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# Academic Program Review

# Guiding Template

# University Council on Learning Assessment

# Office of the Provost

The following processes and recommendations are ***guidelines*** for the divisions to create their own program review processes. The University Council on Learning Assessment evaluated the elements of program reviews and categorized them as either *Recommended* or *Required* when conducting a review. Consult Appendix A for an abbreviated list of recommendations.

The following guidelines apply to academic programs that lead to a degree.

1. **What is an Academic Program Review?**

The purpose of an academic program review is to evaluate the effectiveness, quality, rigor, relevancy, and viability of a program for the purpose of improvement and accountability. Assessment of student learning outcomes should be a major part of data collected and analyzed as part of periodic improvement and as part of the program reviews.

1. *Program Reviews* should be periodic and typically follow a 5, 7, or 10-year cycle.
2. *Program Reviews* address the following questions:  
   1. How well is the academic program executing its mission?
   2. What is the quality and rigor of the academic program under review?
   3. How relevant is the program for the intended audience?
   4. What data are informing decisions?
   5. How can the program be improved?
3. **Elements of an Academic Program Review**

The *Program Review* process includes 3 phases: the ***Self-Study***, evaluation by an ***External Review Team,*** and planning of ***Next Steps***.

1. Establish a *Cycle for Reviews* for each program – typically, 5, 7 or 10-year cycle.
2. Establish an internal self-study committee. The committee typically includes the department chair, program director, faculty, and staff administrators. The self-study committee should:

* 1. Establish guidelines for the review process.
  2. Create a program review timeline.
  3. Set date for completion of the self-study.
  4. Discuss data sources needed including, graduation rate, time to graduation, enrollment, learning assessment data, etc.
  5. Schedule the review process activities.
  6. Establish the process to identify external reviewers (Appendix B).
  7. Include students and alumni as part of the review team.
  8. Optional: You may want to identify a facilitator from the university who may be able to guide the process.

1. Create a mid-cycle check-in period during which a self-study report is completed for the upcoming review.
2. Follow the self-study with a plan for improvement (Appendices C & D).
3. Plan and conduct external review.
4. Follow external review evaluation with a plan for improvement (Appendices C & D).
   * + 1. **Self-Study**

An effective self-study process:

1. Is designed to have an impact on program health and performance beyond the team visit.
2. Has a specific focus on teaching and learning and optimal student learning outcomes.
3. Is an extension of an existing program evaluation process that is already in place and designed to monitor program performance and apply improvements as needed (Appendices C & D).
4. Makes use of data collected annually to evaluate program performance and attainment of stated program learning outcomes.
5. Addresses strengths and weaknesses of the program.
6. Addresses the following criteria: Mission, Program Quality, Future Direction.
7. Reflects efforts of all stakeholders: faculty, students, staff, and administrators.
8. Includes:
   1. Document not to exceed 20 pages.
   2. Additional appendices (List of faculty and staff, faculty CVs, strategic plan, student learning outcomes assessment reports, etc.).

The self-study follows established academic standards:

1. Identify goals and learning objectives of the program.
2. Conceptualize the process with input from stakeholders.
3. Collect data as part of regular program evaluation.
4. Learning assessment data should be a major part of data analysis.
5. Analyze data and develop recommendations.
6. Implement changes as needed.
7. Evaluate the impact of the changes as a result of the review.

***Self-Study Components***

***Mission***

State the program mission and align it with divisional and institutional mission and strategic direction. Describe how the program is fulfilling its mission and outline the focus on instruction and research. Discuss how program goals and objectives are linked to the university and divisional strategic priorities, and outline plans for continual development of the program.

***Program Quality***

Describe the curriculum and emphasize the following about the program:

1. Delivers a high-quality education.
2. Offers a curriculum that is relevant, rigorous, current, and coherent.
3. Includes program and divisional assessment plan.
4. Shows evidence that the division systematically examines the quality of the curriculum, instruction, and support services to enable students to achieve intended learning outcomes.

