

ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISION	Academic Affairs
POLICY NUMBER	ACAF 2.20
POLICY TITLE	Academic Program Review
SCOPE OF POLICY	University System
DATE OF REVISION	August 21, 2025
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost
ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE	Office of the Provost

PURPOSE

The University of South Carolina is committed to the comprehensive periodic review of all degree-granting academic programs as an essential part of ongoing strategic planning.

DEFINITIONS AND ACRONYMS

External Program Review: Any degree program that is not evaluated by a professional accrediting agency must be reviewed by a team that includes a total of at least three (3) members which includes peer faculty members external to the university. Also referenced as external review.

Professional Program Accreditation: Accreditation review conducted by the primary accrediting body of the program/college/school.

Specialized Professional Association (SPA): A specialized professional association that reviews programs within certain colleges/schools.

POLICY

The external program review is a mechanism by which an academic unit may benefit from the assessment and advice of disciplinary peers and reflect on how the program aligns with other programs of its type and/or how well the program prepares students for success after graduation. This evaluation extends beyond the assessment of student learning in the biennial academic program assessment reports. While the primary focus of the self-study is the academic program and its students, information about the program faculty complement and other program resources and initiatives to support the program is a critical component of any evaluation. Programs with a professional program accreditation will follow the review timeline and process of the accrediting body and provide copies of all review materials (self-study, final report, and response) to the Office of Academic Program Planning and Decision Support. For those programs not undergoing a professional program accreditation, external reviews conducted at least every seven (7) years are necessary. This policy sets forth the process to be used to conduct periodic external reviews of academic programs. Because unit policies, resources and characteristics have direct impact on academic programs, such unit components are also considered in the review. Costs of the review are the responsibility of the unit or college/school housing the academic program.

PROCEDURES

A. Comprehensive Universities' Procedures

Comprehensive Universities will determine their own procedure for the formal review of programs. The responsibility for self-studies and external reviews are the responsibility of the chancellor of each Comprehensive University.

B. Columbia and Regional Palmetto College Campuses Procedures

1. Responsibility and Oversight

a. Office of Provost Oversight

The Office of the Provost oversees the review process through the Office of Academic Program Planning and Decision Support, which is responsible for notifying academic units and support units about any upcoming external program reviews and the Office of Office of Institutional Research, Assessment, and Analytics, which is responsible for providing data for any upcoming external program reviews.

b. School/College Dean/Palmetto College Chancellor Oversight

i. The dean has the primary responsibility for overseeing and initiating the

1. review process,
2. internal self-study (Appendix 1) and
3. unit's response to the external review report.

In the case of a program or unit that is administered by more than one dean, the responsibility should be shared.

ii. The dean, in collaboration with the faculty of the unit being reviewed, selects the review team with at least three members, including at least two external members. No member of the review team can have a conflict of interest with the program being reviewed (i.e., employee, part-time faculty, etc.). The review team

1. must include at least one (1) peer faculty member from another institution;
2. may include one (1) faculty member internal to Columbia Campus, but the faculty member may not be affiliated with the program being reviewed; and
3. may include one (1) practicing professional.

- iii. The dean may request that a SPA review be accepted in lieu of an external program review if a) the SPA review has all the components of the academic program review outlined in this policy and b) the program has satisfactorily completed a SPA review in the past seven years or has a SPA review scheduled within 12 months of the notification date for an external program review.
- iv. The dean, in collaboration with the faculty of the unit being reviewed, may recommend that the goals of the academic program review can be met by the review team without an on-site visit (e.g., a virtual academic review). The Provost must approve any request for a virtual external review.
- v. The dean of the college is responsible for any travel arrangements; scheduling meetings with faculty, staff, and students; and overseeing any other review team requirements.

c. Unit Oversight

- i. The most common unit for review will be a single academic department, school, or a single interdisciplinary program. However, a separate review may be warranted for a sub-unit of a department. Alternatively, related programs that involve or affect more than one department, school or college may be reviewed together.
- ii. The unit/college/school must provide the Office of Academic Program Planning and Decision Support with a copy of the self-study and review team Report for archiving for SACSCOC purposes.

d. Faculty Oversight

- i. Faculty of the unit under review are responsible for producing the self-study. The unit chair or director is responsible for ensuring the self-study is completed in a timely manner. Program review is considered a collective responsibility of the faculty in the unit.
- ii. Faculty are responsible for producing a formal response to any suggestions or recommendations made in the review team report.

