



# Guide to Creating New Academic Programs and Credentials

Approved by Academic Planning & Priorities: December 9, 2024  
Approved by University Senate: February 28, 2025

## Part 1. Background

---

This document replaces the existing “[Academic Offering Development Process](#),” which was approved by University Senate in April 2016 as a guide for internal groups exploring the development of new academic credentials. This new “Guide to Developing New Programs and Credentials” maintains the principles, lines of accountability, and check points of the original document, but updates the approach in the following ways:

- The process has been updated to recognize current StFX committee structures and mandates.
- The process conforms with the most up to date definitions and procedures for new program approvals set by the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission (MPHEC).
- The approach aligns with goals of the StFX Academic Plan (2023) for efficient and flexible processes.
- The process differentiates the approach for graduate and undergraduate programs.
- An implementation and monitoring phase has been added.
- A review by Joint Committee on Studies has been added to the process, while the Academic Planning and Priorities Committee has been removed. (At the graduate level, the Committee on Graduate Studies takes a similar role to that of JCOS)
- This document focuses on new programs only. Information about the steps required to modify existing programs is presented in a separate document.

### Authority

**University Senate has authority for creating and approving new programs. This document reflects Senate-approved policies and practices. Any changes to the process for approving new programs fall within the purview of Senate and its subcommittees.**

Once approved by University Senate, new academic programs must undergo a review by the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission (MPHEC), and sometimes other external approval bodies. For efficiency, the process and requirements outlined in this document align with the requirements for proposals submitted to the MPHEC. The MPHEC also sets general parameters for the structure and expectations for each type of credential and program through its [Maritime Degree Level Qualifications Framework](#) and the [Maritime University Certificate and Diploma Framework](#). These frameworks ensure that credentials are consistent across all Universities in the region. StFX’s revised program approval process recognizes the role of the MPHEC in providing quality assurance oversight to university programs.

### Scope

The process described in this document applies to the creation of new, credit-baring academic credentials and programs as defined by the MPHEC.

This includes:

- New undergraduate or graduate degrees.

- New field of specialization (e.g., majors, advanced majors, or honours) within existing degrees.
- New areas of specialization within a degree that does not offer a major (e.g., BEd in Secondary Education) that will be recognized on the transcript.
- Introduction of a joint major (or equivalent) if one or more fields of the joint major is not already approved within the degree.
- New undergraduate, post baccalaureate, or graduate diplomas.
- New undergraduate, post-baccalaureate, or graduate certificates that are earned independent of a degree (i.e., that stand alone).
- New undergraduate or graduate certificates that are earned within another degree (i.e., embedded in the degree) if they comprise 30 credits or more at the undergraduate level or 15 credits or more at the graduate level.

The process for modifying existing credentials is described in a separate document, (to be developed). Examples of changes that the MPHEC considers a program modification:

- Changes to the name of a credential.
- Significant changes to admission or graduation requirements.
- Significant changes to the degree requirements.
- A significant change to the learning outcomes or disciplinary emphasis of the credential.
- New concentrations in existing graduate degrees.
- New concentrations within existing three-year undergraduate degrees (this may move to the 'modifications' document).
- The addition of a co-op option to an existing degree.
- A significant change to the delivery mode (e.g., move to fully online, off campus delivery of an existing program).

## Guiding Principles

---

### The process for developing new academic credentials must be

- **Transparent.** The steps in the process and the roles and responsibilities of various groups/bodies must be clearly defined.
- **Responsive.** The process must enable innovation and responsiveness. This includes recognizing and responding to the current needs of students and the external community.
- **Consultative.** The process must take an integrated, whole campus approach. While the genesis of a new program might be with a small group of individuals, new programs can have impacts across other academic and support departments.
- **Flexible.** The process must recognize the wide range of programs that fall under its scope. While some new programs will require a significant investment of new resources for instruction or student supports, many that fall within the scope of this process do not. The process must be adaptable so that programs that involve less risk can move through the process more quickly.

- **Future-focused.** The approval process should recognize that once approved, new programs will continue to be monitored and assessed and will likely require changes or refinements. Enrolment will be monitored against targets.

## Roles and Responsibilities

---

Authority for approving new academic programs resides with Senate and its subcommittees. Other stakeholders across campus have a role in offering feedback. The table below identifies the key stakeholders and the roles and responsibilities of each.

