Academic Program Reviews
Description and Procedures

Graduate Council Academic Program Reviews

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Introduction

All undergraduate and graduate degree granting programs at the University of Utah are subject to regular review as mandated by the Utah System of Higher Education (USHE). The Graduate Council and the Undergraduate Council oversee reviews under their respective jurisdictions.

- The Graduate Council reviews programs with both graduate and undergraduate components or that award only graduate degrees . Graduate Council reviews are administered by the Dean and Associate Dean of the Graduate School.
- The Undergraduate Council reviews programs that are solely undergraduate in nature and are administered by the dean of Undergraduate Studies, senior associate dean for Academic Affairs, and associate dean of Undergraduate Studies.

These procedures apply to all undergraduate and graduate program reviews as administered by the relevant Council.

Academic program reviews are collegial in the broadest sense of the term and are based on the concept of peer review; they are scholarly in that they seek to define questions whose answers will increase understanding of the programs; they are comprehensive in that they view the programs under review as being connected both to other programs within the university and to the intellectual issues of the discipline at large; and finally, they are productive in that they result in actions that will improve undergraduate and graduate education.[1]

Purpose

Regular review and self-scrutiny are necessary to ensure continual improvement of educational units, and the systematic review of academic programs is an integral, formal component of that process. The purpose of program review is to improve the quality of education in the state of Utah by strengthening established programs and eliminating or upgrading those that fail to meet acceptable standards.

Program review has several associated objectives or goals:

- For the university, program review helps in long-range planning by providing information about the size, stability, and/or vitality of a program, its faculty resources and student demand, its equipment and space needs, its strengths and weaknesses, and its contribution to the mission of the institution. It helps set goals for the future and ensures that overall academic plans and budget decisions are based on actual data and agreed-upon priorities, not vague impressions.

- For the academic unit, program review provides a mechanism for change and improvement by creating a structured, scheduled opportunity for a program to be examined. The mechanism should be well-reasoned, far-seeing, and as apolitical as possible.

- Finally, program review is a mechanism by which universities are accountable to stakeholders and constituents (e.g., state government, accreditors, funding agencies, donors, taxpayers, and tuition-paying students) for their activities and for the quality of their programs.

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[1] Sections in "Introduction," "Purpose," and "Elements of an Effective Program Review" are adapted from *Academic Review of Graduate Programs - A Policy Statement,* Council of Graduate Schools, Washington, D.C., 1990, p. 26.

Elements of an Effective Program Review

- Ultimately, successful academic program review is a process of evaluation that provides answers to the following fundamental questions:

    o Is the teaching and training of students effective and useful?

    o Is the program advancing the state of the discipline or profession?

    o Does the program meet the institution's goals?

    o Does the program respond to the profession's needs?

- Program review is initiated and administered within the institution.

- Program review is evaluative as well as descriptive. More than mere compilation of data on a particular program, it requires academic judgments about the quality of the program and the adequacy of its resources.

- Review of programs is forward-looking; it is directed toward improvement of the program, not simply assessment of its current status.

- Units engaged in program review are evaluated using academic criteria.

- To the extent possible, program review is an objective process. It asks units to engage in extensive and intensive self-scrutiny and self-reflection, as manifested in the self-study. It brings faculty members from other units within and outside of the institution to review the self-study; meet with all representative members of the unit; and render their assessment. It is part of an established, public process in which all academic programs are similarly reviewed.

- The goal of program review is productive action. Based on the reviewers' reports and recommendations and the unit's proposed response, the institution develops a contextualized response to materially realize the thoughtfully considered responses to recommendations. This ensures that necessary institutional resources are allocated and that the program's goals fit into the institution's overall academic plans.

Academic Program Review Process

Notification

A department or degree-granting program is formally notified of a scheduled program review during the academic year prior to the year of the review. A seven-year plan for reviews of units that offer graduate degree programs (including those that offer undergraduate degree programs) is maintained in the Graduate School and is available on the Graduate School website (https://gradschool.utah.edu/graduate-council/program-reviews/). A seven-year plan for reviews is maintained by the Office of Undergraduate Studies for all self-standing undergraduate programs.

