

Elective Courses: Gaining State Approval

WHAT are procedures and practices among the states in approving new elective courses? Some answers to this question are provided in the report which follows. A study was conducted, requesting responses from 50 chief state education officers or those appointed to speak for them. Procedures were less formal and requirements were less exacting than those used in gaining approval for new required courses.¹

As was true in 1959-60,² the basic procedures used in gaining approval for new elective and new required courses were similar in a number of states. However, it was clear that even in these states fewer problems would be encountered in seeking approval for new elective than for new required courses.

Responsible Agencies

Thirty-four of the fifty states participating in the study identified some state-level authority or authorities responsible for the approval of new non-required

courses. It should be noted that 43 states identified some state-level authority responsible for the approval of required courses.³ State boards of education were cited most frequently. Twenty-one of the thirty-four states identifying state-level authority named state boards as having final responsibility for the approval of new elective courses. State departments were singled out by four states, accrediting groups by four states, and miscellaneous authority, which included seven different agencies, was reported by seven states. Fourteen states, or two more than in 1959-60, indicated no state-level agency or agencies responsible for the approval of new elective courses.

While it was difficult in a number of cases to identify responsible agencies due to several rather vague responses to this item, the following provides some indication of change in state-level authority for adoption of elective courses between 1959-60 and 1962-63.

Authority	1962-63	1959-60
State Board	21	19
State Department	4	4
Accrediting Groups	4	1
Miscellaneous Authority	7	11
No State-Level Authority	14	12
No Response	0	3

³ Cox, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

¹ Roy L. Cox. "Establishing Curriculum Requirements: Trends in State-Level Policies and Practices." *Educational Leadership* 21: 171-72, 183; December 1963.

² Roy L. Cox and Earl M. Ramer. "How Approval for Elective Courses Is Gained in the States." *Educational Leadership* 20: 192-94; December 1962.

Roy L. Cox is Chairman, Department of Education, Mississippi State College for Women, Columbus.

Approval Procedures

While details varied, some procedures and practices were common to several groups of states. For convenience in reporting, these procedures and practices have been grouped under the major authority responsible for final approval of new courses. As was true in 1959-60, lines dividing these procedures were sometimes thinly drawn.

State Boards of Education. State superintendents were identified as responsible for recommending the adoption of new courses in four of the 21 states recognizing state boards as authorities. In one of these states the State Department staff, together with individuals in the field, served as advisors to the State Superintendent. Two states identified no individuals or groups other than superintendents as involved in procedures leading to the approval of new elective courses. The fourth state in this group assigned the task of investigating needs for new course offerings to the Assistant State Superintendent. Based upon this information the State Superintendent made his recommendations to the State Board of Education.

State departments of education were charged with the task of recommending additions to the curricula of four states. Plans for new courses could originate at any level in these states. In two of the four states, proposals were submitted to the state departments for screening and possible recommendation to the state boards. Local consultants in one state submitted plans for new courses to an advisory committee. This committee forwarded the proposals to the State De-

partment for possible recommendation to the State Board. The remaining state in this group made course approval forms available to local districts through the Division of Curriculum and Instruction. These applications for permission to add new courses were submitted to the State Department of Education for review and recommendation to the State Board.

Local initiative appeared to be a major force in gaining acceptance for new elective courses in four states. The action of the boards in two of these states appeared to be little more than a formality, while the remaining two states required that a more formal request be submitted to the state boards.

Miscellaneous groups in six states were involved in the recommendation of new courses. The Department of Public Instruction in one state submitted plans for new courses to the State Board. The need for the course, as expressed by curriculum committees, administrators, supervisors and teachers, was considered by the Curriculum Division of one state before this group submitted recommendations to the State Board. Local schools in one state developed plans for new elective courses which the Approved Standards Committee then submitted to the State Board for consideration.

In another state, courses were first approved under provisions regulating experimentation and then submitted to the State Board by the State High School Supervisor who also served as chairman of the Standards Committee. The fifth state in the group employed a Director of Secondary and Elementary Education. Proposals concerning new courses were submitted to this office from all levels; here they were reviewed for possible recommendation to the State Board of Education. Initiation of the process leading to the approval of new elective

courses could originate with any interested group, lay or professional, in the last state in this group. An advisory committee made up of lay and professional people was appointed. Hearings were held by the State Board before final consideration of any proposed change.