### Functions:

- **Responsible:** Those who work to achieve the task.
- **Accountable:** Those with decision-making authority.
- **Consulted:** Those whose opinions are sought and with whom there is a two-way communication.
- **Informed:** Those who are kept up to date on status and process. (Note: In accordance with Senate Rules, Senate may give advice or direction consistent with its mandate and responsibility whenever it is informed)

| Group                                    | Function*   | Phase**           |
|--|---|-------------------|
| Interested parties/ sponsors             | <b>Responsible:</b> Individuals or groups who generate ideas for new programs and participate in multiple ways throughout the process, including leading the consultation and working with staff in preparation of the documents and participating in the approval processes as needed.   | All               |
| AVP Office staff                         | <b>Responsible:</b> Recognizing the workload associated with program development, professional staff in the AVP Office are available for consultation and support. Staff assist the sponsors in preparation of documents, consultation, and moving the documents through approvals. Staff are responsible for bringing the proposal through the MPHEC approval process. | All               |
| Home Department (& Curriculum Committee) | <b>Consulted:</b> When a program will be housed within a specific department, the department must be consulted in Phase 1 and Phase 3. Feedback from the department should be documented and considered in the planning.<br><b>Approval:</b> in Phase 4.  | Phase 1, 3, and 4 |

|  |   |                  |
|--|---|------------------|
| <b>Closely affiliated departments</b>  | <b>Consulted.</b> This is particularly necessary when courses in other departments will be part of the proposed programs.   | Phase 1          |
| <b>Dean</b>  | The Dean is <b>consulted</b> early in idea development. The Dean is <b>responsible</b> for bringing the program to Academic Leadership and through the Senate approval processes. The Dean is <b>responsible</b> for monitoring the implementation of the program in Phase 6. | Phase 1, 2, 4, 6 |
| <b>Academic Leadership Team</b>  | <b>Approval</b>   | Phase 2          |
| <b>Recruitment</b>   | <b>Consulted</b>  | Phase 1          |
| <b>Library</b>   | <b>Consulted</b>  | Phase 3          |
| <b>Home Faculty</b> (Faculty of Arts, Business, Science or Education)  | <b>Informed</b>   | Phase 3          |
| <b>University Executive (VPs)</b>  | <b>Informed</b>   | Phase 3          |
| <b>Registrar's Office</b>  | <b>Consulted</b> (Including Admissions and Financial Aid)   | Phase 3          |
| <b>Service Learning</b>  | <b>Consulted</b> (when applicable)  | Phase 3          |
| <b>Online, Professional and Graduate Studies</b>   | <b>Consulted</b> (when applicable)  | Phase 3          |
| <b>Co-op &amp; Career Services</b>   | <b>Consulted</b> (when applicable)  | Phase 3          |
| <b>Relevant Student Services groups</b> (e.g., International, Diversity Engagement)                          | <b>Consulted/ informed</b> (as applicable)  | Phase 3          |
| <b>Committee on Studies</b>  | <b>Informed</b>   | Phase 3          |
|  | <b>Responsible, Accountable</b>   | Phase 4          |
| <b>Joint Committee on Studies</b>  | <b>Responsible, Accountable</b>   | Phase 4          |
| <b>Senate</b>  | <b>Responsible, Accountable</b>   | Phase 4          |
| <b>External reviewers</b>  | <b>Responsible:</b> The MPHEC requires external reviews for all new <u>graduate</u> programs.   | Phase 3          |
| <b>MPHEC</b>   | <b>Responsible</b>  | Phase 5          |
| <b>External interested parties or groups</b> (e.g, potential employers; relevant populations or communities) | <b>Consulted</b> or <b>informed</b> as appropriate  | as appropriate   |
| <b>External Approvers</b> (e.g., government) or <b>Accreditors</b>   | <b>Consulted</b> or <b>responsible</b> as appropriate   | as appropriate   |

