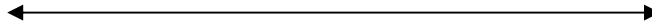


Assessment Process Guide
for
Academic Programs, Faculty, and Administrators

An Introduction to the Academic Assessment Program



Academic Planning and Assessment
Office of the Provost

University of Central Arkansas

1999

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The Academic Assessment Program

The Academic Assessment Program brings together a number of existing evaluations at UCA, including review of existing academic programs and assessment of student learning outcomes; it also seeks to coordinate these initiatives in the Provost's division with similar initiatives in other units on campus. A draft assessment plan for the Academic Assessment Program summarizes its purposes well:

UCA's Academic Assessment Program exists to enhance the effectiveness of the university in accomplishing its educational and other purposes. The Academic Assessment Program does so by helping academic departments and other units systematically evaluate their own purposes within the context of the university, assess the extent to which they are accomplishing those purposes, and respond appropriately to any need for change. As the university's 1995 "Plan for Assessing Student Learning Outcomes" asserts, "The goal is continuous improvement." In general, a successful Academic Assessment Program will be *useful* at both program/unit and university levels, will be *cost-effective* and able to demonstrate that cost-effectiveness, and will *satisfy* not only the needs of the university but also those of its accreditors, relevant state agencies, and other interested parties.

This process guide, originally developed by the Office of Academic Planning and Assessment (OAPA), is intended to help faculty and administrators in the academic departments and colleges work with the Academic Assessment Program.

Academic Assessment Review Processes

Academic assessment information flow is essentially the same for action and information items. Whether information is being conveyed or approval sought, assessment information flows from the department and department chair to the college Curriculum and Assessment Committee and college dean, then to UCA's Academic Planning and Assessment Committee (APAC).

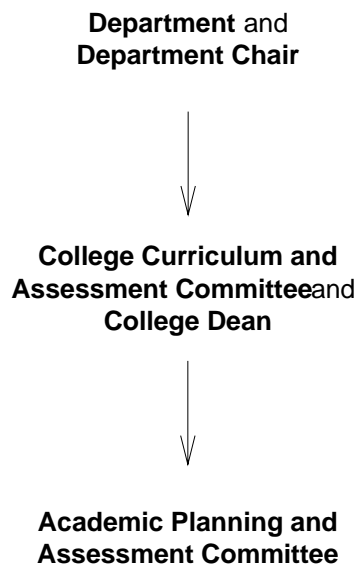


Figure 1: Assessment Review Information Flow

Action Items

Action items require approval at departmental, college, and university levels before implementation. At each level beyond the department, the item is forwarded if recommended, returned to the department if not recommended. Action items include the following:

- New assessment plans
New assessment plans are normally developed in the context of new program development (see *Curriculum Development Process Guide*, available on-line at <http://www.uca.edu/divisions/-academic/assess/curriculum>). No separate form is necessary for assessment plans approved at the time of new program approval; those developed and approved separately from new program approval must be accompanied by Form AP-C (assessment forms are available on-line at <http://www.uca.edu/academic/divisions/assess/guide>).
- Substantive assessment plan revisions
Substantive revisions include added, deleted, or significantly altered program purposes, intended outcomes/objectives, or assessment procedures and criteria.
- Proposals for alternative assessment plans and reporting methods
Accredited programs and their colleges have been invited to make proposals for coordinating university assessment responsibilities with the obligations associated with specialized accreditation. These proposals are developed jointly by a department/program and its college Curriculum and Assessment Committee and follow the normal process of approval.

Information Items

Information items require notification to but not approval from the college and university entities noted in the preceding section. Such items include mere changes of wording and minor changes in assessment criteria.

Reporting Guidelines and Schedule

Assessment Reports

Annual Assessment Summary

The Annual Assessment Summary currently comprises two brief items: (1) description of assessment activities and (2) completion of the Assessment Activities Survey. The Assessment Activities Survey form is available at <http://www.uca.edu/academic/divisions/assess/forms>.

