

# Academic Program Review Guidelines

## Nova Southeastern University

*Revised: September 2025*

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# Academic Program Review Guidelines

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### The Purpose of Program Review

Academic Program Review consists of on-going, high quality peer reviews of all the NSU's academic colleges and programs on an approximately five-year cycle. Such reviews provide a sharpened focus on academic program areas in which excellence can be achieved in order to enhance national stature and ensure the most efficient use of available resources. Thus, academic program review is more of an opportunity for self-examination and self-challenge, rather than an unrestrained opportunity to request additional resources.

The primary mission of Academic Program Review is to:

1. Assess a program's quality and reputation among peers in the discipline, including the extent to which the program is regarded as a leader in the field. National rankings, metrics of excellence in undergraduate and graduate education, and other externally validated benchmarks of academic program success will be considered.
2. Establish clear priorities, identify strategies for achieving the University's goal of academic excellence or eminence in each program, department, or school, and provide documentation of achievement of prioritized goals.
3. Ensure that each academic program has a plan for achieving higher quality and enhancing its national stature in both the short (2-3 years) and the long (7 years beyond) term.
4. Identify improvements that are possible by refocusing existing program resources.
5. Identify improvements that are possible only with additional resources.
6. Stimulate the program or academic college to seek creative educational strategies and solutions.
7. Ensure that newly established programs are effectively managed and are consistent with the mission, goals, and objectives of the University.

Every program progresses through a six-step evaluation in order to develop a comprehensive plan for improvement over the next five years. The process is intended to assist an academic college and program in understanding its current status so that it can establish clear priorities for achieving excellence or becoming eminent in its field. The six-step evaluation process will include:

1. Academic Information Collection & The Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes at the Level of the Major (ASLO);

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2. An Internal Review Committee (IRC) Evaluation and Report;
3. An External Consultant's (EC) Evaluation and Report;
4. A Summary of Evaluations and Recommendations from the Academic Review Committee (ARC);
5. Executive Review meeting with the President, Provost, Associate Provost, and Dean.
6. An Action Plan/Action Plan Update developed by the cognizant college and accepted by NSU's president and provost.

Program reviews have the following characteristics:

1. Reviews incorporate expert assessments provided by reviewers from other institutions of high quality, as well as those participating in the University program.
2. Reviews are evaluative and prescriptive, not just descriptive. Plans for improvement require academic judgments about the quality of the program, students, curriculum, resources, and future directions.
3. Reviews are forward-looking. While assessment of a program's current status is important, priorities for continual future improvement are of greatest concern.
4. Reviews provide a concise, honest appraisal of an academic college's strengths and weaknesses.
5. Reviews will emphasize faculty/scholarly accomplishments as well as the achievement of student learning objectives.
6. Academic program reviews are independent of any other type of review (although they may be scheduled to accommodate and use data collected for other professional and specialized accreditation reviews). The purpose of the academic program review is to provide a plan to achieve excellence, not merely to satisfy accreditation requirements.
7. Reviews will result in an action plan with an overarching strategic agenda, which will enable the program to increase its stature or achieve eminence.
8. Action plans emphasize improvements that are possible through creative reallocation of the program's existing resources.
9. Annual updates will monitor improvements in academic quality resulting from the implementation of program action plans.

### **ASPIRE and Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes**

Though not a self-study, program review begins with the academic program undertaking a comprehensive data collection that serves as the basis for self-assessment and for identifying future directions and opportunities. The data collection, in most instances, will utilize data previously collected for institutional effectiveness, for regional accreditation, and for professional

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accreditation, including academic data collected in the Academic and Scholastic Program Information for Review and Evaluation database (ASPIRE). The review will include the Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes at the Level of the Major collected centrally through the Office of Academic Quality, Assessment, and Accreditation (AQAA), as well as information regarding comparable programs identified by the Dean of the program under review.

### ASPIRE

The Academic and Scholastic Program Information for Review and Evaluation (ASPIRE) database a centralized system for housing programmatic information, designed to support institutional planning, accountability, and accreditation reporting, particularly for SACSCOC. The system is organized into 14 sections that capture key aspects of each academic program, including admissions and enrollment, curriculum and instruction, assessment of student learning outcomes (ASLO), faculty, student support services, graduation requirements, accreditation, alumni outcomes, and licensure information.

### Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

The Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes (ASLO) process engages all academic programs in systematically evaluating student learning outcomes for each major offered. Coordinated by the Office of Academic Quality, Assessment, and Accreditation, the ASLO aims to demonstrate student achievement, improve teaching quality, and enhance overall learning. The process begins with programs documenting their mission, learning outcomes, and instructional locations, then reporting on improvements made since the previous cycle. Programs select specific outcomes for direct assessment, establish achievement benchmarks, and analyze results, including comparisons across locations and modalities where applicable. For programs with licensure or certification requirements, exam performance is also reviewed. Findings are used to identify strengths, address areas for improvement, and develop strategies that advance student learning. Each cycle concludes with a forward-looking plan for continuous improvement, ensuring academic quality and accountability across the university.

