



Date: September 30, 2022

From: Office of the Provost

Re: Guidelines for the Review of Academic Units

Overview

“Rutgers University–Newark aims to be a national leader in 21st century higher education through a commitment to the values of educating a diverse citizenry, producing high impact scholarship, engaging in our community as an anchor institution, and drawing the connection between local and global, for the improvement of the economic and social well-being of society as a whole.”

In order to fulfill our vision statement, Rutgers University-Newark will implement a program of continuous improvement for our academic programs. The purpose of this document is to provide guidelines for conducting reviews of academic units and programs.

The continuous improvement of academic units is an important activity for a university and is of particular interest in the Office of the Executive Vice-President of Academic Affairs. The Office of the EVPAA has provided the following guidelines for conducting such reviews.

- Reviews or assessments should be focused on academic units (schools/departments) or academic programs (degrees/certificates), as determined by each CLU. Reviews may also be thematic in scope (i.e., cluster reviews) to assess the relative strengths and weaknesses of cross-cutting areas (e.g., climate science, etc.).
- Reviews by professional/specialized accreditors may serve as an acceptable form of review, if deemed appropriate by the chancellor. However, best practice is for such reviews to occur in advance of an accreditation review.
- Reviews should be periodic (i.e., on a regularized cycle) and supplemented, as appropriate.
- Prior to the beginning of each academic year, CLUs will submit a list of scheduled reviews to the executive vice president for academic affairs. At the conclusion of each academic year, CLUs will submit a list of completed reviews and provide access to the resulting reports.

- However, reviews may be initiated at any time by the president, executive vice president for academic affairs, chancellor/provost, or deans. Examples of when an ad-hoc review may be initiated include:
 - Demonstrated cause for concern with respect to performance indicators, such as declines in enrollment, graduation rates, or reputational standing.
 - A pending change in decanal leadership, which would subsequently inform the search process.
 - When academic leadership believes a particular area represents a strategic strength, weakness, opportunity, or threat requiring an ad-hoc review.

Reviews will:

- Incorporate an internal assessment (i.e., self-study) of the academic unit or academic program that documents linkages with unit, CLU, and institutional priorities.
- At the discretion of the chancellor, provost, or dean, incorporate an external assessment (i.e., peer reviewers) of the academic unit or academic program.
- Incorporate a suite of metrics, of relevance to academic leadership, to inform both the internal and external assessment.
- Be forward looking and evaluative, not just descriptive, to ensure a focus on continuous improvement.
- Incorporate recommendations and an implementation plan to enact such recommendations.
- Incorporate a status report, at a pre-defined interval, that documents progress on recommendations resulting from the review.
- Share the results of reviews with the university, along with implemented changes, to construct a repository of reviews for use during the reaffirmation of accreditation with the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE)

At the end of the 2021-2022 academic year, Provost Ashwani Monga started the process to establish a CLU policy for conducting academic unit reviews. During the Fall 2022, his successor, Provost Jeffrey Robinson, continued this initiative. This document summarizes the policies and procedures for reviews of academic units with accreditation bodies, those with out accreditation, and decanal review.

Reviews conducted by Accreditation bodies of Professional Schools and Programs

The following schools and programs are reviewed periodically by accreditation bodies:

School/Program	Accreditation Body	Next Accreditation Review
Rutgers Business School	American Association of Colleges and Schools of Business	2023-2024
School of Public Affairs and Administration	Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration	2024-2025
Rutgers Law School	American Bar Association	2021-2022
School of Social Work	Council on Social Work Education	2025-2026
Urban Education	Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation	2022-2023

As noted by the guidelines provided by the Office of the EVPAA, “Reviews by professional/specialized accreditors may serve as an acceptable form of review.”

During the years in which reviews are conducted by the accreditation body, the Chancellor’s Office will provide assistance and support during these accreditation reviews as necessary.

