



Academic Program Planning Guide

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University of North Carolina System
Raleigh, North Carolina

Academic Program Planning Guide

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Executive Summary

This document serves as a streamlined reference for institutions within the UNC System seeking approval for new academic programs, based on UNC Policy 400.1 and Regulation 400.1.1[R]. It outlines key expectations for program planning and offers practical guidance for completing the Request for Planning Authorization (RPA) and Request to Establish (RTE) forms. The planning process involves collecting and analyzing data to assess strategic fit, student and workforce demand, return on investment (ROI), education premium and alignment with UNC System goals.

Institutions begin by determining program relevance and strategic alignment, identifying Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) and Classification of Instructional Program (CIP) codes, and selecting appropriate delivery modalities. The RPA focuses on initial program justification, while the RTE requires enrollment projections, curriculum mapping, faculty resources, and budget. Both incorporate supporting data from UNC System data dashboards and sources like IPEDS, Student Data Mart, NC Commerce, and Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) to validate demand, workforce alignment, and educational premium.

The guide emphasizes clarity, alignment, and transparency, and introduces helpful tools for data sourcing, occupation mapping, and evidence-based program design. It also links new program proposals with productivity review metrics and helps ensure sustainable and high-value academic offerings across the System.

Purpose

This guide is a companion document to [UNC Policy Manual](#) 400.1 “Policy on Academic Program Planning” and 400.1.1[R] “Regulation for Academic Program Planning and Evaluation.” The same or similar metrics will be used in new program proposals as well as for existing program productivity review. This guide also supports institutions completing the "Request for Planning Authorization" and "Request to Establish a New Academic Degree Program" forms required for new degree program approval. It clarifies key expectations outlined in UNC Regulation 400.1.1[R] and outlines helpful tips to ensure programs are designed and justified in accordance with policy. The data collected during the RPA and RTE process will be condensed and presented in the academic program materials summary for University of North Carolina Board of Governors degree program approvals. Each stage of the program establishment process will proceed according to the Academic Programs Calendar published on the [Academic Program Planning webpage](#).

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Metrics and Relevant Data Sources

The [UNC System Insight Dashboard](#) provides a convenient, one-stop location for Student Demand, IPEDS Peers, Education Premium, and Workforce Alignment data from approved sources. To gain access to the dashboard, please ask your campus's Insight administrator to authorize your access. Access must be granted at the campus level. The table below outlines approved data sources.

Metric/Requirement	Relevant Resource(s)
Student Demand	UNC Student Data Mart, Integrated Postsecondary Education System (IPEDS), UNC Data Dashboards, Peer Institutions List
Workforce Alignment	NC Commerce Star Jobs, Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Projections, CIP-SOC Crosswalk
Education Premium	NC Commerce, Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Wage Data, Education Premium Calculations
Return on Investment	UNC Tuition & Fees Tables, Student Data Mart, Time-to-Degree, NC Commerce Wage Data
Program-to-Occupation Mapping	(NCES), NC Commerce Star Jobs, Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS)

Table 1: Metrics and relevant data sources

The RPA and RTE documents list the approved data sources for each section. Optionally, the institution may also choose to use a third-party vendor to provide additional supporting evidence for program proposals or productivity. Please note that these metrics will be reviewed against publicly available data sources; additional supporting documentation may be needed if there are discrepancies between data sources.

Some data from Student Data Mart and NC Commerce have additional access restrictions but is broadly available to universities in the UNC System. Please contact your Institutional Research office or the System Office Enterprise Data Office via data@northcarolina.edu for assistance with compiling program-specific data.

