

ACADEMIC PROGRAM REVIEW SELF-STUDY HANDBOOK

Overview of the Review

All programs, regardless of accreditation status, do an Academic Program Review every 3 years. Official program review is shared from the campus to the Board of Regents every 7 years. This is not a departmental-level review, as it is focused on academic programs approved by the Board of Regents.

Purpose of the Self-Study

The Academic Program Review self-study is a concise planning document designed to support strategic conversations about the future of the academic program. It is not intended to be an accreditation report or an exhaustive narrative. The goal is to:

- Summarize the current state of the program using curated institutional data.
- Identify strengths, opportunities, and areas for improvement.
- Support discussion with Academic Affairs and college leadership.
- Establish 2–3 actionable goals for the next three academic years.

The self-study should focus on trends, observations, and priorities rather than detailed explanations.

Who Should Complete the Template?

The template is typically completed by the:

- Department Chair or Director

Consultation is encouraged with:

- Academic advisors
- Graduate Program Chair (if applicable)
- Faculty with key program responsibilities

After the Academic Affairs review meeting, program leadership should engage program faculty in identifying program goals and actions for continuous improvement.

General Guidance for Completing the Template

Keep Responses Brief

Responses should be:

- 1–2 short sentences
- Bullet points when appropriate
- Focused on trends and implications
- Supported by the provided data

Avoid:

- Repeating large amounts of data already included in dashboards
- Extensive historical background
- Detailed justifications
- Accreditation-style narrative writing

Focus on Strategic Planning

As you complete the template, consider:

- What trends matter most?
- What challenges or opportunities are emerging?
- What should the program prioritize over the next 3 academic years?

The self-study is intended to guide discussion and planning, not produce a comprehensive evaluation document.

Use the Curated Data Sources

Academic Affairs provides:

- Curated reports
 - Enrollment and completion data
 - Economic
 - Market data
- Dashboard links

Use these materials to identify major themes and trends. The source dashboards are shared if you wish to learn more but it's not expected you go beyond the curated data for your analysis.

We Welcome Questions

If data appear unclear or unexpected:

- Note follow-up questions directly in the template.
- Identify areas where additional context may be needed.
- Highlight trends you would like to better understand.

The review meeting is intended to be a place to ask questions for discussion.

Section-by-Section Guidance

1. Mission

This section should provide a concise overview of the program.

Each response should be one sentence. This section is intended to orient readers quickly.

Recommended Approach

- Mission
 - State the central purpose of the program.
- Academic Focus
 - Identify the primary disciplinary or professional emphasis.
- Students Served
 - Briefly describe the primary student population.
- Community Impact
 - Describe how the program contributes to workforce, community, industry, research, or regional needs.
- Highlights
 - Mention notable strengths, accomplishments, partnerships, or distinguishing features.

2. Academic Outcomes

This section focuses on curriculum structure, student success, enrollment, and completion.

Curricular Complexity

Review the linked catalog pages before responding.

Focus On

- Whether the curriculum SCH is appropriately sized
- Student flexibility within the degree
- Transfer student friendliness
- Advising or progression challenges
- Curriculum efficiency

Helpful Questions to Consider

- Are there barriers that delay graduation?
- Are prerequisite chains overly complex?
- Does the degree allow room for electives, minors, or dual majors?
- Are there courses students struggle to access?

Enrollment Challenges and Successes

Consult with academic advisors when completing this portion.

Focus on themes such as:

- Recruitment strengths
- Scheduling challenges
- Bottleneck courses
- Student interest areas
- Transfer pathways
- Online accessibility

Enrollment and Completion

Use the provided reports to identify broad trends.

Focus On Trends Rather Than Exact Numbers

Examples:

- Growth or decline in majors
- Changes by concentration/subplan
- Retention improvements
- Completion increases or decreases
- Differences between undergraduate and graduate programs

Retention and Completion Efforts

Include examples such as:

- Advising initiatives
- Curriculum redesign
- Tutoring/support structures
- Early alerts
- Course scheduling improvements
- Online course availability

- Faculty mentoring

DFW Review

Focus on actionable observations.