In the report include program learning outcomes, course learning outcomes, curriculum mapping and learning outcomes mapping to assessment (Test Blueprint).

1. Include data collected since the mid-cycle self-evaluation and describe curricular actions and improvements applied using the evidence collected.
2. Curriculum map should include the stated learning outcomes, when they should be achieved, and show evidence of student growth through multiple measures of the stated outcomes.
3. You may include indirect evidence, such as student surveys, student course evaluations, exit surveys etc. However, direct evidence of each program learning outcome must be gathered at different periods to show that the students are achieving the outcomes stated by the program.
4. Evidence that data collected, especially learning assessment data are analyzed and improvements are applied informing teaching methods, content, and relevancy to improve student performance.
5. Include examples of how faculty have used data to improve teaching and learning.

***Program Future Direction***

Describe how resources are supporting the program and outline plans for sustainability for the future. The allocation of resources and processes are informed by evidence. The self-study should include information on how the program continues to maximize the use of its human and material resources, and finally outline a program improvement plan for a sustained process.

Include:

1. Program planning documents and how the program will address future trends in the field.
2. Program processes, policies, guidelines etc.
3. Systems for collecting, analyzing, and using institutional information.
4. Describe the feedback loops and assessment plans used to support continuous quality improvement of learning.
5. Budgeting processes.
6. Address any specific issues raised by faculty, students, alumni, and administrators and how they will be handled.
7. Include an evaluation of program relevancy to the field and any advancements in the specific content area.
8. Include a plan for the next review in the next 5, 7, or 10-year cycle, including staffing, resources, enrollment caps etc.
9. Use the template in Appendix D to highlight goals and actions that need to be taken for improvement based on evidence outlined in the self-study.
   * + 1. **Program Evaluation by Internal and External Reviewers**

Programs may pursue internal or external evaluations or a combination of both. The process is the same for both forms of evaluation.

***Internal***

Internal evaluation teams are usually composed of individuals from the program, the division, or the institution. They usually focus on a formative assessment process to monitor continuous quality improvement. Drawbacks of internal evaluation can be that there is subjectivity or bias in the program evaluation.

***External***

External evaluations are conducted by experts in the field from outside of the institution. A benefit of using external evaluators is that the process is broader and may include views that internal reviewers may not possess. Additionally, external reviews carry more credibility if reviewers are well positioned in their field. It also reinforces accountability for those being evaluated.

***Review Process***

The department and program administrators will identify 1 to 3 external reviewers (Consult Appendix B for guidelines identifying and choosing external reviewers).

* 1. Reviewers should be well known experts in the field.
  2. Additional reviewers will be identified from an internal pool and may include faculty and experts from around the university.
  3. Program reviewers study the submitted documents and interview stakeholders connected with the program, including students and alumni.
  4. The committee produces a report with recommendations: Findings about the program strengths, areas for improvement, and recommendations.
     + 1. **Next Steps**

1. Program leads create an action plan, with timeline for deliverables of recommendations and improvements.
2. See Appendix C for a Program Improvement Plan Guide.
3. See Appendix D for a Program Improvement Plan Template.
4. The process is iterative and program evaluations should occur yearly until the next review.

