Things to Think About When Proposing a Program Name Change

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In 2002 the UAPC adopted some guidelines for renaming academic programs. These guidelines also apply, in spirit, to the renaming academic departments, centers, and other academic structures and programs. The UAPC guidelines are included at the end of this document.

The purpose of this document is to provide additional advice to program faculty and staff as they consider changing the name of an academic program or structure.

Name and identity are closely related. Programs with a long history and many alumni and past-employees may find that these groups express strong attachment to the existing name. Thus, the rationale for the name change should be made with full consideration for the impact on the historic connections and with a view to the long-term future. New names should be designed to reflect the nature of the program for many years to come, ideally for decades. Program names that narrow the program scope or reflect short term sub-areas or trends in research tools or methodology should be avoided. A program "brand" as represented by the name has value and so careful planning for a name change is a worthwhile investment.

Proposals should be explicit about all the academic programs and structures that are included in a name change request. For example, list all departments, majors, degrees, certificates, centers, Subject listing, PhD minors or other academic elements that are included in the request.

Some common justifications for a change in major name are that the new name more accurately reflects the curriculum than the old name, that the activities of the program faculty and the training they offer are more accurately reflected by the new name, and that the name of the discipline has changed and consequently the major should be renamed to reflect this change in the discipline.

The proposal should build a case of evidence that the name change is needed. Recommendations from a program review or evidence accumulated in program evaluation and assessment are very useful in this regard. If program faculty seek a name change and the program has not been reviewed in more than a decade then the name change should await the next program review cycle. If there was a recent program review and the name change issue did not come up, the program faculty should explain why an issue of such significance was not part of the self-study or discussed in the review process.

Proposals to change program names go through the governance process to assure wide communication, consultation, and buy-in. It is an expectation that proposals be accompanied by a letter or note from any unit that would have an interest in the name change. These documents signify that the interested school/college or department has no objection. If there is overlap in names this is especially important. It is natural that consultation occurs between colleagues in departments sponsoring programs; however, chairs of the departments that sponsor the programs, as well as their dean's offices must also be consulted.

Students should be consulted in the planning process and the proposal should be accompanied by a statement that the students enrolled in the program are ready to adopt the new name. Students who entered a program under one name may or may not readily accept a new name. If a new program name is a good idea, it should be based in strong academic reasons accompanied by the conviction of the faculty that it is in the best interests of the students to adopt the new name. Ready acceptance by students sends a clear signal to decision makers that the new name is a good idea.

Advance consultation with students is necessary when it comes time to implement the name change so information about that consultation should accompany the proposal. There are two approaches to implementation: turnkey and phase-in.

- For a *turn-key* implementation, all students make the transition from the old name to the new name. The old name is unavailable to students who may have stopped out during the transition and returned after the name change. The turnkey approach means that all codes remain the same and all trend data is not disrupted. From a resource and management point of view, this is the strongly preferred strategy. For a turn-key implementation, all enrolled students must agree to complete their course of study under the new name. The program faculty and staff need to collect evidence of acceptance from every student and keep it on hand in the program office. That level of detail need not accompany the proposal but it must be available if future issues of misrepresentation arise.

- For a *phase-in* implementation, some students will keep the old name and others will take the new name. In effect, the program will be running two majors in the transition period. Phase-in implementations create discontinuities in student information and trend data that the program will have to manage. Whereas a turn-key implementation requires a little up-front work with students, a phase-in implementation requires years of extra work among department staff and across the university to thread the two majors back together.

The proposal should indicate which form of implementation is requested and in which semester the name change is requested to first be effective.

Guidelines for Renaming Degrees or Academic Majors

(Adopted by the UAPC, May 2002)

1. Proposals to rename academic majors begin with the major or program faculty.

2. The program faculty will prepare a brief proposal requesting the name change and giving supporting reasons. A brief memo (one or two paragraphs to one or two pages) is usually sufficient.

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   If the proposed name is similar or related to an existing major, program, or department it is especially important that the proposal clearly and explicitly address any issues of overlap. If there are likely to be any concerns about overlap issues, the affected program(s), department(s), school(s) and college(s) should provide letters of endorsement. All affected parties should be made aware of the planned name change in advance and endorsements should accompany the proposal.

   The proposal should specify the intended effective date of the change. Typically when a major name is changed all currently and subsequently enrolled students will use the new name from the effective date forward. For major programs that want to keep both the existing and newly proposed names fully active, that request should be justified in the proposal. If a request for a major name change is based on a major curricular reorganization, the proposal may be viewed as a request for either restructuring of a major or for a new major. (Both of these actions require UW System and Board of Regent approval, whereas name changes are final after UAPC approval.)

3. The program faculty will forward the proposal to the school/college level. Following approval at the school/college academic level, the Dean will send the proposal to the Provost. For undergraduate programs, the University Academic Planning Council (UAPC) will consider the proposal. For graduate programs, the Graduate Faculty Executive Committee (GFEC) will consider the proposal. GFEC actions will be ratified by the UAPC. The Provost's Office will communicate the name change to the Registrar's Office for action and to UW System Administration for information.