

WEST VIRGINIA CODE: §18B-1A-6

§18B-1A-6. Graduate education.

(a) Intent. -- It is the intent of the Legislature to address the need for high quality graduate education programs to be available throughout the state.

(b) Findings. -- The Legislature makes the following findings:

(1) Since West Virginia ranks below its competitor states in graduate degree production, particularly in the areas that are important to the state's competitive position in the new economy of the twenty-first century, there is a considerable need for greater access to graduate education, especially at the master's degree level;

(2) There is a significant disparity in access to part-time graduate degree programs among the different regions of the state and part-time graduate enrollments are heavily concentrated in the counties immediately surrounding Marshall University and West Virginia University;

(3) There is a particular need for increased access to graduate programs linked directly to the revitalization of the regional economies of the state; and

(4) There is a particular need for improved quality and accessibility of preservice and in-service programs for teachers in subject matter fields.

(c) In order to meet the need for graduate education, the Commission is responsible for accomplishing the following:

(1) Ensuring that West Virginia University and Marshall University assist in the expansion of access to master's degree programs throughout West Virginia. These institutions shall place a strong emphasis on collaboration with the baccalaureate colleges and community and technical colleges in each region when funds are available;

(2) Ensuring that any institution providing a master's degree program under the provisions of this section provides a meaningful, coherent program by offering courses in such a way that students, including place-bound adults, have ample opportunity to complete a degree in a reasonable period of time;

(3) Focusing on providing courses that enhance the professional skills of teachers in their subject areas;

(4) Ensuring that programs are offered in the most cost-effective manner to expand access throughout the region and the state; and

(5) Determining the graduate program needs of each region.

(d) Bluefield State College, Concord University, Fairmont State University, Glenville State College, Shepherd University, West Liberty State College and West Virginia State University shall meet the need for graduate education in their regions pursuant to this subsection and subsection (c) of this section.

(1) If an institution's proposal to offer a Master's degree receives the approval of the Commission, that Master's degree may be offered solely by the institution.

(2) If an institution does not receive the approval of the Commission for a proposal to offer a Master's degree, that institution may broker or collaborate with another higher education institution to develop a revised proposal for offering that brokered or collaborative Master's degree.

(e) There is an urgent need for master's degree programs for teachers in disciplines or subject areas, such as mathematics, science, history, literature, foreign languages and the arts. Currently, master's-level courses in education that are offered in the regions served by the state universities are primarily in areas such as guidance and counseling, administration, special education and other disciplines unrelated to teaching in subject areas. If this need is not being met in a region through the procedure established in subsection (d) of this section, then the graduate center in that region may plan a master's degree program in education focused on teaching in subject area fields in which the demand is not being met. No institution may begin a graduate program under the provisions of this section until the program has been reviewed and approved by the Commission. The Commission shall approve only those programs, as authorized by this subsection, that emphasize serving the needs of teachers and schools in the colleges' immediate regions. In determining whether a program should be approved, the Commission also shall rely upon the recommendations of the statewide task force on teacher quality provided in section eight, article fourteen of this chapter.

(f) The Commission shall review all graduate programs being offered under the provisions of this section and, using the criteria established for program startup in subsection (d) of this section, determine which programs should be discontinued.

(g) At least annually, the governing boards shall evaluate graduate programs developed pursuant to the provisions of this section and report to the Commission on the following:

- (1) The number of programs being offered and the courses offered within each program;
- (2) The disciplines in which programs are being offered;
- (3) The locations and times at which courses are offered;
- (4) The number of students enrolled in the program; and
- (5) The number of students who have obtained master's degrees through each program.

The governing boards shall provide the Commission with any additional information the Commission requests in order to make a determination on the viability of a program.

(h) In developing any graduate program under the provisions of this section, institutions shall consider delivering courses at times and places convenient to adult students who are employed full time. Institutions shall place an emphasis on extended degree programs, distance learning and off-campus centers which utilize the cost-effective nature of extending existing university capacity to serve the state rather than duplicating the core university capacity and incurring the increased cost of developing master's degree programs at other institutions throughout the state.

(i) Brokering institutions shall invite proposals from other public institutions of higher education for service provision prior to contracting with other institutions: Provided, That if institutions propose providing graduate programs in service areas other than in their responsibility district, the institution seeking to establish a program shall work through the district's lead institution in providing those services.

(j) In addition to the approval required by the Commission, authorization for any institution to offer a master's degree program under the provisions of this section is subject to the formal approval processes established by the governing boards.