



The University of Texas at Tyler
Office of Continuous Improvement and Accreditation

Academic and Student Support Services

External Review Handbook

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Introduction

An external review of UT Tyler academic and student support services is an essential function of the institution's quality review process and provides perspectives not available on campus. The results of the external reviews are included with other assessment and evaluation information in determining the quality, efficiency, and contributions toward student success of each unit. Additionally, the self-assessment and systematic review information contribute to planning for continuous quality. Both qualitative and quantitative criteria are included in the review and the various criteria may be weighted differently for each review. Flexibility in the application of the review criteria is appropriate to accommodate the specialized missions of the individual academic support services, offices, and programs. The following factors serve as guidelines in the preparation and planning of the external review.

Guiding Principles

- UT Tyler is committed to external reviews as an integral part of strategic planning, institutional effectiveness and to ensure continuing quality enhancement toward fulfillment of the UT Tyler mission;
- All academic support services fulfill their respective mission and purpose within the context of the UT Tyler mission;
- The external review is considered to be an appropriate assessment effort in the systematic evaluation of performance and accountability;
- Participation in the review process emphasizes self-assessment and demonstrates a concern about quality, an ability to be self-critical and a willingness to act upon identified concerns;
- Relevant groups within the University are included in the review process, especially when recommendations may refer to or affect particular groups.
- Self-regulation protects institutional autonomy and promotes innovation and accountability.
- The external review process should consider the fundamental principles of "best practice" using well recognized and credible profession-wide standards specific to the discipline for quality assurance.

External Reviewer Selection

An approval process for all external reviewers is required. Reviewers are selected with particular reference to their records of experience and thoughts relative to broad issues of education within their respective disciplines. External reviewers should be of appropriate rank or stature in their respective discipline and not affiliated with U.T. Tyler to ensure a strong review is provided and that there is no appearance of a conflict of interest.

Nominations are required for prospective external reviewers. External reviewers must be full-time employees in an institution nationally recognized for excellence in higher education.

Ideally, the director/executive director provides the names of **two** potential external reviewers to the appropriate assistant vice president or vice president. The recommendations should include a statement of the nominee's credentials and documentation that clarifies the nature of any prior contact the director/executive director has had with each suggested reviewer. The assistant vice president/vice president may recommend additional names of potential external reviewers if desired. The assistant vice president/vice president makes the final selection of external reviewer.

Internal Contractual Process

The program coordinator/department chair follows the UT Tyler Financial Services and Contract Processing Procedures.

Fee for Service and Payment of Expenses

External reviewers receive a \$1,000 fee for service plus documented travel and accommodation expenses are reimbursed up to \$1,500. The expenses are funded through the department and department reimbursement is transferred from the Office of the Provost or appropriate vice president. Exceptions may be made on service fees and/or travel and accommodation reimbursements on a pre-approved case by case basis.

External Review Process

Responsibilities of the Department

Pre-Visit

- Review the *Academic and Student Support Services External Review Guidelines*.
- Schedule meetings with the assistant vice president/vice president and the Continuous Improvement and Accreditation Office to discuss the review process, expectations, and timeline.
- Provide the names of potential external reviewers to the assistant vice president/vice president. Ideally, at least **two** potential external reviewers are nominated. The recommendations should include a statement of the nominee's credentials and documentation that clarifies the nature of any prior contact the director/executive director has had with each suggested reviewer.
- The assistant vice president/vice president may recommend additional names of potential external reviewers.
- The assistant vice president/vice president makes the final selection of reviewer.
- Contact the prospective external reviewer finalist to provide information details on the scope and responsibilities of the external review, fee-for-service, and payment for related travel expenses.
- Review and follow the UT Tyler Contract Processing Procedures and arrange for transportation and lodging per assistant vice president/vice president guidance.
- Survey departmental staff, including graduate assistants, and appropriate stakeholders. (Appendix D – Example Survey)
- Prepare the Self-Study Report that includes all relevant components agreed upon with the assistant vice president/vice president. (*Appendix A – Self-Study Guidelines*).
- When appropriate to the unit, include professional benchmark standards and criteria from the appropriate national professional organization and/or the appropriate CAS Professional Standards for Higher Education in the Self-Study report. Include the CAS Self-Audit Guide (SAG) results if the department completed the internal audit as part of the Self-Study Report.
- Provide the Self-Study Report to the reviewer approximately 30-60 days in advance of the site visit.