Examples:

- Courses with consistently high DFW rates
- Sequencing concerns
- Need for supplemental instruction
- Curriculum alignment issues
- Opportunities for pedagogical improvement

The goal is not to explain every DFW outcome but to identify areas worth further discussion.

3. Economic Margins

This section focuses on the financial sustainability and instructional efficiency of the program.

Focus on Patterns and Opportunities

You are not expected to perform a financial audit.

Instead, identify:

- Major trends
- Areas of strength
- Potential efficiencies
- Courses that may warrant additional review

Course Contribution Questions

Consider:

- Which courses enroll many students?
- Which courses serve students outside the major?
- Which courses are expensive to offer?
- Which low-enrollment courses are essential to the curriculum?

Cost-Efficiency Ideas

Possible examples:

- Rotating elective schedules
- Cross-listed courses
- Shared graduate courses
- Increased online offerings
- Adjusted course frequency
- Multi-section coordination

Avoid framing this section solely around cost reduction. The purpose is to balance academic quality, student needs, and program sustainability.

4. Markets

This section evaluates external demand and workforce alignment.

Enrollment and Completion Trends

Focus on broad comparisons across:

- National, Regional and Nebraska market

Consider Questions Such As

- Is demand growing or shrinking?
- Is online participation increasing?
- How does the local market differ from national trends?
- Are there opportunities for program expansion?

Labor Market Alignment

This section should connect the program to workforce preparation.

Focus On

- Alignment between curriculum and employment outcomes
- Whether graduates are prepared for current workforce needs
- Skills employers appear to value
- Potential curriculum updates

Examples of Areas for Improvement

- Emerging technical skills
- Internship opportunities
- Employer partnerships
- Certifications
- Experiential learning
- Career readiness
- Graduate/professional preparation

The purpose is not to guarantee employment outcomes, but to reflect on how well the program aligns with evolving workforce expectations.

Academic Affairs Meeting

This meeting is convened by Academic Affairs after the self-study has been completed and uploaded to the SharePoint site. Typical participants in the meeting include college leadership from the dean's office, the program's chair or director, and the graduate program chair (if applicable), or academic advisor.

Faculty Collaboration Is Encouraged

After the review meeting, program leadership should meet with faculty to identify priorities for the next three academic years.

5. Goals and Actions for Continuous Improvement

This section is typically finalized after the Academic Affairs review meeting.

Recommended Number of Goals

Typically:

- 2–3 major goals

Focus on achievable and measurable priorities.

Strong Goals Are:

- Specific

- Realistic
- Action-oriented
- Connected to evidence from the review

Examples of Goal Areas

- Improve retention
- Increase enrollment in a concentration
- Redesign curriculum pathways
- Expand online access
- Reduce DFW rates in key courses
- Improve graduate completion rates
- Strengthen workforce alignment
- Increase transfer student success

Include Actions and Timelines

For each goal, briefly identify:

- Actions or strategies
- Responsible groups or individuals
- Projected timeline

Timelines do not need to be highly detailed.

Final Reminders

The Self-Study Is a Working Planning Document

The template is intended to:

- Support meaningful discussion
- Encourage data-informed planning
- Identify opportunities for continuous improvement

It is not intended to be:

- A compliance report
- A detailed accreditation document
- An exhaustive program history

Prioritize Clarity and Actionability

The strongest self-studies:

- Clearly identify major themes
- Highlight strategic opportunities
- Focus on actionable next steps
- Remain concise and readable

Submission Process

1. Complete Sections 1–4 and submit the draft to Academic Affairs.
2. Participate in the Academic Affairs review meeting.
3. Meet with faculty to discuss priorities and future direction.
4. Finalize goals and actions.
5. Submit the completed self-study document.