> If the department or program is accredited, it may request that the relevant Council accept accreditation in lieu of program review, in accordance with USHE R411 policy on academic program review. See the final section of this guidebook for details.

Orientation Meeting

For departments/programs undergoing program review, the administrators of the relevant Council will meet with the department chair/program director and staff in the academic year prior to scheduled review to orient the unit to procedures; set timelines for the review; advise preparation of the unit's self-study; and discuss guidelines for nomination of potential external reviewers, which the unit will furnish following the meeting. This meeting should occur no later than spring semester in the academic year preceding the review.

Review Committee

Internal Reviewers: A member of the appropriate Council overseeing the review is assigned by the relevant administrative body to chair the review committee; additional internal committee members are assigned based on unit degree-program offerings, as follows:

Unit Degree Program(s)	Review Committee Chair	Additional Committee member(s)
Graduate only	Graduate Council member	One Graduate Council member
Undergraduate only	Undergraduate Council member	One Undergraduate Council member
Undergraduate and Graduate	Graduate Council member	One Graduate Council member One Undergraduate Council member

Internal reviewers may not be members of the college in which the unit under review is housed.

External Reviewers: External reviewers are typically disciplinary experts of peer institutions (at least one external reviewer); industry experts may also serve in this role. The relevant administrative body secures and appoints external reviewers, informed by nominations furnished by the unit undergoing review, and arranges for external reviewer travel and lodging.

The relevant review administrator notifies the chair/director of the names of all reviewers and of the site visit date(s) no later than the semester preceding the review.

Site Visit

The unit under review, in coordination with the relevant administrator, organizes a detailed itinerary for the review committee's site visit. Generally, site visits are scheduled across one to two days.

Review Report Coordination

In the interest of optimizing disciplinary and professional perspectives that external reviewers bring to reviews, these reviewers are asked to craft a separate external report to be submitted to internal reviewers and to the relevant Council administrator within two weeks of the site visit. Internal reviewers draft a summary committee report that integrates and contextualizes the external report as relevant to the institution and its constituents. This report is expected two weeks after receipt of the external reviewers' report. This report is submitted to the relevant administrative unit, which forwards the report to the unit under review; the unit has seven days to review and correct errors of fact. The report is returned to internal committee members for finalization.

Council Approval

The review committee chair presents the summary report to the relevant Council (Graduate or Undergraduate), accompanied by the external review report and supporting documents. The Council discusses, may amend, and formally approves the report.

Response to Recommendations

The Council report, accompanied by the self-standing external members' report, is furnished by the relevant administrator to the department chair/program director and college dean; chairs/directors are encouraged to share the reports with faculty and staff. The chair/director and college dean are asked to furnish a response to the Council report and recommendations; the chair and dean response may be joint or respective. Chairs/directors and deans are asked to submit their response(s) within one month of receipt of the report.

Institutional Response

A wrap-up meeting is held with the cognizant senior vice president, department chair/program director, college dean, and relevant Council administrators to discuss the Council report and recommendations and the unit's proposed plan of actions to address them. Participants craft an institutional response that outlines proposed actions, designates responsible parties or processes, and establishes timelines for addressing program review recommendations.

Formal Submission

The Council report and institutional response are approved by the cognizant senior vice president and president of the University of Utah, which are then forwarded to the Academic Senate, Board of Trustees and Utah Board of Higher Education as information items. Chairs/directors are expected to distribute the institutional response to faculty and staff.

Progress Reports

Relevant review administrators may request periodic progress reports from the department/program between the conclusion of the program review and the next scheduled one if there are unexpected difficulties that impede progress toward addressing recommendations; if new issues emerge; or if clarification is needed. This may entail a formal follow-up meeting with the chair/director and relevant Council administrators.

Academic Program Reviewer Roles and Responsibilities

Program review involves the participation of two sets of consultants who comprise a single review committee:

- **External reviewers**: A minimum of two, at least one of whom is a scholar of national reputation in the discipline under review. Industry experts may also serve in this role.
- **Internal reviewers**: A Graduate or Undergraduate Council member (as determined by the type of unit under review) who serves as chair; and one to two other Council members as assigned based on the type of program under review (see table on page 6). Internal reviewers may not be members of the college in which the unit under review resides.