Assessment Report Schedule

A full report, including description of assessment activities, analysis of results, and discussion of conclusions and planned actions (see general reporting guidelines below) is due every three to five years in conjunction with existing program review. Every program, that is, submits full reports on assessment twice in any ten-year period (see further information about existing program review below, page 7 ff.):

Accredited programs

- Assessment report in conjunction with program self-study and external review by accreditor
- Assessment report in conjunction with internal review by Undergraduate or Graduate Council

Non-accredited programs

- Assessment report in conjunction with program self-study and external review by consultants
- Assessment report in conjunction with internal review by Undergraduate or Graduate Council

A section on assessment is required in the self-studies undertaken by non-accredited programs for external review; accredited programs will either use an approved alternative reporting method (see below) coordinated with their accreditor's assessment requirements or will write a separate assessment report at the time of their accreditation review; and all programs, whether accredited or non-accredited, will report on assessment at the time of their internal follow-up review by the Undergraduate or Graduate Council.

The general reporting guidelines¹ that follow apply particularly to programs that have not had an alternative assessment plan and/or reporting method approved in their colleges and by the Academic Planning and Assessment Committee. Those programs with approved alternatives, however, will likely find these guidelines useful as well, particularly in preparing the assessment report that accompanies their internal review by the Undergraduate or Graduate Council.

Alternative Assessment Reporting Proposals

Proposals for alternative assessment reporting must include the following components:

1. A detailed description of the assessment component within a given program's specialized accreditation regime. This may take the form of material quoted or copied from an accreditation handbook.
2. A consideration of the relationship of that assessment component to university assessment needs, which include the following for *each program*:
 - a. Stated learning goals/objectives for students in the program
 - b. Documentation/assessment of performance within the program in relation to those goals/objectives
 - c. Regular reporting of results and conclusions (scheduled, most likely, to coincide with the programs' schedules for existing program review)
 - d. Evidence of using assessment results and conclusions in program improvement
3. A recommendation about aligning the two obligations. This may simply entail an argument that the assessment component within a program's accreditation regime already fulfills the university's assessment needs. Any areas of apparent conflict between the two obligations should, of course, be explicitly addressed.

General Reporting Guidelines

Purpose

The Assessment Report, whether it stands alone or is part of a larger self-study, has at least two purposes: (1) It provides a formal opportunity for a program to communicate the results of its self-assessments to certain interested constituencies, most notably the larger university community and the university's accrediting body (the North Central Association's Higher Learning Commission). To best fulfill this purpose, an assessment report should be written as a public document, suitable for dissemination. (2) Of at least equal importance, it provides to every participating program a regular and on-going opportunity for reflection, decision-making, and, sometimes, change.

The usefulness of assessment reporting depends on many factors, probably the most important being the way a program or department has approached implementation of its assessment plans. If, as we hope,

¹ The general reporting guidelines were originally developed as Assessment Reporting Guidelines in April 1997 by the Assessment Subcommittee of the Planning and Assessment Committee.

assessment plans have been implemented critically—that is, with serious attention paid to the plans and the programs they address, to what is working well, what might work better, and what seems not to work—then these critical implementations will quite naturally become the basis for effective and useful reports. Every assessment report, whether an annual summary or a more extensive five-year report, should give evidence of an active and functional assessment process.

Content of the Assessment Report

Five Essential Questions

Any assessment report should grapple seriously with the assessment process and its results and, *as a whole*, should answer five essential questions. Questions 1–3 ask for description; question 4 asks for evaluation; and question 5 asks about projected actions. These questions are listed as a guide to content, not to format; the latter will usually revolve around a program’s intended outcomes/objectives (see Format/Presentation, page 5).

Question 1: What objectives have been assessed?

This question asks a program to identify which of its objectives, stipulated in the program’s assessment plan, have been assessed in this cycle. Beginning with AY 1998–1999, all departments should be fully implementing assessment plans for all their programs, with all objectives assessed; realistically, of course, some objectives will receive more emphasis than others, and programs may well find that some objectives need revision or deletion. The following items suggest appropriate considerations at this point: Have all objectives been assessed? If not, which objectives have been left out, and why? Have any additions, deletions, or modifications been made to the objectives during this assessment cycle? If changes have been made, what are they, and why have they been made?

Question 2: How have the objectives been assessed?

This question asks a program which of the assessment procedures, stipulated in the program’s assessment plan, have been used in this cycle. The following items suggest appropriate considerations at this point: Have all the assessment procedures been used? If not, which procedures have not been used, and why? Have any additions, deletions, or modifications been made to the assessment procedures during this assessment cycle? If changes have been made, what are they, and why have they been made?

Question 3: What are the results of the assessment?