**APPENDIX A**

**Recommendations  
Elements of Program Reviews**

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| **Review Process** | **Recommended** | **Required** |
| 1. Establish Periodic Program Reviews (i.e., 5, 7, 10-year cycle). |  | X |
| 2. Identify goals and learning objectives for the program. |  | X |
| 3. Collect data as part of regular program evaluation. |  | X |
| 4. Learning assessment data are a major part of data analysis. |  | X |
| 5. Report learning assessment in the aggregate. | X |  |
| 6. Include direct and indirect data sources. |  | X |
| 7. Conduct annual evaluation of program. | X |  |
| 8. Analyze data and develop recommendations. |  | X |
| 9. Create an action plan to address recommendations. |  | X |
| 10. Create timeline for implementing improvements. | X |  |
| **External Reviews** |  |  |
| 1. External reviews are necessary. | X |  |
| 2. External reviewers should be well known experts in the field. | X |  |
| 3. External reviewers should not have any connection to the institution or its constituents. | X |  |
| **Self-Study** |  |  |
| 1. Self-Study focuses on teaching and learning and optimal student learning outcomes. | X |  |
| 2. Self-Study identifies goals and learning objectives of the program. |  | X |
| 3. Self-Study is an extension of an existing program evaluation process that is already in place and designed to monitor program performance and apply improvements as needed. | X |  |
| 4. Self-Study addresses weaknesses and strength of the program. |  | X |
| 5. Self-Study describes curriculum and its relevance and rigor. | X |  |
| 6. Self-Study describes evidence that the program systemically examines the quality of the curriculum and instruction. |  | X |
| **Plan for Improvement** |  |  |
| 1. Create a plan for improvement based on recommendations. |  | X |
| 2. Create timeline for improvement implementation. | X |  |
| 3. Monitor application of improvements and successes. | X |  |
| 4. Monitor activities that did not work and how to improve them. | X |  |
| 5. Report on improvements by specified timeline and whether these improvements were effective. | X |  |

**APPENDIX B**

**Identifying External Reviewers**

In general, the Dean of each division has the responsibility of approving the external review team. The following criteria guide the process of selecting external reviewers:

1. Choose reviewers based on the following criteria:  
   1. Established scholars in their area of expertise to ensure credibility.
   2. Understand the work of your program.
   3. Are not connected with the department or program to minimize bias.
2. Reviewers are subject matter experts in all specialties and subspecialties for the program being reviewed.
3. The list of potential reviewers with their qualifications is submitted to the Dean.
4. The Dean may identify additional potential reviewers to add to the list.
5. Reviewers should not have any connections to the Dean, faculty, the division, or any members of the departments to ensure objectivity.
6. It is preferable to identify full professors who are scholars in the field. Junior faculty may be appropriate if they have proven to be scholars in the field.
7. Consider balancing the list of potential reviewers by considering diversity and inclusion for race, gender, ethnicity, and age.
8. The Dean and department chair agree on a final list before sending the invitations from his office.

Ensure the process of identifying reviewers and planning the review:

1. Includes all stakeholders: faculty, staff, and students.
2. Schedule meetings with faculty to discuss program directions.
3. Share the self-study, reports, and decisions with the program community for input.
4. Involve students, alumni, post-docs, and staff in planning the visit.
5. Ensure process is transparent and inclusive.

**APPENDIX C**

**Program Improvement Plan  
*Guiding Document***

**Purpose**:

The Program Improvement Plan should establish and outline the criteria against which each program can monitor their performance on or toward a certain improvement goal. ***There is no limit to the number of goals each program must report each year****,* this is a program-level decision and should be guided by the program needs for continuous quality improvement. This should be considered a “living document” as it is possible that the proposed objectives, implementation, or timeframe may change as a program undertakes these improvement processes. Programs should propose their best plan for improvement and continue to review this document and update information through the academic year.

**Elements of the Plan template:**

Below you will find guidance on each column in the template. This template is intentionally general to allow for the necessary variation of improvement across the diverse programs in your division. This guidance is to help Programs understand what information is needed, not to prescribe a process by which Programs must improve. These goals and objectives are to come from the Programs themselves. The template is a documentation for a cycle of continuous quality improvement.

*Program Improvement Goals***:**

The improvement goal of the Program Improvement Plan is to outline the annual or longer-term goals of each program and identify objectives and a timeline to achieve these goals. A goal should be a broad statement about an annual or longer-term expectation of what one would expect as a result of a candidate matriculating through this program. It should serve as a foundation for establishing program objectives.

