

STEPHEN F. AUSTIN STATE UNIVERSITY
NACOGDOCHES, TEXAS

**Academic Program Review
Handbook**

Effective Fall 2014

Academic Program Review Overview

Academic Program Review (APR) at Stephen F. Austin State University is intended to enhance the quality of all academic programs and ensure the ongoing support necessary for continuation, modification and development of programs. All undergraduate and graduate degree programs fall within this policy. APR provides the opportunity for long-term, cumulative, internal self-study of programs by academic departments; external evaluation for programs not nationally accredited; and planning for continuous improvement.

The Texas Administrative Code Rule §5.52 requires that all master's and doctoral programs be reviewed on a seven-year cycle. APR serves to encourage self-study and planning within programs and to strengthen connections among the strategic plans of the program, the college and the university. Academic program reviews provide information for curricular and budgetary planning decisions at each administrative level. In turn, resources needed for growth, continuation or modification of programs can be included in planning processes.

The normal cycle for APR is every seven (7) years. All academic programs in a department should be reviewed at the same time, making APR a departmental as well as degree self-study. If one program in a department is governed by an external accrediting agency, all programs in the department shall be reviewed concurrently and in the same cycle as the accredited review. If the external professional accreditation is on a cycle of fewer than ten (10) years, that cycle will be followed. If the cycle is ten or more years, an internal program review shall be required at interim fifth year. Departments with multiple accrediting agencies should follow the cycle of the accrediting agency most appropriate to the department.

Professional or specialized accreditation reports shall substitute for the program review report required by this policy. However, any information required by the APR but not included in the professional or accreditation review must be added before the report is submitted as a program review.

The following definitions distinguish terms used throughout this document:

- An **academic program** is a structured grouping of coursework designed to meet educational objectives leading to a baccalaureate degree, post-baccalaureate degree, certificate, or teaching credential.
- A **department/division/school** (hereafter referred to as department) is an administrative unit that manages one or more academic programs.
- **Unit outcomes** are the key services provided by an academic unit (e.g., advising, alumni outreach, file maintenance).
- **Program Learning Outcomes** (PLOs) are the knowledge, skills and abilities students are expected to demonstrate upon completion of an academic program/major.
- **Student Learning Outcomes** (SLOs) define the knowledge, skills and abilities students are expected to demonstrate upon completion of a particular course.
- **Core Objectives** (COs), as prescribed by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), are critical thinking skills, communication skills, empirical and quantitative skills, teamwork, personal responsibility and social responsibility.

PROCESS

The APR process adheres to the standards of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) and the THECB. Academic units are required to evaluate their effectiveness in achieving unit outcomes and learning outcomes to accomplish college and university goals (i.e., mission statements and strategic plans). The APR consists of an Internal Program Review or the self-study, an External Program Review, and a Program Improvement Plan. All master's and doctoral program reviews are submitted to THECB according to its established schedule. Master's and doctoral programs in the same discipline are reviewed simultaneously using the same self-study materials and reviewers.

The university's mission statement and strategic plan drive APR. Academic units must be engaged in the ongoing assessment of their unit outcomes and program learning outcomes. Academic units with core curriculum courses must conduct an assessment of COs.

Internal Program Review or the Self-study

The self-study includes the following: (1) program overview and unit effectiveness (unit outcomes), (2) curriculum and student learning (PLOs and COs), (3) faculty characteristics and qualifications, and (4) summary conclusions. All required data must be completed even if an accrediting report is submitted in lieu of the APR report.

The Academic Program Review Self-Study should:

- engage faculty in thoughtful consideration of the programs.
- reflect the integrity expected of all members of the university, basing its conclusions on honest evaluation of available evidence.
- build on ongoing assessment, planning, and improvement efforts.
- be forward-looking and set future directions clearly related to the department, college, and university's Mission and Core Values.
- result in a succinct and clear report.
be composed with the understanding that additional funding is very limited and that the report should focus on improvements which can be accomplished by reallocation of current funds either within the department or the college.

Once the data is collected, the accompanying narrative should address the effectiveness of the program in fulfilling the university's mission in light of the faculty, student and resource characteristics. The narrative should describe areas for improvement and plans for addressing them.