This question asks a program about the relationship between objectives and performance—how students in the program have fared in relation to the assessment procedures and criteria associated with the objectives stipulated in the assessment plan. Were criteria exceeded? met? not met? The question should be answered in detail, with appropriate explanation. (Note that “pass” and “fail” are not generally considered appropriate terms for assessments.) If the assessment cycle is being used to *establish* standards for success, the report should indicate what student performance has suggested about appropriate targets for the procedures employed.

Question 4: What conclusions can be drawn from this assessment cycle?

This question asks a program to evaluate the results of assessment during the assessment cycle. The following items suggest appropriate considerations at this point: Has the department/program learned anything about itself or about assessment during the process? Do changes need to be made in the program, its policies, or its processes? Do changes need to be made in assessment plans or processes (program purpose statement, objectives, procedures, criteria, implementation)?

Question 5: What actions will result from this assessment cycle?

If analysis and evaluation of assessment results suggest that changes (in program or plan) should be made, the report should indicate specific actions to be taken, a proposed sequence and timeframe for the actions, and the person(s) responsible. In this context the report could appropriately indicate as well what assistance the department/program would like to receive from the university Planning and Assessment Committee or the Office of Academic Planning and Assessment in implementing changes or considering the assessment results.

Departmental Honors Activity

Departments that participate in the departmental honors program will additionally report honors program activity during the assessment cycle.

Format/Presentation**What to Include**

An assessment report should include the following parts:

1. A copy of the assessment plan(s) whose results are being reported,
2. An overall assessment summary, serving as introduction to the report, and
3. The report proper.

The Report and Its Format

The details of format may vary to accommodate, for example, a larger self-study. Regardless of format details, however, any assessment report should include complete information for each intended outcome/objective; collectively, this information will answer the “five essential questions” discussed above:

- Intended Outcome/Objective (Quote from assessment plan.)
- Assessment Criteria (Quote from assessment plan.)
- Results of Assessment (Report in appropriately explanatory detail.)
- Conclusions and Actions (Analyze, evaluate, discuss.)

Tables and figures may be useful in clarifying and summarizing information, but they should support—not take the place of—explanation and discussion.

The report for each program should end with a summary statement about the particular program’s assessment results.

Examples

—Adapted from a report on assessment of the BS program in Speech-Language Pathology

Example 1: Assessment information for an intended outcome/objective

NB: This example uses grade distribution. For a brief discussion of the use of GPA in assessment see “The Use of GPA in Assessment” (an OAPA position statement) available on-line at the Planning and Assessment site: <http://www.uca.edu/divisions/academic/assess/gpadoc.htm>.

OUTCOME 1: Undergraduate students will demonstrate understanding of basic science course work.

Assessment Criterion:

Ninety percent of students will successfully complete the University requirements in math, the social sciences, and the sciences with a 3.0 GPA or better.

Results:

Seventy-one (71) percent of students successfully completed the University requirements in math, the social sciences, and the sciences with a 3.0 GPA or better. (Natural science, 64%; math and the social sciences, 77%.)

Conclusions/Actions:

The Speech-Language Pathology department (specifically the undergraduate committee) considers the successful completion of basic science courses a necessary component and significant predictor of student achievement for students admitted to its program. After having actively collected data relative to student achievement for basic science courses, several revision and/or application options are being considered: (1) The 90% criterion may be lowered as performance in basic communication courses has not been adversely affected by the previous performance abilities in math, the social sciences, and the sciences. (2) Maintain the 90% criterion and average the performance levels so as to reflect a composite or overall 3.0 GPA of undergraduate students. (3) Continue the assessment process as written so that each basic science course is individually considered. Regardless of the revision/application of the assessment goal elected, the assessment goal will be highly considered for admission to the undergraduate program. Clarification of revisions will be submitted according to the outcome assessment timelines for August 1997.

Example 2: A summary table of assessment results

BS Program Outcomes Assessment Results: May 1997		
Outcome 1: Basic Science Course Work 3.00+		
1. Math	-----	Criterion not met
2. Science	-----	Criterion not met
3. Social Science	-----	Criterion not met
Outcome 2: Basic Communication Processes 3.00+ -----		
		Criterion met
Outcome 3: Professionalism/Independent Learning		
3a. Association Membership	-----	Criterion met
3b. Professional Conferences	-----	Criterion met
Outcome 4: Admitted to Grad Programs -----		
		Criterion met
Outcome 5: Prepared for Graduate Practicum I		
5a. Undergraduate practicum prep courses 3.00+	-----	Criterion met
5b. 6180 graduate practicum grade	-----	Criterion met
Outcome 6: Honors Program -----		
		Criterion not met

Existing Program Review

This section of the guide provides detail for and occasional revisions to the more general policies outlined in UCA's Institutional Plan for Existing Program Review. See Appendix B, page 13, for the text of the institutional plan.