2. Other Units Involved in Program Review

- a. The staff of the University Libraries will provide a description of the university libraries' collections, services, and resources that support the unit's instruction, research/creative activity, and service/outreach endeavors. The Office of Academic Program Planning and Decision Support will notify University Libraries each Fall semester of units being reviewed the following academic year. The library information must be included in the self-study. Units will work with University Libraries regarding timelines for submitting information to the unit. If you have questions, contact the head of Collections Strategy and Management in the Thomas Cooper Library.
- b. The Office of Institutional Research, Assessment, and Analytics (OIRAA) will provide

guidance and assistance to the unit preparing the self-study; relevant current and historical data along with other information available at the program, department, school, college, or university levels; and assistance in presenting, analyzing, and interpreting relevant data. These data must include student enrollment and completion data also required by the Commission on Higher Education (CHE). This data can be found in the program review dashboards. If you have questions contact the Director of Institutional Research.

3. Review Timeline and Process

- a. Each Fall term, the Office of Academic Program Planning and Decision Support will identify programs due for review the following Fall and Spring semesters and notify the respective college/school, Thomas Cooper Library (TCL), and Office of Institutional Research, Assessment, and Analytics (OIRAA). For example, at the beginning of Fall 2024, colleges/schools will be notified of those program reviews coming up Fall 2025 and Spring 2026. Program reviews occur at least once every seven (7) years and may take up to a year to complete. A [table](#) listing all programs by college, along with the timeframe for their reviews, is maintained by the Office of Academic Program Planning and Decision Support. An extension for the program review period may be granted if the college/school submits a formal request with a justification for the extension.
- b. Review team visits should last 1-2 days. The dean, in consultation with faculty of the program to be reviewed, will identify the review team within 2-5 months after the initial notification to the dean has been received. The unit should submit the final self-study report to the review team and the Office of Academic Program Planning and Decision Support at least one month prior to the review team visit to archive for SACSCOC purposes.
- c. Guidelines for the review team report, to be shared with the external program review team, are presented in detail in Appendix 2. The review team should submit its report to the dean and unit within one month of the review team's visit.
- d. Within three (3) months of receipt of the final review team report, the Dean or Chancellor of Palmetto College will submit the review team's report to the Office of Academic Program Planning and Decision Support along with a report addressed to the Provost noting recommendations provided through the review team report and how the College/School will/has responded to the team and what changes will be made (if applicable). For programs on the Columbia campus, the Provost should address follow-up to the final review team report and the response of the college/school in the dean's next annual review.

4. Self-Study Report

- a. Preparing a self-study allows units to evaluate the status, effectiveness, and progress of academic programs; recognize and reflect on program strengths and weaknesses; identify important directions in the disciplines or professions that need to be addressed;

and assess the relationships among and contributions to other academic programs and the overall mission of the University.

- b. All externally reviewed programs at the Columbia and the regional Palmetto College Campuses will use the guidance for the self-study report detailed in Appendix 1.

C. Additional Regional Palmetto College Campus Procedures

- 1. The chancellor of Palmetto College, in conjunction with deans of the Palmetto College campuses, may elect to review the programs of all four campuses together or separately.
- 2. The chancellor’s office solicits campus reports from the four deans, to be compiled into a Palmetto College self-study.
- 3. The chancellor identifies an external reviewer team from peer system campuses outside the state and coordinates the review process.

D. Appendices

- 1. Appendix 1: Self-Study Report
- 2. Appendix 2: Review Team Report

RELATED UNIVERSITY, STATE, AND FEDERAL POLICIES

[ACAF 2.00 Creation and Revision of Academic Programs](#)

HISTORY OF REVISIONS

DATE OF REVISION	REASON FOR REVISION
July 05, 2019	Policy updated to clarify procedures and relationship of external review to other evaluation activities.
August 21, 2025	Policy updated to clarify procedures and add language about requesting an extension for the program review period.

