**TOPIC:** DEGREE AUTHORIZATION – RECOMMENDATION FOR THE RENEWAL OF PROVISIONAL AUTHORIZATION FOR GRAND CANYON UNIVERSITY

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1. **SUMMARY**

This agenda item recommends the renewal of Provisional Authorization for Grand Canyon University to operate in Colorado pursuant to the Degree Authorization Act (§23-2-101 et seq.).

1. **BACKGROUND**

The Colorado Commission on Higher Education (CCHE) has statutory responsibility for administration of Title 23, Article 2 of the Colorado Revised Statutes, commonly referred to as the Degree Authorization Act (DAA). The Act sets out the terms by which the Commission may authorize accredited private colleges and universities, out-of-state public colleges and universities, and seminaries and bible colleges to operate in Colorado.

The DAA outlines the Department’s jurisdiction over private education programs available to the residents of the state of Colorado. The DAA establishes standards to (1) prevent misrepresentation, fraud, and collusion in offering educational programs to the public and (2) protect, preserve, foster, and encourage the educational programs offered by private educational institutions, which meet generally recognized criteria of quality and effectiveness as determined through voluntary accreditation.

Provisional authorization is the authorization level for institutions, new or new to Colorado, which have been evaluated by Department staff under Commission procedures and authorized by the Commission to enroll students, offer instruction, graduate students, and award degrees under the condition that the institution is continuously seeking and is making satisfactory progress toward accreditation at the local site. Institutions with provisional authorization are required to renew annually and must receive accreditation at the Colorado site within three years of initial authorization. However, there is a one-time extension for institutions who otherwise comply with the continuous progress toward accreditation and any other required approvals for the Colorado site.

Grand Canyon University is a private university that is headquartered in Phoenix, Arizona. GCU serves traditional-aged students attending on-campus classes in Phoenix and working adult students who attend cohort classes either on campus, an off-site location, or attend online.

GCU is planning to offer an Accelerated Bachelor of Science in Nursing (ABSN). The program is designed for individuals who want to pursue a career in nursing and have advanced standing, or who already have a bachelor’s degree (or higher) in a non-nursing major.

Grand Canyon University is institutionally accredited by the Higher Learning Commission and has held this accreditation since 1968. The next reaffirmation of accreditation with HLC is in 2026-27. GCU also holds specialized accreditation by the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE). The next on-site evaluation for CCNE will occur in the Fall of 2030.

1. **STAFF ANALYSIS**

As required by the Degree Authorization Act, Grand Canyon University submitted the required documents concerning its organization, programs, faculty, accreditation, and finances for the consideration of authorization renewal.

GCU is in the process of applying for approval for its nursing program through the Colorado State Board of Nursing. While the extension of provisional authorization allows institutions to begin enrolling students, institutions seeking approval for nursing programs must obtain partial approval from the Board of Nursing prior to doing so and must maintain compliance with the legal operation as an institution of higher education.

1. **STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Staff recommends the Commission approve the renewal of provisional authorization for Grand Canyon University to offer its ABSN program in Colorado under the Degree Authorization Act.**

**STATUTORY AUTHORITY**

**C.R.S. §23-2-103.3 Authorization to operate in Colorado – renewal**

(1) (a) To operate in Colorado, a private college or university shall apply for and receive authorization from the commission. A private college or university shall obtain a separate authorization for each campus, branch, or site that is separately accredited. A private, nonprofit college or university shall submit with its application verification of nonprofit status, including a copy of the institution's tax-exempt certificate issued by the Colorado department of revenue.

(b) After receiving an application, the department shall review the application to determine whether the private college or university is institutionally accredited by a regional or national accrediting body recognized by the United States department of education. The department shall not recommend and the commission shall not approve an application from a private college or university that, in the two years preceding submission of the application, has had its accreditation suspended or withdrawn or has been prohibited from operating in another state or that has substantially the same owners, governing board, or principal officers as a private college or university that, in the two years preceding submission of the application, has had its accreditation suspended or withdrawn or has been prohibited from operating in another state.

(2) To operate in Colorado, a private college or university shall be institutionally accredited on the basis of an on-site review by a regional or national accrediting body recognized by the United States department of education; except that a private college or university may operate for an initial period without accreditation if the commission determines, in accordance with standards established by the commission, that the private college or university is likely to become accredited in a reasonable period of time or is making progress toward accreditation in accordance with the accrediting body's policies. The commission may grant a provisional authorization to a private college or university to operate for an initial period without accreditation. The private college or university shall annually renew its provisional authorization and report annually to the commission concerning the institution's progress in obtaining accreditation.