

Program Review

Procedures & Guidelines for Review of Academic Programs

California State University, Fresno

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I. Introduction and Overview

Periodic program reviews provide a mechanism for faculty to evaluate the effectiveness, progress, and status of their academic programs on a cyclical basis. It is an opportunity for the department (or program) to evaluate its strengths and weaknesses within the context of the mission of the university and of current and emerging directions in the discipline. For the purposes of program review, a program is defined as a course of study leading to a degree. Academic programs are reviewed at least once every five years. Except for special instances (e.g., interdisciplinary programs), program reviews include evaluation of all undergraduate and graduate programs offered by the department.

The primary purpose of program review is to improve the program by thoroughly and candidly evaluating:

- the mission and goals of the program and their relation to the mission and strategic priorities of the institution,
- the curriculum through which program mission and goals are pursued,
- the assessment of student learning outcomes, program revisions based upon those outcomes, and plans for future assessment activities,
- the range and quality of research activities, emphasizing those involving students,
- the quality and diversity of faculty and staff and their contributions to program mission and goals,
- the quality of entering students (for graduate programs and others with restricted enrollment),
- libraries and other educational resources,
- physical facilities, and
- service and contributions to the community.

These reviews provide an opportunity for faculty to highlight program strengths and achievements, to identify needed improvements, and to address these needs through long-range plans that will endure through short-term administrative changes or budget crises. Program reviews are integral to planning, resource allocation, and other decision-making within the university. Regular program reviews also allow the university to account publicly for its use of public resources and to develop support among its various constituencies.

At California State University, Fresno, the dean of the Division of Graduate Studies, or designee, serves as the review officer for graduate programs and the dean of Undergraduate Studies, or designee, as the review officer for undergraduate programs.

In order to allow for reflection and input, the program review process is long and involved. The department prepares a self-study for each program under review. A review panel examines the self-study, visits the program, and prepares a report. The department and dean must then comment on the review panel's report. The report and comments are forwarded to the appropriate university-level committee for review. After receiving committee recommendations, the department writes a plan that describes actions to be taken in response to recommendations coming out of the reviews. An action plan meeting is held in which the department, dean, and central administration agree upon priorities and resources for a final action plan. The program review website provides a timeline for completion of program review activities, in the form of a checklist summarizing the responsibilities of the various participating parties.

NOTE: Within this document, all references to chair are meant as the department chair or program coordinator.

II. Initial Steps

In September of the academic year before the review is due, the review officer will notify the chair of the academic department and the appropriate dean that a review is upcoming. By that October, the chair of the academic department will notify the review officer and the appropriate dean who the self-study coordinator will be. Between October and November, the review officer(s) will schedule an orientation session for school or college deans, department chairs, self-study coordinators, and, if desired, additional department faculty, for all departments participating in a self-study.

III. The Self-Study

The Program Review website provides a detailed template and instructions for the self-study, which should be submitted to the college/school dean no later than March 1. The self-study is a comprehensive written report that is prepared by the academic program scheduled for a review. If the department undergoing review has multiple degrees, a separate self-study must be prepared for each degree, although a common set of supporting materials may be provided for multiple reports. The self-study should be between 20-30 pages, excluding appendices. It should not exceed 30 pages.

Instructions found on the Program Review web page show you how to obtain from the Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE) a standard data set to be included in the self-study. OIE can assist in updating the assessment plan and planning and evaluating surveys. The review officer(s) can provide guidance and answer questions about the program review process.