External reviewers are typically faculty members of peer universities who are nationally recognized educators and scholars in their respective subject fields. Industry experts may also serve as reviewers. External reviewers are appointed by the administrators of the relevant Council, informed but not restricted to nominations furnished by the unit under review. A minimum of two external reviewers are consulted for academic program review; however, a unit may request additional external consultants. This can be useful for a complex unit that features a number of subdisciplinary areas or tracks, for example. The task of the external reviewers is to assess and evaluate the quality and effectiveness of undergraduate and/or graduate programs relative to disciplinary standards, expectations, and trends. This evaluation is concerned primarily with the quality of education offered and achieved, which includes but is not restricted to overall quality ,and direction of the program; assessment of the composition and quality of faculty and students, as well as unit practices, protocols, resources, and support for them; curriculum offerings and program options; program effectiveness and outcomes assessment; and the adequacy of staff support, physical facilities, library resources, equipment, research facilities and the program budget. In addition, external reviewers consider the quality and effectiveness of the program in terms of such factors as employment demand, potential student population, and service functions performed by the department/program.

Internal reviewers, as Council members well versed in graduate and undergraduate studies, and also as faculty members of the institution are ideally positioned to evaluate program quality and effectiveness as described above in institutional context. Internal reviewers moreover consider relationships of the department/program under review with the goals of other programs, the university, and its constituents more broadly. In crafting the summary and ultimately final Council report, they serve the valuable role of integrating and contextualizing the external reviewers' report and recommendations.

The administrative body of the relevant Council arranges and absorbs expenses for consultant stipends, travel, lodging, and meals for external reviewers invited to the campus. Program review is part of the service commitment for members of Graduate and Undergraduate Council, from which internal reviewers are drawn; in recognition of the substantive time and efforts entailed by review committee service specifically, Council members of program reviews also receive a stipend for their contributions in these roles.

Program Self-Study

The self-study is prepared by the faculty of the unit under review and is both descriptive and evaluative; it provides basic information about the department or program and offers the faculty's assessment of the unit's strengths and weaknesses. The self-study is the faculty's opportunity to scrutinize itself; to publicize its accomplishments; to establish how it is viewed by its peers; and to register its goals and aspirations. A self-study should lead reviewers through the following questions:

- What do you do?
- Why do you do it?
- How well do you do it?
- What is the measure of your success?

PDF versions of the self-study are e-mailed by the review administrator to reviewers. Units under review may produce hard copies of the self-study for their own use or to keep for their records.

While the self-study is intended to be a comprehensive analysis of the unit under review, it should also be efficient and concise (40-80 pages, excluding appendices). Some content not only can but must be included as appendix materials, and additional content is not necessary unless information is lacking from the appendix or in the rare case that brief context for interpretation is necessary. Where content is necessary, listed or bulleted responses may be appropriate. Some content, in particular supporting materials, could be available for on-site review rather than be included in the self-study (e.g., brochures, newsletters, handbooks, teaching evaluations, etc.).

The following outline is a suggested organization for the self-study. Detailed prompts are provided on the self-study template. Wherever possible, data should be provided for the period since the last program review (normally seven years).

- Program Overview *(introduction to the unit, including history, organization, mission, strengths, weaknesses, program planning and previous reviews)*

- Faculty *(description and analysis of faculty composition, teaching, scholarship, service, and support)*

- Students/Postdoctoral Fellows *(recruitment, admissions, advising, resources, and support.)*

- Curriculum and Programs of Study *(programs of study, professional development, outreach education, qualifying exams, theses and dissertations)*

- Program Effectiveness – Outcomes Assessment *(procedures, feedback, completion data and employment)*

- Facilities and Resources *(budget, physical facilities, libraries, centers & institutes, technology, staff support)*

> **Note:** Not all content or prompts are relevant or significant for every unit; nor are prompts exhaustive. Units need only respond to relevant prompts or, as needed, address the subject in ways appropriate to their programs.

