# STEPHEN F. AUSTIN STATE UNIVERSITY

## THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS SYSTEM
## NACOGDOCHES, TEXAS

# Academic Program Review
## Handbook

**Effective Academic Year 2024-2025**

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# Introduction

Academic program review (APR) enables degree program faculty and leadership to reflect, self-assess, and plan in order to improve. Further, the APR process provides an invaluable vehicle for communicating program goals and needs to university administration. This communication flow enables the setting of budget priorities in order to leverage resources and achieve each respective academic program vision as it also serves to fulfill college and university strategic goals.

Per SFA policy 02-202, "Academic Program Review," all degree programs must undergo evaluation annually and all graduate degree programs are also required to submit decennial evaluations. **An academic program is considered a structured grouping of course work designed to meet educational objectives leading to a baccalaureate, master, or doctoral degree.** The academic program may include course work which supports minors or official university-awarded certificates. The policy supports the essential APR process for decennial reaffirmation of Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) university accreditation and complies requirements managed by Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB).

Formative and summative assessments are necessary for an academic program to demonstrate continuous improvement in teaching, student success, program growth, and other objectives such as scholarly/creative output. Regular, annual evaluation of program needs and progress is appropriate coordination to ensure budget considerations are timely and effective. The annual evaluations also support the required SACSCOC 5th year interim report on academic programs, which feeds into the decennial reaffirmation process. The follow phases serve to consistently support and enhance academic programs:

1. Annual check-up (all degree programs)
2. Ten-year cumulative report with a full self-study, external review, and institutional response (graduate degree programs only)

**Academic Program Review (APR)**

Self-Study Schedule and Contents Overview

**10**
Yr. APR

♦ **10 Year - Cumulative Review¹**
- Written submission including:
  - Self-study
  - Program Faculty Feedback Summary
  - External Review Results
- Administrative Interaction and Formal Response Provided
- Action plan developed by:
(Program/Unit, College, and Graduate dean)

♦ **1 Year - Annual Check-up²**
- Primarily verbal discussion
- Only written response required notes faculty feedback summary for trends and action plans
- Administrative Interaction and Informal Response Provided

Each Process Discusses/Documents:
*Key Metric Trends    *Program and Learning Outcomes    *Each Academic Degree Program    *Faculty Perceptions/Analyses

¹ Graduate degree programs only; uses THECB response and review forms.
² Academic degree programs at each level are involved (both undergraduate and graduate). Prompts provided by the Office of the Provost.

October 2024

**Definitions related to Academic Program Review:**

**Academic programs** are considered a structured grouping of course work designed to meet educational objectives leading to a specific baccalaureate, master, or doctoral degree.  The academic program may include course work which supports minors or official university-awarded certificates.

**Academic units** are the organized academic administrative groups (e.g., departments, divisions, schools) which directly manage the instruction, coordination, and delivery of course work for one or more academic programs.

**Academic unit heads** are the academic leaders (e.g., chairs, directors) assigned to administer the responsibilities of an academic unit.

**Core objectives** (COs), as prescribed by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), are critical thinking skills, communication skills, empirical and quantitative skills, teamwork, personal responsibility and social responsibility.

**Program learning outcomes** (PLOs) are the knowledge, skills, and abilities students are expected to demonstrate upon completion of an academic degree program.  The PLOs may also be referenced as "student learning outcomes" for an academic program by external agencies such as SACSCOC and THECB.

*Links to SACSCOC and THECB documentation are located in the Appendix A reference listings.*

*See Appendix B for SACSCOC Notes and Excerpts.*

# Annual Checkup
# All Academic Programs

Faculty involvement in the program review process is essential and required by SACSCOC.  As many academic program faculty as possible must contribute and be involved in the evaluation and feedback.