### Internal Review Committees (IRCs)

Deans and Department Chairs will nominate six program faculty (or faculty from related program) who may serve as IRC members. Three members of the IRC will be selected from the nominees offered by the College Dean. Two members of the IRC (including the Chair) will be from a University academic discipline external to the college being reviewed. Each IRC will consist of five members, all of whom maintain NSU faculty status. IRC Chairpersons are members of the IRC and are not members of the program under review or of the college in which the program under review is situated. Each Internal Review Committee is charged with conducting a comprehensive evaluation of a specific academic program and preparing a report for transmission to the ARC. Internal Review Committees decide how best to use the information that they will need to advise the President and the ARC.

The Internal Review Committee Report covers several areas. First, the Report identifies preeminent programs and demonstrates what qualities make those programs preeminent. Next, the Report summarizes the information that will be presented and positions the program in relation to the University's mission statement and overall goals. The most substantive part of the report focuses on specific and in-depth analyses of the program. The Assessment of Quality section of the IRC report covers three general areas: **Faculty**, **Students** and **Curriculum**. Under each of these general headings, several areas are analyzed. The report closes with specific recommendations for improvement in each area.

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The IRC Report not only analyzes the state of the program as it stands, but also the future of the program, including the likelihood that the program will achieve preeminence and how resources can best be allocated for that realization. The IRC makes specific recommendations about faculty, students, curriculum, facilities, and resource allocation, all of which are utilized by the ARC in determining final recommendations to the President. This report will be evaluative and prescriptive in nature and will provide specific recommendations for program improvement.

### **External Consultant**

External Consultants will be experts in the field to be reviewed and accepted as leaders in their area of expertise. For each program to be reviewed, a designated External Consultant (EC) will provide to the President and the ARC a written evaluation of the program and the IRC report.

The Dean or department chair will submit a list of potential External Consultants with their qualifications to ARC. These nominees will be selected from those programs that are similar to the program being reviewed and, in the Dean's judgment, reflect excellence in the field. The nominated individuals will be regarded as outstanding representatives and have provided leadership within their field. These individuals also will be sufficiently independent from the program under review and from NSU so as to provide a separate and candid assessment of the program. The President or his designees will select one External Consultant from those nominated. After the visit, the External Consultant will provide a written report/critique to the Provost, based on his/her meetings with students, key program administrators, the IRC members, and the Provost. In the event that an External Consultant cannot be selected from the college's original list of potential External Consultants, the Executive Director of Academic Affairs will solicit additional nominees from the unit to be reviewed.

Subsequent to the conclusion of an External Consultant's visit, the consultant will provide a written assessment to ARC for use in completing its review and preparing its report. This report will comment on the validity and accuracy of the IRC report as well as contain the consultant's own observation and assessment of the program.

### **The Academic Review Committee (ARC)**

The Academic Review Committee (ARC) is a permanent, standing university committee comprised of University faculty members appointed by and reporting to the President. Recommendations for membership will be solicited from a variety of sources, including academic deans, faculty, and University administrators and officially appointed by the President and Provost.

ARC's oversight of the process of academic program review includes:

- Advising the Internal Review Committees and the External Consultants (EC) in the development of their reviews and on issues pertinent to the conduct of their reviews.
- Developing Academic Review Summaries that succinctly summarize the IRC's and EC's recommendations and evaluates the program's strengths and areas of needed improvement

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in relationship to the goal of preeminence.

- Serving as a chair on Internal Review Committee's (IRC)
- Serving as a peer reviewer for the Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes (ASLO) reports

### **Executive Review**

Following the finalized Academic Review Committee (ARC) Summary, an Executive Review is a formal meeting convened where the President/Provost, Associate Provost, Dean, and Program Director/Chair come together to review and discuss the results of the academic program review. The purpose of this meeting is to evaluate the findings, consider their implications for the program and the institution, and ensure alignment with strategic priorities. As part of the process, the leadership team requests the development of an Action Plan that outlines concrete steps for program enhancement, growth, and accountability moving forward.

### **Action Plan/Action Plan Update**

The action plan, once accepted, will be incorporated into each academic college's long and short term planning process. While the primary emphasis is on program improvement, the review process will also lead to identification of those academic programs that are not central to the strategic direction of the university and for which sufficient improvement appears to be unlikely. Therefore, the Preeminent aim of Academic Program Review provides each academic college with the unique opportunity to reflect on its achievements and areas of need with respect to preeminence, inspiring each respective program's faculty, and administration to work together for the improvement of the program and NSU. The program will provide an annual update on its action plan each year until the next review cycle begins.

### **Calendar for Program Review**

Each new program undergoes an initial review within 1–2 years of launch to ensure its implementation matches the approved proposal. After 5–7 years, the program enters the formal Academic Program Review process. Established programs are reviewed on an approximate recurring five-year cycle thereafter.