1. Program Overview and unit effectiveness

This section provides a brief overview of the department and evaluates the department's effectiveness in performing its operational activities. This section should (1) review the program's administration and resources and (2) analyze the annual

assessment results of unit outcomes.

a. **Program Administration**

An academic program cannot be effective unless it is supported with sufficient and quality resources to fulfill its mission. Address the following: (1) alignment of the unit's mission statement with the university's mission statement, (2) degrees and/or certificates offered by the program, (3) faculty profile, (4) student profile, (5) staff, and (6) sources of income. Except where indicated, data are for the academic unit rather than specific degrees.

b. **Unit Outcomes Assessment**

Unit outcomes define the key services a department provides. Under SACSCOC accreditation standards, these outcomes must be assessed and appropriate actions taken as warranted by the assessment.

- Review the longitudinal data for the department and any actions that have been taken since the last APR to improve the quality of departmental services.
- Discuss the department's success in achieving the stated goals, including the strengths and weaknesses of the goals and outcomes in the department. Are they achievable, clear, and do they reflect a contemporary vision for the future?
- State and explain recommendations for future improvements.

c. **Headcount, degrees awarded and retention for last 5-7 years**

Discuss the trends in each area and what has been done to improve student success.

A narrative should summarize the trends discerned in the assessment information, demonstrate that appropriate actions have been taken to enhance program effectiveness and outline a five-year plan.

2. Program Learning Outcomes

PLOs constitute benchmarks against which the effectiveness of student learning is measured. Under SACSCOC accreditation standards, PLOs must be assessed and appropriate actions taken in light of the data. Assessment data on COs should be incorporated, if appropriate. PLOs, as reported in the university's assessment software, should be analyzed.

- Review the longitudinal data for each program within the department and any actions that have been taken since the last APR to improve the quality of student learning.
- Discuss the success in achieving the stated goals for each program including the strengths and weaknesses of the outcomes in each program. Are they achievable, clear, and do they reflect a contemporary vision for the future?
- State and explain recommendations for future improvements for each program.

The narrative should summarize the trends identified through the assessment process and demonstrate that appropriate actions have been taken to enhance learning effectiveness within the program.

3. Faculty Research/Scholarly/Creative Productivity

This section assesses the performance of a program's faculty in conducting scholarly activities. Include the following (1) faculty data on intellectual contributions, creative works, and contracts/grants/sponsored research from the university's faculty reporting system (e.g., Digital Measures) and (2) the results of tenure and promotion decisions.

The narrative should include an analysis of the data as well as emphasize distinctive faculty accomplishments and honors. Where improvements are indicated, an explanation should indicate that appropriate actions have been or shall be taken to enhance faculty effectiveness within the program.

External Program Review

University policy clearly articulates the goals to be achieved by the periodic review of its academic programs:

Academic Program Review (APR) is intended to enhance the quality of all academic programs and ensure the ongoing support necessary for continuation, modification and development of programs. All undergraduate and graduate degree programs fall within this policy. APR serves to encourage self-study and planning within programs and to strengthen connections among the strategic plans of the program, the college and the university. Academic program reviews provide information for curricular and budgetary planning decisions at each administrative level. In turn, resources needed for growth, continuation or modification of programs can be included in planning processes.

The examination of program effectiveness consists of both internal and external reviews. The internal review is designed as a self-study that considers the results of annual data typically over a five-year period. The external review is intended to ensure that an academic program is professionally competent under current disciplinary standards.

At a minimum, an external consultant is provided with the following materials and information:

- A copy of the self-study, departmental brochures, student advising materials, and the dean's comments on the self-study;
- Undergraduate and, if appropriate graduate, bulletins;
- University and college strategic plans;
- A copy of the university's APR guidelines;
- A list of questions, if any, for the consultant to address.

The external review should be of sufficient length to cover the topics under consideration. Please begin the report with an overall evaluation of the program and conclude with a summary and specific recommendations. Relevant issues to consider are the following:

- The quality and appropriateness of the degree program curricula (e.g., currency, educational preparation in the discipline)
- Qualifications of faculty
- Effectiveness of the instructional programs as evidenced by student learning outcomes
- Research, professional, and/or other creative activity of the faculty
- Short and long-term planning strategies as outlined by the department
- Quality of the assessment regime
- Comparison to peer programs
- Program strengths and weaknesses
- Strategies the department might take to address weaknesses/challenges
- Address the undergraduate and graduate programs under identifying titles

The program reviewer should provide a cover sheet that includes the following: date of the review; full name of reviewer; title; degrees earned and discipline; position held at the time of the review; other abbreviated information that is relevant to the subject-matter expertise for the review. In addition, the cover page should include the following signed and dated statement.

I affirm that I have no conflict of interest with the institution or the program under review.