## A. Annual (one-year) review contents:

1. Written submission of program faculty feedback (summary of perceptions and analyses)
2. Verbal discussion of the academic degree program(s) with executive leadership
3. Provost's office oral response to program leadership

## B. Annual program review steps:

1. Academic unit head and/or designated program coordinator review response prompts.
2. Academic unit head and/or designated program coordinator determine method of collecting faculty feedback for summary of responses.
3. Faculty provide perceptions and analyses of data and information for response prompts.
4. Academic unit head and/or designated program evaluate faculty feedback and submit summary into the university assessment monitoring system.
5. Academic unit head and dean review faculty summary for consideration of actions.
6. The Provost, Associate Provost, Dean of Research and Graduate Studies (as applicable), college dean, academic unit head, and program coordinator(s) meet the following year to discuss status of the program, faculty feedback, and actions needed.  The interaction and discussions serve as the response from the Provost's Office to annual review of undergraduate and graduate degree programs.

## C.  Supportive data and response prompts

- Certain supportive data and information are required for program review and determined by the Office of the Provost.
- Institutional data is published online with annual updates. The Office of the Provost maintains a link on the program review webpage to the latest available institutional data.
- Annual reviews only require use of institutionally provided information.  As appropriate for individual academic degree programs, other supportive data may also be included.
- Notification of the specific annual prompts will be distributed by the Office of the Provost near the beginning of the spring semester for the review year.

# Decennial (ten-year) Review
# Graduate-level Academic Programs Only

The preparation of materials for a program review must be an inclusive process, involving all continuing faculty in the program to the extent possible. Decennial reviews for graduate programs are required by THECB and essential for SACSCOC processes.
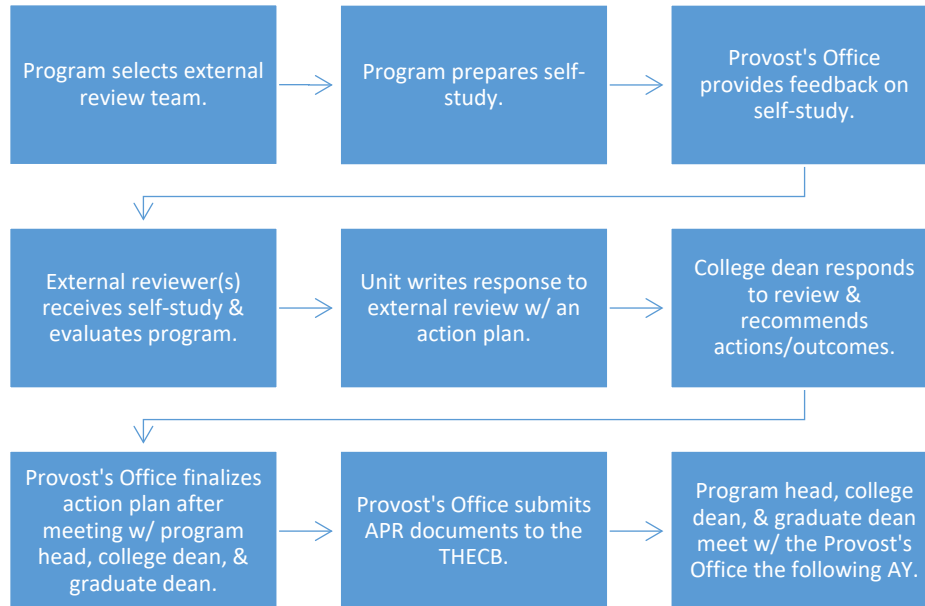
## A. Decennial (ten-year) review contents:

1. Self-study of academic degree program(s), including faculty feedback summary of perceptions and analyses. External review of the academic degree program(s). The THECB Graduate Program External Review form format may be used to prepare the required elements of the External Review Report.

2. Institutional response to the external review's recommendations, including an *action plan* devised by the program, the college dean, and Dean of Research and Graduate Studies with approval from the Provost's Office. The THECB Graduate Program Institutional Response form format may be used to prepare the required elements of the Institutional Response Report.

## B. Decennial program review steps:

1. External reviewers are selected. Doctoral programs must include a site visit. A site visit is preferable for master programs, but is not required.

2. The academic unit head designates or confirms the academic program coordinator.

3. The designated academic program coordinator prepares the self-study (including faculty feedback summary) and submits it to the Dean of Research and Graduate Studies for initial review.

