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Academic Senate Policy, #F05-236

GUIDELINES FOR THE SIXTH CYCLE OF ACADEMIC PROGRAM REVIEW

I. Introduction

The purpose of the academic program review process at San Francisco State is to assure University degree programs of the highest quality. The review process provides an opportunity for faculty and administrators to clarify the intellectual vision, range, coherence, and currency of each program, examine the effectiveness of its organizational structure, articulate the learning outcomes it inculcates, and assess the extent to which learning outcomes are being achieved. The review process should highlight efforts by instructional units to ensure and improve program quality, demonstrate how the degree program has been revised in response to evolving circumstances and changes in the field, and indicate the resources needed to accomplish program goals. The review should afford a clear and comprehensive perspective on the program's standing within its discipline, its role in its own College and in the University as a whole, and its consonance with SFSU's mission, CSU plans, and State mandates.

A. The Sixth Cycle of Program Review

Over the past thirty years, the University has engaged in five cycles of academic program review, each with its distinctive characteristics. The focus of the Sixth Cycle of Academic Program Review will be on the quality and currency of the University's graduate programs. This particular focus is in large measure a response to the 2001 WASC report and 2005 CUSP II recommendations that call for a thoughtful exploration of issues specific to graduate education. The review process will be informed by explicit indicators and criteria intended to determine the sustainability and quality of programs. These indicators and criteria are best construed as normative expectations, rather than rigidly prescriptive rules. In the sixth cycle, all graduate programs, whether nationally accredited or not, will need to demonstrate the extent to which University- and program-established standards are being met.

Though the Sixth Cycle of Program Review will focus on evaluating the quality and currency of the University's graduate programs and the resources needed to maintain and improve them, academic units offering both graduate and undergraduate programs will also be expected to examine the relationships between their undergraduate and graduate endeavors, including the past, current, projected, and optimal distribution of resources devoted to graduate and undergraduate education. Undergraduate degree programs will not be expected to participate in a formal process of self-study and external review during this cycle, except in special circumstances.

B. Resources to Enhance Quality of Graduate Programs

Quality graduate programs involve students actively in the research, creative work, and other professional development activities of their respective fields and therefore impose significant demands on faculty and departments. The University must squarely address the appropriate levels of funding for graduate study if SFSU is to achieve the goal of improving graduate program quality articulated in CUSP II.

The call for increased funding of graduate programs has arisen from several sources. The 2001 report of the WASC Visiting Team noted, for example, that such programs are neither adequately supported nor properly recognized at SFSU. The *University Strategic Plan 2005-2010* asserts that the University should "increase resources for faculty and graduate student scholarship and creative endeavors" and "support increased opportunities for graduate students to secure teaching and research assistantships, internships, and traineeships." Similarly, the Task Force on Graduate and Postbaccalaureate Education of the CSU Academic Senate, in its September 2004 report, concludes that "graduate programs in the CSU should receive a different marginal funding amount [than undergraduate programs]." Any new formula for resources available to graduate programs needs to take into account the substantially higher fees that graduate students currently pay while maintaining maximum flexibility regarding the nature and use of resources. Increased resources will better enable graduate programs across campus to comply with the heightened expectations set forth in this document.

C. Review of Undergraduate Programs

As noted above, undergraduate programs will not undergo formal program review in the sixth cycle. Instead, they will continue to engage in the annual programmatic assessment of cumulative student learning that is already in place for all

academic programs, both undergraduate and graduate. Such assessment, identified as a requirement by the campus, the CSU system, and the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, includes the following:

- The establishment of programmatic learning objectives
- The determination of where in the curriculum those objectives are being attained
- The development and implementation of assessment strategies to measure their attainment
- The use of findings from the assessment endeavor to structure curricular improvement and enhance student learning

II. Components of Program Review

Within the context described above, academic program review in the sixth cycle will include the following four components:

- Instructional Unit Self-Study and Recommendations
- External Review and Recommendation
- Program and Dean Response to External Review and Recommendations
- University Review and Decision Processes

A. Instructional Unit Self-Study and Recommendations

At the start of the process for a given College, representatives from the instructional units (departments or programs offering masters or doctoral degrees), the College, the Office of Academic Planning and Educational Effectiveness, and the Academic Program Review Committee (APRC) will meet to discuss substantive and procedural matters. Those attending should indicate any specific areas or issues needing to be addressed so that these may receive special attention in the review process. As soon as possible after the initial meeting, the administration shall provide the academic unit with the most current available data pertinent to the self-study.

The faculty of every instructional unit offering a graduate program (other than any subject to periodic accreditation review) shall prepare a self-study that will serve as a basis for all subsequent levels of review and recommendations. In this self-study, the unit should delineate and forthrightly assess each degree program offered, following the guidelines in the *Handbook for the Sixth Cycle of Academic Program Review*. To the extent possible, the unit's faculty should include student and alumni input in the preparation of the self-study. The self-study should describe the recent history of the program or programs under review and identify current aspirations for development and improvement. These aspirations ought to be tempered by realism, and a useful self-study will neither shy away from self-criticism nor consider the issue of resources as the sole source of problems or means of improvement. The self-study should be informed by a process of planning, which could include the identification of a mission statement, an assessment of strengths and weaknesses, and the development of goals and objectives for the graduate degree program.

Department or unit heads should assure that there is widespread faculty participation in the development of the self-studies and that faculty members are made aware of all findings and recommendations generated by the review process. The unit shall forward its completed self-study to the Office of Academic Planning and Educational Effectiveness and to the College Dean for review and signature indicating that the document is ready for external review. At this same time, the Dean will be encouraged to submit his/her own independent comments regarding the program.