Reviews of schools and programs conducted through internal review (Self-Study)

Currently, the academic programs that do not require accreditation are not reviewed on a regular basis, but on an as-needed basis (e.g., if enrollments are low, or if the quality of the program appears to be faltering based on rankings or any other information). This will be changed to a seven to ten year cycle for each school or program.

The review of academic units and programs that do not have external accreditation bodies will include three components:

- Internal review (self-study)
- External review by peer review team
- Academic unit response.

Below each component is described.

Internal review

An internal review or self-study should be conducted by the Dean's office or department chair. This internal review should cover the following topics.

Overview

- University Mission/Vision Statement
- Overview of the School
- Mission and purpose
- External reputation

Faculty

- Recruitment, mentoring, and retention
- Diversity
- Intellectual life of the unit
- Trends in academic appointments

Research and Creative Expression

- How and how well is new knowledge being created
- Funding patterns and trends
- Interdisciplinary research

Educational programs and students (graduate/professional/undergraduate)

- Student academic preparation and engagement in learning
- Graduate student recruitment, time to degree, and placement
- Recent/planned curricular and programmatic changes

- Undergraduate enrollment and degree completion patterns and trends, time to degree, job placement
- Majors and minors since last review
- Instruction and student satisfaction
- Role of technology in instruction
- Use of student outcomes assessment
- Structure of advising and academic support.
- Optional undergraduate activities

Outreach and engagement

- Current pattern and potential activity Infrastructure and resources
- Finances, staffing, and academic support
- Status of technology needs
- Space issues

Governance

- Recent leadership succession and impact
- Effectiveness of internal governance: Pattern of Administration and Appointments, Tenure and Promotion processes

External Review

An external review will take place once internal review is complete. The Dean will submit e of potential reviewers to the provost. The provost will appoint a peer review committee of two or three people from peer institutions.

External reviewers will meet with representatives from various part of the institution (e.g., faculty, staff, students, alumni, the Deans) during their visit. Reviewers will prepare a report of their visit highlighting departmental, strengths, challenges, and opportunities. Reviewers also will be asked to share any recommendations that will support the excellence of the department.

Academic Unit Response

Following the review of the report from the external reviewers, the Dean and Department Chair will meet to explore the report's findings. Within 30 days, the unit or department will prepare a formal response and develop an action plan for any remedies for any areas of improvement highlighted in the report. This response will be submitted to the Dean of the School and copied to the Provost.

Decanal Review

The University maintains a *Process for the Evaluation of Academic Deans*, which states “each academic dean shall normally be evaluated by faculty, staff, and students in the unit every five years, but an evaluation can be triggered at any time by the Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs (EVPAA).”

[To be completed]

*Appendix A is a survey of current academic unit review practices at RU-N.

Appendix A

Continuous Improvement Survey

Decanal Review

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- *What data do you collect to help with the review?*

Feedback from a Dean Evaluation Committee set up in accordance with the EVPAA Process for the Evaluation of Academic Deans (Dated November 2021). There was an earlier version we have used in the past, which was broadly similar, but had come to us from the University Senate.

- *What data would you request from our central data support service to help with the review?*

OIRAP is helping in collecting data (and analyzing data) from surveys conducted by the Dean Evaluation Committee.

- *At what point in the dean’s term do you initiate the review?*

In the final year of the Dean’s term.

- *How long does it take to complete the review?*

About six months.

- *Provide any other relevant information that may help to understand your approach.*

We only follow the guidelines in the university EVPAA document for Decanal review.

- *We are also interested in any documents you may share relative to these reviews. These include templates, guidelines, timelines etc. Please provide a link to any relevant documents or website.*

The only document/process we rely on is the EVPAA one referenced above. However, RBS does have a bylaws provision for an annual Dean evaluation (though there are some other conditions that need to be met for that annual evaluation to happen).

