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.