Scheduling the Site Visit

Coordination: An administrator for the relevant Council coordinates travel arrangements for the external reviewers, who will typically arrive the evening prior to the site visit and depart mid-afternoon or evening of the second day. It is the unit's responsibility to schedule the meetings described below, excepting the final exit meeting, which is scheduled by the review administrator. Departments should prepare the site visit schedule based on the general guidelines in this handbook. Modifications to the sample itinerary provided in this handbook may be necessary based on the individual needs of the unit under review. If needed, units may consult with review teams in advance of the visits to coordinate the site visit schedules.

Visits with Students/Postdocs: Some of the most helpful meetings are those with students. These meetings often take place over lunch or during a coffee/refreshment hour. Separate meetings with undergraduates and graduate students are desirable. After the visitors are introduced and the review process explained, faculty members should leave so that students feel free to discuss issues that have been raised during the review process. If the unit has postdoctoral fellows, a similar meeting with them is recommended. It is best practice to give all students the opportunity to participate in these meetings, rather than selectively invite a group of students.

Visits with Faculty Members and Staff: Two or three meetings with faculty groups is desirable so that all faculty have the chance to express their opinions. Considering that particular faculty groups may have specific concerns and that mixed groups may not be conducive to open discussion, it is generally helpful to have tenured and tenure-track faculty meet separately and to have a separate session(s) with career-line and/or adjunct faculty, particularly those with roles in education and training. If there is a faculty member who is a spouse or partner of the chair/program director or dean, they should either be excused early from a group meeting to allow for discussion in their absence, or be offered the opportunity for a short, separate meeting with reviewers. The review team should have opportunities to meet with department/program staff.

Visits with Department Chair/Program Director and College Dean: Sufficient time should be scheduled for the site visitors to meet with the head of the academic unit. The unit also should schedule a meeting between the reviewers and the dean (or dean's representative) of the respective college. Because site visitors will usually have questions from their conversations with students and faculty, time for this visit with the dean should be saved for later in the schedule.

Visits with Administrators for the Relevant Council: The site visit ends with an exit interview of the review committee with the administrators representing the relevant Council.

An Extra Note on Hospitality for Reviewers

It is helpful to have a faculty or staff member serve as a local host who will pick up external reviewers at their hotel, escort them to their first meetings each day, arrange return transportation, and lend general assistance over the two days. Lavish entertaining of the site visitors is not expected or encouraged. Faculty members often have dinner with reviewers; however, reviewers may also appreciate the opportunity to have dinner alone as a team in order to discuss review business. The relevant review administration will reimburse meal expenses for the reviewers only (information about processing reimbursements will be provided). If faculty members wish to dine with the visitors, the individuals or unit under review are responsible for faculty expenses. By university policy, reimbursement cannot be made for alcoholic beverages.

Sample Site Visit Schedule

Day before: External reviewers arrive and take taxi/rideshare to University Park Marriott Hotel.

Day 1

7:30 a.m.	Department chair meets review team at hotel coffee shop for breakfast and overview of site visit and brings them to campus.
8:45 a.m.	Meet with Department Executive Committee - conference room
9:30 a.m.	Meet with Faculty Group I
10:30 a.m.	Break
10:45 a.m.	Meet with Faculty Group II
11:45 a.m.	Pizza lunch with undergraduate students
12:45 p.m.	Committee meets to review notes
1:15 p.m.	Meet with graduate students
2:15 p.m.	Meet with Faculty Group III
3:15 p.m.	Break
3:30 p.m.	Tour of facilities
4:00 p.m.	Committee meets to review notes
4:30 p.m.	Department provides transportation back to hotel
6:00 p.m.	Dinner with 1-2 department faculty members; or review team working dinner

> Separate meetings should be set up, as applicable, for:
> - Tenured faculty
> - Tenure-track (pre-tenure) faculty
> - Career-line/adjunct faculty

> Depending on unit, postdoctoral fellows could have a separate meeting (potentially instead of a third faculty group) or be combined with graduate students.

