

Academic Department and Program Strategic Plan and Periodic Review Procedures

(updated 4/19/2023 1:07 PM)

I. INTRODUCTION

The College of New Jersey embraces continuous improvement through assessment. In this practice, the college is consistent with the expectations advanced by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) that academic departments and academic programs (hereafter: programs) enhance quality through periodic, faculty and/or professional-led review of curriculum and strategic planning. The procedures outlined here provide guidance for this periodic review.

A program's strategic plan describes its long-term objectives and provides the college community with valuable information about program priorities, desired outcomes, and resources. Each academic program should have a detailed strategic plan that includes its vision, goals, and student learning outcomes, and discusses how these will be realized.

Program planning is an ongoing process whose foundation is the strategic plan. While the strategic plan evolves continuously, periodic review provides opportunity for faculty to reflect on the program, its strategic plan, and key issues the program will face in the next five years. This analysis of the program's condition helps the faculty make decisions about future direction. Periodic review also provides opportunity to gain feedback from external experts and discuss with the school dean, the dean of graduate and continuing education, the college core curriculum leadership, and the provost the role of the program within the school and the college.

II. STRATEGIC PLAN

Each academic program should have a strategic plan that describes its vision, goals, and explicitly stated student learning outcomes. There may be an institutional- and/or school-level framework for development of the program-level plan, and this may evolve over time. In general, the strategic plan would include details on the following areas: program mission, curriculum, student learning outcomes, students, faculty, and resources. Within the strategic plan, current and proposed projects of the program should be listed. The strategic plan should also align with the college's strategic plan wherever possible. Although the program should consult its strategic plan annually, major changes are not expected each year. The periodic review represents the program's prime opportunity to make updates to the strategic plan.

III. PERIODIC REVIEW GUIDELINES

Overview

- A. In cases where multiple programs are integrally connected, at the discretion of the school dean, these programs may be assessed concurrently as part of a single review.
- B. Each program undergoes review on a regular five- to seven-year cycle. For accredited programs, the scheduling of the review is coordinated with professional accreditation visits. To eliminate duplication of effort, programs may use materials from the accreditation for their review. As the accreditation requirements may be different from those of the review,

accredited programs should ensure that all aspects of this program review process are addressed.

- C. Programs initiating periodic review will communicate with the Vice Provost, Office of Assessment, and the Office of Institutional Research and Analytics to request delivery of accurate and verifiable program-level data. This will ensure that reported data and statistics are valid per best-practice quality standards and are archived for the purpose of continuous improvement. Allow four weeks for delivery of these data reports to the program via Faculty Process.
- D. Faculty Process serves as the repository for all program review documents, facilitates access to review documents for the external reviewers, stores the external reviewers report as well as the department's response, and serves as the archive for the program review in general.
- E. Periodic review marks the end of one planning cycle and the beginning of a new one.
- F. The results of the review become the basis for setting future long-range (5+ years), intermediate (2-4 years), and short-term (less than 2 years) objectives. These objectives form the core of the action plan.
- G. Each periodic review includes:
 - 1. a program self-study and action plan,
 - 2. the report of the external reviewer(s), and
 - 3. a response by the program to the external reviewers' report.

Other documents may be included as desired, and all documents must be uploaded to Faculty Process to facilitate access by the program faculty, school dean, dean of graduate and continuing education, college core curriculum leadership, external reviewers, and provost. The documents comprising a review are not circulated beyond the campus, except for use by external reviewers.

- H. The school dean, in consultation with the program faculty and the dean of graduate and continuing education, chooses the external reviewer(s), taking advantage (as possible) of referral services by scholarly and professional associations. The school dean extends the college's official invitation to the external reviewer. In all other matters, each program decides its own procedures for completing the self-study and review.

Self-study

- I. Each program's self-study is led by the program's faculty. The program selects a Review Committee and a chair for overseeing the program review process. The members of the Review Committee prepare a 10-to-15-page self-study report (excluding appendices), that explains the program's mission, vision, goals, and student learning outcomes, and how the program is accomplishing these. The self-study also looks back to the program's previous self-study and external review, and it reflects on the program's implementation of that self-study and review's recommendations. The self-study also includes analysis informed by student learning assessment data and student feedback describing key learning outcomes, accomplishments, emerging or persistent issues, and challenges facing the program.