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Simplified Workflow for Establishment Process

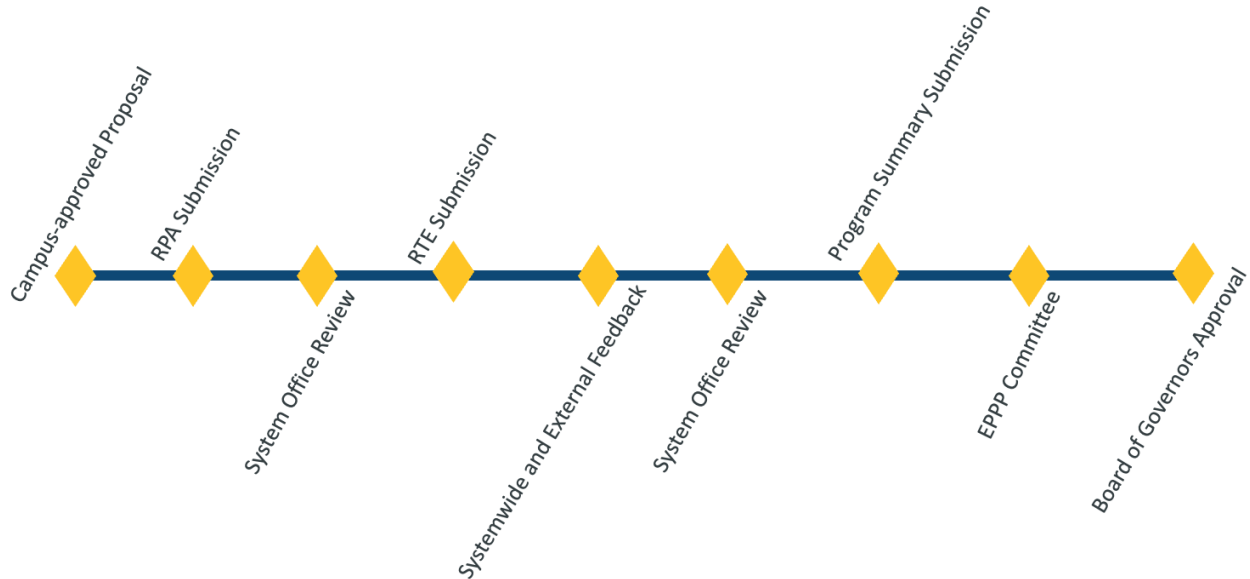


Image 1: Graphic of simplified workflow for academic program approval process

1. Institution or UNC System develops and submits a program proposal (RPA followed by RTE) in the PREP portal
2. UNC System Academic Program team reviews and approves the materials or returns them for revision
3. Systemwide feedback invited for bachelor's and master's programs and shared with institution
4. Systemwide and external feedback invited for doctoral programs, and shared with institution
5. UNC System Academic Program team approves and recommends proposal for consideration by UNC Board of Governors' Educational Planning and Policy Committee (EPPP)
6. EPPP recommends to full BOG

Overview of Establishment Process

Key Process Stages

1.  Request for Planning Authorization (RPA)
2.  Request to Establish (RTE)
3.  UNC System Office Review
4.  Systemwide Review
5.  External Review for Doctoral Program Proposals
6.  Proposed Academic Program Summary Submitted
7.  BOG EPPP Committee Review
8.  Board of Governors Approval

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Common Structure

- Campus develops and submits proposal through PREP
- UNC System Office conducts academic and financial review and invites Systemwide review
- Questions and revisions addressed collaboratively
- Final recommendations move through EPPP Committee and are approved by Board of Governors

Key Distinctions between Bachelor and Graduate Process

- Bachelor's and Master's Programs
 - Reviewed by UNC System Office and institutions
- Doctoral Programs
 - Include additional Grad Council review
 - Doctoral programs include external reviewer input

Overview of Planning Documents: RPA and RTE

Mission Alignment • Duplication Review • Student Demand • Financial Sustainability • Academic Quality • ROI • Workforce Need	
Request for Planning Authorization (RPA)	Request to Establish (RTE)
Purpose: Permission to plan a new degree program	Purpose: Full proposal requesting final approval for BOG consideration
Strategic concept and rationale	Comprehensive academic and operational plan
Focus on workforce needs, student demand, ROI, and duplication	Focus on curriculum, faculty, resources, operations, and assessment
Includes labor market and financial feasibility analysis	Includes detailed budget implementation and sustainability plans
High-level budget and enrollment projections	Full staffing, facilities, technology and delivery plans
Demonstrates mission alignment and supports institutional and UNC System priorities	Demonstrates readiness for launch and long-term quality
Outcome: Authorization to develop full proposal	Outcome: Recommendation to BOG EPPP and full BOG

Proposed Academic Program Summary

Once a proposal has been recommended for BOG EPPP review, the institution will submit a completed proposed academic program summary via the PREP portal. A template and directions are available on the [Academic Program Planning webpage](#). The academic program planning summary is shared with the Board of Governors and published online in the BOG meeting materials.