Campus Visit

- Schedule opportunities to meet with students, faculty and staff, college/school deans, Dean of Libraries, Digital Learning, and other stakeholders. Include appropriate representatives from campus instructional sites.
- Schedule time for campus tour(s) as appropriate.
- Provide time for the reviewer to work alone during the visit.
- Schedule an exit interview for preliminary external review report findings with the Provost, assistant vice president/vice president, department director, staff, as well as with faculty and other administrators as appropriate.

Post-Visit

- Coordinate with the Provost or vice president's office for transfer of funds to process fee-for-service and approved travel-related expenses. Reviewers are compensated upon receipt of the External Review Report.
- Provide the Self-Study Report, External Review Report, and the *draft* Institutional Response to the appropriate supervisor, VP/AVP, and to the Associate Provost of Continuous Improvement and Accreditation (CIA).
- Schedule a meeting with the Provost or appropriate Vice President, department leadership members, and the Associate Provost for CIA to finalize the Institutional Response.
- Collaborate with the CIA Office to integrate external review documents, findings, and action plans in the unit's annual assessment plan.

Responsibilities of the External Reviewer

Pre-Visit and Self-Study Review

- Sign and return UT Tyler Contractual Forms.
- Review the Self-Study document, supporting documentation, and program website information. Communicate with the department to request clarification on any additional information as needed.
- Coordinate with the external review team leader for travel and lodging requirements.
- Provide a preliminary list of any staff or administrators (by titles/positions) for campus interviews outside of the program/department.

Campus Visit

- Visit the UT Tyler campus to meet with administrators, professional staff and students directly involved with the department or unit as well as with professionals from collaborating offices.
- Visit may include the UT Tyler Longview University Center, the UT Tyler Palestine instructional site and/or the UT Tyler Houston Engineering Center, and with online-only students served by the department. Virtual meetings may be facilitated as needed.
- Complete a thoughtful and principled review based on professional judgement of generally recognized practices in higher education
- Complete a preliminary report to share during the exit interview at the conclusion of the campus visit.

Post Visit and External Review Report (See Appendix A)

The External Review Report includes findings based on information from the Self-Study and support documentation; the campus visit; and interviews with staff, students, administrators, faculty, and community stakeholders.

The typical External Review Report includes the following information:

- A general description of the department/program's alignment with the UT Tyler vision, mission statement, and strategic plan as well as with the division strategic plan.

- A brief statement on the general process of the review, including a list of those who participated in the review. (Roster may be provided by the department)
- Overall strengths based on quantitative and qualitative data.
- Overall concerns based on quantitative and qualitative data.
- Evidence that the department uses assessment performance information for continuous quality improvement.
- Recommendations for continuous quality planning *emphasizing student outcomes*.
- Other information relevant to support continuing quality planning.
- If there is more than one reviewer, a single report authored by both reviewers should be submitted.
- The External Review Report should be provided to the director/executive director and to the assistant vice president and/or the vice president within approximately 30-60 days following the campus site visit.
- Payment of approved travel-related expenses and the fee for service are processed upon submission of the External Review Report.

Responsibilities of the Office of Assessment and Institutional Effectiveness

Pre-Visit and Self-Study Review


- The external review process is assessed for ongoing improvement by the CIA Office in collaboration with the department and vice president's office.
- Provide resources to assist with the self-study faculty survey as needed.

Campus Visit

- Meet with the External Reviewer to provide information on institutional planning and effectiveness and how the program assessment and evaluation is integrated into the institutional processes.

Evaluation and Assessment of the External Review Process

- Assess the external review process for ongoing improvement in collaboration with the department and vice president's office.
- Refine and update the UT Tyler external review process as appropriate.
- Collaborate with the department to integrate all external review reports, action plans and follow-up statements into the department's assessment plan

A photograph of a university campus path. The path is paved and runs through a green area with many trees. Several students are walking along the path. In the foreground, four students are walking towards the camera. Behind them, a person is riding a bicycle. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day, with long shadows cast on the path. The text "Appendix A" is centered over the middle of the image.

Appendix A

The University of Texas at Tyler
Academic and Student Support Services Self-Study Guidelines

I. Department Overview

A. **Purpose** – Provide the UT Tyler University Description and a brief description of the department's alignment with the UT Tyler vision, values, mission, and strategic plan. Summarize recent notable department recognitions and accomplishments.