No recognized procedure for submitting new courses to the state boards was reported by three states. In two of these states, plans for new courses could proceed from any level. The procedure in the third state was less clear. This state mentioned the pressure of special interest groups which sometimes attempted to influence the State Legislature as well as the State Board in an effort to gain approval for certain courses.

State Departments of Education. A number of different groups were influential in gaining approval for new courses in the four states recognizing state departments as responsible agencies. One state stressed the use of pilot studies, conferences, and the preparation of state guides before proposals were developed. Another state made similar use of advice from successful teachers and college specialists. One state required the local school system to show a need for the course. In addition, evidence had to be supplied that qualified teachers, proper facilities and sufficient equipment were available. The last state in this group identified no procedures used in gaining approval for new courses.

Accrediting Agencies. Four states reported that they looked to accrediting groups for the decision concerning new elective courses. Two of these states reported no recognized procedures for submitting proposals to state or regional accrediting groups. One state required the State Department to submit a formal proposal, while the fourth state allowed

the admission of any course which could meet the established regional accrediting requirements.

Miscellaneous Groups. Seven states reported a variety of agencies responsible for the approval of new elective courses. One of these states required outlines of proposed courses to be submitted to the Director of Curriculum for approval. The Assistant State Superintendent of one state was responsible for secondary education. This office was charged with the task of screening new course proposals. Before approval could be granted, proposed tests and statements of teacher certification had to be submitted along with course descriptions.

The State Supervisor of one state was responsible for the approval of new courses. In another state the State Course of Study Committee was charged with the responsibility for reviewing plans for new courses. These plans were submitted to the committee by state department consultants, county staff, teaching groups and individuals. The District Superintendent of one state approved new elective courses after consulting with program specialists and the state directors of secondary education.

Recommendations to the Superintendent of Public Instruction came from the division superintendents of one state. If the course was not generally offered, one or more staff members reviewed the request and their findings were submitted to the State Board by way of the Textbook and Curriculum Committee. The State Commissioner of Education in the remaining state in this group was responsible for the approval of new elective courses. Recommendations came from local school committees through the State Department of Education.

(Continued on page 195)

Second: "I have tremendous faith that individual schools will make adequate and dependable decisions on what they want to do and that each school will become its own broken front."

Third: "I believe that an environment that is dedicated to growth and to development of people, in which everyone is free to move, finds less resistance. When people suddenly discover they are free, they do not have to fight against things but can put their energy to the things they want to do."

I must warn you that if, after thinking these suggestions through, you should decide to try them, you are going to come up against new pressures. There are those who will want you to issue directives—they will want to know when you are going to make the district adoption, which means "When will we fixate at a certain point so we do not grow?" They will want you to emphasize homework and A B C's and phonics. Hemingway had a definition of "courage" which was: "Courage" is grace under pressure." I have a definition which says, "Courage" is poise under pressure." You are going to need a lot of poise under pressure when you begin to invest in human beings in an interesting, creative, consultative way.

From Center—Hillman

(Continued from page 157)

and improve on what he sees and hears. This freedom leads the teacher to do his own questioning. He has time to ask himself, "Where am I going? How do I intend to get there? Who and what do I need to help me?" This kind of thinking is the basis for strong curriculum planning. By not being hampered by over-direction, those of us who might be mediocre in another setting, are pulled up and made strong and independent.

With this feeling of strength comes a willingness to experiment, change, question and move without limits.

Is it easy to teach in this type of climate? No! Just as a man in business for himself works harder than an employee, a teacher in this setting strives continuously for self-improvement. Where the focus is constantly on the classroom, where the question from all sides is, "How can we help you?", the only road open is an exhilarating uphill climb. To expand and improve on your own is never easy. However, when a teacher has no need to fight elements of hierarchy, where he is a confident member of a team and valued as a person and as a teacher, he has a bank account with unlimited funds. Once addicted to this type of affluency, where he is free to draw interest in any amount, a teacher would find it difficult to tolerate a district that offered less.

Elective Courses—Cox

(Continued from page 179)

No State-Level Authority. Local option was reported by 14 states. In many of these states only the approval of local boards of education, local high school boards or curriculum committees was necessary for individual schools to establish new courses. Although state-level approval was not required, two states reported strong leadership at the state level when studies indicated the need for new course offerings.

Two other states published or otherwise made recommendations concerning the need for new courses. However, all such efforts were clearly of an advisory nature. While approval of a new course was not required, one state requested that a formal report of the addition of new courses be made to the Department of Education.

Copyright © 1964 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.