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Additional Resources

Academic Program Inventory

Through statutory authority, the UNC Board of Governors may authorize the establishment of new degree programs and the discontinuation of existing degree programs. All degree programs authorized by the Board can be found using the [UNC System Program and Degree Finder](#).

Bureau of Labor Statistics (OEWS)

Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS) data is available as an aggregated dataset shared annually with us and available via the [NC Department of Commerce website](#) and [BLS website](#). It contains industry, occupation, geographic region, and wage data (survey). The websites allow for a targeted download (a specific industry-occupation-region parameter), but the underlying complete dataset can be provided to us by NC Commerce.

- Relevant metric(s): ROI for existing or proposed programs
- Known caveat: level of education and years of experience of individuals are unknown/all employees are aggregated regardless of education or years in position, survey data

CIP-SOC Crosswalk

[CIP-SOC Crosswalk](#) is available as a many-to-many relational dataset between programs and occupations developed by BLS and National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).

- Relevant metric(s): anything linking program and occupation data
- Known caveat: some CIPs/SOCs have no match, many-to-many relationship can create complicated paths between program(s) and occupation(s) when assessing wage and workforce demand

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) [Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System \(IPEDS\)](#) is available as an aggregated dataset shared annually and available via the IPEDS website, contains enrollment data by institution and completion data by program and institution. The datasets are generally downloadable by IPEDS survey with a provisional dataset available approximately one year after the academic year cycle and a final dataset available approximately two years after the academic year cycle.

- Relevant metric(s): student interest/pipeline for existing or proposed programs
- Known caveat: publicly available data are typically 1-2 years behind present day

NC Department of Commerce

[NC Commerce data](#) is available as a unit-record, identifiable dataset shared annually with us for post-education outcomes, contains industry and wage data, but not occupation.

- Relevant metric(s): post-graduation outcomes, ROI for existing programs

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- Known caveat: only available for employees whose company/employer is required to submit unemployment benefits wage data to NC Commerce, only available for former UNC students

NC Department of Commerce Star Jobs

NC Commerce Star Jobs data is available as an aggregated dataset shared annually with us and available via NC Commerce website, contains occupation, geographic region, wage, current and projected employment counts and openings, and minimum education level required for given occupation.

- Relevant metric(s): workforce demand for existing or proposed programs, education premium for existing or proposed programs
- Known caveat: level of education and years of experience of individuals are unknown/all employees are aggregated
- [NC Commerce dashboards](#) based on [BLS employment projections data](#)

Peer Institutions

The UNC Board of Governors approved list of peer institutions supports academic benchmarking. The list of peer institutions also provides a standardized set of institutions to serve as a reference point for strategic planning.

- [2025 UNC Peer Institution Study](#)

Student Data Mart (SDM)

The [UNC System Student Data Mart \(SDM\)](#) is available as a unit-record, identifiable dataset with term-based data available post-census; unit-record data from the original institution is available for use by that institution while it typically is only available in aggregate for other UNC's.

- Relevant metric(s): student interest/pipeline for existing or proposed programs, ROI for existing or proposed programs
- Known caveat: publicly available data are typically in aggregate with small-count suppression
- [UNC System Interactive Data Dashboards](#)

UNC System Workforce Alignment Report (April 2026)

The purpose of the [UNC System Workforce Alignment Report](#) is to assess alignment of University of North Carolina System degrees to North Carolina's workforce needs. Career readiness has been, and remains, at the core of the University's mission since the founding of the constituent universities of the UNC System.