APPENDIX 1: SELF-STUDY REPORT

The external program review is a mechanism by which an academic unit may benefit from the assessment and advice of disciplinary peers and reflect on how the program aligns with other programs of its type and/or how well the program prepares students for success in the field after graduation. This evaluation extends beyond the assessment of student learning in the biennial academic program assessment reports. While the primary focus of the self-study is the academic program and its students, information about the program faculty complement and other program resources and initiatives to support the program is a critical component of any evaluation. In the guidelines below, use of available standard reports is emphasized. The self-study described below and the report of the external reviewers described in Appendix 2 must be submitted to the Office of the Academic Program Planning and Decision Support, but ultimately the program faculty should determine any strategic actions based on the review.

The outline below is intended to fit a typical academic program, which includes instruction (undergraduate and graduate), research/creative activity, and service/outreach endeavors. Appropriate modifications may be made for units whose activities diverge from the usual range of activities in academic units. These modifications should be shared with the college dean prior to submitting the report. Note the timeline of events provided in the policy. The report should be finished within 6 months of the initial memo from the provost requesting that the program review occur. The college/school may implement an earlier timeline. The final Self-Study report is to be sent by the dean to all review team members at least 1 month prior to their site visit.

Self-Study Report
For
<degree name> in <major name>
<Department/School of XXX>
<College/School of XXX>

- I. Overview
 - A. Provide a brief description of the academic program under review (e.g., purpose/mission statement from academic program assessment plan)
 - B. Provide a brief description of the academic unit that governs the academic program under review.
 - C. Describe the connection between the unit program goals and college/school goals.
 - D. Indicate any substantive changes in the curriculum and discuss significant changes, if any, in the unit in the past seven years, including justification.

II. Statistical Profile

- A. Student data provided by OIRAA (applications, admissions, headcount, student credit hour production by majors and non-majors, demographics, retention and graduation rates, cumulative GPA data, student-faculty ratios) for three years.
- B. Faculty data provided by OIRAA (FT/PT headcount by track and rank) for three years
- C. Faculty roster provided by OIRAA (demographics, track, rank, highest degree)
- D. Staff roster provided by OIRAA
- E. Library resources provided by University Libraries
- F. Research/scholarship productivity provided by Office of Research

III. Additional Data Provided by Academic Unit (if any are applicable)

- A. Student Information
 - 1. Student awards and honors
 - 2. Aggregate student/graduate performance on state or national tests (e.g., certification/licensure exams)
 - 3. Placement of graduates (e.g., job placement, further training) if available
- B. Research/scholarship metrics not provided by Office of Research or Academic Analytics report
- C. Faculty awards for teaching, research/scholarship, and service activities given by national or international associations
- D. Selection of faculty for prestigious invited memberships (e.g., the National Academy of Science)
- E. Prestigious positions held in national or international organizations, as members of review panels, as journal/book editors, etc.

IV. Assessment of Academic Program

- A. Assessment of Student Learning
 - 1. List learning outcomes as published in Bulletin
 - 2. Provide mapping of learning outcomes to program curriculum
 - 3. Describe culminating experience or experiential learning that is a program requirement
 - 4. Provide summary of assessment metrics and methods used in the academic program assessment plan
 - 5. Provide summary of academic program assessment plan results and use of results for the last three years
 - 6. Provide summary of student exit interviews, alumni surveys, and employer surveys, if available. If these evaluative results and/or placement data for graduates are not available, indicate future plans for collecting such data.
 - 7. Describe unit process for curriculum assessment and revision, including use of the academic program assessment reports
 - 8. Describe the process used for this self-study, including faculty involvement

- B. Educational Effectiveness
 - 1. Explain how the assessment results are discussed and shared with faculty to elicit feedback/input
 - 2. Provide any contextual information such as projections of labor market demand in areas relevant to the academic program if available
 - 3. Describe strategies to recruit and retain quality, diverse faculty

- C. Other Student Measures
 - 1. Ratings or ranking indicators, if applicable
 - 2. Results of recent Specialized Professional Association (SPA) reviews if the SPA review does not meet the external review criteria as outlined by this policy, if applicable
 - 3. Results of student course evaluations and evaluation of advising including student self-assessment measures, if applicable
 - 4. Describe efforts to recruit and retain quality, diverse students

