So you think you might want to create a new degree program? You’ve probably heard that creating a new degree program takes tremendous time and significant effort. That can be true, but it doesn’t need to be overwhelming or a reason not to start. There are a number of steps and none can be skipped but we can work together to move through them in an expedited way. I am always happy to have a conversation with you at any stage in the process. This guide is simply a roadmap.

All new program ideas should first be discussed within your department before bringing to the Dean and or the Dean of the Graduate School where appropriate. Once you have determined together that this is an idea with pursuing you will proceed along this plan. If the idea is not yet part of the 5 year enrollment plan, you may need to also seek approval from the Provost.

Step 1: Who is your target audience and what does your audience want and/or need?

Remember that the program will be in response to a need in the market – and that’s going to include your audience as well as (see the next step) the competition. The new program ought to also be aligned to CCSU’s strategic plan and to your academic school’s mission.

It’s easier to develop a solution for a problem than find a problem that matches your “solution”. With your target audience, the goal here is to understand how many have an unmet or under-served want or need. This allows you to address [a] what the program might address and [b] are there enough people with that want/need to support the program. And when it comes to “sizing the market demand”, look at historical and current size so you can estimate future size – because you ideally want a large audience that’s growing versus a small audience that’s shrinking, understanding that what is large for one discipline might be small for another. One place to start is with the Department of Labor for both the US and CT specifically. But that is just a start, your discipline specific organizations and or advisory boards may also have this information.

Step 2: How is the competition addressing this want and/or need?

Next, take a look at your competition – primary, secondary and tertiary. Are they addressing this need? How? With what results? If not, why not? The first question I usually ask, “Is anyone else doing this? And if not, why not?” This becomes really important when the answer is “Well, U. Hartford used to do it but their program closed down”. We’ll really want to spend time to figure out why that is. It doesn’t mean we won’t pursue the program but it is important for us to understand the hurdles they encountered.

Look at those institutions you compete with regularly all the way down to organizations that offer similar programs that might enter this space at some point in the future. For example, here in Connecticut, there are several colleges with communication departments (primary). There are several targeting Connecticut with part-time/evening/weekend/online programs in the New England area that could be considered secondary competition. And then there are other non-traditional programs offered that could fill a smaller want/need – CT School of Broadcasting certificate vs. bachelor’s in communication (tertiary).

You want to understand what they offer, how they deliver the offering, costs as well as pricing, enrollments as well as retention and graduation rates (too the extent possible). You want to know about the faculty – their education, experience, workload, training and development etc.
It is crucial to understand what our sister institutions in the system offer and how they offer it. If a similar program is offered within the system, reach out to the faculty directly or if you are uncomfortable doing so let me know and I can reach out to their Dean to make a first contact. Find out if there needs we can serve together, if there are TAP implications, etc. You might get good information by reaching out to the CC institutions as well. There might be an area their AA degree students are asking for that is not currently being met.

From this, you get an understanding of what’s out there (so you can look for unmet or under-served wants and needs), how it came to be (how long to develop, successful features), reputation and other key factors.

**Step 3: What does the hiring population want and/or need?**

Next, it’s time to speak with those that employ individuals with the skills your proposed new program will serve and find out what they want and need today and in the foreseeable future from someone that has successfully completed your program.

What do they expect “high quality graduates of the program” to be able to do upon graduation? How do they perceive your institution in terms of being able to consistently produce high quality graduates of the program? What do they feel your new program must address so graduates are ready to “hit the ground running” upon completion of the program? Is there a specific program delivery option that is being requested (on-site, hybrid, online)?

**Step 4: What is the unmet or under-served want and/or need?**

After speaking with your target audience, analyzing the competition and gathering insight from those relevant members of the market, you need to start putting together the concept of a unique, valuable program that you can consistently bring to life, your audience wants, your competition cannot replicate and the market wants and needs.

