



# PA State System of Higher Education Board of Governors

Effective: July 16, 1986

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## Policy 1986-04-A: *Program Review*

**Adopted:** July 15, 1986

**Amended:** October 17, 1991, October 9, 2003,  
October 6, 2016, and July 20, 2023

**Background:** Periodic program review is a best practice in American higher education that involves stakeholders in the continuous improvement of existing academic programs and programs in support of the student experience. Such review includes an analysis of past performance and projected demand and industry direction that is used to inform present and future decision-making. The review process must be integrated with strategic planning and budgeting, with institutional and specialized accreditation processes, and with student outcomes assessment. Criteria for the implementation of this policy can be found in the System Procedure/Standard for review of academic programs and programs in support of the student experience.

### A. Definitions

1. **Academic Programs:** All programs defined in Board of Governor's Policy 1985-01-A: *Requirements for Initiation or Change of Credit-Based Academic Programs*. This includes all academic degree programs (academic majors) along with any associated tracks/concentrations, academic minors, certificates, and the general education program.
2. **Programs in support of the Student Experience:** A broad network of programs and services delivered either in-person or virtually that directly contribute to students' educational experience and foster student success. Examples include, and are not limited to, academic advising processes, library, student and residence life, tutoring, enrollment services (e.g., undergraduate admissions, graduate admissions, financial aid, bursar, and registrar), public safety, athletics, career services, disability services, wellness services, and diversity equity and inclusion (DEI).
3. **Modified Review:** Academic departments with programs subject to specialized accreditation may request to submit the most recent program accreditation report as a primary document for the five year academic program review. Requests must be made in writing and are at the discretion of the President (or designee). Approval may be contingent upon the amount of time elapsed since the tendering of the most recent program accreditation report. The submission for modified

review shall include the complete accreditation report and accreditor's recommendations/suggestions. Additional criteria and information, including centrality to university mission and contribution to university program array metrics not addressed in the accreditation review process, may be required at the discretion of the President (or designee) or Chancellor (or designee) on a case-by-case basis. Guidance on modified review will be detailed in the System Procedure/Standard for review of academic programs and programs in support of the student experience.

## **B. Purposes of Program Review**

1. To assure deliberate and continuous attention to enhancement of the quality and to assess mission centrality of academic programs and programs in support of the student experience within State System universities.
2. To ensure compliance with institutional accreditation standards related to educational effectiveness and supporting the student experience.
3. To analyze and employ quantitative and qualitative data in the review of academic programs, including student outcomes, enrollment, cost, workforce demand and outcomes, contribution to university program array, and program effectiveness, which are aligned with university and State System goals and priorities and contribute to university and State System planning and sustainability.
4. To provide the Chancellor and Board of Governors, as well as the council of trustees of each university, with assurance that university programs and student services are being assessed in a systematic fashion and that plans for making continuous improvements are developed, implemented, and communicated.

## **C. Guidelines for Program Review**

1. **Cycle:** All university academic programs and all enrollment management units (including minimally marketing and recruitment, admissions, financial aid, and institutional aid processes) shall be evaluated at least once every five years; when deemed necessary, the university president (or designee) or Chancellor (or designee) may require a shorter review interval for given programs. Additional programs in support of the student experience may be designated by the President (or designee) or Chancellor (or designee) for regular five-year review or *ad hoc* review. At least once every 10 years (or more frequently at the University's discretion), each program shall be reviewed by an appropriate external evaluator.
2. **Criteria:** In consultation with State System universities, the Office of the Chancellor shall establish standards-based criteria for academic program reviews and reviews of programs in support of the student experience. Moreover, in consultation with State System universities, the Office of the Chancellor will establish quantitative thresholds for academic programs; programs not meeting those thresholds may be subject to additional scrutiny and termination. These criteria will be detailed in the System Procedure/Standard for review of academic programs and programs in support of the student experience.

## **D. Reporting**

1. Academic program reviews and program accreditation reports and reviews of enrollment management units are to be submitted to the Office of Academic and Student Affairs in the Office of the Chancellor by the university provost or another responsible vice president.
2. The Office of Academic and Student Affairs within the Office of the Chancellor will develop an appropriate procedure and timeline for periodic reporting to the Board of Governors.
3. The President or designee shall keep the council of trustees apprised of program reviews and their outcomes.

## **E. Implementation**

This policy is effective for five-year program reviews due in summer of 2025.