Existing Program Review Schedules for All Programs

A periodically updated ten-year Existing Program Review schedule is maintained in the Office of the Provost. This section outlines general scheduling expectations.

The year before review:

February 15 No later than February 15, the Office of the Provost notifies all programs—both accredited and non-accredited—that will be undergoing either external or internal review during the following academic year.

March 15 Accredited programs communicate their accreditation review schedule to the Office of the Provost by March 15 or as soon thereafter as possible.

All programs scheduled for internal review determine their preferred schedule for submission of internal review documents and report their preference to the Office of the Provost by March 15.

April 15 Non-accredited programs, in consultation with their dean and the provost, identify external consultants, negotiate with them as necessary, determine a reasonable review schedule, and communicate the review plan to the Office of the Provost by April 15.

The year of review:

March 31 Internal reviews must be completed by March 31 of the academic year in which they are scheduled. External review schedules are arranged on a case-by-case basis.

External Review Process and Information Flow for Accredited Programs

Accredited programs will be constrained by the usual review practices of and schedule imposed by their accreditors. With allowance for the particular practices of individual accreditors, the following list and Figure 2, below, detail the process.

1. The program completes a comprehensive self-study and forwards copies of the self-study to the college dean and the Office of the Provost.
2. The program sends the self-study to its accreditor and/or the visiting team of consultant/evaluators.
3. As arranged with the accreditor, a site visit takes place.
4. The site team's written evaluation is sent to the department. The department forwards copies to the college dean and the Office of the Provost.
5. If required by the accreditor, the program prepares a written response to the site team's evaluation. Copies of the response, if any, are forwarded to the college dean and the Office of the Provost.
6. The accreditor notifies the program (and others—typically the college dean and the university president) of its action. The department forwards a copy of the notification to the dean, if necessary, and to the Office of the Provost.
7. The Office of the Provost notifies other parties as appropriate and ensures disclosure of accreditation status in university publications.

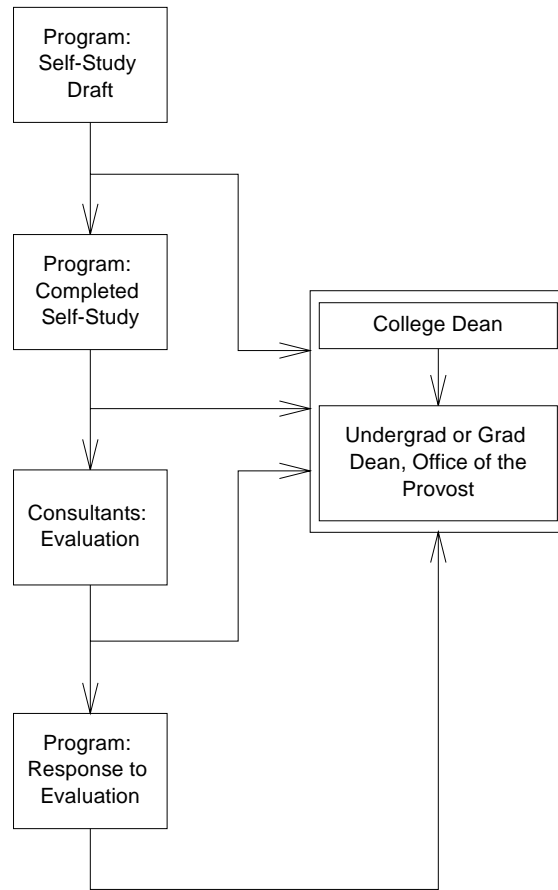


Figure 3: External Review Information Flow, Non-Accredited Programs

Budget for External Review of Non-Accredited Programs

The February notification for non-accredited programs undergoing external review during the following year includes information about current UCA expectations for Existing Program Review honoraria and other expenses. In general, the program being reviewed is expected to pay honoraria; the provost will underwrite travel expenses, hotel, and meals. The Existing Program Review budget assumes that the on-campus consultant will visit for one day only. For further information, check with the Office of the Provost.