4. The Dean of Research and Graduate Studies provides feedback on the self-study, which the program leadership takes into account.

5. The academic unit head (or designated academic program coordinator) head submits the self-study to the external review team.

6. The external review team submits the external review to the academic program coordinator, academic unit head, the college dean, Dean of Research and Graduate Studies, and the Provost's Office.

7. The academic program coordinator drafts a response to the external review and includes an action plan. The academic unit head reviews and provides to the dean.

8. The college dean provides feedback on the external review and the program's action plan.

9. The Provost, Associate Provost, Dean of Research and Graduate Studies, college dean, and academic unit head and/or program coordinator meet to finalize the response and action plan.

10. The finalized institutional response is signed by the Provost, Associate Provost, Dean of Research and Graduate Studies, college dean, and the academic unit and/or program coordinator.

11. The Associate Provost submits all decennial program review contents to the THECB as required.

12. The Provost, Associate Provost, Dean of Research and Graduate Studies, college dean, an academic unit head and/or program coordinator meet the following year during the annual review process to discuss progress towards the program's action plan and determine whether any additional steps need to be taken.

**Decennial program review summary**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Program selects external review team. | Program prepares self-study. | Provost's Office provides feedback on self-study. |
| External reviewer(s) receives self-study & evaluates program. | Unit writes response to external review w/ an action plan. | College dean responds to review & recommends actions/outcomes. |
| Provost's Office finalizes action plan after meeting w/ program head, college dean, & graduate dean. | Provost's Office submits APR documents to the THECB. | Program head, college dean, & graduate dean meet w/ the Provost's Office the following AY. |

*A general timeline template for the decennial APR process is included in Appendix B.*

*The specific academic programs scheduled for decennial review is maintained on the Office of the Provost* [website](#)*.*

## C.  The Decennial Self-Study (Graduate programs only)

The centerpiece of APR is the self-study. The primary focus of the self-study is the academic program's strategic plan and progress toward achieving its program and learning goals, as well as additional steps that need to be taken to ensure continuous improvement. The narrative should evaluate and describe the academic program contributions to the university's mission and strategic vision, as well as the mission and strategic vision of the college in which the program resides. The self-study provides an opportunity for faculty within the program to think through critical issues that influence progress toward academic program goals in a systematic way. The self-study must be developed by a committee composed of faculty within the academic unit and appointed by the academic unit head.  All of the required elements noted in the APR Handbook must be included.

- The review packet narrative should be about 20 pages in length per program (double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font, 1" margins).
- A title page with a list of participants and authors, table of contents, and appendices are expected, but not included in the page count.
- Each degree program administered by the academic program unit should have its own narrative (around 20 pages per program).
- Narratives can be longer provided unnecessary repetition is avoided.

## Narrative Outline of the Self-Study

**GRADUATE PROGRAM CHARACTERISTICS**

1. Program enrollment (last 3 years)
   Headcount of students enrolled in the fall semester of each year

2. Number of degrees per year
   Rolling 3-year average of the number of degrees awarded per academic year

3. Graduation rates
   Average percentage of entering graduate students who graduated within five years, considering all starting terms

4. Persistence rates
   Average percentage of entering graduate students who continue to be enrolled over the last two full academic years considering all terms.

5. Employment Outcomes
   $1^{st}$-, $5^{th}$-, and $10^{th}$- Year Median Earnings and Median Loan
   Report the last three years of career outcomes, employer trends, and skills

6. Admissions criteria
   Description of admission factors

7. Full-time student equivalent (FTSE), full-time faculty equivalent (FTFE), student-faculty ratio (SFR), and contribution margin trends
   Values and trends for the last three fall terms

8. Number of Core Faculty
   Number of core faculty in the prior year.  Core Faculty: Full-time tenured and tenure-track faculty who teach 50 percent or more in the graduate program or other individuals integral to the graduate program who can direct thesis/dissertation research.