The self-study examines the current status of the academic program based on its activities and achievements since its last program review. The document should identify strengths and weaknesses in curriculum and instruction; student performance; student learning outcomes activities over the period since the prior review and a student outcomes assessment plan (SOAP) for the period until the next review; faculty contributions in teaching, research/creative activities, and service; resource availability and needs; and special features or services provided by the department. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it should serve as a vehicle by which the department, in conjunction with the university, can plan for the future. Goals for program improvement, an action plan to achieve those goals, and strategies for measuring progress towards goal achievement should be included. Thus, the self-study should include mechanisms for solving current problems and avoiding projected problems, for building on existing strengths, and for maximizing opportunities that are likely to develop within the discipline in the near future. The allocation of resources is an important matter to all programs. However, if the self-study report becomes primarily a budget request, the department misses an excellent opportunity to provide the campus information on its strengths, weaknesses, plans, and goals. Moreover, an unduly self-serving document in some measure loses credibility. The report is likely to have the most favorable impact on readers if the department seizes the opportunity for creative thinking about plans.

A self-study coordinator, selected from the department faculty by the department faculty, will oversee preparation of the report. All program faculty members should be involved in preparation of the self-study and consulted prior to the preparation of the final draft. Since the department chair is responsible for the content, accuracy, and completeness of the self-study, the chair should continually and actively oversee the preparation of the report. It is the responsibility of the self-study coordinator to meet periodically with the college/school dean to review progress on the self-study, to share the content of the self-study as it develops, and to report to the department faculty the comments and recommendations of the dean.

The college/school dean will review the program's self-study, provide comments to the self-study coordinator, and work with the department to address any concerns that arise. When satisfied with the quality and content of the self-study, the dean will forward the self-study with a memorandum of approval to the review officer(s) normally no later than March 30.

The review officer(s) will review the self-study for conformity with university guidelines. If all required elements of the self-study have been addressed, the review officer will notify the department to submit an electronic copy of the program self-study.

IV. Site-Visit and Report by a Panel of External Evaluators

The site-visit will be conducted by a team of three consultants including an external expert in the discipline under review who has experience with student outcomes assessment in that discipline, a faculty member from within the department's school or college (but outside the department under review), and a faculty member from the campus (but outside the school or college). The department may elect to include a fourth member of the team representing the alumni, community, or other accreditation experts. A fourth member must be pre-approved by the program review

officer(s). The chair of the academic department, in consultation with the department faculty and the appropriate dean, submits to the program review officer a list of reviewers by the end of April of the review year. The Review Panel Nomination Form is available on the Program Review web page. The review officer(s) will promptly confirm with the chair, coordinator, and panel members those selected. The university provides a stipend to the external consultant in addition to travel expense reimbursement.

The review officer(s) and the department work together to schedule the review panel site-visit. The department will provide the team with an office for use during the visit, as well as a computer and printer. In addition, space should be provided for scheduled meetings of the team with the various groups. It is the department's responsibility to arrange tours of its facilities; a tour of the library; time for reviewing course syllabi and student work (including randomly selected theses, if applicable); and to schedule the appropriate meetings with faculty, students, and alumni as appropriate. The site-visit opening meeting with the review team should include the department chair and undergraduate dean and/or graduate dean. The site-visit should conclude with an exit meeting of the school/college dean, undergraduate dean and/or graduate dean, department chair, and/or graduate program coordinator, to be scheduled by the review officers. If only one program is being reviewed, the panel can complete its work in a single day. For review of multiple programs (e.g., undergraduate and graduate), additional time may be needed. Sample site-visit agendas are provided below and on the Program Review web page. Remember to leave time in the agenda between activities as needed for moving between rooms/buildings.

[Download Sample Site-Visit Agenda \(one degree, one day\) pdf](#)

[Download Sample Site-Visit Agenda \(two degrees, two day\) pdf](#)

Description of Site-Visit Sessions:

1. Site-Visit Opening Meeting (typically first thing in the morning of Day 1)

One of the first meetings scheduled for the review panel will be with the review officers. The purpose of this half-hour meeting is to orient the site-visit team to the purpose of their visit and to answer any questions they might have on the procedures for the Academic Program Review and/or their role in the review. The opening meeting should include the department chair and undergraduate dean and/or graduate dean.

