

Summary of Changes External Review Policy for Non-accredited Academic Programs

Prepared by Dr. Marianne Fallon, Interim AVP—Planning and Resources

February 16, 2019 (v23)

Revised March 4, 2019 (v24)

Revised March 19, 2019 (v24)

Revised March 25, 2019 (v25)

Preamble:

Given the recent NECHE visit, it is a good time to update the external review process for non-accredited academic degree programs. The goals of the external review are twofold: (1) to meet NECHE requirements (Standard 4, and more specifically [Standard 4.6](#)); and (2) to provide Departments, Deans, and the Provost's Office with information to fuel discussion and shape future planning for academic programs. To those ends, the proposed changes from V22 provide additional clarification regarding the process and content of the self-study and reviewer questions. The Director of OIRA, Academic Deans, Academic Assessment Committee, and Council of Chairs have reviewed the proposed changes and have provided feedback.

Summary of proposed changes:

Lines 3 and 4. Changed NEASC to NECHE and removed upcoming visit date.

Lines 21 and 24. Changed "degree" to "academic" programs to improve consistency of terms.

Line 24. Added "unless other arrangements have been agreed upon with the department chair" to the sentence beginning "All degree programs in a department will be reviewed at the same time." In some departments, there are so many degree programs (e.g., Manufacturing and Construction Management) that reviewing all programs at once becomes overly burdensome. In such cases, Yvonne Kirby has worked with department chairs to create a more tenable review schedule.

Lines 24-26. Removed "Degree programs include bachelor's degrees, master's degrees, sixth-year certificates, and doctoral degrees; programs leading to other credentials are exempt from this process." NECHE expects all academic programs to be reviewed.

Line 36. Changed "four-year cycle" to "five-year cycle" to accurately reflect the current practice voted upon by Faculty Senate [February 13, 2012](#).

Line 37. Fixed acronym for the Academic Assessment Committee.

Line 40. Changed "prepare" to "complete" to clarify when exemptions from submitting assessment and annual department reports apply.

Line 48. Changed "10 pp. summary" to "self-study" for clarification and greater flexibility.

Lines 56-57. Removed “The final review report will serve as a basis for future plans in the department’s annual/assessment reports” and replaced with “The final review report will serve as a basis for the Department, Dean, and Provost to discuss, identify, and document action items for programmatic improvements during an in-person meeting. Procedures for following up on action items will also be discussed and documented.” This change complies with a commitment the institution made in the recent NECHE report and works to “close the feedback loop”.

Lines 61-62. Changed “3-4” possible external reviewers to “2-3” reviewers to streamline process.

Lines 65-66. Specified amounts for honorarium (minimum of \$500 per program) and travel expenses (up to \$500 from the Provost’s Office).

Line 69. Removed “(the NEASC liaison officer)”. The AVP does not necessarily have to be the NECHE liaison.

Line 78. Added “Responses should be based on the **previous 5 years or the period of time since most recent self-study**.” This information clarifies the time frame that departments should consider while they complete their self-study.

Lines 80 to 89 and lines 91 to 97. Switched order of “1. Program Learning Outcomes” and “2. Academic Program Profile” for better cohesion.

Line 80. Reworded “Program Learning Outcomes” to “Learning Outcome Assessment” to better reflect the information requested in this section.

Line 81. Reworded for clarification and to align with assessment report dimensions: “What are the program’s learning outcomes? Are they clear and measurable? “

Line 82: Changed “present” to “discuss” for clarification.

Line 83. Reworded for clarification and to align with assessment report dimensions: “What methods are used to measure departmental learning outcomes (e.g., final paper assessed using rubric; graded assignment)?”

Lines 85-86. Removed “as set by the program faculty”. All learning outcomes for non-accredited programs are set by program faculty; that clause implies that some learning outcomes are not, which is decidedly not the case.

Lines 87-88. Reworded for clarification: “How do program faculty use student learning outcome data to inform and/or make adjustments to their curriculum?”

Line 89. Removed “Is this use of information appropriate?”. It is the external reviewer’s charge to reflect on whether the use of information is appropriate.

Line 91. Added “Include a brief description of the academic program (such as in the preface of Assessment Reports).” This information saves the external reviewer from going to the program website to infer general information about an academic program.

Line 92. Reworded for clarification: “What is the program’s enrollment including number of majors and student credit hours?” (Notably, lines 72-73 of the policy states that “The OIRA Director will ensure that a common set of program metrics is provided to departments.” This change would not place undue burden on Department Chairs.)

Lines 93-95. Removed questions about contributions to general education and interdisciplinary programs. These questions do not apply to all programs and the term “contribution” is unclear. This is not to say that a department’s contribution to general education and interdisciplinary programs is unimportant—it simply falls beyond the scope of reviewing a specific academic program. If departments are concerned that external reviewers understand instructional load issues that extend beyond students within their degree program (e.g., minors, contributions to general education, and contribution to interdisciplinary programs), the requested information about student credit hours in 2B provides the external reviewer with that information.

Lines 96-97. Reworded for clarification: “How many students graduate from the program on a yearly basis? What is the average time to graduation? (You might consider reporting native and transfer students separately.)”

Line 98. Added “What changes has the Department made to the academic program in response to: (1) the most recent external review; and (2) your assessment process? What other changes has the Department made to the academic program?” Responses to the first question produce information required by NECHE. The second question provide departments with an opportunity to discuss programmatic decisions that would not otherwise be captured in their response to the first question.

Lines 100-102. Reworded for clarification and separated into a question and potential—but not necessary—exemplars: “In what ways do program faculty engage students in curricular activities and those beyond the classroom? Such activities might include but are not limited to: faculty-student research, community engagement, international education, and workforce development.”

Line 105. Reworded for clarification and to encourage responses focused squarely on the academic program: “What are the Department’s future plans for the academic program?”

Lines 106-107. Reworded for clarification: “What is the rationale supporting these plans?” Clause about connection to the University’s mission and strategic plan are addressed in Line 109 addition.

Line 108. Reworded for clarification: “What personnel, space, and financial resources would be needed to implement the Department’s plans?”

Line 109. Included new section (“Alignment with Strategic Plan”) with two parts: “(A) Do the activities described in 3A align with the current strategic plan? If so, how? (B) Does the rationale in 4B align with the current strategic plan? If so, how?”. The rationale for this change is explained in a footnote: “Faculty are not contractually obligated to provide students with experiences that align with the strategic plan. Nevertheless, when budgets are presented to the University Planning and Budget Committee, there is an opportunity to identify how each request aligns with elements of the strategic plan. Thus, Departments should have the opportunity to convey how activities and future plans align with the strategic plan.”

Line 117. Reworded for clarification: “Given resource constraints, what recommendations would produce measurable improvement for the academic program? Please comment specifically on elements 4A-C in the self-study.” Language about improving “the department” was removed because this is not a departmental review; it is an academic program review.

Line 118. Reworded for clarification: “Discuss how the Department is using data (e.g., learning outcome assessment, enrollment trends, etc.) to inform programmatic decision making.”