Academic Program Review

For the purposes of this survey, academic program review is defined as a review of a degree or certificate program and is distinct from a review of an academic unit (e.g., school, department, center, or institute). A number of chancellor-led units rely on [specialized/professional accreditation](#) to conduct academic program reviews.

For your academic programs that do not require specialized or professional accreditation, please provide the following information:

- *Frequency- How often are your academic programs reviewed?*

The academic programs that do not require accreditation are not reviewed on a regular basis, but on an as-needed basis (e.g., if enrollments are low, or if the quality of the program appears to be faltering based on rankings or any other information). For instance, we recently suspended admissions to a couple of undergraduate programs in SASN based on low enrollments and a long-term review of our graduate program in Global Affairs is on-going. These as-needed reviews may be initiated either by the relevant dean's office or by the faculty and department(s) governing the program. But most of our academic programs are reviewed as part of the accreditation processes that happen every few years (e.g., ABA for the Law School, AACSB for the Business School, and NASPAA for SPAA). Note that some of these accreditations also require yearly reporting (e.g., ABA for the Law School). Additionally, there are also some program-specific accreditations such as the Urban Ed programs being accredited by CAEP and accreditation for social work. Also, the SASN Dean is currently having discussions with Chairs to figure out ways in which regular program reviews can be conducted.

- *Timeline- How long does it take to complete a review of an academic program?*

This varies depending on the program. For instance, the law school yearly review (needed for ABA) takes about a month, but their five-year review takes 6-8 months. Similarly, the review that led to the suspension of admission to the undergraduate Theater program took less than a year, while the on-going review of graduate Global Affairs is in its sixth year.

- *What data do you collect to help with the review?*

The data usually relate to a variety of aspects that apply to students, such as admissions, course content and delivery; and job placements. There is also additional data such as faculty headcount and rank distributions, faculty publications, department hiring plans and ability to mentor and support new faculty who would be involved in the program, library resources, etc.

- *What additional data would you request from our central data support service to help with the review?*

It would be helpful to have easy access to detailed demographic data on faculty members. It is not easily accessible through ROCS. Also, it would be helpful to have more information regarding standard templates for program review, as well as any available market trends on different programs.

- *What other circumstances would trigger a review?*

Apart from accreditation cycles, a review could be triggered by low enrollments or any indication that the quality of a program is faltering (e.g., based on enrollments, employment outcomes, rankings, faculty perceptions, student feedback, etc.).

- *What is your primary reason for requesting Academic Program Review?*

- *Academic Prioritization Program (i.e. resource allocation)*
- *Performance control assessment (i.e. increase efficiency)*
- *Strategic direction (i.e. long-term central planning)*
- *Other*

I would say Academic Prioritization Program (we can pick only one).

- *Do you utilize the results of specialized/professional accreditation to inform decision making*

on academic programs?

YES

No

Maybe

- *Provide any other relevant information that may help to understand your approach.*

We conduct program reviews as needed, as determined by the relevant dean and faculty, while also following the regular cycles dictated by accreditation agencies. We rely on professional accreditations in many schools to inform our decision making. For example, AACSB requires RBS to “close the loop” on improving learning outcomes and meeting faculty qualification standards, which then leads to certain decisions to accomplish the same.

- *We are also interested in any documents you may share relative to these reviews.*

These include templates, guidelines, timelines etc. Please provide a link to any relevant documents or website.

Some schools haven’t had regular program reviews, but Deans are making attempts to make them more regular. For instance, the SASN Dean is currently having discussions within the school on how to accomplish this. However, some aspects of graduate programs are assessed by the Graduate School through surveys with program directors, as needed by the Rutgers Assessment Council on Learning Outcomes. Finally, in terms of leadership development in this arena, the SCJ Dean is attending seminars on how to conduct Program Reviews, such as the following one: <https://academicanalytics.com/community/webinars/>

Here is information about some of our accreditations:

RBS:

<https://www.business.rutgers.edu/about-rbs/accreditation>

SPAA:

<https://spaa.newark.rutgers.edu/rankings-and-accreditations#:~:text=Rutgers%20SPAA's%20program%20first%20received,in%20accordance%20with%20NASPAA%20guidelines.>

Law:

<https://law.rutgers.edu/aba-standard-504-and-509-disclosures#:~:text=Rutgers%20Law%20School%20is%20accredited,legal%20education%20in%20New%20Jersey.>

Review of Academic Units (Schools/Departments)

For the purposes of this survey, review of academic units is defined as a review of organizational structures (schools, departments, etc.). A number of chancellor-led units rely on [specialized/professional accreditation](#) to conduct academic program reviews.

- *How often is a school/department reviewed?*

Same as described above, accreditations usually cover everything from overall school to specific programs.

- *Is there an optimal time when this review should occur?*

Same as described earlier—either based on accreditation cycle or based on any signals that trigger a review (low enrollment, poor employment outcomes, drop in rankings, etc.) Faculty headcount and rank distribution perhaps plays an even larger role here than with program review, since non-tenure-track faculty can fill in instructional gaps in programs, but cannot do the work of tenure and promotion review or new faculty mentoring done in departments. Therefore, consideration of possible merger with another department becomes inevitable when a department becomes too small or too heavily weighted towards assistant professors and non-tenure-track faculty. Concentrations of faculty research interests may also play a role here, as when a recent review of Biological Sciences and Environmental Sciences led to moving several ecologists' tenure from the former to the latter. But while their importance may be weighted differently, the circumstances that would trigger a departmental review generally are the same as might trigger a program review.

- *What circumstances would trigger a review?*

As described above.

- *What data do you collect to help with the review?*

Same as described earlier for programs.

- *What data would you request from our central data support service to help with the review?*

As described earlier, easy and detailed access to faculty/staff demographics would be helpful.

- *Provide any other relevant information that may help to understand your approach.*

Same as described earlier for programs. Some reviews happen due to accreditation or other triggers (e.g., low enrollments). But Deans are having conversations internally on how to maintain regular reviews, and are also getting up to speed themselves on best practices to conduct reviews, such as this one in which our SCJ Dean is participating:

<https://academicanalytics.com/community/webinars/>

- *We are also interested in any documents you may share relative to these reviews. These include templates, guidelines, timelines etc. Please provide a link to any relevant documents or website.*

None to share.

Centers & Institutes Review

The University maintains [Policy 10.1.5 \(Centers and Institutes\)](#), which outlines how centers and institutes are established, approved, monitored, renewed, and dissolved. A procedural document – *Guidelines for Center and Institute Proposals and Periodic Progress Reports and Procedures for their Submission* – outlines how periodic reviews should be conducted.

- *What data do you collect to help with the review?*

Data includes information such as the mission of the center/institute, goals and accomplishments, instructional activity, budgets, and space needs.

- *What data would you request from our central data support service to help with the review?*

It would be helpful to have a central repository for information on different centers/institutes (more detailed than is currently available) so that new centers/institutes can benchmark against those.

- *Provide any other relevant information that may help to understand your approach.*

We have several centers/institutes relating to programs, research, industry outreach, and those that are more hybrid. So, different centers/institutes sometimes need to be assessed differently based on their mission. Center/Institute reviews have not been regular at all our schools, though such reviews are becoming more regular now. But the reviews aside, Deans have frequent discussions with their Centers/Institutes to discuss challenges, needs, and future plans. Schools are also taking initiative in specifying their own guidelines. For example, SCJ established procedures for C&I Review in 2020 based on the Guidelines for Center and Institute Proposals and Periodic Progress Reports and Procedures for their Submission. Relevant documents can be found here <https://rscj.newark.rutgers.edu/about/leadership-administration/school-of-criminal-justice-document-repository/>

- *We are also interested in any documents you may share relative to these reviews. These include templates, guidelines, timelines etc. Please provide a link to any relevant documents or website.*

None.