2. Visits with College/School Dean and/or Associate Dean

As part of an effort to incorporate review results into general university planning, meetings will be scheduled with the dean of the supervising college or school. Since the recommendations of the review team will affect planning by the department and college, the dean's interaction is crucial. Scheduled times for these visits will be arranged approximately one month prior to the review to allow for planning.

3. Visits with faculty members

Depending on the size of the department, two or three small group meetings (or individual meetings, where possible) might be desirable so that most faculty members will have a chance to express their opinions. In addition, there should be a small meeting with the faculty who prepared the report and with the graduate advisory committee or other committees whose work relates to the program review. The department chair should not attend the meetings with faculty. It is important that examples of course syllabi and student work (anonymized) should be readily available to be presented for review.

4. Visits with the department chairs

At least an hour should be scheduled for the review team to meet with the department chair. Because the review team will usually have questions from their conversations with students and faculty, some time for this visit with department chairs should be saved rather late in the schedule.

5. Visits with students

Some of the most helpful meetings are those with students. Because students often bring up questions for which the review team will want to seek answers, these meetings should be set up fairly early in the schedule. Class visits also work well. After the visitors are introduced and the purpose of the visit explained, department faculty members

should leave so that students feel free to discuss issues. Since undergraduate and graduate students may have different concerns, a separate meeting should be arranged for each group. It is important to have a substantial number of students in each group.

6. Review panel's report (Appendix D)

Time needs to be reserved during the site-visit to allow the review team to draft a report summarizing their program evaluations and recommendations. The review team report template is available on the Program Review web page. As the only review team member to receive a stipend, the external reviewer is tasked with the writing of the final report. If the department undergoing review has multiple degrees, as appropriate, there should be separate reports on undergraduate and graduate programs, delivered to the review officer(s). The report(s) will be distributed to the college/school dean and to the department via the chair and the coordinator.

7. Site-Visit Exit Meeting (typically last thing of the last day of the visit)

Site-visits conclude with an exit meeting comprised of the review officer(s), the college/school dean, undergraduate and graduate dean (if not the same as review officers), department chair, the self-study coordinator, and/or graduate program coordinator (if a graduate program).

A Note on Hospitality. Please coordinate faculty members to serve as local hosts, who will pick up out-of-town visitors at their hotel, escort them to meetings, arrange return transportation, and lend general assistance. If it is a two-day visit, please arrange for out-of-town visitors to check out of the hotel before noon on the second day so that the university is not charged for an extra day, unless the visitors have asked to stay over a third night. The review team will have two busy days and will likely appreciate a few hours of quiet. Please leave the evening hours free. Also, no funds have been set aside for entertainment. Lavish entertaining is not expected nor encouraged. If faculty members wish to go out to dinner or lunch with the visitors, they will be responsible for their own expenses.

V. Responses to the Review Panel's Report

The self-study coordinator and chair work together with the faculty to complete a written response to the review panel's report. The departmental response should be a good faith effort to address each of the issues raised in the report and may also discuss significant changes or developments that have taken place in the program subsequent to the self-study. The departmental response is to be submitted to the college/school dean and the review officer(s) within two weeks after receipt of the review panel's report.

The college/school dean should address the issues raised in the review panel report and the chair's response. The dean's response shall be submitted within two weeks to the chair and to the review officer(s) and distributed for review by the departmental faculty.

VI. University Committee Review

The campus program review committees will examine the review panel's reports and the departmental and dean's responses. The program review committees will then interview representatives of the program and the administration as appropriate and provide committee recommendations based on the reports provided. They should also comment on the outcomes assessment process in the department and on the updated Student Outcomes Assessment Plan. The committee report should be completed in no more than one month following receipt of the material and should be delivered to the review officer(s). The following are categories for committee recommendations:

University Committee Recommendations to Approve a Program:

1. Recommendation to Approve a Program with Notation of Exceptional Quality

Approval is recommended without reservation and with a notation of specific areas of program promise and excellence. Programs recommended in this category may be considered for an award for program excellence. These are programs that exhibit special strength in all aspects of the review process and reflect the very best attributes of commitment, quality, and promise.

