

Academic Department and Program Strategic Plan and Periodic Review Procedures

Final Version

I. INTRODUCTION

The Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools recommends that academic departments and programs enhance their quality through a periodic, faculty-led review of their strategic plan. The College of New Jersey embraces a spirit of continuous planning marked by periodic evaluation, assessment and review. The procedures outlined in this document provide a framework for the periodic review.

A department/program's strategic plan details its long-term objectives and provides the College community with valuable information about the department/program's resources, desired outcomes, and priorities. Each academic department or program should have a detailed strategic plan describing its aspirations and enduring goals and discussing how they are realized in each of the following areas: curriculum, students, faculty, and resources.

Departmental and program planning should be a continuous and ongoing process whose foundation is the strategic plan. While the strategic plan will always be evolving, the periodic review provides an opportunity for the department's/program's faculty to step back and undertake a systematic study of the program, its strategic plan, and the key issues that the program will face as it plans for the future. By reevaluating its strategic direction and updating its strategic plan in light of a comprehensive analysis of the department/program's current condition and objectives, the faculty of a department or program can make significant decisions about its future direction. The periodic review also provides an opportunity to gain feedback from external experts, and engage in a discussion with the Dean and Provost on the role of the department/program within its school and at the College.

II. STRATEGIC PLAN

Each academic department and program should have a strategic plan detailing its aspirations and enduring goals and discussing how these are realized in each of the following areas: curriculum, students, faculty, and resources. In each area, current and proposed projects of the department/program should be listed. The strategic plan should also direct the annual study of and reflection on a departmental/program objective that informs the ongoing development of the department/program. The strategic plan should be in a template form following the basic format of the College's strategic plan. Although the strategic plan should be updated annually by the department/program, major changes are not expected each year. The periodic review is an opportunity for significant updates and changes to the strategic plan.

III. PERIODIC REVIEW GUIDELINES:

- a. For the purposes of this document, the word “program” will be used to refer to an academic department or an independent academic degree program.
- b. In cases where several programs are integrally connected academically, at the discretion of the Dean, all of these programs may be assessed concurrently as part of a single overall review.
- c. Each program should normally be reviewed on a regular five to seven-year cycle. For accredited programs, the scheduling of the review should be coordinated with the timing of professional accreditation visits. To eliminate duplication of efforts, programs should be able to use materials from the accreditation for their review. As the accreditation requirements may be different from those of the review, accredited programs should ensure that all aspects of the review be addressed.
- d. The periodic review marks the end of one planning cycle and the beginning of a new one. The results of the review should be the basis for setting future long-range, intermediate and short-term objectives. These objectives should form the core of the action plan.
- e. Each periodic review will include a program self-study and action plan, the external reviewer(s)’s report, and a program response to the reviewer(s)’s report. Other documents may be included as desired. All faculty members within the program will receive copies of these documents. The documents comprising a review, shall not, as a general matter, be circulated beyond the campus.
- f. Each program’s self-study will be led by the program’s faculty members. Working together, the Dean and the program’s faculty members will choose a specific focus for the self-study if needed or desired. They will also choose the external reviewer(s), to whom the Dean will extend an official invitation. In all other matters, each program may decide its own procedures for completing the self-study and review.
- g. Each program should select a Review Committee and a chair for overseeing the review process. The members of the Review Committee will compose an 8-10 page reflective, focused self-study that explains the program’s aspirations and enduring goals and how the program’s current offerings support their accomplishment. The self-study should include a detailed analysis, informed by feedback from student learning and other program assessments, explaining key issues and challenges facing the program and the program’s response(s). Other areas that should be addressed include the program’s ongoing assessment plan, future projects and resource reallocation, and any specific questions suggested by the Dean. The program’s faculty should also compose an action plan describing any proposed changes to their strategic plan, including details regarding future projects and resource reallocation.

In Section V, there are suggested questions that faculty may want to consider as they reflect upon their program. The self-study is not expected to answer all or even most of the listed questions. Instead, the self-study should provide a detailed analysis of the program, written after a program's faculty have reflected upon the answers to these questions for their program. In some cases, the Dean and/or the program's faculty may agree that specific questions, which need not be from Section V, may need to be addressed as part of the written self-study.

- h. Following completion of the self-study, each program should be reviewed by one or two external reviewers from outside the campus. The external reviewer(s) should be distinguished in the field that is being reviewed and must not have close ties with the program or its faculty. Academic Affairs should establish a budget to be applied towards the expenses and honorarium of the reviewer(s). The external reviewer(s) are selected and invited by the Dean in consultation with the program chair and faculty members. The Dean will send the external reviewer(s) the program's self-study, together with up-to-date faculty vitae, student data, and information on matters such as the careers of the graduates, the curriculum, and degree programs.

