

Guidelines:

Name Change

These guidelines offer advice about name changes to ministry-approved programs and specializations (majors).

Institutions may wish to change the name of a program or specialization for a variety of reasons. Most commonly, institutions propose a name change to modernize terminology as a field or industry evolves or in response to requirements of regulators and accreditation bodies.

The ministry requires institutions to seek approval to change the name of a ministry-approved program or specialization since:

- the review process for such proposals ensures that a proposed new name remains aligned with the practices of the relevant discipline and/or industry and recognizable to other stakeholder groups;
- the name approved by the ministry and registered within PAPRS (Provider and Program Registry System) is the legal name of the program, and institutions are expected to use this name on parchments and transcripts; and
- PAPRS records are used by ministry departments (e.g., Alberta Student Aid) and reporting system (e.g., LERS, ASI, and PFD) as primary data sources, and so these records need to be updated to maintain currency and accuracy.

Scope

This guideline pertains to name change proposals that are submitted by post-secondary institutions to the ministry through PAPRS for non-credential, certificate, diploma, and degree programs.

Institutions should consult with the Campus Alberta Quality Council (CAQC) regarding name change proposals for degree programs that were previously reviewed and approved by the Council.

CAQC's review processes for proposed name changes to approved degree programs are outside the scope of these guidelines.

Guiding Principles

- Name changes are grounded in academic decision-making processes and institutional quality assurance policies.
- Naming practices should follow established academic nomenclature for a field and/or industry naming conventions, as applicable.
- Consultation and transparent communications are important underpinnings of effective planning for and implementation of a program/specialization name change.

Name Change Considerations

- Justifying a Proposed Name
- Program of Study Changes
- Stakeholder Consultation
- Identifying Potential Risks
- Student Accommodations
- Governance
- Communicating the Name Change
- PAPRS Considerations

Justifying a Proposed Name

In the initial planning stage for a name change, institutions should conduct research on:

- naming conventions for similar programs within Alberta and, as relevant, in other jurisdictions; and
- the broader public awareness of the proposed new program/specialization name(s).

Typically, the proposed new name should:

- align with naming conventions in the relevant academic field and/or industry;
- align with program learning outcomes and program of study; and
- be recognizable and understandable to the general public and employers in closely associated industries and/or professions.

In proposals, institutions should explain the rationale for the proposed new name in alignment with the above expectations. In cases where the above conditions are not met, institutions should describe extenuating circumstances preventing alignment.

Program of Study Changes

Name change proposals are grounded in the assumption that program delivery is continuing, albeit under a refreshed name, and that the program of study for the program/specialization is remaining largely unchanged.

While revisions to a program of study can be the impetus for a name change, such revisions can, in some cases, be significant enough that a proposal to establish a new program is warranted.

In such circumstances, the revised program needs to undergo the ministry's review and approval process for new programs and specializations (including CAQC review in cases of degree proposals). In these cases, it would also be necessary for the institution to coordinate submission of suspension and termination proposals for the legacy version of the program with submission of the new program proposal. (Please see *Guidelines: Suspensions* and *Guidelines: Terminations* for further information on these topics.)

Stakeholder Consultation

Institutions should consult with relevant stakeholder groups regarding the proposed name change.

Institutions should use their best judgement in deciding which stakeholder groups should be consulted and the level of engagement required. (For example, for programs regulated by professional colleges or regulatory bodies, it is expected that institutions will have sought approval from these groups for the name change and will provide documentation thereof in the proposal.)

When submitting a proposal, institutions should provide information about the kinds of consultations that occurred, dates of the consultations, and a summary of relevant feedback received. Attaching relevant documentation such as meeting minutes or survey results can also be useful.

The ministry expects that institutions will consult students (and, sometimes, alumni) regarding a proposed name change since they are typically most affected by a change to the name of a program or specialization.

Identifying Potential Risks

As part of the name change process, institutions should identify potential risks and develop mitigation strategies. Potential risks may include (but are not limited to):

- the proposed new name may be too similar to other unrelated programs, prompting potential confusion among students and employers;
- the proposed name is sufficiently different from the historical name so that potential applicants may not associate it with the type of program and/or subject area in which they wish to enrol; and
- the proposed new name may not be immediately recognizable to other post-secondary institutions and/or employers.

Development of a communications plan regarding the proposed name change that targets potential applicants, employers, and the wider public is typically an effective strategy to mitigate against these potential risks.

Student Accommodations

Institutions should have procedures, in alignment with their own internal policies, to adjudicate requests from current program students and past program graduates in matters arising from the program/specialization name change.

In particular, institutions should make decisions about:

- whether students admitted into a program prior to the name change can and/or should graduate with the old or new program/specialization name; and
- whether, and under what conditions, to allow alumni to exchange a parchment conferred on them at the time of their convocation for a parchment bearing the new program/specialization name.

Following a name change, some students may continue to graduate with a parchment bearing the old program/specialization name consistent with regulations in effect at time of student admission into a program.

Governance

Institutions should provide information about which internal governance body (or administrator) approved the program/specialization name change and specify date of approval.

Communicating the Name Change

Institutions should develop a communications plan so that stakeholders are appropriately advised of the change to the program/specialization name. This plan should involve formal communications with students. Communication with students is typically managed by the Office of the Registrar or the appropriate dean.

Institutions should follow their internal policies and practices concerning website notices, calendar information updates, and key institutional planning documents.

PAPRS Considerations

In terms of configuring the actual name change proposal within PAPRS, there are several issues of which institution should be aware:

- Institutions can submit a change proposal in PAPRS that includes both a change to a name for a program and/or specialization and a change to the credit load.
- Name changes for programs and specializations can only be implemented by academic year and cannot be implemented partway through an academic year; accordingly, all name changes must be implemented within PAPRS on July 1st, which the ministry uses as the start date for the academic year.
- Names changes should be configured as program change proposals rather than as co-ordinated termination and new program/specialization proposals since program change proposals ensure continuity in longitudinal reporting to the ministry.
- Institutions should avoid changing the program and specialization codes for individual PAPRS records, whenever possible, since changes to these codes can create continuity issues for the ministry with respect to longitudinal enrolment records. (Institutions should consult with staff in the Program Design and System Innovation unit if considering making changes to these codes).

Further Information and Assistance

For additional information contact:

Director, Program Design and System Innovation

Alberta Advanced Education

780-643-9472

Related Guidelines:

- Proposal Timelines
- Program Learning Outcomes

Other related documents:

PAPRS Template: Name Change

To obtain a copy of other guideline documents, or to ensure that you have the most recent copy of this guideline, please send a request via email to ae.psp-paprs@gov.ab.ca.