

SENATE COMMITTEE ON OUTREACH

The Penn State World Campus Program Proposal and Review Process

(Informational)

**PURPOSE**

All undergraduate and graduate courses and programs delivered through the Penn State World Campus are approved through the same curricular affairs processes that govern undergraduate and graduate courses and programs in residence. The University Faculty Senate has legislative authority on all curricular matters. The Penn State World Campus has, however, developed a process for recognizing which University courses and programs may be identified and extended for online delivery.

World Campus program identification involves a multi-step process to review ideas for full online delivery of its programs. Over the last decade the process has been continuously refined to ensure efficient and effective decisions are made. It has brought structure and systemization, thoroughness and rigor, risk analysis, and financial responsibility to the program selection process.

As the process has been refined, the yield has improved. Over the past seven years, more than 95 percent of the programs that were selected have consistently met enrollment and financial goals, for both the academic partner and the World Campus.

This report outlines the program proposal and review process in place at the Penn State World Campus.

**ORIGINATION OF IDEAS**

Program ideas for World Campus typically originate from one or more of three sources. These include:

- **Academic Units:** Faculty members, department heads, and deans may propose a program idea to World Campus.
- **World Campus:** Some ideas are generated through day-to-day discussions among existing World Campus program teams and staff around the curriculum of undergraduate and graduate degrees as well as certificate programs offered by the World Campus. These discussions can reveal opportunities to expand curriculum as well as points of synergy.
- **Market Scans:** Outreach Marketing Research completes market scans for World Campus on a regular basis. Changing employment trends and hiring patterns can suggest emerging markets and the need for new programs.

## **INITIAL CRITERIA-BASED ASSESSMENT**

The World Campus Directors of Academic Affairs (DAA) for Undergraduate Programs and Graduate Programs are responsible for leading the review of new programs. They each have the authority to make an initial assessment of the idea based on past experience and the program selection criteria that were established following the creation of World Campus in 1997. The criteria focus on six areas.

Six areas of focus in World Campus Program Selection Criteria:

- *Academic Reputation*
- *Academic Readiness*
- *Appropriate Technology*
- *Sustainable Market*
- *Income Potential*
- *Scalability*

These six areas weigh heavily in the selection of a program to be offered by the World Campus. Not only are they used in the initial assessments made by the DAAs, but they are used throughout the review process.

The criteria are applied, regardless of whether the program idea originated from an academic unit or within the World Campus.

## **ACADEMIC UNIT CONSULTATION**

Early and earnest consultation with other academic units and groups of faculty who deliver similar programs in residence or have related scholarly interest is a requirement that the DAAs are charged to facilitate. The Graduate School, for example, has mandated that competing online degree programs will not be approved, and the World Campus does not want to compete with itself in marketing degree and certificate programs. Hence, it is very likely that delivery of a program via the World Campus is often a collaborative effort across colleges and campuses, with revenue shared among those partners; even when the idea is initiated by one academic unit. Collaboration adds academic diversity to a program and increases faculty capacity as program enrollment grows.

Program ideas that are not ready to move forward are tabled for possible reconsideration in the future.

After initial review by a World Campus DAA and the identification of academic partners, the review of a program idea progresses through a series of internal steps.

## **PROGRAM INTAKE FORM**

For program ideas that clear initial review by a DAA, a program champion (typically a faculty member, professor in charge, department/division head) is identified and asked to work with colleagues to complete a short Program Intake Form.

The DAA and/or the World Campus program manager who typically works with the college or campus will review the intake form to ensure the program idea is fully captured and arrange for a market analysis to be completed.

## **MARKET RESEARCH**

To determine the viability of a proposed program, Outreach Market Research typically conducts a market analysis. The previously mentioned Program Intake Form has been designed to gather information about the program idea and will assist Outreach Market Research in determining the type of market analysis that will be completed. The market analysis process can take six to eight weeks to complete, and scheduling the analysis may add time to the process.

The four key factors are typically assessed in the market analysis:

- Economic /employment trends,
- Demographic trends,
- Program demand, and
- Competition

Depending on the proposed program, other factors may need to be considered.

