# THE CURRICULUM APPROVAL PROCESS

## A RESOURCE GUIDE FOR TRUSTEES AND ADMINISTRATORS

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# Executive Summary

The desire to improve curriculum approval processes has been a part of many California Initiatives. The Student Success Task Force, the Online Education Initiative, Open Educational Resources, Associate Degrees for Transfer, Baccalaureate Degree Pilot Programs, Basic Skills Initiatives, Inmate Education Pilot Programs, College and Career Access Pathways, and the Strong Workforce initiative have all had curricular processes and responses as part of their plans for student success. The need for greater local control of the curriculum approval processes developed following a period that permitted local approval of stand-alone courses, which expired on January 1, 2014. Following the sunsetting of that legislation, the California Community Colleges Curriculum Committee (5C) requested a review of courses that had been submitted to the Chancellor's Office prior to the expiration of local control. Those submissions were effectively found to be error free, prompting 5C toward a broader review of the expanded role of local approval process. Local approval of stand-alone courses was approved by the Board of Governors in July 2016. Since then, the Chancellor's Office through review by 5C and approval from the Board of Governors has instituted several improvements to the curriculum approval process. The streamlined course approval process is based on enhanced local responsibility. Curriculum approval creates a larger role and increased responsibilities for college Chief Instructional Officers, Curriculum Chairs, and local curriculum committees. Ultimately, the process will be more efficient, responsive, and recognize local decision-making.

## Introduction

Title 5 recognizes that approval of curriculum falls under the direction of the local boards of trustees. However, AB 1725 (Vasconcellos, 1988) established oversight of local curriculum within the local academic senate and, by extension, with faculty. While academic curricula are the responsibility of the faculty and academic administrators, community college trustees and administrators also recognize that the curricula is at the heart of the college's mission and their role is key in supporting an effective and efficient process. College curriculum approval processes have been established to ensure that rigorous, high quality curriculum is offered to meet the needs of students. California community college faculty are entrusted not only with the responsibility of developing high-quality curriculum, but also with the professional responsibility for establishing local curriculum approval processes and ensuring that local curriculum approval processes allow curriculum to be approved in a timely manner. Students are best served when curriculum approval processes are faculty-driven, efficient, and effective. Curriculum development, review, and approval involves multiple personnel within a college, each with distinct roles and responsibilities.

The following sections outline these relationships, explain the role of trustees and administrators in the curriculum process, and provide an overview typical of local curriculum processes.

## The Role of Faculty and 10+1

With the passage of Assembly Bill (SB) 1725 in 1988, the relationships between local governing boards and local academic senates was redefined in several key areas, and the ensuing California Code of Regulations, title 5, codified policies and guidelines concerning the role of the academic senate, and thereby faculty, in governance processes[1]. Specifically, California Education Code section 70901(b)(1)(E) calls upon local governing boards to ensure faculty, staff, and students the right to participate effectively in district and college governance, and the right of academic senates to assume primary responsibility for making recommendations in the areas of curriculum and academic standards[2]. These rights are further refined in the California Code of Regulations, title 5, section 53200(c) with the enumeration of the "10 +1" areas in which faculty and a community college governing board must agree on the role of faculty in policy development and implementation matters. In areas of policy and procedure,

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[1] AB 1725
[2] California Education Code sections 70901(b)(1)(E) and 78016

governing boards may either "rely primarily" on recommendations from the academic senate or may seek to "mutually agree" with the senate depending on their local agreement[3].

As California Education Code section 70901(b)(1)(E) specifically calls for curriculum and academic standards to be the primary responsibility of faculty, the typical "10 + 1" agreement calls for boards to rely primarily on the recommendations of the academic senate, or its empowered curriculum committee, in areas where curriculum and student learning are the primary concerns. Though each senate and board will reach an agreement that works best for their culture, these areas or primacy for faculty typically include curriculum, including establishing prerequisites and placing courses within disciplines; degree and certificate requirements; grading policies; educational program development; and standards or policies regarding student preparation and success.

These policies may translate into various procedural steps at a local college. Most frequently, colleges adopt procedures whereby new or modified curriculum proposals are provided for the governing board in a summary document that is then approved routinely on a consent agenda or similar action item. This practice provides boards and the public the opportunity to be aware of changes or new trends in curriculum while respecting the primacy of faculty as established by education code to make curriculum choices. Boards can trust in the subject matter expertise of faculty and the professionalism of the administrators, specifically the college's chief instructional officers and deans, and the classified professionals who support faculty to design effective curriculum that serves students and local communities.