Self-Study Guidelines for Non-Accredited Programs

General Note

At the heart of a useful self-study for program review is a question: What is the program's performance in relation to its purposes/goals and its intended outcomes/objectives? To answer that question, a program offers evidence and analysis in support of conclusions reached on the basis of agreed-upon criteria. It stands to reason that the value of the conclusions reached will depend on the soundness and persuasiveness of the evidence offered and the analysis performed. The self-study requires identification of external reference points and disciplinary/professional best practices to ensure an appropriate context for the evidence, analysis, and evaluation.

Self-Study Outline

NB: The order of elements in this outline is not set in stone; it has, however, been chosen to provide a reasonable progression of information, ideas, and evaluation. UCA's plan for Existing Program Review has specifically allowed for additional components or materials as a program sees fit. Evidence for conclusions drawn should include the views of as many constituents as is appropriate to the particular matter being considered.

- I. Title Page
- II. Introduction
 - A. Program history, purposes, and description, including alignment of the program with university mission/purposes
 - B. Program's student "outputs" over time: number of majors and minors, number of graduates, information about graduates' placements (e.g., graduate or professional school, discipline-related employment, etc.); generally reported as annual numbers during the years covered by the self-study
 - C. Summary response to the last program review
 - D. Identification of the program's external reference points and disciplinary/professional best practices supported in the literature. External reference points might include benchmark programs at other institutions, published professional standards, and government-/foundation-sponsored (e.g., NSF) criteria.
- III. Physical and Financial Resources
 - A. Description
 - B. Evaluation in relation to external reference points and best practices
 - C. Conclusions: strengths and concerns
- IV. Faculty and Staff Resources
 - A. Description
 - B. Evaluation in relation to external reference points and best practices
 - C. Conclusions: strengths and concerns
- V. Curriculum
 - A. Description
 - B. Evaluation in relation to external reference points and best practices
 - C. Conclusions: strengths and concerns
- VI. Assessment of Program Outcomes, Including Student Learning Outcomes

This is the evaluative heart of the self-study, focusing on the program's performance—and its students' performance—in relation to its intended outcomes or objectives. For five "essential questions" to be answered when reporting outcomes assessment activities and results, see General Reporting Guidelines, page 3.

 - A. Description of assessment plan and processes
 - B. Assessment results
 - C. Analysis and conclusions: strengths and concerns
- VII. Program Improvement

This section brings together in one place the evaluative material from all the other sections of the self-study, presenting in summary format the strengths and concerns identified in those evaluations and outlining the program's planned responses. *The outline of planned responses*

should clearly set forth a plan of action for each area of concern, including specific information about steps to be taken, their sequence, a projected timetable for action, how outcomes of the plan of action will be evaluated, and person(s) responsible for action.

Internal Review Process and Information Flow for All Programs

See the general schedule above (page 7). The following list and Figure 4, below, detail the process.

1. The department completes its response to the appropriate internal review form (Form EPR-I-UC or Form EPR-I-GC; see on-line: <http://www.uca.edu/divisions/academic/assess/guide/apg04.htm>).
2. The department submits all internal review documents (the form as cover sheet, the departmental response, the last external evaluation, and the assessment report) to the college dean; the dean forwards all materials, with her/his review, to the Undergraduate or Graduate Council.
3. The Undergraduate or Graduate Council reviews the documents and responds to the department, forwarding copies of the internal review documents and the council's response to the office of the provost and the college dean.