The typical World Campus student is an adult learner, often working full-time and having family obligations that make education in traditional settings a challenge. In most cases they are location-bound—unable or unwilling to relocate to continue their education. Most adult learners are seeking education programs that advance them in their careers or help them pursue a new career. For that reason, the market analysis focuses on the occupations and careers that are related to the proposed program.

## **TRENDS**

The economic trends that are assessed may include related occupational employment and growth, industry demand for education and training, and new and emerging technologies that may drive the need for education and training.

Demographic trends such as retirement and turnover rates, educational attainment, average and median salary are reviewed to determine if there will be possible job openings for graduates. Gender, ethnicity, and residency status may also be significant factors, depending on the proposed program.

## **PROGRAM DEMAND**

The number of awards conferred nationally for the proposed program, as well as the student pipeline, is assessed by looking at degrees awarded in the program area. The number of students completing programs is an indication of how many prospective students would potentially be interested in the program. In some cases, enrollment numbers are available, and they would also be used to determine the popularity of a program. Programs that have very low conferral or enrollment rates are likely to have very small target audiences.

## **COMPETITION**

The number of institutions awarding credentials related to the proposed program is a good indicator of the level of competition. The more institutions offering the program, the more choices the target audience has for an education provider. Key competitor programs are reviewed for tuition, curriculum, credential being offered, admission requirements, and program features. The competitor programs are compared to the proposed program to determine if the proposed program would have a competitive advantage in the current market. After compiling the market information, recommendations are made based on the following:

- Market potential for the program,
- Ability to compete with similar offerings, and
- Ability to reach and attract the target audience

There is no set formula for a go/no-go decision. In some cases, other factors such as industry relationships, faculty expertise, and Penn State's reputation may uniquely position the program, potentially making it more viable than the market would indicate. In these cases, the intake form can provide crucial information that can allow market research to make a more accurate assessment of the market.

## **INTERNAL REVIEW OF MARKET RESEARCH**

All market research on proposed programs is thoroughly reviewed prior to sharing it with academic partners in a meeting. This will include the market researcher who completed the analysis, representatives from Outreach Marketing who will develop the marketing plan for the program if it moves forward, the World Campus program manager who will manage the program during development and delivery, the respective DAA and other relevant staff.

## **ENROLLMENT AND FINANCIAL PROFILE**

The enrollment and financial profile shows how enrollments and finances are anticipated to develop over an initial five or six year period. The market research and patterns of growth in similar programs offered via the World Campus are used to develop enrollment projections. World Campus tuition rates and the University's Revenue Distribution Categories (RDC) Policy are used to predict total tuition income and revenue the academic units and World Campus should expect to receive if the enrollments materialize. The World Campus completes a further analysis for its own use that shows the resource investment it will need to make to the

delivery of the program. The information in the profile facilitates a similar analysis by the academic partner(s).

## **PROJECT MANAGEMENT TIMELINE**

At least six new programs are expected to open each year. The planning, development, and delivery processes for each of these programs needs to be coordinated across as many as 50 people, involving the academic unit(s) and multiple World Campus and Outreach units. Therefore, a project manager will be assigned to each proposed program by World Campus. These managers will help to facilitate this process.

If the market research report is positive, the World Campus program manager for the proposed program will develop an initial draft of a project timeline that covers the tasks involved in moving the program through development and into delivery.

## **CULMINATING STEPS**

Internal review steps culminate in meeting with Academic Unit(s):

- **“Yes” Decision – Move Forward**  
A “Yes” decision moves the program into planning, development, and delivery guided by the project timeline. A World Campus program manager will then develop a formal agreement between the academic partner and the World Campus to offer the program.
- **Need for Further Exploration – Reexamine**  
There may be the need to reexamine, for example, do more market research or consider new information, before moving forward.
- **“No” Decision – Idea Tabled**  
The joint decision may be to not move forward – to table the idea for a period of time. An example is a master’s degree idea that was tabled for five years while the number of individuals with bachelor's degrees increased.

## **QUESTIONS**

Questions or proposals for undergraduate or graduate degrees or certificates to be delivered by World Campus should be directed to:

- **Undergraduate Program Ideas**  
Karen Pollack, DAA for Undergraduate Programs [kiw1@psu.edu](mailto:kiw1@psu.edu)
- **Graduate Program Ideas**  
David Sylvia, DAA for Graduate Programs [dms39@psu.edu](mailto:dms39@psu.edu)

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