Day 2

7:30 a.m.	Faculty member meets review team at hotel for breakfast; transports to campus
8:45 a.m.	Meet with department staff – conference room
9:30 a.m.	Committee meets to review notes – conference room
10:00 a.m.	Meet with College Dean - Dean's office
11:15 a.m.	Exit meeting with Department Chair
12:00 p.m.	Exit meeting and box lunch with administrators for the relevant Council
1:15 p.m.	The review administrator arranges transportation to airport

Guidelines for Reviewer Reports

The primary tasks of both external and internal reviewers is to identify strengths and weaknesses of the unit, as relevant, across the respective areas of review addressed in the self-study; cite features that merit commendation; and, of particular import, generate key recommendations for the unit to the end of aiding and/or focusing their continued improvement. Reviewers utilize a report template to complete reviews in accordance with these charges. The external reviewer report is expected within two weeks of the site visit; the internal reviewer report is expected within two weeks of receipt of the external reviewer report.

The most useful reports are concise and focused: on strengths and weaknesses, if and as relevant, in each area of review; and especially on recommendations, which should be selective, prioritized, concrete, and actionable. Reviewer recommendations furnish the foundation for the eventual plan of action that the unit proposes in response to the reviews, which in turn informs the institutional response.

> **Note:** Narrative description or summary of the unit relative to each of the areas of evaluation is not necessary; the self-study furnishes this information. Reviewers are welcome, however, to contextualize their evaluations in relation to disciplinary and/or professional norms (in the case of external reviewers); and institutional best practices (in the case of internal reviewers).

While there is no prescribed review report length, reports generally average about 4-8 pages, in total. As detailed in the report template, review reports include:

- A cover page (unit, date, reviewers)

- A brief program overview

- A chronicling of strengths and weaknesses, as relevant, in each of the following areas:
    - Faculty
    - Students
    - Curriculum
    - Program Effectiveness and Outcomes Assessment
    - Facilities and Resources

- Commendations

- Recommendations

Options for Programs with Specialized Accreditation

Per USHE Policy R411, academic programs that are accredited by an organization recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation or the U.S. Department of Education may request that programmatic accreditation is accepted in lieu of academic program review. Consonant with the nature and function of an academic program review, such accreditation signifies that the unit has met rigorous standards for quality, capacity, and effectiveness.

A unit that wishes to substitute an accreditation review for all or part of its program review shall submit an application (p. 13) and accompanying necessary materials to the cognizant (Graduate or Undergraduate) Council charged with review and evaluation of the program. Application standards are informed by and in alignment with state and university policies governing program review; as well as institutional accreditation standards (see Policy and Standards Guidance, p. 15).

If any institutional standard identified on the Application Checklist (p. 14) is not required by an accreditor, or if any program of the unit is not covered by the accreditation, the unit may submit evidence demonstrating compliance through other means (e.g., program or institutional documents or reports). The cognizant Council shall consider these materials and may accept them in lieu of a formal review; or may require the unit to submit those standards or programs not covered by the accreditation to a formal review. The cognizant Council will inform the unit of their decision in the spring prior to the academic year of the review.

Adjustments include, but are not limited to:

- The unit may submit their programmatic accreditation letter and/or report to USHE in lieu of the entire program review.
- The unit may undergo a supplementary review of the programs not included in scope of accreditation.

Application for Substitution of Programmatic Accreditation for Academic Program Review

Accreditation Status and Accreditor Standards

1. Unit scheduled for review:

2. Name of programmatic accreditor:

3. When was the most recent site visit conducted by the accrediting body?

4. Weblink to accreditation standards:

5. List the programs that are included in scope of accreditation:

6. List the programs that are not included in scope of accreditation. Note: if the unit is petitioning to include *all* programs in this proposal, please provide a statement outlining the rationale for the request.

7. Provide the text from the accreditation standards addressing student assessment.
   a. Does the accreditor define a specific set of learning outcomes that must be achieved by program graduates? If so, list here or direct where to find them (link and page number, if PDF).

   b. What are the accreditor's benchmark standards for student outcomes such as graduation rates, licensure exam pass rates, or graduate employment? Has the program met those benchmarks since the last accreditation review?

8. Provide the text from the accreditation standards regarding curricula.

9. Provide the text from the accreditation standards regarding faculty.

10. Provide the text from the accreditation standards regarding student advising.

11. Provide the text from the accreditation standards regarding physical facilities.

Provide the following documents as attachments:
- self-study from the last accreditation review

- most recent accreditation report or letter affirming accreditation

- letter from the college dean supporting this proposal

- unit's Curriculum Management Plan *

- Learning Outcomes Assessment reports completed since the last review (at least 2) *

- Any additional documents that demonstrate compliance with institutional standards as identified in the *Application Checklist for Accepting Programmatic Accreditation*

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*Programs are required by University of Utah Policy 6-001 and further detailed in Rule 6-001CMP, to develop and follow a written Curriculum Management Plan, which includes processes for conducting Learning Outcomes Assessments. See the Office of Learning Outcomes Assessment webpage for guidance and a suggested template.

Application Checklist

Institutional Standard:	Required by accreditor	Program is compliant
1. The internal consultation and decision-making processes place primary responsibility for curricula management decisions with faculty.		
2. The unit has a written curriculum management plan.		
3. Programs are systematically assessed using meaningful indicators to assure currency, improve teaching and learning strategies, and achieve stated student learning outcomes for all students.		
4. Student assessment efforts are used to inform academic and student support planning to continuously improve student learning outcomes.		
5. The unit reports results of outcomes assessment. To be compliant, at least two interim reports must be provided to the university.		
6. A thorough curriculum review of every credentialed academic program is conducted at least once every seven years.		
7. The unit has an effective system of student advisement.		
8. The unit's physical facilities and technology infrastructure is sufficient to ensure healthful learning and working environments that support and sustain the unit's programs.		
9. The unit employs faculty, staff, and administrators sufficient to achieve its educational objectives and ensure the integrity and continuity of its academic programs.		

To be compliant, a program must demonstrate that either:
  a. The standard is required by the accreditor *and* there was no finding of noncompliance with affirmation of accreditation; or
  b. The standard is not required by the accreditor, but the program can demonstrate compliance through other means, such as written policies and procedures, student surveys, or reports filed with the Office of Learning Outcomes Assessment.

Policy and Standards Guidance

[Rule 6-001CMP: Curricula Management Plans of Academic Units](#)

[Policy 6-001: Academic Units and Academic Governance - Roles of Faculties, Committees, Councils, and Academic Senate](#)

[USHE Policy R411, Cyclical Institutional Program Reviews](#)

Applicable [NWCCU Standards](#):

Standard One - The institution articulates its commitment to student success, primarily measured through student learning and achievement, for all students, with a focus on equity and closure of achievement gaps, and establishes a mission statement, acceptable thresholds, and benchmarks for effectiveness with meaningful indicators. The institution's programs are consistent with its mission and culminate in identified student outcomes leading to degrees, certificates, credentials, employment, or transfer to other higher education institutions or programs. Programs are systematically assessed using meaningful indicators to assure currency, improve teaching and learning strategies, and achieve stated student learning outcomes for all students, including underrepresented students and first-generation college students.

1.C.5 The institution engages in an effective system of assessment to evaluate the quality of learning in its programs. The institution recognizes the central role of faculty to establish curricula, assess student learning, and improve instructional programs.

1.C.7 The institution uses the results of its assessment efforts to inform academic and learning-support planning and practices to continuously improve student learning outcomes.

2.F.3 Consistent with its mission, programs, and services, the institution employs faculty, staff, and administrators sufficient in role, number, and qualifications to achieve its organizational responsibilities, educational objectives, establish and oversee academic policies, and ensure the integrity and continuity of its academic programs.

2.G.6 The institution designs, maintains, and evaluates a systematic and effective program of academic advisement to support student development and success. Personnel responsible for advising students are knowledgeable of the curriculum, program and graduation requirements, and are adequately prepared to successfully fulfill their responsibilities. Advising requirements and responsibilities of advisors are defined, published, and made available to students.

2.I.1 Consistent with its mission, the institution creates and maintains physical facilities and technology infrastructure that are accessible, safe, secure, and sufficient in quantity and quality to ensure healthful learning and working environments that support and sustain the institution's mission, academic programs, and services.