Faculty in career education programs play a special role in ensuring their program remains viable, relevant, not duplicative regionally, and meets a current labor market need. Per California Education Code section 78016, every career education program must be reviewed every two years to ensure that the program is training students for strong and emerging industries and viable and available employment opportunities. This process should rely heavily on data and analysis, with faculty input and consultation at its center. Data used to review viability must address the need for a program to show that it is not a duplication of other programs in the area and that it meets a documented, labor-market demand. In addition, this two-year review should require data that demonstrates the effectiveness of the career education program based on student completion of the program and subsequent employment. This process should be documented in a clear procedure for reviewing the viability of programs and what steps to take if a program is considered no longer viable. Local procedures will differ. Some colleges develop processes for supporting struggling programs,

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[3] California Code of Regulations, title 5 section 53200(c)

including non-career education programs, with revitalization efforts prior to discontinuance. Ultimately, any career education program deemed no longer viable as a result of the governing board's two-year review may be discontinued in one year in accordance with agreed upon procedures to meet education code mandates, California Code of Regulations, title 5, and accreditation standards[4].

## The Role of the Chief Instructional Officer

The Chief Instructional Officer (CIO) plays a key role in the local curriculum development and approval process. Although faculty have a major responsibility to ensure that courses and programs maintain the qualitative integrity of each discipline, it is the CIO who is accountable for compliance with appropriate laws and regulations. Curriculum committees, or councils, are generally chaired by faculty members, and membership is primarily faculty members. While the role of the CIO will vary according to the committee structure at individual institutions, the CIO is responsible to ensure that committee members and faculty developers understand the requirements for curriculum under California Education Code and California Code of Regulations, title 5.[5] Likewise, the CIO is responsible for ensuring the integrity and compliance of the local curriculum approval process and typically manages the submission of curriculum to the local Board and the Chancellor's Office. The CIO typically presents curriculum to the Trustees for approval at board meetings.

Each year, the CIO is responsible for submitting a certification to the Chancellor's Office guaranteeing that the local curriculum approval process met all standards set forth in regulations, that all staff and faculty involved in the process were appropriately trained, and that all elements of the curriculum proposals comply with regulatory requirements. This certification allows local districts to approve and implement curriculum without additional approvals from the Chancellor's Office for most types of curriculum.

## The Role of Trustees in Curriculum Approval

Board policies state "the programs and curricula of the District shall be of high quality, relevant to community and student needs, and evaluated regularly to ensure quality and currency." The Board of Trustees retains authority to approve new programs and courses, and discontinue programs, and delegates the authority for all other actions to the Chief Executive Officer

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[4] Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) Accreditation Standards II.A.15 and II.A.16
[5] California Education Code sections 70901(b), 70902(b), and 78016

(CEO). Procedures for the development and review of all curricular offerings, including their establishment, modification, or discontinuance shall be established.

Prior to submission to the governing board, curriculum approval includes:
- Appropriate involvement of the faculty and Academic Senate in all processes;
- Regular review and justification of programs and course descriptions;
- Opportunities for training for persons involved in aspects of curriculum development; and
- Consideration of job market and other related information for career education programs.

*Key Legal Requirements to Know*
California Code of Regulations, title 5, section 55002 states that the curriculum committee "shall be either a committee of the academic senate or a committee that includes faculty and is otherwise comprised in a way that is mutually agreeable to the college and/or district administration and the academic senate."[6]   The regulation provides that the curriculum committee shall recommend curriculum to the governing board for approval, either directly or through the academic senate depending on local processes.