9. Core Faculty Publications
   Rolling 3-year average of the number of publications issued per core faculty member

10. Core Faculty External Grants
    Rolling 3-year average of core faculty member receiving external funds, external funds per faculty, and total external funds per program per academic year

11. Faculty Demographics
    Headcount of core faculty reported by ethnicity & gender

12. Student Demographics
    Headcount of students reported by ethnicity & gender during the prior year

13. Student Publications/Presentations
    Rolling 3-year average for the number of student publications per year by FTE students

14. Date of Last External Review

15. External Program Accreditation (if applicable)

**ALIGNMENT OF PROGRAM WITH PROGRAM AND INSTITUTIONAL GOALS**

Program Contribution to the Mission and Goals of the University and College, with a summary of the impact of the program on the college and university and an explanation of the degree to which it is mission critical.

**PROGRAM COMPARISON TO PEER PROGRAMS**
Description of Program (undergraduate and/or graduate), including each available degree, major, minor, and certificate, in comparison to peer programs.

**PROGRAM FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT**
A Description of Facilities and Equipment

**PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION**
The self-study report should provide a narrative of the following:

a. Strengths/Weaknesses
Quality of faculty research/scholarship/creative work, instruction, and service, as well as the program's sustainability with regard to enrollments, graduates, and future resources.

b. Internal/External Opportunities
Prospects for program improvement and development that further the mission and goals of the university and the college.

c. Threats or Challenges
Description of how threats or challenges affect the program's mission, goals, and future plans.

d. Future Plans
Describe how future plans relate to the mission and goals of the academic department, college, and university, and the resources necessary to achieve them.

e. Supportive data and trends
 Include summary of annual faculty feedback (reported from university assessment monitoring system).  Utilize data designated by the Office of the Provost from annual prompts as well as any other required metrics appropriate for the program as specified by discipline-specific accreditation or Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board references.

**PROGRAM FINANCE AND RESOURCES**

**FACULTY QUALIFICATIONS**

**CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT**

## D. Supportive data and response prompts

- Certain supportive data and information are required for program review and determined by the Office of the Provost.
- Institutionally required data is published online with annual updates. The Office of the Provost maintains a link on the program review webpage to the latest available institutional data.
- Notification of the specific annual prompts will be distributed by the Office of the Provost near the beginning of the spring semester prior to the academic year of the scheduled review.  Data published during the spring semester is the intended set of information and time periods included in decennial reviews.

- In addition to the institutionally-required information, individual academic degree programs may also include other supportive data as appropriate. Decennial reviews of graduate programs must further include any additional data as required by [Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board](#).
- Annual program review checkup results should be referenced and used as supportive evidence of continuous improvement and planning. The required annual summaries are available in the university assessment monitoring system for reference and use with the self-study materials submitted.
- **All required data must be completed even if an accrediting report is submitted in lieu of the APR report.\***

   **\* Per SFA Policy 02-202:  If approval is granted to substitute an accreditation report for and the external review requirement, any information required by the APR Handbook and not already included in the accreditation review must be submitted to the Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs with the external accreditation report.**

## E. Decennial External Review (Graduate programs only)

An external review team analyzes the academic program self-study and conducts interviews during the site visit, if applicable. The goals of the external review team include:

1. Assessing the appropriateness of the academic program goals contributing to the university and the college strategic goals, and the degree to which the academic program has achieved its determined program and learning goals;
2. Identifying strengths and weaknesses of the academic degree programs;
3. Providing recommendations for quality improvement.

**Note:  Master's and doctoral programs in the same classification of instruction program (CIP) are reviewed simultaneously using the same self-study materials and reviewers.   If a bachelor level academic degree program is also optionally reviewed with the same external review process, the external reviews should separately address graduate programs in a unique report section.**

### External Reviewer Information

External Reviewers:

- Must be nationally recognized experts in the academic field.
- Must have senior faculty status at peer or aspirant institutions.
- Must have significant administrative, curricular, and program-review experience.
- Must be employed by an institution of higher education outside Texas.
- Are preferred to be employed by SACSCOC-accredited institution.
- Must not hold a conflict of interest that could bias their judgment (e.g. SFA alumni, former students, or employees of SFA; or formal collaborators with faculty in the program).