Reviewer Selection Criteria

The following criteria should be considered in the selection of an external reviewer:

- part of a program that is nationally recognized for excellence in the discipline;
- employed by an out-of-state institution accredited by SACS or other accrediting body;
- appropriate terminal degree in relevant field from a regionally accredited institution;
- academic or appropriate professional experience (administration and/or teaching) in the field;
- research experience (where appropriate);
- appropriate professional experience in relevant field(s) (when appropriate);
- knowledge of the state of the art of the field;
- familiarity with standards for the academic program;
- familiarity with existing programs in the region;
- awareness of employment possibilities of graduates;
- knowledge of budgeting and financial matters;
- experience in evaluating academic programs; and
- no conflict of interest related to the institution or program under review.

Adapted from the University of Northern Arizona

Program Improvement Plan

Undergraduate Programs

Academic Program Reviewers, both internal and external, will consider the following issues in constructing the report. The final improvement plan will include the input from the self-study, external review and the dean's comments.

1. Mission and Goals/Outcomes of the Department: What strengths and weaknesses do you find in the Department's Mission and Goals/Outcomes? Consider whether the department's goals relate to those of the University and College, whether they are achievable, and whether they reflect a clear and contemporary vision for the future of the department and its academic programs and students. Do the enrollments and the graduation rates reflect a strong department? What recommendations do you have concerning such issues as graduation rates, attrition, enrollment, recruiting, retention, advisement and course scheduling for maximum effectiveness?
2. Core Curriculum and Undergraduate Programs: What strengths and weaknesses do you find in the department's Core Curriculum course offerings and/or undergraduate academic programs? Consider the overarching university goals of the Core Curriculum (critical thinking, communication, and quantitative reasoning). Consider also the seriousness and effectiveness of the department's efforts to improve student learning in both core and its majors. Are degree requirements for majors in the department of high quality, fulfilling current needs? Is the degree plan (including pre-requisites) designed to ensure that students can move through it smoothly and without undue delay? What recommendations do you have?
3. Assessment and Improvement: What strengths and weaknesses do you find concerning the department's commitment to and pursuit of continuous improvement of operations and student learning? What recommendations do you have in this area?
4. Teaching, Research/Scholarship/Creative Activity, and Service: Consider such issues as teaching loads, research/scholarly creative productivity, and quality and appropriateness of service activities. What strengths and weaknesses do you find concerning the department's teaching, research/scholarship/creative activity, and service? What recommendations do you have?
5. Faculty: What strengths and weaknesses do you find concerning the department's faculty? What recommendations can you make concerning such issues as future hiring, diversity, or professional development?
6. Relationships between this department and other units of the University: What strengths and weaknesses do you find in the department's functioning as an element in the larger University endeavor? Consider, if appropriate, the quality of Core Curriculum contributions to other university departments and such programs as teacher education. What recommendation do you have?

7. Resources: What strengths and weaknesses do you find in the resources available to the department and in the department's allocation of available resources? Assess the sufficiency of resources and support services to achieve goals and desired student learning outcomes. Consider such issues as budget, administrative support, classrooms and labs, library, technology, office space, faculty support and leadership. What recommendations do you have, assuming that near-term increases in funding will be modest at best?
8. Does the department's Improvement Plan appear to address the major weaknesses you have perceived? What additions or changes would you recommend?

Finally, compile the recommendations as a specific list, categorizing each recommendation as *Revenue neutral* or *Requiring additional funding*. Include recommendations that will remove barriers or more effectively accomplish goals and improve student learning in the department and the university.

Graduate Programs

Academic Program Reviewers, both internal and external, will consider the following issues in constructing the report. The final improvement plan will include the input from the self-study, external review and the dean's comments.

1. Mission and Goals/Outcomes of the Department: What strengths and weaknesses do you find in the Department's Mission and Goals/Outcomes? Consider whether the department's goals relate to those of the University and College, whether they are achievable, and whether they reflect a clear and contemporary vision for the future of the department and its academic programs and students.
2. Faculty: What strengths and weaknesses do you find concerning the program's faculty, considering such factors as coverage of the areas in the discipline, recruitment and training of new faculty, diversity, and/or professional development? What recommendations do you have in the areas of teaching, research or creative activity, and service for faculty in this program?
3. Students: Do the enrollments and the graduation rates reflect a strong program? What recommendations do you have concerning such issues as graduation rates, attrition, enrollment, recruiting, retention, advisement and course scheduling for maximum effectiveness? What recommendations do you have in this area?
4. Program: Does the curriculum reflect contemporary perspectives and best practice in the discipline? What recommendations do you have for future improvements in this area?
5. Resources: What strengths and weaknesses do you find in the resources available to the program and in the program's allocation of available resources? Assess the sufficiency of resources and support services to achieve goals and desired student learning outcomes. Consider such issues as budget, administrative support, classrooms and labs, library, technology, office space, faculty support and leadership. What recommendations do you

have, assuming that near-term increases in funding will be modest at best?