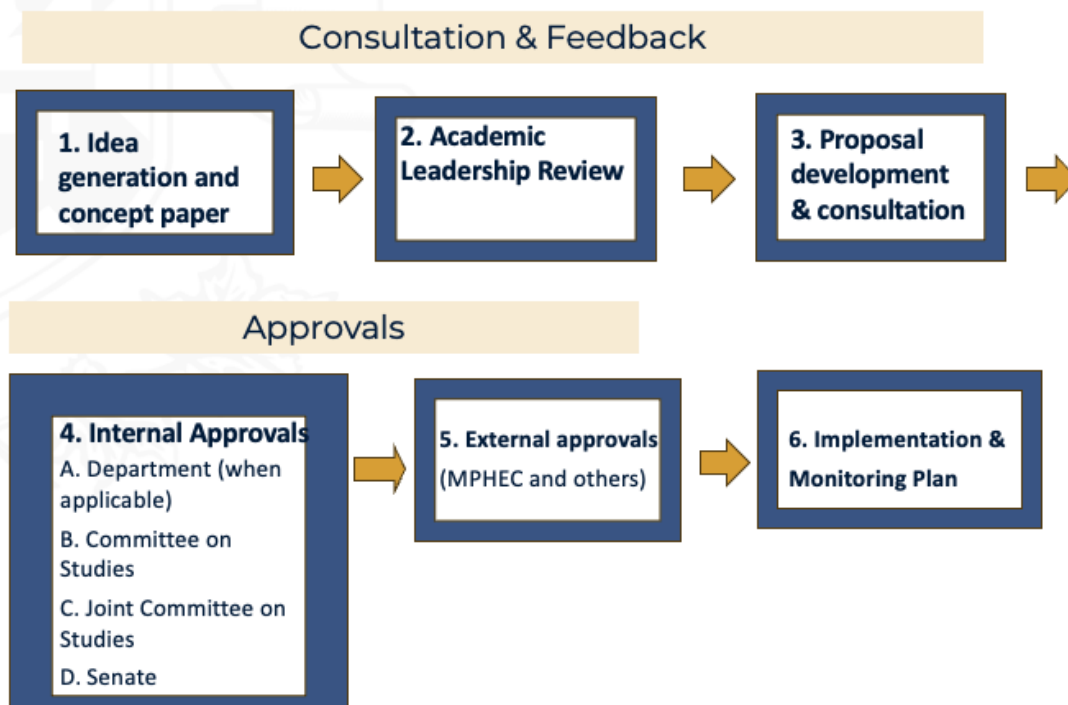
**Notes:**

\*Groups that have been consulted should also be kept informed as the process evolves.

\*\* In specific situations it may make sense to consult or inform groups at other phases than those indicated in the table.

## Part 2. Undergraduate Programs

### Undergraduate: new program development process



#### Phase 1: IDEA GENERATION

- **Identify idea for exploration:** Anyone can identify a program idea and bring together interested parties for initial discussions (department/ program/ groups of faculty members/ Deans, etc.). Faculty members with subject matter expertise must be involved. All proposed programs should be responsive to demonstrated needs.
- **Consult MPHEC frameworks:** Interested parties should consult the [Maritime Degree Level Qualifications Framework](#) or the [Maritime University Certificate and Diploma Framework](#) to identify the most appropriate type of credential and to understand its requirements.
- **Consult AVP Office staff:** AVP Office (Director, Academic Projects and Planning) is consulted early in the process and advises on steps in development. Every potential program is different and raises different questions. These early discussions help identify the specific questions that should be emphasized as part of the development of the specific program under consideration.
- **Consult Recruitment:** Recruitment offers some initial feedback on potential audiences.
- **Consult the home department** in situations where the program will sit within an existing department. The department can offer feedback on the proposal which sponsors should consider as they continue to develop the proposal.

- **There are no formal approvals in Phase 1**, though interest parties will seek feedback from related departments and others as appropriate. Groups that have been consulted may endorse the continued exploration, though there is no obligation that they do so and no requirement.
- **Conversations are informal** and centered on exploring the options in more detail to develop a Concept Paper
- **Develop a concept paper.** See Appendix.

## **Phase 2: ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP TEAM**

- The Dean brings the program to **Academic Leadership Team**.
- The Academic Leadership Team discusses the proposal at one of its regular meetings. (This committee currently includes the AVP&P; Deans/ Associate Dean; Registrar; University Librarian; Associate VP Research, Graduate, and Professional Studies; Assistant VP, Academic Affairs; Director of Recruitment; Director, Institutional Research & Planning; Director, Academic Projects & Planning.) While Academic Leadership does not have authority to create new programs, the Provost is responsible for the academic budget and, thus, has a role to play in assessing the financial viability of the proposal. Additionally, the Academic Leadership Team provides a representative view from across the academic areas and, as such, is well-positioned to evaluate the proposal from an operational perspective.
- The AVP&P, in consultation with Academic Leadership, assesses the fiscal and practical feasibility of the proposal. The group provides feedback on the following:
  - The ways in which the proposal does, does not, or could better align with the StFX Academic Plan.
  - Potential resource needs (instructional and non-instructional); this will include the start-up resources as well as ongoing resources.
  - The level of demand (i.e., minimum student enrolment/ intake per year) that will be needed to justify the needed investment of resources.
  - Which specific groups should be informed or consulted. This may include academic departments, student services groups, external groups or others.
- The Academic Leadership Team can approve, reject, set conditions for, or request modifications to the proposal.
- The Dean is responsible for communicating the decisions and recommendations of the Academic Leadership with the sponsors. Academic Leadership Team decisions and recommendations are to be documented in the proposal.