- J. The program's narrative self-study must include a descriptive overview of the five core areas outlined in Section V below (i.e., mission and planning, curriculum and student learning, students, faculty, administration, and resources). For each of these five core areas, a range of suggested questions are outlined in Section V for the program's faculty to consider as they reflect upon their program. The self-study is not expected to answer all or even most of the listed questions. Rather, the self-study should provide a detailed analysis of the program, written after a program's faculty have reflected upon these questions for their program. Working together, the school dean, the dean of graduate and continuing education, and the program's faculty members may identify a specific focus for the self-study, if desired, and a limited number of specific questions to focus on at this point in the program's history and evolution. In some cases, these deans and/or the program's faculty will agree that specific questions, which need not be from those listed in Section V, will become the focus of the written self-study.
- K. Each program should include/assess direct and indirect evidence of student learning through appropriate measures. Examples of direct measures of student learning are levels of mastery of program- and course-level outcomes, whereas examples of indirect measures of student learning are surveys and focus groups. The Office of Assessment can provide guidance to program faculty, including a list of methods that explain direct and indirect measures. A program's learning outcomes should align with the program's curriculum map or outline. Other areas to address in the self-study include future projects, resource reallocation, and any specific questions suggested by the school dean and the dean of graduate and continuing education. The program faculty should describe any proposed changes to their strategic plan, including details regarding future projects and resource reallocation.

External Review

- L. Following completion of the self-study, each program is reviewed by one or two external reviewers from outside the campus (two external reviewers are preferred if possible). The external reviewer(s) are experts in the field and do not have close ties with the program or its faculty (consult the [TCNJ Ethics Liaison Officer](#) and the [NJ Uniform Ethics Code](#) for clarification of conflict of interest requirements). Academic Affairs establishes a budget for expenses and reviewer honoraria.
- M. External reviewers are selected and invited by the school dean following consultation with the dean of graduate and continuing education, the program chair, and faculty members. The school dean sends to the external reviewer(s) the program's self-study, along with current faculty members' vitae, the program curriculum and mission statement, student learning outcomes, curriculum map/outline, student data, and information on matters such as the careers of the program's graduates.
- N. For accredited programs that include external reviews as part of their accreditation process, such reviews typically play the role of the external reviews described above, and additional external reviews are unnecessary.

- O. The external reviewer(s) ideally visit(s) the campus in person for one to two days to examine the facilities and resources of the program and to meet with the program's faculty, students, the school dean, the dean of graduate and continuing education, the college core curriculum leadership, the provost, and other stakeholders (e.g., alumni) as desired. In developing the schedule for the on-site visit, the program faculty will work collaboratively with the school dean, who should approve the final schedule. The external reviewer(s) will submit – within 6 weeks of the visit – a synthesized written report to the dean who oversees the program. The school dean will provide copies of the review to the program faculty, the dean of graduate and continuing education, the vice provost, and the provost.

Response to the External Review and Action Plan

- P. The program's Review Committee will draft a response and a revised action plan based upon the report from the reviewer(s). All recommendations/aspects of the external review report should be addressed. The faculty members of the program as a whole will then examine the report and the Review Committee's response and provide additional comments as desired. The Review Committee will submit its report, along with the report from the reviewer(s) and any faculty comments, to the school dean, the dean of graduate and continuing education, the vice provost, and the provost.
- Q. In consultation, the school dean, the dean of graduate and continuing education, the provost, and faculty representatives from the program will discuss an appropriate updating of the program's strategic plan in light of its self-study and the report from the external reviewer(s). A "Closing the Loop" meeting of the deans of the school and graduate/continuing education, the provost's designee, and faculty representatives from the program will occur to review the final recommendations and adjustments that have occurred through the self-study and external review process.