Resource: Department

Request Time: N/A

B. **Department Strategic Plan** – Provide the 5-year goals and initiatives for the department and current progress status. Include progress notes as needed.

Resource: Department

Request Time: N/A

C. **Summary of services and/or programs** – table summary in comparison with peers (peers may be determined with vice president)

Resource: Department

Request Time: N/A

II. Department Personnel

A. **Administrative structure** for the department/program

Resource: Department

Request Time: N/A

B. **Professional Staff** (Provide current job descriptions and credentials for each of the professional staff and include graduate assistant job descriptions)

Resource: Department/HR Office

Request Time: N/A/2 weeks

D. **Staff Professional Development** –Table Summary of professional development (3 most recent years)

Resource: Department/Program

Request Time: N/A

III. Department Resources

A. **Fiscal** – Budget and expenditure totals for 3 years

Resource: Program

Request Time: N/A

B. **Facilities** – Describe physical space available and needed (include a detailed description of plans for renovations, expansions, etc.)

Resource: Program

Request Time: N/A

IV. Student Information (Table with last 3 years data)

A. **Enrollment, Retention, Graduation Rates**

B. **Student Demographics**

C. **Student Achievement Tables**

V. Program or Department Quality and Student Academic Success

A. Student Academic Success – Describe department/unit initiatives and include data collected to track correlation or effect on effect student academic success. (

Resource: College/School Assessment Professional

Request Time: 1-2 weeks

B. Professional Organization and/or Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) Standards – Self-Audit Report (as appropriate, confirm with AIE Office)

Resource: Department/Program

Request Time: N/A

C. Student Outcomes and Student Learning Outcomes – Provide the department/unit assessment plans

Resource: Department/Program/AIE

Request Time: N/A/1 week

D. Self-Study Survey Report(s) (See Appendix C for Sample Survey Prompts)

Resource: Department/Program


Request Time: N/A

E. Other Measures of Quality

Resource: Department/Program

Request Time: N/A

VI. Staff Proposed Action Plans for Improvement based upon the Self-Study

A photograph of a university campus path. The path is paved and runs through a green area with many trees. The sun is shining from the upper right, creating a bright, hazy atmosphere and casting long shadows on the path. Several people are walking along the path. In the foreground, a group of four people is walking towards the camera. In the background, a person is riding a bicycle, and other people are walking. The text "Appendix B" is centered in the middle of the image.

Appendix B

Common Questions of an External Reviewer

NOTE: The Common Questions examples are based on academic program external reviews but have been adapted for academic support services and administrative departments.

To facilitate meaningful analysis of the evidence, it may be helpful to provide guiding questions to structure the self-study inquiry and report. These questions often produce deep discussions among faculty and are considered the most important aspect of the self-study and peer review process. Hence, a set of sample questions is embedded below within each of the core elements typically analyzed in the self-study report. Ideally, program evidence falls into two categories: evidence that addresses questions about program quality and evidence that addresses issues of department/program viability and sustainability.

I. Program/Department Overview

Department History and Purpose – How are national trends and initiatives considered in the program’s planning processes? How does the program align with professional/business trends and practices? Does the Self-Study provide a sound analysis of strengths and areas for improvement? What evidence is provided that the program is increasing student access AND student success?

Future Goals and Planning for Improvement - What are the program/department goals for the next few years? Does the program/department review key outcome measures and performance indicators? Is the quality, use and analysis of program/department data assessed consistently? What is happening within the profession, local community or society generally that identifies an anticipated need for this program in the future (including market research)? How will the program/department address any weaknesses identified in the self-study or build on existing strengths? What internal improvements are possible with existing resources? What improvements can be addressed only with additional resources? Where can the formation of collaborations improve program quality and viability?

Alignment with Institutional Mission and Strategic Plan - Are the practices, processes and resources properly aligned with the goals of the department/program and the institutional mission? What evidence is provided on strategic plan revisions and updates? What is the process for strategic initiative development and review?

Evidence in this category might include:

- A detailed narrative on goals for the next 1-3 years including descriptions of resources necessary for goal attainment
- Minutes or notes from department meetings describing recommendations for improvement
- Minutes or notes from department meetings describing recommendations on collaborations
- Evidence of department/program goals/outcomes aligning with institutional mission and strategic plan

II. Department/Program Administration

The Administrative Environment - The administrative structure of the department/program should reflect the purposes for which it was established. Well-defined lines of authority with detailed duties and job descriptions should be followed. Policies and procedures should be followed to guide processes. Capable, credible, knowledgeable and experienced leadership is essential for success. Is there evidence of shared leadership that is innovative, inclusive accountable and flexible?

