

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

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*Revised March 19, 2019 (v24)*

*Revised March 25, 2019 (v25)*

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### **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. Further feedback from individual faculty members has also been incorporated. Changes from V25 are printed in [blue](#).

### **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 to 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 24. Placed the footnote about accredited programs after "exceptions" to improve coherence.](#)

[Lines 28 to 66. Changed order of elements and formatting to better reflect the typical chronology of the external program review cycle.](#)

Lines 32 to 33. Changed to “... to begin the program review with an informational meeting between the Chair, Associate Vice-President, and Director of the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (OIRA). The Department will prepare a self-study based on annual and assessment reports for each program under review.” This change clarifies steps that occur at the start of the external review process. The initial time investment is intended to help clarify questions about the process, identify concerns or potential obstacles for completing the program review, and (if applicable) discuss solutions.

Lines 34 to 36. Changed to “...departments will respond to a standard set of questions (see below) and are encouraged to include any additional information that their faculty believe is important for the external review.” This change telegraphs that the standard set of questions is included within this policy document. In addition, the encouragement to include additional information not specifically requested within this standard set of questions reinforces faculty autonomy.

Line 36. Changed “four-year cycle” to “5-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.

Lines 42 to 45. Changed to “The external reviewer(s) will receive the department’s self-study and all supporting materials. Subsequently, they will conduct a site visit that includes meeting with the faculty, the Dean(s) and Provost” and “Ideally, the program review would be completed across two adjacent full semesters.” These changes clarify process and ideal timeline.

Line 48. Changed “10 pp. summary” to “self-study” for clarification and greater flexibility for departments who decide to combine reviews for multiple programs into a single report, or who determine that they need additional space to adequately reflect their academic program. Ten pages of narrative (not including appendices) is recommended to help constrain the workload for faculty and the external reviewer.

Lines 56 to 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 the basis for the Department, Dean, and Provost to meet in person and discuss findings from the external review. During the meeting, action items for improving the academic program will be identified and documented. Procedures for following up on action items will also be discussed and documented.” This change fulfills a commitment the institution made in the recent NECHE report to “close the feedback loop”.

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

Lines 65 to 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.

Lines 72 to 73. Replaced “provided” with “available”. Please see the supplemental material for a list of links to institutional data.

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 to 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 to 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? Include number of majors and departmental student credit hours with full-time equivalent enrollment.” Links to the data for program enrollment are included in supplemental information.

Lines 93 to 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 1B provides the external reviewer with that information. In addition, departments are encouraged to include in their self-study information that they believe is important to their academic program, even when those questions do not explicitly appear in the standard questions.

Lines 96 to 97. Reworded for clarification: “How many students graduate from the program on a yearly basis? What is the average time to graduation?”

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.

Line 99. Reworded heading to “Faculty-Student Engagement” to better reflect the content of this section.

Line 99. Added question “Describe program faculty’s instructional workload (e.g., average class size, student-to-faculty ratio, the ratio of student credit hours to instructional load credits). Are there sufficient faculty to meet instructional demand?” Links to relevant institutional data are provided in the supplemental material. This question provides a foundation for productive discussions about workload.

Lines 100 to 102. Reworded to “Highlight 4 to 8 ways that program faculty engage students in educational activities designed to promote their students’ learning. Such activities can be in or beyond the traditional classroom.” This question is worded broadly to provide departments with the flexibility to describe educational activities what they consider to be important facets of their academic program. The rewording provides suggested bounds to this question to help constrain workload. Because of the provision that departments are encouraged to include additional information that they deem important, departments can exceed this range. A list of potential—not necessary—activities is provided in supplemental information.

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 to 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 educational experiences that align with the strategic plan. Budget requests (including those that could support current educational activities and/or future plans) made during the annual budget cycle identify how the request aligns with elements of the strategic plan. As such, departments should have the opportunity to convey how they believe their educational activities and future plans align with elements of 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.”