

To: [Appropriate Dean/Department/Program]  
From: [Current] Chair, GPSEPC  
Re: Fast Track Approval Process  
Date: [Current]

Enclosed you will find, in outline form, the guidelines for developing a proposal under the “Fast Track Approval Process” for new graduate and/or professional studies programs at Saint Mary’s College. This process is the result of collaboration by interested faculty, Deans, the Graduate and Professional Studies Educational Policies Committee (GPSEPC), past Chairs of the Academic Senate, and the senior administration of the College. Its substance is drawn largely from the Program Review Guidelines established by the Program Review Committee.

The Fast Track process is intended to meet the needs of a School that wishes to “pilot” a program (or to respond quickly to the educational needs of the outside community) before seeking approval for it as a permanent program of the College. The steps in the guidelines are meant to insure that when adequate planning and oversight have been exercised, the new program can operate experimentally for an appropriate period of time that will allow a full assessment of its educational and financial viability. The general standard for “an appropriate time” is two or three “cycles” of the program, depending on its length. The timeline for submitting the new program for final approval by the GPSEPC and ultimately the Academic Senate appears in the proposal itself and will be the basis for the Senate’s subsequent consideration of the merits of the program. After the proposal has been prepared and all the necessary signatures obtained, the original proposal will reside in the files of the Academic Senate. It is the responsibility of the proposers to meet subsequent deadlines and submit all needed materials in a timely way to the Chair of the GPSEPC to facilitate the process for “final approval” when that time comes.

The Chair of the GPSEPC may request any additional information, or seek the opinion of other faculty members and administrators if needed, before signing off on the proposal and allowing it to go forward. If all other elements of the proposal (including other signatures) are in good order, however, it is only the signature of the Chair of the GPSEPC that is needed to complete the Fast Track Process and allow the program to commence. If the Chair of the GPSEPC rejects the proposal, reasons must be provided in writing to the authors of the proposal and a revised version may be submitted subsequently for further consideration, with new dated signatures from each of the designated officials, based on the revised version.

The basis for the decision to accept the proposal is strictly academic: is the program as proposed of merit, a potentially valuable contribution to the academic programs of the College, and within the guidelines for academic quality normally applied by the GPSEPC when it considers new programs for approval? Approval by the Chair of GPSEPC at this point does NOT guarantee final approval by the Academic Senate, which will be based solely on the assessment of the program and the GPSEPC’s evaluation of its merit after it has been operating for the designated period, but is intended to indicate that the program is within the parameters considered by when making a final decision.

The proposal itself should contain: a rationale, based on the College’s Mission and the School’s goals/strategic plan; a clear and complete presentation of the academic structure of the program; a business plan, with the specific, projected cost/revenue figures for the period of the proposal; and a completed Library review, a timeline for assessment, including the date by which all materials will be submitted to the GPSEPC for final approval; and, the signatures called for in the Guidelines.

- 1) The faculty, staff, and administration of a School identify the need for a new program.
- 2) Faculty members design an appropriate academic structure for that program and a means to assess its educational effectiveness. Some questions and issues to address:
  - a) How does the program fit within the threefold mission of Saint Mary's College?
  - b) How does the program fit within the strategic plan of the sponsoring School?
  - c) Describe the educational goals and learning outcomes of the program.
  - d) Provide a program design description, including number of units, methodologies for content delivery, location, intended calendar, and necessary facilities/support.
  - e) How, if at all, does the new program build on existing programs and resources?
  - f) What effects will the addition of this program have on other programs of the School?
  - g) What faculty have been involved in the design of the program? Who will teach in it?
  - h) What are the library resource needs of the program? (This can be assessed after a library review has been completed. To request a library needs assessment of the program simply contact the SMC library before submitting the fast track proposal.)
  - i) Describe the plan for assessing the educational effectiveness of the program, based on the outcomes identified in "c" and the design provided in "d." (When the final assessment report is made to the GPSEPC later, be sure to detail the ways in which feedback and assessment along the way have led to program enhancements or revisions.)
  - j) What is the timeline for completing the assessment and providing it to the GPSEPC (Interim reports are highly recommended, but at the very least there must be a specific deadline set by which time all assessment materials must be in the hands of the GPSEPC. The completion of two or three cycles of offering the program is the usual guideline for identifying when a request for final approval is due, with an absolute deadline of 4 years from the commencement of the program.)
- 3) Develop the business plan that will support this new program.
  - a) What analysis has been done of how this program meets educational needs in the market place?
  - b) What are the projected enrollments, revenues, and program costs (including start-up and initial marketing costs, as well as ongoing operational costs) associated with the program? What are the financial goals of the plan?
  - c) What, if any, new resources, especially staff and faculty, will be required for the successful operation of this program over time?
  - d) What, if any, legal or contractual obligations are associated with this program? (eg. rental of space, agreements with other organizations or groups, etc.)
- 4) After completing all the necessary steps in the design of the program, the proposal must also contain a signature page with the following signatures, to indicate that due diligence has been applied to each of the critical aspects of the proposal process:
  - a) The dated signature of the Dean of the School, indicating that this program has support and approval at the School level and fits within the strategic plan of the School;
  - b) The dated signature of the appropriate senior administrator of the College with authority over the School involved (usually the Provost), indicating that the intended program fits within the strategic plan of the College as a whole and has administrative support;
  - c) The dated signature of the CFO, certifying that the business plan is reasonable and fits within the financial strategic plan for the College and the School (additionally, if legal contracts are involved, the signature of the College Counsel);
  - d) Last, the dated signature of the current Chair of the GPSEPC, who reviews the proposal for academic merit after all the other approvals have been given.
- 5) The properly signed proposal will be kept on file in the office of the Academic Senate and serve as the basis for the subsequent, final approval process as designated in 2 (j) above.