2. Recommendation to Approve a Program of Quality and Promise

Program approval is recommended with identification of specific areas that need to be further developed, and a notation of specific areas of achievement. These programs meet all evaluative measures of quality, but nonetheless could improve in substantial ways (e.g., absence of a strong student recruitment plan.)

3. Recommendation to Approve a Program for Conditional Continuation

Conditional approval is recommended with identification of specific areas requiring significant improvement, including the conditions and a reasonable time frame for such conditions to be met in achieving unconditional approval. Conditional continuation is appropriate for a program that fails to meet expected quality standards and for which additional time and/or implementation of planned actions to address these weaknesses could be expected to eliminate such deficiencies without impairing student progress (e.g., the need to obtain space or equipment.)

Other University Committee Actions:

4. Recommendation to Suspend a Program

A recommendation for suspension of a program is appropriate upon receipt of a conditional continuation in the most recent program review and when two conditions occur: (1) when the program fails to meet established standards of quality that ensure an appropriate academic experience for students and (2) when there is evidence that these deficiencies may be corrected over a specified period of time. Those standards of quality include, but are not limited to, a minimum critical number of faculty, a minimum critical number of students, adequacy and frequency of required courses, adequate library holdings, and appropriate physical facilities. Please note that a recommendation to suspend a program could lead to administrative action. Administrative action to suspend a program (1) places a moratorium on new student admissions; (2) requires students currently in the program be accommodated so that they may complete the program; (3) places a moratorium on reappointment of faculty to graduate faculty status, if pertinent to a graduate program; and (4) removes program catalog copy. The degree title may be retained on the trustee-approved campus Academic Plan. If evidence suggests that the program may be successfully reconstituted at a later date, then conditions to be fulfilled in order to fully reopen the program should be identified along with a process to support the removal of a recommendation for suspension. Note that discontinuation may result if the program is unable to satisfy the conditions for successful reconstitution as identified.

5. Recommendation to Discontinue a Program

A recommendation to discontinue a program is appropriate upon receipt of a conditional continuation in the most recent program review and when the program fails to meet established standards of quality that ensure an appropriate academic experience for students, and at the same time when there is no evidence that deficiencies have been corrected over a specified period of time. Please note that a recommendation to discontinue a program could lead to administrative action. Administrative action to discontinue a program (1) places a moratorium on new student admissions; (2) requires students currently in the program be accommodated so that they may complete the program; (3) places a moratorium on reappointment of faculty to graduate faculty status, if pertinent; and (4) removes program catalog copy. A separate process for reviewing the implications of program termination is implemented. This second and separate level of review follows University policy and includes an assessment of the implications for the University and its service area, faculty, facilities, students, and resources if the program is discontinued.

VII. The Action Plan

In consultation with the dean, the department chair and/or program coordinator will draft an action plan, providing for each issue identified during the review the following: (1) proposed action and expected outcome, (2) cost/resource implications, (3) source of funds or resources, and (4) timeline for accomplishing the proposed action. This document will be discussed at a Planning and Implementation Meeting arranged by the Program Review Coordinator and including the vice provost, department chair, college/school dean, review officer(s) and a representative from the site-visit team (if requested by the department) to consider all recommendations and comments. The purpose of this meeting is to prioritize the action plan and obtain commitments for any resources needed to achieve the high priority goals. The dean and the provost may propose additional action items. The department may be requested to revise the action plan, and another action plan meeting may be called if needed. The finalized action plan is signed by the

chair, the dean, and the vice provost. Annually, departments report action plan implementation to the dean and submit assessment reports to the provost which are reviewed by the Learning Assessment Team. Departments receive feedback for closing the loop.