The local Board of Trustees approves all new programs and program discontinuances. It is suggested that Boards not require program or course modifications be submitted to them for approval. All new programs are submitted to the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office for approval as required. By contrast, individual degree-applicable credit courses offered as part of a permitted educational program only require approval by the local Board. Non-degree-applicable credit and degree-applicable courses that are not part of an existing approved program must satisfy the conditions authorized by California Code of Regulations, title 5, and shall also be approved by the Board[7].
- U.S. Department of Education regulations on the Integrity of Federal Student Financial Aid Programs under Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended;
- 34 Code of Federal Regulations Sections 600.2, 602.24, 603.24, and 668.8

## The Role of the Chancellor's Office

The California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office chapters each curricular item to assure that all courses and programs have a unique control number assigned in the Chancellor's

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[6] California Code of Regulations, title 5, sections 51000, 51022, 55100, 55130 and 55150
[7] • Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) Accreditation Standards II.A and II.A.9

Office Curriculum Inventory (COCI). The unique control number for each course and program is used to assign the appropriate values for the student record through the Management Information Systems (MIS) Data Elements. The Chancellor's Office offers in-depth training and technical assistance through webinars and in-person trainings to assist colleges with maintenance of their curriculum inventory.

As a state agency, the Chancellor's Office develops curriculum- related policy and conducts periodic reviews of all locally approved curriculum to ensure compliance. This includes updating California Code of Regulations, title 5 language when necessary to support the infrastructure of curriculum processes. In addition, the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office Audit Manual guides the new role of the Chancellor's Office in conducting periodic reviews.

The Chancellor's Office requires one annual certification form per college signed by CEO, CIO, Academic Senate President, and Curriculum Chair to be submitted annually to the Chancellor's Office. The certification form will be sent to the colleges in September each year with an October due date.

By signing this certification form, the CEO, CIO, Academic Senate President, and Curriculum Chair acknowledges and certifies that:
- Courses and programs that are submitted to the COCI system are accurate in accordance with the current Chancellor's Office Program and Course Approval Handbook (PCAH);
- credit course hours and units are correct in accordance with the Chancellor's Office Course Calculations;
- the college/district course outline of record has been approved by the District Governing Board;
- opportunities for training are provided for college personnel regarding curriculum rules and regulations to ensure compliance (Cal. Code Regs., title 5, § 55002(a) & (b)); and
- the college has developed local policy, regulations, or procedures specifying the accepted relationship between contact hours, outside-of-class hours, and credit for calculating credit hours to ensure consistency in awarding units of credit.

## Explanation of the Approval Process

The curriculum approval process varies among colleges, reflecting local practices for participatory governance and variations in the implementation of state regulations. The descriptions below generalize the curriculum approval process and are not intended to

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prescribe any particular process for any local district. California Code of Regulations, title 5 recognizes that approval of curriculum falls under the direction of the local governing boards. However, authority over curriculum belongs to the academic senates and, by extension, to the faculty. Boards encourage development of curriculum by using timely processes to approve new courses and programs and by recognizing the primacy of faculty in the development of curriculum in all areas of the college.

Three steps of the process are specified in regulation and are consistent at all institutions:
- Review and approval of new or revised curriculum by a curriculum committee (Cal. Code Regs., title 5, § 55002(a)(1))
- Endorsement of curriculum by the local governing board (California Education Code section 70902(b)(2))
- Submission of locally approved curriculum to the Chancellor's Office for approval or chaptering.

The first step in the curriculum process is the development phase. Faculty members, students, advisory boards, community partners, employers, and others interested in the educational offerings of the college develop an idea for a new course or program and request that the college consider the creating or modifying the curriculum. Ideas for curriculum originating within the faculty typically work their way through program and department discussions, eventually ending up as a written proposal from a faculty member to the curriculum committee. Ideas for new or revised curriculum originating from external audiences are also channeled to the appropriate department or program faculty for discussion and consideration. Members of governing boards and college administrators frequently receive requests or solicitations for new curriculum from members of the community. These requests and ideas must be funneled to the faculty and responsible administrators within the college for consideration and action. Faculty will work with their administrative colleagues, particularly deans and their chief instructional officer, to review the feasibility and necessity of new or modified curriculum. Not every idea for curriculum can be implemented, and it is imperative that this determination be made through the established local process.

This phase of the curriculum process culminates in a written course outline of record (COR) or a program template authored by the appropriate faculty member, following a highly specific set of standards outlined in California Code of Regulations, title 5. After development, curriculum proposals go through an internal review and approval process includes the following reviews, some of which are handled as discrete steps, prior to submission to the college curriculum committee:

- Program, department, and/or division faculty review
- Review and approval by the appropriate dean
- Technical review—a committee or work group that typically reviews curriculum proposals for feasibility, completeness, writing standards, distance education elements, and compliance with regulations, among other points.
- Articulation review: review of transfer courses by the Articulation Officer against standards and expectations at transfer institutions

The next step for most colleges is review and approval by the curriculum committee or other governance body delegated authority for curriculum approval as specified in California Code of Regulations, title 5, section 55002(a)(1)[8]. While the membership, roles, and title varies widely across the Community College system, this committee plays the central role in the curriculum development and approval process.