6. Assessment and Improvement: What strengths and weaknesses do you find concerning the department's commitment to and pursuit of continuous improvement of operations and student learning? What recommendations do you have in this area?
7. Does the department's improvement plan appear to address the major weaknesses you have perceived? What additions or changes would you recommend?

Finally, compile the recommendations as a specific list, categorizing each recommendation as *Revenue neutral* or *Requiring additional funding*. Include recommendations that will remove barriers or more effectively accomplish goals and improve student learning in the department and the university.

Submit the final document to the Provost Office

The final document should be submitted to the Provost office according to the timeline. Submit the document in the following format:

- Internal Review (self-study)
Save the document as the Internal Review. Save any appendices in a separate document titled Internal Review Appendices.
- External Review
Include a Cover page for the External Review that includes the information about the external reviewer credentials, place of employment and the declaration included in the external reviewer information elsewhere in this document.
- Response
Save the document with Response as the title. Include the response to the self-study, external review, dean's comments and the action plan.

APPENDIX

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board Rules for Graduate Programs

Graduate Program Review

At their April 27, 2011 meeting, the Coordinating Board adopted revisions to Section 5.52 of Board rules. This revised section adds new criteria and procedures for the review of existing graduate programs. The rules create a seven-year cycle during which all master's and doctoral programs must be reviewed. The link to Section 5.52 is: [Texas Administrative Code - §Rule 5.52](#)

On June 16, 2011, a memorandum was sent informing institutions of the change in rules and the necessity of submitting a schedule of review to the Assistant Commissioner of Academic Affairs and Research. This schedule must list the review date for every master's and doctoral program on the institution's inventory during the next seven years, 2012 through 2018.

Additional information on the implementation of rule 5.52:

- The first round of scheduled reviews for the upcoming seven-year cycle should begin by Fall 2012. During any given year of a cycle, an institution may review no more than 20 percent of its graduate programs. New graduate programs must be reviewed no later than the seventh year after the start date of the program.
- Alterations to the schedule of review are possible, but they must be formally requested. An institution wishing to make changes to its schedule of review should send a formal request from the provost to the Assistant Commissioner of Academic Affairs and Research. This request should include a list of the programs and review dates being altered, accompanied by a justification for the changes being requested. In no case shall an institution be allowed to move the review dates for its programs beyond the limit of the current seven-year cycle.
- During the seven-year cycle, each program is reviewed using the criteria listed in Section 5.52. The process must include a programmatic self-study and a review by external consultants with discipline expertise. Doctoral programs shall be reviewed by at least two external consultants and master's programs by at least one.
- No later than 90 days after the conclusion of each review, institutions shall submit electronically a report of the outcomes of each review to the Academic Affairs and Research Division. This report must include a summary of the programmatic self-study and the full text of the external reviewers' evaluation, as well as the institutional response to the external evaluation.
- Board staff will review and analyze each report, followed by an official response to the institution which may include requirements for program improvement.

Doctoral Program Review

Each public university and health-related institution shall review all doctoral programs at least once every seven years.

According to guidelines established by the Commissioner, SFASU submitted a schedule of review for all doctoral programs to the Assistant Commissioner of Academic Affairs and Research.

Institutions **shall** review master's and doctoral programs in the same discipline simultaneously, using the same self-study materials and reviewers.

The review of a doctoral program begins with a rigorous self-study.

Criteria for the review of doctoral programs must include, but are not limited to:

- a. The 18 Characteristics of Texas Doctoral Programs;
- b. Student retention rates;
- c. Student enrollment;
- d. Graduate licensure rates (if applicable);
- e. Alignment of program with stated program and institutional goals and purposes;
- f. Program curriculum and duration in comparison to peer programs;
- g. Program facilities and equipment;
- h. Program finance and resources;
- i. Program administration; and
- j. Faculty Qualifications.

External Review

As part of the required review process, institutions shall use at least **two** external reviewers with subject-matter expertise who are employed by institutions of higher education outside of Texas.

External reviewers

- a. must be provided with the materials and products of the self-study **and must be brought to the campus for an on-site review.**
- b. must be part of a program that is nationally recognized for excellence in the discipline.
- c. must affirm that they have no conflict of interest related to the program under review.

Institutions shall submit a report on the outcomes of each review, including the evaluation of the external reviewers and actions the institution has taken or will take to improve the program, and shall deliver these reports to the Academic Affairs and Research Division **no later than 90 days after the reviewers have submitted their findings to the institution.** The SFASU submission to THECB will be made by the Provost.

Institutions may submit reviews performed for reasons of programmatic licensure or accreditation in satisfaction of the review and reporting requirements in this subsection.

The Coordinating Board shall review all reports submitted for master's and doctoral programs and shall conduct analysis as necessary to ensure high quality. Institutions may be required to take additional actions to improve their programs as a result of Coordinating Board review.

Master's Program Review

Each public university and health-related institution shall review all stand-alone master's programs at least once every seven years.

According to guidelines established by the Commissioner, SFASU submitted a schedule of review for all doctoral programs to the Assistant Commissioner of Academic Affairs and Research.

Institutions **shall** review master's and doctoral programs in the same discipline simultaneously, using the same self-study materials and reviewers.

The review of a master's program begins with a rigorous self-study

Criteria for the review of master's programs must include, but are not limited to:

- a. Faculty qualifications;
- b. Faculty publications;
- c. Faculty external grants;
- d. Faculty teaching load;
- e. Faculty/student ratio;
- f. Student demographics;
- g. Student time-to-degree;
- h. Student publication and awards;
- i. Student retention rates;
- j. Student graduation rates;
- k. Student enrollment;
- l. Graduate licensure rates (if applicable);
- m. Graduate placement (i.e. employment or further education/training);
- n. Number of degrees conferred annually;
- o. Alignment of program with stated program and institutional goals and purposes;
- p. Program curriculum and duration in comparison to peer programs;
- q. Program facilities and equipment;
- r. Program finance and resources; and
- s. Program administration.

External Review

As part of the required review process, institutions shall use at least **one external reviewer** with subject-matter expertise who is employed by an institution of higher education outside of Texas.

External reviewers **may be brought to the campus** for an on-site review or **may be asked to conduct a remote desk review**.

External reviewers

- a. shall be provided with the materials and products of the self-study
- b. must be part of a program that is nationally recognized for excellence in the discipline.
- c. must affirm that they have no conflict of interest related to the program under review.

Institutions shall submit a report on the outcomes of each review, including the evaluation of the external reviewers and actions the institution has taken or will take to improve the program, and shall deliver these reports to the Academic Affairs and Research Division **no later than 90 days after the reviewers have submitted their findings to the institution**. The SFASU submission to THECB will be made by the Provost.

Institutions may submit reviews performed for reasons of programmatic licensure or accreditation in satisfaction of the review and reporting requirements in this subsection.

The Coordinating Board shall review all reports submitted for master's and doctoral programs and shall conduct analysis as necessary to ensure high quality. Institutions may be required to take additional actions as per THECB guidelines.

Timeline for Program Review

Target Date	Activity	Responsible Party
Spring Semester (before review date)	Self-study coordinator identified	Chair of department under review.
Spring Semester (before review date)	Department requests data from Institutional Research	Institutional Research
September 1	Calendar update for program reviews	Provost
Academic Year Review Date		
September 1- January 15	Conduct self-study of all programs in the academic department following Academic Program Review Self-study committee (A-64) and THECB Graduate Program Review Guidelines*+ Identify external reviewer/s as required by policy A-64 and THECB and submit recommendation to academic dean	Self-study committee and Chair of department under review
October 1	Dean of the college will select one/two external reviewers as per procedures and make appropriate arrangements	College Dean
November 1	Draft report of self-study document electronically sent to college dean from academic department	Chair of department under review
January 15	Self-study document sent to external reviewer/s	Chair of department under review
February 1	Self-study committee, department chair and dean make final recommendations based on external review.	
April 1	Completed program review document electronically submitted to Provost (brewersj@sfasu.edu)	College Dean
April 15-May 15	University program review committee reviews completed document and holds possible consultation with department chair/representatives and dean	Program Review Committee
May 15	Draft recommendation report from University Program Review Committee to Provost, Dean and Department Chair	Program Review Committee
May 15 - June 15	Provost meets with dean/department chair or representatives to discuss implementation plan	Provost
July 1	Provost submits graduate program reviews electronically to THECB	Associate Provost
September 1	Final Program Review and Final Recommendation document electronically forwarded to the Office of Institutional Research (sfa_ir@sfasu.edu) with copy to appropriate College	Provost

*Policies, guidelines and forms are located on the Academic Affairs website.
+Graduate and Undergraduate programs should complete a separate program review document for each program level. The review committees will evaluate the documents.