Evidence in this category might include:

- Organization chart
- Job Descriptions and detailed duties
- Demonstrated success of leading the department/program to promote student success
- Staff evaluations/surveys of direct supervisors and/or administrators

Staff – Does the current support staffing contribute to the quality of the department/program? Does support staff participate in systematic professional development opportunities that enhance the quality of the department/program directly? What is the professional development plan for each staff member for the next 1-3 years?

- Professional and Technical staff FTE supporting program/departmental operations
- Professional and Technical staff qualifications
- Professional and Technical staff professional development plans

III. Allocation of Resources

Financial resources – Has the department/program experienced any significant changes in budget allocation that have impacted the quality of the programs or services in any way? Is the budget linked with strategic planning based data-driven decisions? Does the department/program demonstrate fiscal responsibility and cost effectiveness consistent with institutional protocols?

Evidence in this category might include:

- Operational budget (revenues and expenditures) and trends over a 3-year period

Facilities – Do the facilities meet the needs of the program? Are there any plans for modifications or renovations in the near future? Do facilities meet established standards for accessibility to persons needing accommodations?

Evidence in this category might include:

- Office space
- Student study spaces
- Student common areas
- Proximity to similar academic and student support services offices
- Access to classrooms designed for alternative learning styles/universal design

Equipment, Information and Technology resources – Does the department/program have state-of-the-art equipment/technology to meet program and student needs? Are the existing equipment, information and technology resources adequate to support the mission of the department/program? Do existing equipment, information and technology resources reflect current best pedagogical practices? Do resources meet established standards for delivery to persons requiring accommodations? What equipment, information and technology resources exist that are not used regularly by students and/or staff and why? What equipment, information and technology resources might improve the quality of the department/program services?

Evidence in this category might include:

- A systematic plan for replacing equipment/technology to ensure state-of-the-art programming
- Technology resources available to support staff and students' needs
- Library print and electronic holdings in the professional discipline areas of the department/program

Student Support – What support services infrastructure is in place to help students graduate in a timely manner and experience academic success throughout the program? What student support services are available that students engage in the most? What student support services are available that students use infrequently or not at all and why? What student support services might be offered that are not currently provided? What resource requirements would be needed to accomplish providing new services? How does the department/program support distance education and off-campus instructional sites to promote investment in student access and success?

Evidence in this category might include:

- Innovative use of technology to promote student engagement and success
- Orientation and transition programs
- Financial support (scholarships, internships, student employment, etc.)
- Support for engagement in the campus community
- Support for non-cognitive variables of success, including emotional, psychological, and physical interventions if necessary
- Support for research or for engagement in the community beyond campus, such as service-learning and internships

IV. Student Information

Students – What is the profile of students supported through the department/program and how does the profile relate to or enhance the mission and goals of the program?

Evidence in this category might include:

- Students' gender, ethnicity, age,
- Student employment status
- Trends in numbers of student participation over a 3-year period

(Note that the specific list of indicators in this category will depend on the goals of the program)

V. Quality of Services and Programs

The assessment of the quality is the primary purpose of any self-study and external review. It is helpful to consider that quality is multifaceted and assessment measures should include all components. While departments/programs may have individual characteristics of excellence, all programmatic areas have identifiable commonalities that are necessary to guide decisions for program improvement. Additionally, the review process should consider the fundamental principles of “best practice” using well recognized and credible profession-wide standards specific to the discipline for quality assurance.

Evidence in this category might include:

- Student – Staff Ratios by services provided
- Student satisfaction information from surveys, focus groups, interviews, etc.
- Student academic performance correlated to student support services participation
- Student awards and scholarship through academic/support services
- Comparison of aspirational peer programs and services

The Curriculum and Learning Environment – How current is the program curriculum? How well does it align with learning outcomes? Are the services aligned for student learning well sequenced and reliably available in sequence? Has the program been reviewed by external stakeholders, such as practitioners in the field, or compared with other similar programs? Is the level of program quality aligned with the university's acceptable level of program quality? Are program goals being achieved? Are student learning outcomes being achieved at the expected level?