The next step is submission to the local governing board. As with all other steps, this process varies greatly among colleges, but is always the end result of a long process of development and review. Governing boards are expected to accept the recommendations of the curriculum committee or academic senate, in except in extraordinary circumstances, relying on the integrity of the process and rigor of the curriculum. Governing boards must trust the expertise of faculty in designing courses and programs to meet the needs of students and trust that the CIO has ensured compliance with all regulations and standards.

While the curriculum committee is authorized by regulations to recommend approval of curriculum to the governing board, some colleges have additional steps between the curriculum committee and the governing board, including review by other committees, the local Academic Senate, upper administration, student government, counseling, financial aid, admissions and records, and others. At most schools, these are not approval steps, but serve to communicate pending curriculum changes to key college constituents and services. Additionally, some multi-college districts have a separate, district curriculum committee that reviews and approves curriculum prior to submission to the district governing board.

Whatever the local process, the final step in the curriculum process is submission of curriculum to the Chancellor's Office for chaptering or approval, depending on the type of proposal.

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[8] California Code of Regulations, title 5, sections 51000, 51022, 55100, 55130 and 55150

## Sample Workflow Graphs

The following images provide a visual explanation of typical curriculum processes. As noted above, the processes at local colleges vary greatly with nearly as many variations as there are colleges in the system.