If you ever find yourself looking at your competitor’s courses and learning outcomes, and considering that as a part of your own offering...stop. Your goal here is to be uniquely valuable, not one of many offering the same thing.

You want to be able to say “…this is what the industry leaders are looking for, and our program is the only one offering that because we worked with them to build it into our program and have their executives teach the courses....”

**Step 5: How can you consistently deliver a unique, valuable solution for the unmet and/or under-served want and/or need?**

What about the faculty – what background, education and experience must they have to help deliver that unique value?

What about the online component? Hybrid? Accelerated? Weekends... What training will your faculty need to be able to delivery in this modality?

Can you use Open Educational Resources to support students? How else can you meet the unique needs of the students you are attempting to reach.
**Step 6: Market Sizing, Revenue Projection**

Have a detailed description of your target audience is good...having an estimated size of that audience is great. Almost always someone approaching me with a program says they will bring in “a lot” of students. What “a lot” means can vary greatly. We need to tell the BOR how many and where are they – and are they increasing in numbers or decreasing.

This requires some research and then a process for calculating the size.

Some of the sources we can use include Department of Labor Statistics, National Center for Education Statistics, annual reports, educational associations and organizations, industry publications and other government agencies.

Based on the performance of competitors, and the size of the market, we can then calculate a range for enrollments and revenue. And this helps drive budgeting – from staffing and equipment and curriculum development to marketing efforts. This will be helpful when preparing the Pro-forma budget.

**Step 7: Concept Paper**

At this point, it’s time to make the “Do we go or do we pass” decision. You’ve invested some resources but nothing close to what you could have invested if you just went straight ahead into developing the program once someone vocalized the idea.

Remember there could be a third option here – the “are there other viable options that we’re overlooking” option. This may not be appropriate in all situations but remember to keep your eyes and ears open throughout the entire process because you might pick up some information that turns out to be a greater opportunity than the original new program concept.

The Concept Paper first goes to your academic dean and to AVP Academic Affairs before being submitted to the Provost. The AVP Academic Affairs will proof-read but also can help add more to the market forecast and help you think through issues that others have experienced at this point in the process. (link to BOR Concept Paper)

**Step 8: Present Concept Paper to Academic Affairs Council**

This committee is made up of provosts and chief academic officers from all of the institutions in the system. That means both the CSUs and the CCs (as well as Charter Oak). This presentation is for feedback and guidance. They often provide a different perspective that can be very helpful. They also have some people really good at going through the “nitty gritty” details that might otherwise get overlooked in the enthusiasm for the new program. You should prepare a very short rationale and explanation of your program but the decision will rest mainly on what you have written in the Concept Paper. Rarely will there be a firm, “No” given in response to a Concept Paper. Instead they will suggest areas to add, delete or improve. You must respond to their feedback and will be expected to bring your revisions back to the Academic Council for consideration and approval.

**Step 9: Develop it**

Once the Concept Paper is approved you start work on campus by submitting the proposal to the Curriculum Committee using their forms and process. Some look at the development process as “...we
got approval, now let’s put our heads down and build this thing…” I recommend a more “…heads up, eyes open…” approach that allows you to take new developments into consideration.

For example, new research impacting the field. New technology impacting the delivery – and development – of the curriculum. New laws/rules/regulations that impact what you can or cannot do in a degree program in order to remain accredited. Competitive changes such as a new competitor entering the market or mergers/acquisitions or even a competitor closing its doors.

As you develop the curriculum, consider more carefully how to best deliver the program and the courses.

All the curriculum, the new program and all the courses will need to be reviewed by the university curriculum committee. (Attach link to documents and deadlines here). In addition new program admission policies must be reviewed at the Graduate Level by the Graduate Studies Committee, Policy Subcommittee and the Undergraduate...(???) One note on admissions policies. Make certain that every item you require is actually predictive of success in your program. That is, if letters of reference are not actually going to help you make a prediction about a candidate’s success in your program, don’t require them. Think similarly about essays and interviews.

