

# Charter Policy Proposal - Update to Faculty Handbook 1.4.1- Departmental Charters

**Submitted by:** the Office of the Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Senate Leadership

**Summary:** Policy proposal to maintain up-to-date charters and streamline the charter revision process.

## Background and Rationale

Charters play a critical role in shared governance and provide units the opportunity to define how they operate in certain key areas. They are, however, vulnerable to becoming obsolete as policies that supersede charters change, and new ways of operating become evident. When old charters are being followed, they also risk excluding the voices of those that they aim to serve, as they do not reflect the viewpoints of more recently hired members of the unit.

This proposal addresses those challenges by defining that charters will expire after a period of six years. This proposal provides for a default charter to be implemented when a charter expires, and includes a provision for the approval of new charters to be followed even when there are still unresolved issues between the unit and the administration.

The contents of a charter are defined by the Departmental Governance chapter of the Faculty Handbook (1.4.1). In addition to charters, units may also maintain an up-to-date document (often referred to as bylaws, operating manuals, or similar) that describes the operations of the unit under topics that are outside of the purview of the charter.

## Goals

- Provide equitable access to charter content for newer unit faculty, staff, and leaders, and maintain charters as meaningful governance documents.
- Provide mechanisms for streamlined charter review processes, both within the units and in the administration.
- Reduce faculty and staff workload.
  - Revising charters regularly will reduce the time needed for their revision.
  - Revising charters allows for items governed by university or other policies to be referenced and not duplicated. Duplication of policies in the charter leads to challenges when a policy changes.

**Relevant issues**

- Charter revision processes can be very drawn out (over multiple years in some cases)
- Given average faculty turnover, after six years, there is the potential for 1/3 or more faculty to have had no say in this key unit governance document.
- New department chairs and other unit leaders do not necessarily have the opportunity to provide feedback on their unit’s charter.
- Charter contents do not necessarily keep up to date with best practices for unit governance.
- Constituents may be reluctant to open a charter for revision due to the time commitment involved in revising a charter.
- Many existing charters include rewrites of university or board policy that are inaccurate and outdated.

**Implementation**

- The following charters will be open and revised in the 2026-27 academic year:
  - Any charter that went into effect in Fall 2021 or earlier.
    - Under this proposal, charters initially effective Fall 2021 would be open for revision during the 6th year in service (AY 26-27). The new charter would be implemented in AY27-28.
    - Charters effective prior to Fall 2021 would either be updated in AY26-27 for implementation in AY27-28 or replaced by the default charter in AY27-28.
  - Any otherwise unexpired charter in a unit with a permanent chair/unit lead who started in academic year 2025-26 or earlier.
- Notifications will be provided to units by the provost's office on an ongoing basis when charters are due to be opened and revised.
- Updates will occur over the course of an academic year, with units drafting their updates in the Fall semester, and Administrative review occurring in the Spring semester.

**Current status of charters (November 2025)**

The table below displays the current status of unit charters under this proposal and whether there are any unapproved proposals to modify the existing charter.

College Department		Last Approved	Due or Expired?	Unapproved Proposal?
College of Business		Jan 2022		
College of Computing	Computer Science	Oct 2013	yes	
	Applied Computing	none	n/a	61-20