- V. Assessment of Resources
 - A. Assess Current Program Faculty Relative to
 - 1. student support (e.g., advising and mentoring) and course teaching (majors and non-majors),
 - 2. academic credentials, and scholarly productivity relative to peer and peer aspirant programs,
 - 3. assignments across full-time and part-time faculty and graduate teaching assistants

 - B. Financial, Facilities and Material Resources
 - 1. Assess the adequacy of financial resources to support this academic program
 - 2. Describe strengths and limitations of the academic program related to financial resources (e.g., classroom, student support, technology, etc.)

 - C. Library
 - 1. Describe the information resources and services (e.g., relevant library collections and special facilities, staffing, and local on-line bibliographic access that support the program) provided by the library

 - D. Other Resources
 - 1. Describe advising resources and other student support services
 - 2. Describe resources for student culminating experience or experiential learning if outside the classroom if applicable
 - 3. Assess the adequacy of part-time and full-time staff to support the academic program

- VI. Other Information
 - 1. Describe any additional information about the program or academic unit that would be helpful to the external reviewers, e.g., service components;

community engagement; training, continuing education, and outreach activities; dual enrollment partnerships

VII. Summary and Unit Recommendations

A. Describe program program's comparative advantage and/or its unique features. Components may include the following:

1. Top program strengths and areas of concern/weakness
2. Program distinctiveness attributable to interrelationships with other university programs
3. Areas of focus and program uniqueness/differentiation from programs offered at other state-assisted universities; other colleges and universities in South Carolina; peer comparison universities; and other universities in the region and nation
4. Viability of the program in terms of state, regional and national workforce needs
5. Areas of duplication with other programs offered at the university

B. Unit Recommendations

1. List the top 3 to 5 recommendations for this program
2. Describe how the academic program will be changed or improved utilizing currently available university/academic unit resources and/or additional resources the unit will generate through its own activities.

Attachments:

1. Current bulletin listing for academic program
2. Copies of other reviews, reports, policy documents, student recruiting brochures, and other items appropriate to the Self-Study.
3. Current academic program assessment plan
4. Last three academic program assessment reports
5. Academic Analytics graphs for academic unit
6. Brief curriculum vitae for all faculty support the program
7. Academic unit faculty review, appointment, tenure and promotion policies and criteria (tenure-track and non-tenure-track, if applicable)

APPENDIX 2: REVIEW TEAM REPORT

The following is an outline for the review team Report. Units may have additional criteria or requirements if needed. The Self-Study Report should be sent to the review team at least 1 month in advance of the Team's visit, along with the Self-Study (Appendix 1), information on travel arrangements, and a schedule for the visit.

Academic Program Review
Name of Academic Programs [list name(s)]
Review Date
Requested Program Review Completion Date

COVER PAGE

- Name of College/School, Name of Department/Unit Name
- Name of Academic Program(s)
- Date of Submission
- Review Team Membership
- External Review Timetable
- External Review Procedures Followed
- Methods of Data Collection

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (maximum two pages)

The Review Team should provide an Executive Summary to act as a brief overview of the most compelling findings of the Review Team Report encapsulating what the Review Team believes administrators most need to know about the Academic Program(s) under review. Since the Self-Study Report outline calls for a separate list of recommendations, there is no need to list them in the Executive Summary. It may be useful, however, to mention the most important ones. The information sources serving as the basis for the report should include the sections included in the self-study for the Academic Program(s) under review as well as interviews, questionnaires, and/or surveys with appropriate unit/program personnel or clients.

ACADEMIC PROGRAM ANALYSIS

The review team should be able to address each of the major categories in the self-study which are listed below. The review team is asked to reflect on the content included in these categories and provide comments on the current status, program strategies, opportunities, threats, possible future status, and other topics they deem essential to the review.

- I. Overview
- II. Statistical Profile
- III. Additional Data Provided by Academic Unit
- IV. Assessment of Academic Program
- V. Assessment of Resources
- VI. Other Information
- VII. Summary and Unit Recommendations