

**MEMO: Proposed changes to the MUS Program Review Process**

With input from the Academic Review Task Force, the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education is proposing the following changes to Academic Program Review (governed by BOR policy 303.3).

- A two-pronged review process: 1) an internal program review that focuses on student experiences and outcomes and 2) an annual review by the Commissioner that flags programs that do not meet metrics, established by the commissioner, of program viability.
- Revisions to BOR policy 303.3 – Program Review
- Revisions to the Academic Affairs Handbook that governs program review processes (found below the timeline)

Proposed Implementation Timeline (pending BOR approval):

May 20, 2026	Revisions to BOR Policy 303.3 provided as an information item to the Board of Regents
Summer 2026	Program Review Task Force recommends program level metrics to the Commissioner
September 2026	BOR Policy 303.3 considered for approval by the Board of Regents
Fall 2026	Pilot review of flagged programs begins
Spring 2027	Evaluation of pilot program, finalize MUS Academic Affairs Handbook
August 2027	New Program review process take effect

## Proposed changes to the MUS Academic Affairs Handbook

<https://www.mus.edu/che/arsa/Academic%20Affairs%20Handbook%20Spring23.pdf>

\*OLD TEXT\*

### **Academic Program Reviews**

All of the institutions that make up the MUS, excluding the CC, are required by [BOR Policy 303.3 Program Review](#) to conduct internal reviews of their academic programs to ensure program quality and effective stewardship of resources. All programs listed in the official degree and program inventory, except for certificates of 29 credits or less, must be reviewed at least once every seven years. The program review schedules are filed with the OCHE and can be found at <http://mus.edu/che/arsa/ProgramReview/ProgramReview.asp>.

Academic program reviews for the previous academic year are to be submitted at each November BOR meeting according to the regular item schedule. The reviews are considered as an information item and should be submitted using the [Academic Program Review Template](#). An Item Template is NOT required for submission of program reviews.

\*DRAFT NEW TEXT

### **Academic Program Reviews**

All institutions that make up the MUS, excluding the community colleges, are required by [BOR Policy 303.3 Program Review](#) to conduct internal reviews of their academic programs and are subject to ongoing portfolio review by the Commissioner of Higher Education. All programs listed in the official degree and program inventory, except for certificates of 29 credits or less, are subject to review under this policy.

Policy 303.3 establishes two complementary review processes: a campus-based review cycle (Section II) and an ongoing program review led by the Commissioner (Section III). The procedures for each are described below.

#### **Campus Program Review (7-Year Cycle)**

Per BOR Policy 303.3, Section II, each campus shall review all of its programs at least once every seven years. Program review schedules are filed with the OCHE and can be found at:

<http://mus.edu/che/arsa/ProgramReview/ProgramReview.asp>

#### **Use of accreditation reviews**

Campuses may use programmatic accreditation reviews to satisfy the seven-year review requirement. The accreditation self-study must be accompanied by an executive summary addressing the criteria prescribed by the Commissioner (see review criteria below).

## Review criteria

Campus program reviews should address the following areas. These criteria parallel those used for new program approval under BOR Policy 303.1:

- **Student learning outcomes.** Are program learning outcomes being met? What assessment methods are used?
- **Student experiences.** What high-impact practices does the program offer (e.g., capstone, experiential learning, undergraduate research, internships)?
- **Student outcomes.** Post-completion employment, wages, and further education rates.
- **Time to completion.** Average and standard deviation, with comparison to institutional and national benchmarks.
- **Enrollment and completion trends.** Seven-year trend data from the OCHE program performance dashboard.
- **Program structure.** Alignment with BOR Policy 301.11 (Undergraduate Degree Requirements) and BOR Policy 301.12 (Graduate Degree Requirements).
- **Mission alignment.** How the program supports the campus mission and mission parameters under BOR Policy 219.1.

## Institutional decision

Following each program review, the campus shall reach a decision regarding the future of the program:

- **Invest:** Program warrants additional resources or strategic growth.
- **Maintain:** Program is meeting expectations; continue current trajectory.
- **Restructure:** Program requires changes to curriculum, delivery, or resource allocation.
- **Sunset:** Program should be phased out through teach-out, moratorium, or termination.

## Reporting

Academic program reviews for the previous academic year are to be submitted at each November BOR meeting according to the regular item schedule. Reviews are considered an information item and should be submitted using the [Academic Program Review Template](#). An Item Template is NOT required for submission of program reviews.

## OCHE Ongoing Program Review

Per BOR Policy 303.3, Section III, the Commissioner of Higher Education maintains a process for the ongoing review of academic programs across the Montana University System. This process complements the campus-based review and provides continuous monitoring of program performance between seven-year review cycles.

## Thresholds and identification

The Commissioner establishes and publishes thresholds for program performance. Thresholds may be differentiated by degree level and institutional type, consistent with the principle that

performance expectations account for differences in program type and institutional mission. Threshold types include:

- **Floor thresholds:** minimum headcount and graduation levels, established by degree level and institution type.
- **Trend thresholds:** sustained downward trends in headcount and/or graduation over a defined period.

Programs crossing one or more thresholds are flagged for enhanced review. OCHE provides the list of flagged programs to each campus by August 15 of each year.

### **Petition period**

Chief academic officers have 30 days from receipt of the flagged program list to petition OCHE for removal of a program from the list. Petitions must demonstrate that one or more of the following conditions apply:

1. Institutional data provides context not captured by system-level metrics (e.g., different reporting methodology, data lag, recent corrective action).
2. The program serves a broader role than headcount reflects (e.g. mission-critical access function, workforce pipeline in an underserved region).
3. The program is undergoing a documented institutional transition of a scale that materially affects program performance (e.g., campus reorganization, leadership change, facility disruption).

OCHE reviews petitions and notifies campuses of outcomes. The final list of programs subject to enhanced review is reported to the Board of Regents at its November meeting.

### **Campus response and improvement plans**

By January 15, campuses submit a response for each program on the final enhanced review list. The response must include:

Recommended action. The campus recommends one of the following:

- **Sunset:** The campus recommends placing the program in moratorium, with a proposed timeline and teach-out plan.
- **Restructure or invest:** The campus recommends continued operation with changes, supported by an improvement plan.

Improvement plan requirements. Programs recommended for restructure or investment must submit an improvement plan that addresses:

1. **Evidence of need.** How does the program fit the mission of the institution? Is there convincing evidence of student, societal, or state demand? These criteria parallel BOR Policy 303.1.

2. **Actions taken or planned.** What steps have been taken or will be taken to address declining trends or low enrollment? Could the program be delivered more efficiently through collaboration with other MUS institutions?
3. **Resource assessment.** What are the actual costs of offering the program, and do the projected benefits outweigh those costs? Does the institution have the resources to deliver the program to an acceptable degree of quality?
4. **Performance targets.** Specific headcount and graduation goals the program commits to achieving, with a defined timeline.

### **Commissioner review and Board action**

The Commissioner reviews campus responses and presents recommendations to the Board of Regents at its March meeting. Recommendations may include approval of improvement plans, modifications to proposed plans, or a recommendation for moratorium or sunset.

Per BOR Policy 303.3, Section III.E, the Board of Regents has the authority to request additional information, accept the Commissioner’s decision, or change the Commissioner’s decision with respect to each program.

### **Improvement plan monitoring**

The Commissioner determines the review period for each approved improvement plan. The default review period is two years, though the Commissioner may adjust this based on program circumstances.

**Programs that fail to meet the standards established in an approved improvement plan shall be placed into moratorium, unless specifically granted a reprieve by the Commissioner.** A reprieve may be granted when the Commissioner determines that the program is making demonstrable progress or that external circumstances warrant additional time. Chief academic officers may petition the Commissioner for a reprieve.

Programs placed in moratorium are subject to the procedures established under [BOR Policy 303.4 \(Academic Program Moratorium and Termination\)](#) and the moratorium procedures described in the Level I section of this handbook.

### **Annual calendar for ongoing program review**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Action</b>
<b>August 15</b>	OCHE provides flagged program list to campuses
<b>September 15</b>	CAO petition deadline (30 days from notification)
<b>November BOR meeting</b>	Final enhanced review list reported to Board of Regents; campus seven-year program review reports presented
<b>January 15</b>	Campus responses and improvement plans due to OCHE
<b>March BOR meeting</b>	Commissioner presents recommendations to Board of Regents
<b>Ongoing</b>	Improvement plan monitoring per Commissioner-determined review periods

