presented first.

3. Degree and certificate programs at off-campus sites or online should be presented in the same way (award/designation level and name/title) as the same programs at the main campus. Any *curricular* distinctions related to location or modality should be clearly described and should not significantly alter the primary content, focus or scope of the original SCHEV-approved program.

4. Institutions should, to the extent possible, have policies/procedures that require involvement of the registrar, institutional research, and provostial offices in processes that result in the public presentation of degree and certificate program information in catalogs, websites, and other communications. One purpose of such policies/procedures is to prevent "slippage," whereby administrative units enact changes that result in inaccurate representation of programs or in changes that require approval according to the SCHEV Program Approval policy.

5. Institutional reports, to IPEDS or other third parties, of enrollment and completion data related to degree programs should not be at variance with what is reported to SCHEV, i.e., the roster of degree programs for which completions are reported should be the same in each case.