B. External Review and Recommendations

The purpose of the external review is to provide each instructional unit with a well-informed, independent analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of its curriculum, its complement of faculty, and its organizational structure as well as an evaluation of the relationship of all of these to the quality of its degree programs. The external review should evaluate program goals and the program's success in achieving them, and suggest strategies for implementing recommendations for program improvements. Typically, the external review will be conducted by a team of two experts, one from within and one from outside the CSU system.

After the Dean signs off on the self-study, the instructional unit shall submit to the Dean a list of potential external reviewers who can provide a thorough, knowledgeable, and constructive critique of the program or programs to be reviewed. The list should be accompanied by relevant information on the professional background and experience of these individuals, together with an explanation of why they would be suitable reviewers. The Dean may ask that additional prospective reviewers be advanced for consideration by the unit. The Dean shall forward the names and CVs of those individuals selected by the Dean in consultation with the unit to the Vice President for Academic Affairs for his/her concurrence. Reviewers will receive a copy of the unit's self-study and supporting documents. They are expected to spend two days on campus interviewing students, faculty, staff, and administrators and to prepare a report of findings and recommendations. Copies of this report should be sent to the unit head and the Dean within a month of the external reviewers' visit to campus.

C. Program and Dean Response to External Review and Recommendations

Within one to two months of receipt of the external reviewers' report, the unit head, in consultation with the faculty of the unit being reviewed, will comment in writing on the report. The Dean will review the unit head's response and prepare an

independent written response to the review team's recommendations. Upon completion of these steps, the unit's complete program review file—consisting of the self-study, the external reviewers' report, and the responses to the external reviewers' report by both the unit head and the Dean—shall be forwarded to the Academic Program Review Committee for evaluation.

D. University Review and Decision-Making

In order to provide a University-wide faculty perspective and to assist in University planning, the Academic Program Review Committee will scrutinize each unit's complete program review file. APRC will meet with the College Dean and program head to ensure that APRC fully understands all recommendations made and all responses to those recommendations. APRC will also accept additional data and recommendations from the Dean and/or unit at this time. The Committee will then proceed to evaluate all recommendations and, in consultation with program, College, and Academic Affairs representatives and with the assistance of the Associate Vice President for Academic Planning and Educational

Effectiveness, will then develop a concluding action memorandum. This memorandum will specify any actions the unit and/or College is advised to consider or is required to carry out, together with timelines for implementation and consequences resulting from failure to act appropriately. The memorandum will be kept on file in the Office of Academic Planning and Educational Effectiveness and the Academic Senate and will be in effect until the completion of the sixth review cycle. It will then be used at the beginning of the seventh cycle to assess the degree to which actions that had been recommended or required in the previous cycle have been undertaken in order to avoid negative consequences including possible discontinuance.

III. Review of Accredited Programs

For programs that are nationally accredited and undergo periodic accreditation review involving a self-study and a campus visit by an accrediting team, the accreditation review will normally substitute for academic program review with the following exceptions:

A. All accredited graduate programs, at the time of completing their accreditation self-studies, shall also be required to submit brief documentation to APRC demonstrating performance in regard to the "Indicators and Criteria of Graduate Program Sustainability and Quality". The documentation submitted to APRC shall be supplementary to the main accreditation documents and should address only indicators and criteria not considered in those documents.

B. Following receipt of notification from the accrediting body that a program has been accredited or re-accredited, APRC, in consultation with program, College, and Academic Affairs representatives, will evaluate both the accrediting body's recommendations and the program's performance vis-à-vis quality and sustainability criteria. APRC's conclusions will be incorporated into a concluding action memorandum that specifies any actions the program will be advised or required to undertake. This memorandum, kept on file in the Office of Academic Planning and Educational Effectiveness and the Academic Senate, will be in effect until the program's next accreditation.

C. Upon special request of the instructional unit, College Dean, and/or Vice President for Academic Affairs, an accredited program shall undergo academic program review in addition to accreditation review. In this event, the self-study prepared for accreditation may be adapted or substituted, as appropriate, for the purpose of program review, and the campus visit by the accrediting team may be substituted for the external review.

IV. Program Review Schedule

As nearly as feasible, programs shall be reviewed on a six-year cycle, in a sequence corresponding to the alphabetical order of the Colleges, beginning in Fall 2006 unless reviewed as part of the unit's external accreditation process. Deans are entrusted to make sure that the programs of their respective Colleges are reviewed in a timely fashion; that there is appropriate involvement of program faculty and dissemination of findings and recommendations arising from the review process; and that APRC requirements are implemented.

To facilitate the academic program review process, programs will be provided with support that includes clear guidelines for the preparation of documents, timely access to pertinent data, and self-studies singled out as exemplary by APRC. Under special circumstances (normally those involving quality and/or budgetary issues), the Vice President for Academic Affairs, the Dean, or the program itself may call for a special program review—either undergraduate or graduate—outside of the normal academic program review cycle.

V. Handbook for the Sixth Cycle of Academic Program Review

A handbook to guide the Sixth Cycle will be prepared, based on the *Handbook for the Fifth Cycle of Academic Program Review*, which will incorporate the general guidelines required by this policy. Additionally, the handbook will describe specific self-study and external review expectations in regard to those indicators and criteria of program sustainability and quality set forth here.

***** Approved by the Academic Senate at its meeting on October 18, 2005*****