*Improvement Objectives:*

The improvement objectives are the measurable steps needed to achieve the improvement goal. Each objective should be rooted in evidence/data that are used to contextualize and articulate the rationale necessary to justify each action step required to meet the objective.

*Supporting Evidence:*

Please list the data you used as evidence to support the articulation of this improvement objective. Examples of data include but are not limited to enrollment data, course evaluation forms, qualitative feedback from candidates, standard changes, or trends in the field. You should be able to use data to show some justification for why an objective is present.

*Detailed Implementation:*

Articulate the action steps required to meet each objective. This can include, but is not limited to actions related to planning, program review, or evaluation guiding the curriculum. Each of these steps must be a measurable action where data are collected to provide evidence of completion.

*Evidence of Goal Completion:*

Document the data sources that will be analyzed to determine the progress on or completion of each goal. These data sources should be in direct alignment with the action steps underlying each objective. Data sources can include, but are not limited to qualitative analysis of curriculum, policy, procedures, or candidate assignments, enrollment data, candidate grades, course evaluation data, or surveys of candidate preparation. The evidence reported in this section may or may not currently exist, and it is important to articulate the need if data are not currently available.

*Person Responsible:*

For each implementation element, there should be an individual within the program who is responsible for seeing this action through to completion.

*Timeframe for Implementation*:

Articulate a proposed timeframe for implementing each action for each improvement objective. There is no requirement that this timeframe be limited to the current academic year, rather it should be a feasible timeline for task completion.

*Measurable Outcomes:*

Programs should note the outcome of each improvement objective. Note what has been completed and what is ongoing. Since this is a living document, update annually if this is a new or ongoing action.

**End of Academic Year Summary**:

This section requests a review and summary of the program improvement work across the academic year. This can be completed at the end of the academic year and reflect on the successes and challenges faced in implementing each objective and meeting each articulated goal. If the work was successful, note your evidence to support the statement of completion. If the work will carry into the next academic year, note the evidence of progress and what steps remain ongoing. The goal here is to provide data/evidence of the work completed during the academic year. There should be an analysis of data to illustrate and support any intended interpretations and uses of results.

**APPENDIX D**

## Program Improvement Plan

## Draft Template

## *Edit or modify as needed*

### Program Name:

**Report Prepared by:**

**Date of Program Meeting to Develop/Discuss/Approve Plan:**

**Data Sets Included in Review:** Fall\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, Spring\_\_\_\_\_\_, Summer\_\_\_\_\_\_, Intersession\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

### Data Analysis and Program Improvement Discussion:

Indicate which data from **AEFIS** and/or other sources were analyzed in determining strengths and areas for improvement on candidate performance and program improvement.

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| **Improvement Objectives** | **Informal and Formal Data that informed objective** | **Action Steps** | **Detailed Implementation** | **Informal and Formal Data that will guide and measure completion of the objective** | **Person Responsible** | **Timeframe for Implementation** | **Outcome of Implementation** |
| **Program Improvement Goal #1:** | | | | | | | |
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| **Program Improvement Goal #2:** | | | | | | | |
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| **Program Improvement Goal #3:** | | | | | | | |
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| **Program Improvement Goal #4:** | | | | | | | |
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**Final Evaluation:**

1. Summarize the program improvements made since the last review, or since the implementation of the program’s Program Improvement Action Plan. Include in your summary responses to the following:  
   * What changes were made in the curriculum? Include changes to content, changes to courses, changes to assessments, and changes to program requirements.
   * What changes were made in instructional delivery and/or approach?
   * What assessment results prompted these changes? What were the challenging areas that were revealed by learning assessments?
   * How well did the changes address these challenges?
2. Analyze the effectiveness of your program’s Program Improvement Plan. Include in your analysis responses to the following:  
   * How effective were the assessment methods used in identifying challenges?
   * Did learner achievement challenges arise that were NOT revealed through your assessment efforts?
   * What changes, if any, will be made to the Program Improvement Plan and why?