Additional requirements and procedures for external reviewer selections:

- Each doctoral program must have at least two reviewers, and they must conduct an onsite review, as well as prepare an external report.
- Each master's program must have at least one reviewer, who must prepare an external report; an onsite visit is optional.
- Faculty members of the academic program nominate three individuals from comparable institutions of higher education to serve as possible external reviewers and submit to the college dean each reviewer's curriculum vitae as well as a disclosure statement of any known affiliations between the proposed reviewers and SFA (i.e., nature of the relationship, any potential conflicts of interest, etc.).
- The college dean then selects at least one person (two for doctoral programs) from the three nominated.
- The Dean of Research and Graduate Studies will consider final approval of the reviewer selection and coordinate with the college dean regarding any revisions or alternates required.
- Preference is given to nominees from colleges and universities accredited by SACSCOC.

## External Review Onsite Visit

All doctoral programs must undergo a site visit as part of the external review. On the site visit, the external review team spends up to two days on campus discussing the self-study and related information with administrators, faculty, staff, students, and others related to the program. Required meetings include:

- An initial meeting with the Provost's Office, Office of Institutional Research, Office of
- Institutional Effectiveness, graduate dean, college dean, academic unit head, and, where appropriate, program coordinators;
- A meeting with program faculty;
- A meeting with graduate students of the program and, as appropriate, undergraduate students.
- Unscheduled time for the review team to formulate initial recommendations;
- An exit meeting with the Provost's Office, Office of Institutional Research, Office of
- Institutional Effectiveness, graduate dean, college dean, academic unit head, and, where appropriate, program coordinators.

## External Review Report

The external review team shall prepare an external review report that includes:
- A general assessment of the program (students, faculty, curriculum, etc.).
- An evaluation of the appropriateness of the program learning outcomes to the:
- SFA strategic plan and
- Respective academic college and unit strategic plan
- Attainment/progression of program learning outcomes
- A description of significant strengths and weaknesses of the program.  Including concepts related reducing student debt and the SFA Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) is encouraged.
- A prioritized set of recommended strategies for future improvements, which should address critical issues and include rationales for the strategies recommended for improvement.

The external review report should be at least 10 pages, but not more than 20 (double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font, 1" margins).

The THECB Graduate Program External Review form format may be used to prepare the required elements of the External Review Report.

## F.  Institutional Response

After the external review report is received, the academic unit shall draft a response to the review that includes an evaluation of the main findings of the review, a response to each of the review team's recommendations, and an action plan detailing the unit's proposed strategies and timeline to address the review team's recommendations.

The college dean will then provide feedback on the unit's action plan in light of the external review report's recommendations.

The academic unit head, college dean, graduate dean, Associate Provost for Curriculum and Instruction, Provost, and, where appropriate, program coordinator will meet to finalize the response and action plan. The final response and action plan will be signed by the above officials.

## G. External Submission of the Decennial Academic Program Review

All decennial academic program review materials, including the self-study, external review report, and institutional response, will be submitted to the THECB by the associate Provost for Curriculum and Instruction.

The THECB Graduate Program Institutional Response form format may be used to prepare the required elements of the [Institutional Response Report.](Institutional Response Report.)

# Appendix A:  References and Supportive Documents

Hanover Research. (2012). Best practices in academic program review.
https://www.asanet.org/sites/default/files/hanoverresearch_bestpractices_programreview.pdf.

Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges. (2020). The principles of accreditation: Foundations for quality enhancement. Standards 7.1 & 8.1-8.2a. 2024-POA-Resource-Manual.pdf (sacscoc.org)

Stephen F. Austin State University. (2022). Policy manual. University policy 02-202, Academic program review. https://www.sfasu.edu/docs/hops/02-202.pdf

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. (2022). Best Practices for Graduate Program Reviews-Online Included. https://reportcenter.highered.texas.gov/agency-publication/guidelines-manuals/best-practices-for-graduate-program-reviews-online-included/