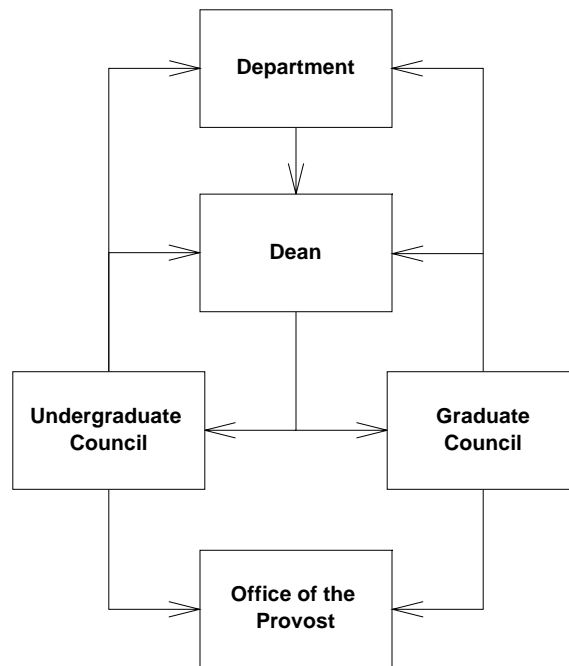


Figure 4: Internal Review Information Flow, All Programs

Appendix A: Forms

For access to all assessment forms (existing program review and assessment plan change), see the on-line APG forms page at <http://www.uca.edu/divisions/academic/assess/guide/apg04.htm>.

Appendix B: Institutional Plan for Existing Program Review

EXISTING PROGRAM REVIEW INSTITUTIONAL PLAN UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL ARKANSAS

[This document was filed with the Arkansas Department of Higher Education in May 1998. Note that the attachments referred to in the document are not included here. All are on file and available for viewing in the Office of Academic Planning and Assessment.]

I. Person Responsible for Oversight of Institutional Academic Program Review

Director, Office of University [now “Academic”] Planning and Assessment

II. Ten-Year Institutional Academic Program Review Schedule, 1998/99–2007/08

(Attached)

III. Letters from accrediting, certifying, or licensing agencies or organizations verifying status of certificate and degree programs and effective dates

(Attached)

IV. Institutional Program Review Process

1. Annual Assessment of Student Outcomes

Every certificate and degree program in the university will submit an annual assessment report on student outcomes to the [Academic] Assessment Subcommittee of the University Planning and Assessment Committee. [That committee has been replaced by a free-standing Academic Assessment Committee.]

2. Accredited programs

A. Certificate and degree programs that are accredited, certified, or licensed by recognized external accrediting agencies or professional organizations will be reviewed by the appropriate external agency or organization, according to the attached schedule.

B. Three to five years after a program has been reviewed by an external accrediting agency or professional organization, the Graduate Council or Undergraduate Council will conduct an internal review of the program by requiring the program to complete a “Departmental Response to External Review of Graduate/Undergraduate Program.” [See Internal Review Process and Information Flow for All Programs, page 11, and Forms EPR-I-UC and EPR-I-GC (available on-line on the APG forms page at <http://www.uca.edu/divisions/academic/assess/guide/apg04.htm>).] The attached schedule indicates when such internal reviews will be conducted.

3. Non-accredited programs

A. All certificate and degree programs that are not accredited, certified, or licensed by a recognized external accrediting agency or professional organization will undergo an external review once every ten years, according to the attached schedule.

B. The external review will consist of a self-study completed by the program. This self-study will include, but is not limited to, the following components:

- Program Faculty
- Program Curriculum
- Program Resources
- Student Outcomes
- Program Improvement

[See Self-Study Guidelines for Non-Accredited Programs, page 9.]

C. The program self study will be sent to two external professionals (consultants) in the discipline. These external consultants will be chosen in the following manner:

- If the national professional association of the discipline or program maintains a list of professionals in the field who are qualified and willing to serve as consultants, then the Provost, Dean, and faculty in the program shall attempt to agree on two consultants from this list.
- If no such list of qualified and willing consultants is available, then the faculty in the program to be reviewed will compile a list of at least five acceptable consultants, and the Provost and Dean will agree on one name from this list. The Provost and Dean will also compile a list of at least five acceptable consultants, and the faculty in the program to be reviewed will agree on one name from this list.

After reviewing the self study, one consultant will visit campus, at UCA expense, to conduct an on-site review of the program. After consulting with each other, the two consultants will then submit a written evaluation of the program's strengths and weaknesses, including any recommendations for program improvement. The program will write a response to the external consultants' evaluation. [See External Review Process and Information Flow for Non-Accredited Programs, page 8, and Budget for External Review of Non-Accredited Programs, page 9.]

D. Three to five years after external review, the Graduate Council or Undergraduate Council will conduct a brief internal review of the program by requiring the program to complete a "Departmental Response to External Review of Graduate/Undergraduate Program." [See Internal Review Process and Information Flow for All Programs, page 11, and Forms EPR-I-UC and EPR-I-GC, available on-line on the APG forms page at <http://www.uca.edu/divisions/academic/assess/guide/apg04.htm>.]

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