## **Phase 3: CONSULTATION & PROPOSAL DEVELOPMENT**

### **3.1 Consultation:**

- **All proposed programs must consult with**
  - Liaison Librarian
  - Recruitment

- Related academic departments (see page 4)
- Registrar's Office including Admissions and Financial Aid
- **Other consultation as appropriate for the specific program (determined through Phase 1 and 2).** This may include
  - StFX Online, Graduate, and Professional Studies
  - Student Life/ Student Services areas (International, Diversity Engagement Centre, etc.)
  - Graduate Studies (AVPRGS)
  - Co-op & Career Services
  - Service Learning
  - Students
  - External stakeholders (e.g. potential employers, government, accreditors)
- **The following groups must be informed:**
  - University Executive (VPs)
  - Faculty of Arts, Science, Business OR Education, as relevant
- **A list of groups consulted (including any relevant details or feedback) will be included in the proposal.**

### 3.2 Complete the MPHEC proposal template (provided by the MPHEC)

The template includes detailed questions about the program model, expected learning outcomes, demand, resource implications, comparators, rationale for name, consultation, etc. The sponsors work with staff in preparation of these documents.

## Phase 4: INTERNAL APPROVALS

4.1 **Department** (if the proposed program sits within an existing department)

4.2 **Committee on Studies** of the appropriate Faculty: COS is responsible for a detailed review of course and program proposals before making recommendations for Senate approval. COS reviews the proposal with a disciplinary and Faculty level focus. Typical questions include:

- Will the program as presented meet its learning objectives?
- Are the academic regulations relevant(e.g.: admissions requirements, progression requirements)?
- Is there overlap with programs or courses within the faculty
- Is the roll out plan appropriate to support student learning?
- Has appropriate consultation taken place

4.3 **Joint Committee on Studies:** Reviews the details of the program proposal with a view across Faculties. Typical questions include:

- Has appropriate consultation/collaboration taken place across faculties?
- Is there overlap with other programs from other faculties?

4.4 **Senate:** Authority to approve programs



## **Phase 5: EXTERNAL APPROVALS**

- 5.1 **Staff in the AVP Office coordinate the MPHEC proposal submission process** with support from the sponsors. Once the program has been submitted to the MPHEC it may be promoted to potential students but must be indicated as “pending MPHEC approval” until the MPHEC approval process has been completed.
- 5.2 **As needed, other external approval** processes are also carried out according to their individual requirements (e.g., government, accreditors).

## **Phase 6: IMPLEMENTATION & MONITORING**

- 6.1 **Once a program is approved by Senate**, the Dean will ensure the development of an implementation working group and monitoring plan. The overall goal of having such a committee is to ensure that various staff understand their responsibilities in ensuring the success of the program. Since programs vary significantly in complexity, the composition and responsibilities of the working group will vary depending on the program.  
The working group will typically include the Chair or Program Coordinator, the Associate Registrar, Admissions, potentially Marketing (website). In some cases, a single meeting may be sufficient. In other cases, the working group may need to meet regularly over a longer period.
- 6.2 **Once the program begins to accept new students**, the Dean will ensure monitoring is in place for a predetermined time during which the program will be assessed to ensure adequate demand and that students’ needs are being met. For four-year programs, the typical length of the monitoring phase is 5 years. For two-year programs, the typical length is three years. As a normal condition of its approval, the MPHEC expects a review of new programs after one cohort has graduated. At StFX, this is typically done as part of the normal Academic Review process.



## Appendix A: Concept Paper

---

- Template provided (approximately 1000 words)
- No expectation for a fully fleshed out proposal. Short, bullet point answers. Staff available to answer questions
- Sample questions:
  - Type of credential
  - Target audience/ admission requirements
  - Initial evidence of demand, and plan for examining demand in more detail. This may include an initial sample of comparable offerings in the region or more broadly.
  - Assessment of how the program will advance the goals of StFX academic plan
  - Alignment with StFX expertise
  - Broad learning goals, including a description of what careers or further education that graduates will be prepared for.
  - Potential overlap with existing programs
  - Opportunities for collaboration, especially internal
  - Initial assessment of existing and needed resources (instructional resources, plus plan to identify the other areas)
  - Groups consulted already and feedback
  - Groups to be consulted in next phase