Elimination of Graduate Programs
Procedures and Best Practices
(Submitted May 3, 2013)

As a leading national and international research institution, Rice University is committed to graduate education. There can be multiple reasons why the university may decide to eliminate a specific graduate program. This document establishes the normal procedures and best practices to be followed in the elimination of graduate programs, irrespective of the substantive reasons for eliminating any given program.

1) The review to establish whether a graduate program should be eliminated is different from routine performance reviews of departments and programs. It should be completed within six months, normally between September and February, so as not to come into conflict with the graduate school admissions process.

2) In order to begin the specific review process to determine whether a graduate program should be eliminated, the Provost, the Dean of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies, and the Dean or Deans of the school or schools in which the program under review is located must first consult with each other. While a review ordinarily would proceed if there is no substantial disagreement among Provost, Dean of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies and the school’s Dean about the need for such a review, the Provost can initiate such a review on his or her own volition after such consultation has occurred.

3) The Provost, the Dean of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies and the school’s Dean should work collaboratively to consider whether the program should be eliminated, and, if so, provide a clear rationale for the elimination of the graduate program under review, including a timeline, and develop a practical plan for the elimination of the program. Specifically, the plan should address in detail the following issues:
   - the effect of eliminating the program on current graduate students, including how the university intends to meet any legal and ethical obligations to current and accepted graduate students in the program under review. This section will also include a detailed "teach-out plan" that describes how current students will continue to be taught until their completion of degree, and which will be submitted to SACS for prior approval;
   - the effect on the future of the department or departments in which the graduate program is located;
   - the impact on other graduate programs that are linked to the program under review;
   - the effect on faculty in the program and department or departments under review, including tenure decisions and the distribution of tenure-track lines;
   - the effect on research grants housed in the program under review;
   - the effect on the university’s standing and reputation.
If the Provost, the Dean of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies and the school’s Dean disagree on the conclusions of the review and the plan, the areas of disagreement shall be noted in their report.
4) The Provost, the Dean of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies and the school’s Dean must submit their reasons for eliminating the program, together with the plan for the actual elimination of the program, to the following parties in a timely manner:
   - Graduate Council;
   - the Executive Committee of the Faculty Senate;
   - the Chair of the department in which the graduate program is located, or the Director of the graduate program if it is not housed in a department;
   - Faculty members in the department in which the graduate program is located, or faculty members listed as participating in the graduate program if it is not housed in a department;
   - current students in the graduate program under review.

5) Once a review of a specific graduate program to determine whether the program should be eliminated has commenced, the graduate program cannot accept any further student applications for admission until a final decision has been made with regard to the future of the program.
   - Should there be already graduate students that have been accepted for the following academic year, they shall be informed immediately about the possible elimination of the program.
   - Graduate students that have already accepted an offer from Rice shall be released from their commitment to the university.
   - Although no new applications will be considered, the university will honor all financial and other commitments it has made in writing to current and accepted graduate students, keeping the program intact until all students in good standing have completed the program.

6) Should the review by the Provost, the Dean of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies and the school’s Dean conclude that the program in question should be eliminated, they must provide the Chair and the faculty of the department in which the graduate program is located, or the Director of the graduate program and associated faculty if the program is not located in a department, with a reasonable timeframe to respond to their rationale and plan for eliminating the program. The Chair may support or reject the rationale and plan, or offer an alternative solution. The Chair’s response must be submitted in writing in a timely manner to the following parties:
   - Faculty members of the department in which the graduate program is located, or faculty members listed as involved with the graduate program if it is not housed in a department;
   - Provost;
   - Dean or deans of the school or schools in which the graduate program is located;
   - the Dean of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies;
   - Graduate Council;
   - the Executive Committee of the Faculty Senate.
   Individual faculty members also have the right to write separate, written statements, which must be submitted to each of the offices listed above.
7) Once the Provost, the Dean of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies and the school’s Dean have submitted their rationale and plan to the Graduate Council, and once the Chair or Director has submitted his/her response, the Graduate Council shall form a working group to independently review the proposal to eliminate the program and the Chair’s response. No faculty of the graduate program under review can be a member of the working group.

8) The Graduate Council will submit a detailed report of its findings to the Executive Committee of the Faculty Senate.

- If the Executive Committee believes that the Graduate Council’s report is in agreement with the rationale provided by the Provost, the Dean of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies and the school’s Dean, the Executive Committee will take no action except to announce the decision to the full Faculty Senate. However, if the Program or a majority of faculty members teaching in the Program requests a Senate review, then the Speaker of the Senate shall ask the full Senate to discuss the question of whether to eliminate the graduate program. The Faculty Senate's resolution will be submitted to the President as a recommendation.

- In cases of substantial disagreement between the Graduate Council’s conclusion and the rationale provided by the Provost, the Dean of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies and the school’s Dean, the Graduate Council must provide the reasons for this disagreement to the Executive Committee, and the Speaker of the Senate shall ask the full Senate to discuss the question whether to eliminate the graduate program. The Faculty Senate’s resolution will be submitted to the President as a recommendation.

9) The final authority to eliminate a graduate program rests with the President.

10) Once the decision is made to terminate a program Federal regulations require that the teach-out plan is submitted to SACS under SACS’s Procedure Three for Substantive Change for approval before the termination is official.

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(Note: The final draft of the document has been reviewed by Richard Zansitis, General Counsel)