

Fairmont State University

Academic Program Review Institutional Process

Purpose

The primary purpose of an academic program review (APR) is to evaluate the educational quality, viability and responsiveness of an academic program. The insights gained from program reviews help make informed decisions about program actions, resource allocation, and strategic planning.

The Fairmont State program review process provides each academic unit the opportunity to engage in a continuous improvement process - systematically examining strengths, deficiencies against strategic goals over time, and allows the university to:

- Identify areas for program improvement, development, or expansion.
- Evaluate program's ability to respond to current needs, future challenges, and opportunities.
- Promote strategic planning and goals setting within and across departments.
- Identify potential opportunities to redirect existing resources, and/or generate and use incremental resources.
- Ensure educational quality to relevant stakeholders (e.g., parents, students, alumni, HLC).

The APR is also an essential component of institutional accreditation with the *Higher Learning Commission* accreditation standards, including the following:

- *Criterion 3.A: The rigor of the institution's academic offerings is appropriate to higher education.*
- *Criterion 4.A.1 The institution ensures the quality of its educational offerings; The institution maintains a practice of regular program reviews and acts upon the findings.*
- *Criterion 4.B: The institution engages in ongoing assessment of student learning as part of its commitment to the educational outcomes of its students.*

Note: The *West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission* retains authority to resume program review using productivity standards to identify programs that are underperforming based on enrollment and completion rates and to recommend to governing boards those programs should be improved or discontinued (*Series 10: §133-10-5*),

Academic Program Review Process

Academic Program Reviews are conducted on a 5-year cycle, or whenever possible, in conjunction with other discipline-specific accrediting agencies. The evaluation of programs is conducted through a self-study process, culminating with a reflection and action plan.

The individual and groups involved in the APR process include:

- Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs or the provost's representative(s)
- Office of Institutional Effectiveness
- Dean
- Department Chair
- Assurance of Learning Director
- Undergraduate and/or graduate students in the program(s)
- Internal Program Review Council
- Other key constituents, as appropriate.

Internal Reviewers - Program Review Council

The Program Review Council (PRC) consists of 5-8 members elected by each College, in consultations with the Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs or the provost's representative. For reviews of academic units with graduate programs, at least two Council members must have graduate faculty status. The Provost Office staff and the Finance and Administrative representative serve as *ex officio* members. Additional Council members may be added as needed.

Council members serve three-year staggered terms to allow for continuity. The Council is responsible for conducting the program review and making recommendations to the Provost and VP of Academic Affairs through a formal report. The APR review will involve:

- Examining the program's self-study report, including any supporting materials.
- Touring facilities (where appropriate).
- Meeting with the department's administration, faculty, staff, and/or students.
- Discussing findings with internal review teams.
- Providing input for developing program action recommendations.
- Holding an exit meeting with the dean, department chair, director of institutional effectiveness, and the Provost or their representative to clarify any remaining concerns and present preliminary findings.

- Preparing a final report outlining the Council's findings and recommendations.

Council members are expected to maintain confidentiality throughout the review process, as their guidance is crucial to its integrity.

Program Review Council Procedures

1. **Program Self Study Submission:** Every degree program scheduled for review in a particular year must complete a program self-study and submit to the Provost Office by **December 1** of the review year.
2. **Review Period:** Program self-studies are reviewed by the Program Review Council over the period of December through the first week in February.
3. **Interim Reports:** When programs are asked to provide interim reports, these reports will be submitted to the Program Review Council by the first of February of the following year.
4. **Council Membership:** PRC members are elected by each College to review undergraduate program self-studies. Faculty members of the Graduate Program Review Council are elected by the University Graduate Studies Council to review graduate program self-studies.
5. **Reviewer Assignment:** Each program is assigned a lead reviewer and one or more secondary reviewers. Reviewers may not participate in reviews of programs within their own departments.
6. **Review Process:** Reviewers evaluating the assigned self-study documents may request additional information and/or clarification from the program as needed. The reviewers will meet with the program faculty to address any gaps or ask for clarification of the self-study.
7. **Preliminary Findings:** The lead reviewer collaborates with secondary reviewer(s) to complete a program evaluation report, outlining the preliminary findings and initial recommendations.
8. **Exit Meeting:** The lead reviewer presents preliminary findings and recommendations at the Program Review Council exit meeting convened by the Provost. This meeting is generally held in late February or early March.
 - **Council Deliberation:** During the PRC meeting, reviewers answer questions about the program based on their review. If present, up to three representatives from the program may provide information but should refrain

from attempting to influence the Council's decision.

- **Final Recommendations:** The Council votes on its recommendation to the Office of the Provost and discusses any required actions, interim reports, or follow-up suggestions.
9. **Final Submission:** The Provost or designee reviews, edits and collates the final review summaries and submits them for action by the Board of Governors.
 10. **Program Feedback:** Once approved by the Board of Governors, the programs receive a summary review, including any requested follow-up actions and suggestions.

External Reviewer Overview

External reviewers are *optional* for non-accredited programs during the program review process. Serving as recognized experts in the disciplinary or professional field relevant to the department under review, external reviewers can be instrumental in the following ways:

- Providing objective and critical evaluation of the program,
- Assessing how the program compares to similar programs regionally and nationally,
- Offering actionable recommendations for program improvement.

External reviewers are expected to bring an informed and unbiased view in the evaluation of the program. Key factors to be considered by reviewers include program relevance and currency, disciplinary trends, faculty qualification, student characteristics, the community served and the program's ability to meet the professional or career needs of its graduates.

Selection of External Reviewer

The department chair, in collaboration with program faculty, will propose external reviewer nominees by submitting their names and CVs to the college dean for consideration.

Academic units should aim to nominate individuals from reputable institutions who are recognized and active members of their discipline. The external reviewer's credentials will play a critical role in the evaluation and selection process. Ideally, the department chair should confirm the potential reviewer's willingness to serve before submitting their name to the college dean for review and approval. The dean will forward the selected external reviewer's name, CV, and any other available information to the Office of the Provost.

External Reviewer Credentials

External reviewers are expected to meet the following criteria:

- Possess the highest degree(s) in a relevant discipline or meet Fairmont State University's qualifications for a tenured faculty member,
- Have a strong record of teaching, service, and current scholarship in the discipline,
- Have experience at an institution with comparable programs to those being evaluated,
- Be affiliated with an institution with which the program aspires to be compared,
- Have no conflicts of interest that could impede a thorough and impartial evaluation (e.g., former employee of Fairmont State University, prospective candidate for employment at Fairmont State University, or former/current mentor of a faculty member in the program).

Specialized Accredited Programs

An external accrediting agency's review may replace the university's comprehensive internal review process if the external review includes an on-site visit and adequately addresses the primary elements required in the university's self-study report. Departments or academic programs must submit the on-site visit report and all relevant correspondence with the external accreditor to the Office of Institutional Effectiveness.