

Institutional Framework for Continuous Improvement in Academic Affairs

July 24, 2024

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey is committed to continuous improvement in academic affairs to link periodic assessment to the broader strategic goals of the academic unit, campus, and/or university and to evaluate the budgetary resources necessary to achieve such goals. The university engages in multiple assessment efforts to promote continuous improvement. ¹

To build upon these efforts, each chancellor-led unit (CLU) shall maintain and implement a procedure or policy that articulates the manner in which a regularized assessment process, with the goal of continuous improvement, is instituted within the CLU. Such procedures or policies are subject to approval by the executive vice president for academic affairs to ensure they are consistent with the guidelines outlined. The intent of CLU-specific procedures or policies is to ensure that each CLU has sufficient latitude to define a continuous improvement process appropriate to its mission and to document evidence of assessment and continuous improvement to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE). The Office of Academic Assessment and Accreditation (OAAA) will oversee the collection of the reviews. No later than July 1, OAAA will send an email to Provosts to verify the schedule of reviews for the upcoming academic year. At the beginning of the Fall semester, no later than September 15th, OAAA will send an email to the contact of each School/department responsible for completing the review to remind them of the process and offer consulting support available by staff from the Office of Teaching Evaluation and Assessment Research.

CLU-specific policies should adhere to the following guidelines:

- 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 at least every 7 years) 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 to the Office of the Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs.
 - 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 should:

- Incorporate an internal assessment (i.e., self-study) of the academic unit or academic program that documents evidence of mission-centric 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. At minimum, these metrics should include measures of student learning outcomes connected to annual assessments, faculty productivity including publications, external awards and grants, and financial documentation as specified by University Finance and Administration. These data should be used to show how the unit/program uses this information to make programmatic decisions.
- Incorporate into your data and discussion, ways in which diversity, equity, and inclusion goals are accomplished.
- Be forward looking and evaluative, not just descriptive, to ensure a focus on continuous improvement.
- Incorporate recommendations and an implementation plan and timeline to enact such recommendations.
- Incorporate a status report, at a pre-defined interval, that documents progress on recommendations resulting from the review.

- In addition to sharing the results with the executive vice president for academic affairs, chancellor, and provost, the completed reviews should be sent to the Office of Academic Assessment and Accreditation at evpaa-oaaa@rutgers.edu at the completion of the academic year, or no later than June 1st.

1 Examples include (1) periodic review of the institution and select academic units through institutional accreditation and specialized accreditation, (2) ad-hoc reviews, such as those coordinated by the Office of University Strategy (OUS) and the Committee on Academic Planning, (3) leadership reviews, including the Process for the Evaluation of Chancellors and the Process for the Evaluation of Academic Deans, (4) reviews of centers and institutes (Policy 10.1.5), and (5) regularized assessment of student learning outcomes (SLOs) and student support services through the Assessment Council on Learning Outcomes (ACLO) and the Assessment Council on the Student Experience (ACSE).