College of Engineering	<b>Biomedical Engineering</b>	<b>Jan 2017</b>	<b>yes</b>	
	Chemical Engineering	Oct 2022	new chair	
	<b>Civil, Env., and Geospatial Engineering</b>	<b>Mar 2015</b>	<b>yes</b>	<b>28-24</b>
	<b>Electrical and Computer Engineering</b>	<b>Sept 2015</b>	<b>yes</b>	<b>27-24</b>
	Engineering Fundamentals	Feb 2022		<b>34-23</b>
	Geological and Mining Engineering and Sciences	Nov 2022		
	Manufacturing and Mechanical Engineering Technology	Nov 2022		
	<b>Materials Science and Engineering</b>	<b>Jan 2014</b>	<b>yes</b>	<b>1-25</b>
	<b>Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering</b>	<b>Nov 2017</b>	<b>yes</b>	<b>30-24</b>
College of Forest Resources and Environmental Science		<b>Oct 2020</b>	<b>yes</b>	
College of Sciences and Arts	<b>Biological Sciences</b>	<b>Mar 2013</b>	<b>yes</b>	
	<b>Chemistry</b>	<b>Mar 2019</b>	<b>yes</b>	
	<b>Psychology and Human Factors</b>	<b>Feb 2019</b>	<b>yes</b>	
	<b>Humanities</b>	<b>Oct 2016</b>	<b>yes</b>	
	<b>Kinesiology and Integrative Physiology</b>	<b>Mar 2013</b>	<b>yes</b>	<b>13-20</b>
	<b>Mathematical Sciences</b>	<b>Aug 2014</b>	<b>yes</b>	<b>29-24</b>
	<b>Physics</b>	<b>Aug 2013</b>	<b>yes</b>	
	<b>Social Sciences</b>	<b>Jan 2018</b>	<b>yes</b>	<b>52-22</b>
	<b>Visual and Performing Arts</b>	<b>Mar 2013</b>	<b>yes</b>	
Other Academic	<b>Pavlis Honors College</b>	<b>Sept 2017</b>	<b>yes</b>	

Units	Library	none	n/a	
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## Charter Policy Update

The following pages show the proposed updates to the Faculty Handbook (1.4.1 Departmental Charters).

Changes to the existing list of required charter contents (specifically item A.8) are proposed to clarify that units may have other unit-specific operational documents, but that they are not included or approved as part of the charter process.

The most substantive change is the addition of a new Section B, reflecting the proposed charter update policy.

# Proposed Changes to Faculty Handbook

## 1.4.1 Departmental Charters

### Academic Unit Governance:

*<remains the same>*

#### A. Required Charter Contents to be Stated in the Following Order:

*<remains the same until>*

- Units may include [reference to the existence of](#) other policies or practices [outlined in secondary documents kept by the unit \(e.g., bylaws, operating manual\)](#) ~~to cover unique aspects of their unit~~ that describe the operations of the unit under topics that are [outside the purview of the charter](#).

#### B. Charter Update Policy:

To ensure the ongoing currency of unit charters and that they continue to reflect the evolving membership of the unit, the following will apply:

- Charters at Michigan Tech are valid for a period of six (6) years. In the sixth year, the charter shall be reopened and go through the revision and approval process.

- When a unit hires a new permanent chair, director, or dean (in a unit without departments), the charter will be opened for revision during the second year of the unit lead's appointment so that they may have input into the content of the charter.
- Absent a revised charter in either of the above circumstances, a default charter shall be followed until a revised unit charter is approved.
- When there are unresolved issues between the unit and the administration, the majority of a revised charter may be approved and operated under, while issues (represented by lined-out sections) remain to be resolved.
  - In the meantime, the relevant part of the default charter will replace any lined-out sections at issue.
  - Once the issues are resolved, the section used from the default charter for temporary operation will be replaced with the approved language.

Secondary documents that contain other unit procedures that are not a required part of the charter (e.g., operating manuals, bylaws) shall be reviewed on a similar timeframe. This process is overseen by the relevant dean's office or the provost's office (in cases where the unit reports directly to the provost), as applicable.

#### **Timeline for charter revision in an academic year**

Notifications will be provided to units by the provost's office on an ongoing basis when charters are due to be opened and revised.

##### Fall semester

- Unit forms a charter revision ad hoc committee (following charter procedures).
- Input from constituents is considered in developing a draft revised charter.
- Charter revisions are discussed at a meeting of constituents.
- The draft charter is sent to the administration for review.

##### Spring semester

- Administration reviews the draft charter.
- Unit responds to the administration review to develop the final draft.
- The revised charter is presented to the University Senate for approval as an informational item.

#### **Default Charter**

The default charter, referenced above, is developed and maintained by the Office of the Provost.