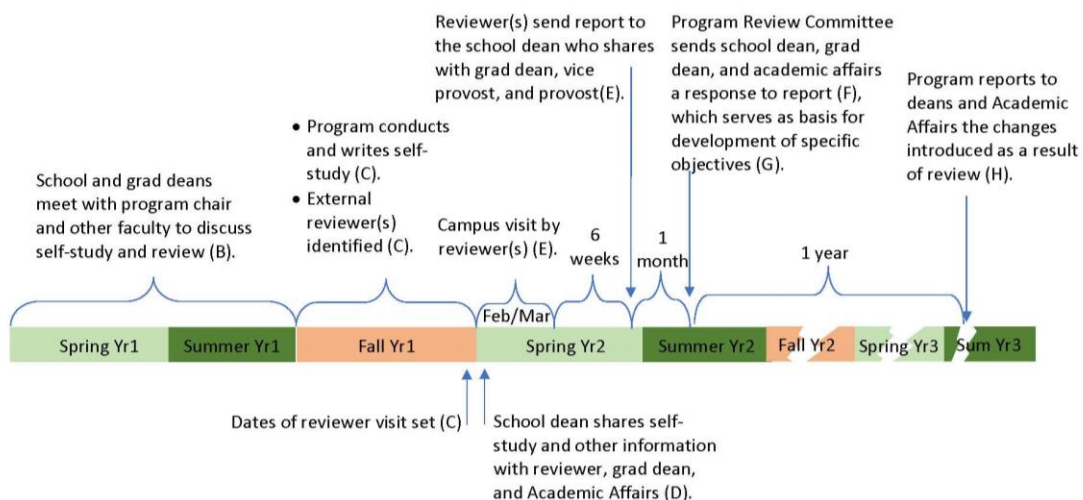
IV. TIMELINE FOR THE REVIEW

- A. Academic Affairs maintains a schedule of periodic reviews, [posted online](#) for viewing by all stakeholders.
- B. During the spring semester and summer before the review, the school dean and the dean of graduate and continuing education (as appropriate) will meet with the program's chair and other faculty, if desired, to discuss the self-study and review process. Together, these deans and the program's chair will choose the emphasis of the self-study and a list of additional questions for the self-study, if any, before the beginning of the fall semester.
- C. In the fall semester, the program will undertake the review and writing of the self-study and identification of the external reviewers. The faculty chair should identify two or more potential external reviewers with the consultation of the faculty and share these names with the school dean and the dean of graduate and continuing education, with the goal of establishing the reviewers' spring visit dates by the end of the fall semester. The self-study document should be finished by the beginning of the spring semester and shared with the school dean, the dean of graduate and continuing education, the college core curriculum leadership, the vice provost, and the provost.

- D. At the beginning of the spring semester, the school dean will grant the external reviewer(s) access to the program's self-study and strategic plan, together with up-to-date faculty vitae, student data, and information on matters such as careers of the graduates, the curriculum, and degree programs. The list of questions to guide the self-study should also be included.
- E. The external reviewer(s) will ideally visit the campus in person, typically in February or March. Within 6 weeks, the external reviewer(s) will send the school dean a written evaluation of the program, its self-study, and strategic plan. The school dean will share this letter with the dean of graduate and continuing education, the college core curriculum leadership, the vice provost, and provost.
- F. Normally, within one month of receiving the external reviewer(s)' external report, the program's Review Committee will send the school dean, the dean of graduate and continuing education, the college core curriculum leadership, and the vice provost a response to the reviewer(s)' report.
- G. This response, along with self-study and external reviews, will provide the basis for the school dean and dean of graduate and continuing education to work with the program to develop specific objectives.
- H. Within a year of the external review, the program will prepare a letter outlining any changes and improvements introduced in response to external review's recommendations and submit it to the school dean, the dean of graduate and continuing education, the college core curriculum leadership, and academic affairs.
- I. The figure below illustrates the program review timeline:

Academic Program Review Timeline (Fall Start Example)

Note: For additional information Capital letters in parentheses indicate location of additional information in Section IV of the guidelines document, *Academic Department and Program Strategic Plan and Periodic Review Procedures*.



V. SELF-STUDY GUIDANCE

The five topics below (in bold font) *must be* considered by all programs (i.e., mission and planning, curriculum and student learning, students, faculty, administration and resources). The questions under each topic, however, *represent suggestions* for program faculty to consider as they reflect upon their program and its long-term objectives. Working together, the school dean, the dean of graduate and continuing education, and the program's faculty members may identify a specific focus for the self-study, if desired, and a limited number of specific questions to focus on at this point in the program's history and evolution. In some cases, these deans and/or the program's faculty will agree that specific questions, which need not be from those listed below, will become the focus of the written self-study.

A. Mission and Planning

The program must evaluate its purpose and plans in light of the college's mission and strategic priorities.

1. *Mission*

- What is the program's mission and vision?
- How well is the mission aligned with the mission of its school and the college?
- How does the program see its role within its school and the college?

2. *Goals*

- What are the program's goals?
- Have the program's goals changed since the last review? If so, please explain how and why they have changed.
- How do the program's goals and strategic priorities relate to its curriculum, the enrollments in its programs, faculty teaching, and the expectations for faculty scholarly, and creative activities?

3. *Excellence*

- What are the marks of excellence of an undergraduate program in this field (if applicable)? Of a graduate program (if applicable)?
- Which of these qualities are found at The College of New Jersey?
- What are the distinctive aspects of TCNJ's program, its strengths, and areas of need?
- What quantifiable measurements does the program use to assess its performance?