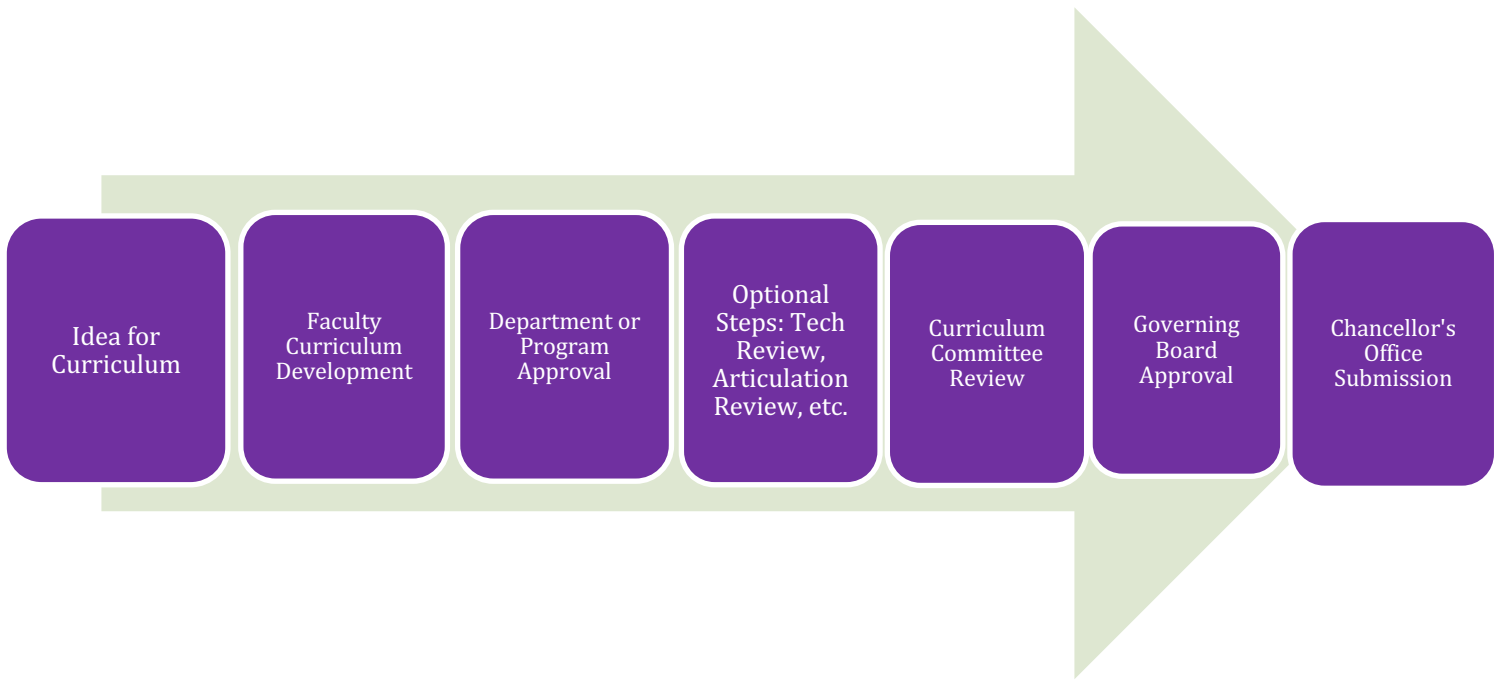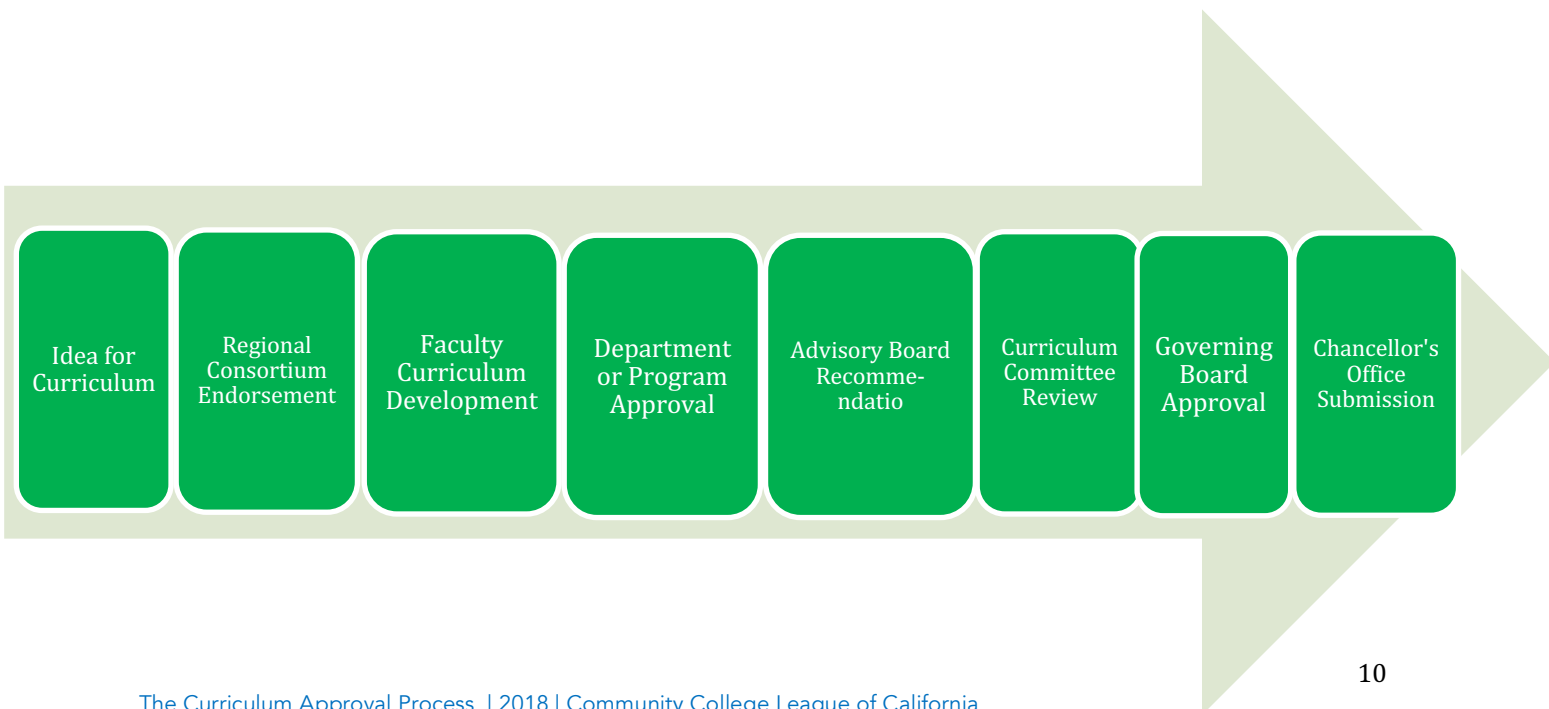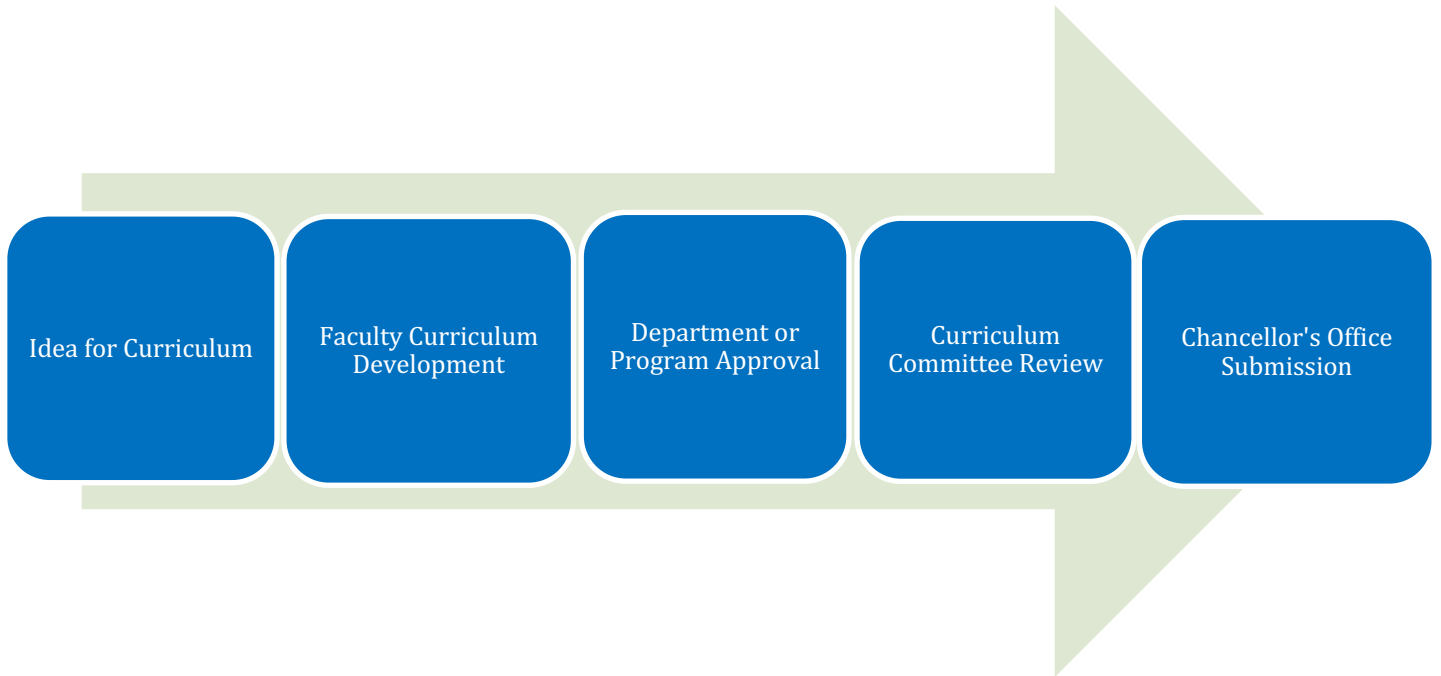### Image 1: Typical New Course and Program Approval Process

Idea for Curriculum → Faculty Curriculum Development → Department or Program Approval → Optional Steps: Tech Review, Articulation Review, etc. → Curriculum Committee Review → Governing Board Approval → Chancellor's Office Submission

### Image 2: Typical Career Education New Program Approval Process

Idea for Curriculum → Regional Consortium Endorsement → Faculty Curriculum Development → Department or Program Approval → Advisory Board Recommendatio → Curriculum Committee Review → Governing Board Approval → Chancellor's Office Submission

Image 3: Typical Non-substantive Revisions to Courses

| Idea for Curriculum | Faculty Curriculum Development | Department or Program Approval | Curriculum Committee Review | Chancellor's Office Submission |

## Suggested Questions When Considering Curriculum

- Was the local approval process followed?
- How does this new program meet regional needs?