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. (2020). Graduate Program External Review Form. See Templates on: https://reportcenter.highered.texas.gov/agency-publication/blank-forms-templates/graduate-program-external-review-form/

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. (2020). Graduate Program Institutional Response Form. https://reportcenter.highered.texas.gov/agency-publication/blank-forms-templates/graduate-program-institutional-response-form/

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. (2021). Texas Administrative Code. Title 19, Chapter 4, Subchapter B, Rule 4.30, Institutional Assessment and Reporting. https://texreg.sos.state.tx.us/public/readtac$ext.TacPage?sl=R&app=9&p_dir=&p_rloc=&p_tloc=&p_ploc=&pg=1&p_tac=&ti=19&pt=1&ch=4&rl=30

# Appendix B:  SACSCOC Notes and Excerpts

SFA Academic Program Review Note Section 7:
SACSCOC Core Requirement 7.1 centers on the university's mission. Note that SFA's mission states that the university is "dedicated to excellence in teaching, research, scholarship, creative work, and service." Therefore, at a minimum, each academic program must maintain and regularly assess program goals that set measurable outcomes for these activities. The assessment of academic program goals must be included in the APR, and the program's progress towards those goals should be a major focus of its self-study.

## SECTION 7: Institutional Planning and Effectiveness

**7.1**  **The institution engages in ongoing, comprehensive, and integrated research-based planning and evaluation processes that (a) focus on institutional quality and effectiveness and (b) incorporate a systematic review of institutional goals and outcomes consistent with its mission.** (*Institutional planning*) **[CR]**

SFA Academic Program Review Note Section 8:
SACSCOC Core Requirement 8.1 and Standard 8.2.a center on student learning and success.  Outcomes and achievements for students in each academic program are vital to the mission of the university. Each academic program must maintain and regularly assess program learning outcomes (PLOs) demonstrate actions toward the improvement of student learning.  Documentation and assessment of PLOs must be included in the APR, and the program's progress towards them must be addressed in its self-study.

## SECTION 8: Student Achievement

**8.1**  **The institution identifies, evaluates, and publishes goals and outcomes for student achievement appropriate to the institution's mission, the nature of the students it serves, and the kinds of programs offered. The institution uses multiple measures to document student success.** (*Student achievement*) **[CR]**

### Rationale and Notes

Student learning and student success are at the core of the mission of all institutions of higher learning. Effective institutions focus on the design and improvement of educational experiences to enhance student learning and support student learning outcomes for its educational programs. To meet the goals of educational programs, an institution provides appropriate academic and student services to support student success.

**8.2**  **The institution identifies expected outcomes, assesses the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provides evidence of seeking improvement based on analysis of the results in the areas below:**

a.  **Student learning outcomes for each of its educational programs.** (*Student outcomes: educational programs*)

## Appendix C:  10-year APR Timeline

| Decennial APR General Timeline - Checklist | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Step** | **Due By** | **Notes** | **Done** |
| *Self-study written* | September-February | Use data prepared for the academic year ending in August. Current fall data is not required, but may be used if desired. | |
| *Identify external reviewer(s) as required by HOP 02-202* | By October 1 | Submit recommendation to college dean and Dean of Research and Graduate Studies (ORGS) | |
| *Self-study due* | February 1 | Send report to the ORGS dean | |
| *Self-study sent to external review team* | By March 1 | ORGS dean submits | |
| *External review conducts site-visit, if scheduled* | By March 1 - May 31 | Completion by May 31 | |
| *External review team report due* | June 1 | Submitted by external review team to ORGS Dean | |
| *Action plan in response to external review report due* | By July 1 | Action plan sent to college dean. | |
| *College dean provides written feedback on action plan* | By July 15 | Feedback sent from dean to academic unit | |
| *Send external review report to ORGS dean* | By August 1 | Action plan incorporated into assessment monitoring system. | |
| *Assoc. Provost submits APR materials to THECB (as applicable)* | By August 15 | Due date established by THECB | |
| *Program head, college dean, & graduate dean review progress towards action plan* | By the following July 31 | Results and follow-up added to assessment monitoring system. | |