4. *Campus contribution*

- How do the program and its faculty partner with other programs or offices across the college?
- In what ways do the program and its faculty contribute to the college's larger efforts in Global Engagement, Community Engagement, Faculty-Student Collaboration, and Inclusive Excellence?
- What are the school and college needs that are met by the program?
- Are there opportunities to meet these needs more effectively, such as through collaboration with other programs?

5. *College Core/Liberal Learning Curriculum (to be addressed by undergraduate programs)*
 - How does the program's curriculum support the learning objectives of TCNJ's Core Curriculum/Liberal Learning program?
 - How does the program's curriculum align to the Core Curriculum/Liberal Learning's student learning outcomes?
 - What direct evidence is there to support program–Core Curriculum/Liberal Learning alignment?

6. *State/Region/Community Needs*
 - How well does the program serve the community and the state? Use Bureau of Labor Statistics, NJ Department of Labor and Workforce Development and other external market reports as needed to support this area.
 - Are there additional ways, such as academic offerings or community-based research, that the program can serve these constituencies?

7. *Peer/Aspirant Institutions*
 - How does the program compare to peer and aspirant institutions?
 - How do the goals and objectives relate to disciplinary norms (e.g., accrediting agencies, comparable and aspirational programs, peer institutions, etc.)?
 - Are there nationally recognized "benchmarks" and/or best practices that TCNJ should emulate?

8. *Previous Self-Study/Review*
 - What progress, both qualitative and quantitative, has the program made in implementing the recommendations of any previous self-studies/reviews?

9. *Development*
 - What opportunities for future development are envisioned for the program in the next five years?
 - What would constitute "success" in accomplishing the goals and objectives listed above?

B. Curriculum and Student Learning

Providing a high-quality education for students should be the primary consideration when evaluating the relevancy and coherence of the program's curriculum. Evaluation of the curriculum should reflect an awareness of changing knowledge, trends in the discipline, and the professional context for curriculum.

1. *Curriculum*
 - How would one succinctly describe the program's curriculum?
 - Have changes been made since the last program review? If so, describe them and explain why they were made and the outcomes of the changes.
 - Are there ways to improve the curriculum?
 - Does the curriculum reflect the best thinking in the discipline?
 - In what ways is the program's curriculum distinctive?

- How does the curriculum relate to disciplinary standards and those of programs at peer institutions? What internal and external measures are employed to ensure that the curriculum is relevant and current?
 - How coherent is the curriculum? What is the rationale for the selection and organization of the courses in the curriculum? How does the program ensure that the curriculum is structured in a logical, sequential, and coherent manner?
 - How does the program ensure an appropriate balance between breadth and depth?
 - How do the course offerings contribute to campus-wide curricular needs (other than the College Core, which is addressed above)?
 - How diverse is the curriculum? Is it open and inclusive?
 - Are there barriers to engaging the curriculum? Have these barriers been evaluated? What efforts are there to ensure that entrance into the discipline adequately supports the dual mission of excellence and access?
2. *Learning outcomes and assessment*
- What are the program's learning outcomes and how are they aligned with courses/curriculum?
 - Are the current learning outcomes appropriate for our students? If not, how should they be changed?
 - What clear and compelling evidence demonstrates that students are achieving the program's primary student learning outcomes?
 - How are direct and indirect assessment of student learning outcomes used in reviewing and modifying curriculum, advising, and other program elements?
 - Based on the learning outcomes assessment, in what areas is the program doing well? What curriculum areas need improvement based on the outcomes assessment?
3. *Quality of teaching*
- What is the program doing to ensure excellent instruction?
 - Are there areas in which the program can improve?
4. *Class sizes*
- Given the contractual constraints, are there optimal class sizes for core curricular offerings and how are these sizes determined?
 - Are these optimal class sizes maintained? Why or why not?
5. *Scholarly, creative, and applied activities*
- Are student scholarly, creative, and/or applied activities built effectively into the curriculum?
 - How is success in terms of student engagement in these activities measured by the program?
 - Is there capacity for expansion of these high-impact student activities?
6. *Interdisciplinary opportunities*
- Does the program's curriculum offer appropriate interdisciplinary opportunities?
 - What is the overall quality of its interdisciplinary offerings?
 - How might the extent or quality of interdisciplinary opportunities be enhanced?

C. Students

Programs must ensure that their courses, advising resources, and academic services are tailored to the students they serve.

