

Malaspina University-College

Criteria for Ranking Proposals to Add or Expand Programs

In order to rank proposals for new or expanded programs at Malaspina University-College, Education Council has approved the following five unweighted criteria:

- Relevance
- Quality
- Relative Operating Costs
- Access
- Institutional Priorities

For the ranking process, proponents must submit a proposal which explains how the addition or expansion of their program meets the five criteria. The proposal should contain a short statement about the program and its purpose, followed by specific sections for each of the five criteria. Any amount of supporting material can be attached to the proposal, and the proposal should include specific references to this material. Judgements about the merits of the proposals will turn on the clarity and quality of the evidence to support the proposals.

Each criterion is a complex concept that has to be approached through multiple indicators. This is why a number of more specific questions are attached to each criterion. When evaluating a program in terms of a particular criterion, judges will use all the relevant information that is supplied. Therefore program proponents should address as many of the specific questions as they can, but they should also include additional evidence they think is relevant.

• **Relevance**

Relevance is the student demand and community need for a program. In presenting evidence about program relevance, proponents should explicitly address each of the following questions:

- What is the level of student demand for this program?
- What is the likelihood that the program will deliver anticipated student FTEs through consistent enrolment and retention?
- What are the on-going employment and education opportunities for graduates of this program?
- Does the program have the capacity to meet identified community or regional needs?
- How will this program contribute to the general social and cultural development of the community?

Evidence on these indicators may not be in harmony. For example, there could be considerable student demand for a program while labour market studies suggest limited job prospects for graduates. The ideal is a program with large demand, many on-going employment opportunities, the support of other programs, identified community or regional need, and desirable cultural and social spin-offs.

• **Quality**

Quality is the capacity of a program to “add value” to students’ lives in exchange for their time and effort. Overall quality is a function of quality in curriculum, faculty, support services, equipment, and fellow students, as well as the perception of the program among employers and professional peers. An adequate level of quality can be presumed to exist by virtue of Curriculum Committee approval. For program ranking purposes, the issue is the level of quality beyond what is required to gain curriculum

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approval. Proponents should address questions like the following in making their case for the overall level of quality of their program:

- How is the curriculum designed to meet or exceed the standards of similar programs, including matters like current technology and experiential learning?
- What is the professional standing of the faculty among their peers? (Or, for completely new programs: What is the ability of the program to attract the quality of faculty it wants?)
- What quality of student is the program likely to attract? (This question recognizes that much of what students learn, they learn from other students.)
- How will the program provide the support that students need to succeed?
- Are there facilities, learning resources and technology of sufficient quality for the program?
- (For existing programs): How successful is the current program in terms of outcome measures like student satisfaction, employment and further education?

Judgements about quality are contextual in that they are dependent on the kind of program being evaluated. For example, an advanced trades certificate in a trades program and a Ph.D. in a university degree program are likely to represent equivalent levels of qualification.

• **Operating Costs**

The basic consideration is whether the estimated program costs and revenues are reasonable and achievable. Projected costs and revenues should be accurate and appropriate to the anticipated outcomes. Proposals should be evaluated on their projection of both direct and indirect operating costs, and where appropriate capital costs.

The main questions to be addressed are:

- What are the costs and what evidence is given to support these projections?
- Are the costs justified by the anticipated outcomes of the program?

There are also two dimensions of relative program operating costs. One is the cost of the program compared to the costs of similar programs here or elsewhere, with the preference being for programs that are less expensive in per student terms than similar programs elsewhere. The second cost factor is the balance between the direct operating costs of the program and the revenue (tuition, base funding and other) that the institution expects to receive to support the program. Programs that operate relatively economically are preferred because they leave more money for general services and other programs.

Both elements of relative cost are important. In terms of relative operating costs, the ideal is a program that is well funded compared to expenses and that operates more economically than similar programs elsewhere. A program that is expensive compared to similar programs and cannot meet its direct costs through the revenue that will come to the institution for the program might still be offered but the program would not earn a favorable ranking on this cost criterion. Likewise, Malaspina does not offer programs only because they are relatively well funded by the Ministry.

Therefore, two main questions will need to be addressed in arriving at an overall judgement in terms of relative costs.

- How do the direct operating costs (mainly salaries and supplies) of this program compare with equivalent programs here or elsewhere on a per student FTE and per graduate basis?
- What portion of the ministry grant plus tuition (and any other regular revenue) will be required to meet the departmental salary and supply costs for the program?

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Less central, but still relevant evidence on costs, may also come from answers to:

- What impact, if any, will the program have on the cost-efficiency of other programs?
- Will the on-going demand for general support services be higher or lower than the typical pattern for Malaspina programs?

• **Access**

A program provides “access” to the extent that it serves those who otherwise have the fewest opportunities for post-secondary education. Thus, a program focusing on bright, middle-class students just out of high school is not emphasizing access because these students are more mobile than many other people and have more educational opportunities as a result. By contrast, a program which emphasizes access is one that is designed to accommodate those who are less mobile and who may find it financially or socially impossible to study full time. Indicators of access, in this sense, are:

- How much of the program will be rotated among campuses or scheduled in ways that make it easy for people to attend?
- Is the program offered in a way that allows part-time study?
- Are there alternate methods of fulfilling certain program requirements (e.g., PLA or transfer credit)?
- Are agreements in place to allow students to ladder out of or into related programs?
- How will the program recruit and support students from groups who, historically, have had lower participation rates in post-secondary education?

• **Strategic Priorities**

This criterion provides the opportunity to judge a program in terms of institutional goals and objectives. From time to time these “strategic priorities” may be given more specific definition by Education Council and the Board. Questions relevant for judgements about this criterion may be taken from institutional and Ministry planning documents. Some questions that might be considered are:

- How will the addition or expansion of this program affect the balance of programming in the institution?
- How will the program contribute to identified departmental, Faculty, institutional and Ministry goals and priorities?
- Are there one-time-only opportunities that could be lost if the program is not implemented e.g. special funding, partnerships, facilities?
- How will this program contribute to the success or viability of other Malaspina programs?
- How else will the program advance the goals and objectives of the institution in ways not assessed by the previous four criteria?