Evidence in this category might include

- A curriculum flow chart and description of how the curriculum addresses the learning outcomes of the program (annual program assessment plan)
- A comparison of the program's curriculum with curricula at selected other institutions and with professional standards
- Measures of program/services effectiveness - A description of other learning experiences that are relevant to program goals (e.g., internships, research experiences, study abroad or other international experiences, community-based learning, etc.), as well as how many students participate in those experiences

Student Learning and Success – Are students achieving the desired learning outcomes for the program/support services? Are they achieving those outcomes at the expected level of learning and how is the expected level determined? Are they being retained and graduating in a timely fashion?

Evidence in this category might include:

- Annual results of direct and indirect assessments of student learning in the program (could be combination of quantitative and qualitative measures), including the degree to which students achieve the program's desired standards
- Ongoing efforts by the department to "close the loop" by responding to assessment results
- Student retention and graduation rate trends (disaggregated by different demographic categories)
- Graduating student satisfaction surveys (and/or alumni satisfaction surveys)


VI. Staff

Staff – What is the profile of staff in the department/program and how does the profile relate to or enhance the mission and goals of the department/program? Is support provided to ensure staff may fulfill their professional expectations? Are professional development opportunities fostered both on campus and through travel? What professional development opportunities might be offered that are not currently provided?

Evidence in this category might include:

- Staff annual review and evaluation processes
- Mentoring processes/programs
- Professional development opportunities/resources

Questions adapted from the Montana University System Board of Regents' *MUS Strategic Plan 2013*; the *Program Review Guide, Rev. October 2007*, Office of Academic Programs and the Program Review Panel, California State University Dominguez Hills; the *Academic Program Review Handbook, 2009*, Institutional Research Office, Charles Drew University of Medicine and Science and the *CAS Professional Standards for Higher Education 7th Edition*, Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education.


A group of people, including students and a person with a bicycle, are walking on a paved path in a park-like setting. The scene is bathed in bright sunlight, creating long shadows and a warm, golden glow. The path is lined with trees, and the overall atmosphere is peaceful and active.

APPENDIX C

SAMPLE Academic and Student Support Services Campus Visit Schedule

Department Name
External Reviewer Name
Campus Visit Dates

Day of Arrival			
Time	Attendees (Names)	Event	Location
----		Airport Pick-up	Pounds Fields Airport
----		Drop off at Hotel	Hotel name
----	Department Director	Dinner	Restaurant name
Campus Visit Day One			
Time	Attendees (Names)	Event	Location
8:30 A.M.	Department Director or Staff	Pick up from Hotel	
9:00 A.M.	Department Director and Staff	Department Meeting	Room ----
10:15 A.M.	BREAK		
10:30 A.M.	Administrators	Meet with Student Success Administration	Room ----
11:30 A.M.	Students	Lunch with Students	The Met Dining Room
1:00 P.M.	Student Success Directors and Coordinators	Student Success Meeting	Room ---
2:00 P.M.	Department Director	Campus Tour	
2:45 P.M.	BREAK		
3:00 P.M.	AIE Office	Meet with Assessment Staff	STE 378
4:00 P.M.	Return to Hotel	Writing Time	
6:00 P.M.	Department Staff	Dinner with Department Staff	Restaurant name
Campus Visit Day Two			
Time	Attendees (Names)	Event	Location
8:30 A.M.	Department Director	Pick up from Hotel	
9:00 A.M.		Work on Preliminary Exit Report	Room ----
10:30 A.M.	Department Director and Staff, Dean of Students, VPSA	Exit Interview	Room ----
11:30 A.M.		Leave for airport	Pounds Fields Airport

A photograph of a university campus path. The path is paved and runs through a green area with many trees. The sun is shining from the right, creating long shadows and a bright, hazy atmosphere. Several people are walking on the path, and one person is riding a bicycle. The text "APPENDIX D" is centered over the image.

APPENDIX D

Self-Study Survey - EXAMPLE

Staff and administrators are invited to complete this brief survey as part of the external review Self-Study. Please share your thoughts and recommendations in the short-answer items below. The survey results will be included in the Self-Study as aggregate data and all survey responses are anonymous.

Identify department or unit strengths:

Describe how the current department or unit strengths could be enhanced in the next five years:

Identify department or unit challenges:

Describe recommendations to address the challenges:

Recommend ONE short-term priority you would implement for student engagement/success and include resources necessary to accomplish this initiative.

Other Comments:

