

November 15 – 16, 2007

ITEM 137-102-R1107

**Revisions to Montana Board of Regents’
Policy 303.3, Program Review**

THAT:

The Board of Regents of Higher Education approves the suggested changes to Section 5, Procedures, in the above-referenced policy. The suggested changes are attached to this Item page.

EXPLANATION:

Policy 303.3, which was approved by the Montana Board of Regents in May 2005, is a significantly-different approach to academic program review in the Montana University System. Prior to May 2005, program review at the Board of Regents’ level only occurred every five years and the review only included programs with low graduation rates. The Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education also managed the review for the Board.

Policy 303.3 establishes a significantly different approach to program review at the Board of Regents’ level. Under that new Policy,

- all academic programs must be reviewed at least once during a seven-year period;
- the responsibility for that reviews rests with the campuses;
- the results of the review are reported to the Board of Regents, and the Board has the authority to change campus decisions concerning the future of its programs.

The philosophy of Section E. is a holdover from the old program review process, which singled out underperforming programs and ignored everything else. It was included as part of the revised policy, to reassure the Board that those programs would receive special scrutiny in the review process. It also included multiple measures of “underperformance,” primarily because some programs will almost always have low graduation numbers, regardless of their importance to the campus and the support they provide to other disciplines. Physics is probably the best example.

While the multiple measures were well-intended, they have proven to be unworkable, especially the measures

that focus on faculty ratios and average credit hours. Many academic programs in the Montana University System are multi-disciplinary in approach, utilizing the coursework and strengths of programs throughout the institution. Tying courses to specific programs really only works for self-contained disciplines like nursing or law or business.

The chief academic officers and the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education recommend the elimination of Section E. for two (2) reasons:

- many of its provisions are unworkable;
- the entire philosophy of the new policy places the responsibility for program review on the campuses, and asks them to make a recommendation concerning the future of all programs. Section E. is a holdover from a different era, when program review and the future of programs, rested with the Board.

The suggested policy revisions do require the campuses to include graduation numbers and student major numbers so the Board has that information when the campuses report the results of their reviews every November.