1. *Students and inclusive excellence*

- What is the size and demography of students enrolled in the program? Does the demography of students enrolled reflect the overall TCNJ student population?
- Are we serving all subsets of students (majors, non-majors, students at each stage of their education, transfer students, graduate students, special admits, men, women, students of color, students with special needs, etc.) appropriately?

2. *Enrollment*

- What are the program enrollment patterns and trends for the last five years?
- What is the potential for future enrollment in the program as compared to past enrollments and existing resources?
- What is the optimal number of majors and minors? Why?
- Describe program enrollment patterns, e.g., numbers of entering first year students, graduating seniors, majors, minors, and internal and external transfer students. How do these compare with institutional and national enrollment patterns?
- What recruitment strategies, if any, does the program use to increase enrollment?
- How academically qualified are the students admitted to the program compared to the general profile of TCNJ students?
- How can the program improve recruitment of underserved populations?
- How can the program improve recruitment of external transfer students?

3. *Advising*

- How does the program ensure that students are provided with appropriate advising?
- Describe the student advisement process for majors and minors. Do students regard this process as appropriate to their needs?
- Are students successfully completing The college's and program's requirements in a timely manner?
- Does the advisement program adequately support students in making curricular decisions, and co-curricular or post-graduate plans?

4. *Co-curricular activities*

- Are appropriate co-curricular activities provided to enhance the students' college experience?
- Describe the groups or organizations for students within the program.
- What do they do for students and how do they enhance the programs?
- How many students participate in these activities?
- How do these activities compare with those at comparable institutions?

5. *Preparation for life after graduation*

- Have students gained the skills and experience necessary for success after graduation? What measures does the program use?

- Are students being adequately advised and trained for (further) graduate studies, professional schools, or entering the job market?
- Describe alumni/ae patterns regarding graduate education and career choices.

6. *Student satisfaction*

- How satisfied are they with the courses?
- How does the program promote a sense of belonging for first-year students?

D. Faculty

Programs should ensure that faculty (both full- and part-time) receive the support necessary to assure effective instruction, curriculum development, and appropriate scholarly or creative activities.

1. *Support of teaching*

- Do faculty have the necessary knowledge and skills to provide all students with excellent instruction that is respectful of individual needs and views?
- Do they have the necessary knowledge and skills to help all students meet the learning goals?
- How does the program foster the professional and pedagogical development of faculty as teachers?
- How does the program encourage faculty to develop new curricula?

2. *Support of scholarship*

- What are the expectations for faculty scholarship, and are they being met?
- How does the program foster professional development of faculty as scholars?
- What can be done better to support faculty scholarship?

3. *Support of service*

- Are faculty members appropriately serving the academic program and the college?
- In what ways do faculty lend their professional expertise as teachers and scholars to on and off-campus constituencies?
- Are faculty who engage in cross-disciplinary activities properly rewarded for their efforts?
- How does the use of faculty members for duties and service outside the program affect the program?

4. *Hiring*

- What should be the program's hiring priorities when new positions become available?
- Does the program make good faith efforts to recruit a diverse faculty?

5. *Support of new and adjunct faculty*

- Are new faculty members given adequate mentoring and support to meet the goals set by The college for tenure and promotion? Are adjunct faculty offered mentoring and support to ensure high quality teaching?

- Do new and adjunct faculty members feel welcomed by the program, the wider college community, and integrated into the life of the institution?
6. *Inclusive Excellence*
 - How well does the program promote diversity and inclusion among its faculty with respect to gender, race, and economic issues, as well as research and professional interests?
 7. *Faculty satisfaction*
 - Is there a positive, productive work environment for faculty?
 - Is the program's environment conducive to supporting faculty development?

E. Administration and Resources

Programs should ensure that resources are being appropriately used to meet program goals and objectives.

1. *Structure and leadership*
 - Does the program's administrative structure function as effectively and efficiently as possible?
 - Are there areas in which improvements could be made?
 - Are support and training sufficient for faculty serving as chairs and in other leadership and administrative positions?
2. *Program staff*
 - Is the program's staff being used effectively and appropriately?
 - Could these individuals be enabled to better support the program?
 - Is the work of the program shared equitably among the staff?
3. *Workload*
 - Is the work of the program shared equitably?
 - How does the use of faculty members for duties outside the program affect the program?
4. *Infrastructure*
 - Does the infrastructure currently available to the program (e.g., physical space, computer hardware and support, special instrumentation or facilities) enable the program to support its mission, implement its curriculum, and meet its scholarly and creative goals?
 - How is the program maximizing its use of available resources?
5. *Library*
 - Are current library holdings adequate to support the program?
 - If not, which specific areas are weak?