At this point it is advisable to start working on how you will promote this new program and what resources you will need to support the marketing effort. Content for the brochures, website and other marketing materials can begin now in addition to having conversations about how best to communicate this information to the right audience. For some programs the promotion may need to be quite broad while for others you’ll need to be much more targeted in order to be successful. Everyone wants a billboard on Rt84 but there are many other (more effective and cost efficient) ways to reach your students that should be explored.

**Step 10: Go back to the BOR with the Program Proposal**

Largely, this is a cut and paste of much of what you presented in the concept paper, however along the university curriculum process somethings might have changed. A program may now be larger or smaller in credits, the courses or learning objectives might have been modified. All those changes must be reflected in the new document. In addition you will now need to work with the Academic Affairs budget AVP to create the Pro-forma Budget. (Include links) You will need time to work with OIRA to create the correct codes and other detail pieces go into the Program Proposal.

The Academic Council BOR process does take some time, and several meetings. Be prepared to present your program and have others present who are able to attest to its value (hiring managers, other community support). Here you may be asked to justify the “why” of the program more conclusively. You may also be surprised to find that there aren’t many questions and you feel like you over prepared, but to do otherwise would be disastrous.

**Step 11: Go-to-market**

Once approved by the full BOR you may begin to promote the program. In the first semester that you are promoting the program, leading up to the first semester it is offered be ready to work regularly on promoting this new program. Marketing and Communication and Admissions staff will promote the
program as well, but you are the best ambassadors and so will be called on to write promotional materials and articles, represent the new program at conferences etc. as appropriate for your discipline.

When you launch the new program you will need to spend time in order to see how everything really works. The key is to monitor the critical factors, gather data, analyze what’s going on and use those metrics to report on performance. Are the audiences responding the way you anticipated? What feedback are you getting from admissions staff, applicants, etc. Are the admissions criteria you established working?

Remember that you want to look at more than marketing/enrollment management factors – you want to be looking at factors that help you identify the effectiveness of the faculty, curriculum, student services and anything that impacts the student’s experience.

**Step 12: Evaluate, Modify**

Based on the results, you can make the decision to leave things as they are, modify based on input or skip ahead to Step 13.

**Step 13: Exit**

In the beginning, everyone is optimistic and couldn’t possibly imagine the idea failing – or running its course after a long, successful existence. So they ignore an important question…okay, two questions.

What would cause us to end the program and how would we end it?

Ignoring it today means leaving it for a much more emotional discussion where you may be in control of less factors. And that means rushing which can lead to bad decisions and bigger headaches.

I also recommend you make this public so that everyone involved – students, faculty, staff, administration, community leaders…you name them…know what the exit strategy is. Why? Because if the time comes, no one that’s involved will be surprised. This helps take a lot of the emotion out of the situation might help for a smoother exit.

What is the criteria for considering to end the offering? What is the criteria for ending the offering? Once that decision to end the offering has been made, what happens – who needs to do what, when, how and why?

How are students, faculty and staff notified? What accommodations will be made for students in the program? Faculty? Staff?

You can create your own list of questions to answer, criteria to meet- the key here is to remember that once the decision has been made, your exit strategy must then be followed in an open, transparent manner so all parties are involved, informed and on-board.

**Conclusion**

Yes, that’s a great deal of work. But it’s better to invest in this work than skip straight ahead to “Develop and Go to Market”. The bottom line is that you really should be asking questions in order that you are making a well informed decision that’s in the best interest of CCSU and its resources (financial and human).
Developing and launching successful new programs is tough to do – these steps will help you by addressing key areas and minimizing risk.

For those of you who might be thinking “…too much time, have to be fast and be first to market”, I hear you. We can work together to get through some of these steps quickly. So far the record is seven months, let’s try to beat that together. But don’t by-pass a review and evaluation process for the sake of speed because if the opportunity looks too good to pass by, you might be missing something!