For accredited programs that have external reviews as part of their accreditation process, these external reviews would normally play the role of the external reviews described above and additional external reviews would be unnecessary.

- i. The external reviewer(s) will normally visit the campus for two days to examine the facilities and resources of the program and to meet with the program's faculty and students, its Dean, the Provost, and others as desired. The reviewer(s) will submit a written report within a month of the visit to the Dean who oversees the program. The Dean will provide copies of the review to the program.
- j. The Review Committee will prepare a response and a revised action plan based upon the reviewer(s)' report. All aspects of the reviewer(s)' report should be addressed. The faculty members of the program will then examine the reviewer(s)' report and the Review Committee's response, and provide additional comments as desired. The Review Committee will submit its report, with the reviewer(s)' report and any faculty comments, to the Dean and the Provost.
- k. In consultation, the Dean, the Provost, and faculty representatives from the program will discuss an appropriate updating of the strategic plan in light of the program's self-study and the external reviewer(s)' report.

IV. TIMELINE FOR THE REVIEW

- 1. Academic Affairs will prepare a schedule of periodic reviews. Any program scheduled for review should be informed in the spring semester preceding the academic year in which the review will be conducted.

2. During the spring semester and summer before the review, the program's Dean will meet with the program's chair and other faculty, if desired, to discuss possible emphases for the self-study and review. Together, the Dean and the program's chair will choose the emphasis of the self-study and a list of additional questions for the self-study, if any, before the beginning of the Fall semester.
3. In the Fall semester, the program will undertake the review and writing of the self-study. The self-study document should be finished by the beginning of the Spring semester.
4. At the beginning of the Spring semester, the Dean will send the external reviewer(s) the program's self-study and strategic plan, together with up-to-date faculty vitae, student data, and information on matters such as careers of the graduates, the curriculum, and degree programs. The list of questions to guide the self-study should also be included.
5. The external reviewer(s) will visit the campus, normally in February or early March. Within a month, the external reviewer(s) should send the Dean a written evaluation of the program, its self-study and strategic plan.
6. Normally, within two weeks of receiving the external reviewer(s)' external report, the program's Review Committee will send the Dean a response to the reviewer(s)' report.
7. Faculty representatives from the program, the Dean, and the Provost should meet to discuss the review before the end of May.

V. QUESTIONS TO GUIDE THE SELF-STUDY

The questions which follow are suggestions for program faculty to consider as they reflect upon their program and its long-term objectives.

1. Mission and Planning

The Program should evaluate its purpose and planning in light of the campus mission and strategic priorities.

- a. *Mission.* What is the program's mission? How well is it aligned with the mission of its School and the College? How does the program see its role within its School and the College?
- b. *Excellence.* What are the marks of excellence of an undergraduate program in this field? Which of these qualities are found at The College of New Jersey? What are the distinctive aspects of TCNJ's program, its strengths and weaknesses? What quantifiable measurements does the program use to assess its performance?
- c. *Goals and objectives.* What are the program's goals and objectives? Have they changed since the last review? If so, please explain how and why they have changed. How well are they aligned with the goals and objectives of the School and/or College?
- d. *Implementation of Strategic Goals.* How do the program's goals and strategic priorities relate to its curriculum, the enrollments in its programs, faculty teaching, and the expectations for faculty scholarly, and creative activities?
- e. *Development.* What opportunities for future development do you see for your program in the next 5 years? In the next 10? Which would constitute "success" in accomplishing the goals and objectives listed in (1c).
- f. *Previous Self-Study/Review.* What progress, both qualitative and quantitative, has the program made in addressing the recommendations of any previous self-studies/reviews?
- g. *Needs.* What are the School and College needs that are met by the program? Are there opportunities to meet these needs more effectively, such as through collaboration with other programs?
- h. *Peer Institutions.* How does the program compare to exemplary models at peer institutions? How do the goals and objectives relate to disciplinary norms (e.g. accrediting agencies, comparable departments, elite programs, peer institutions, etc.)? Are there nationally recognized "benchmarks" and/or best practices that TCNJ should emulate?

- i. *Community Needs.* How well does the program serve the community and the state? Are there additional ways, such as academic offerings or community-based research, that the program can serve these constituencies?

2. Curriculum and Student Learning

Providing a high quality education for students should be the primary consideration when evaluating the relevancy, currency, and coherence of curricula. Evaluation of the curriculum should reflect an awareness of changing knowledge, trends in the discipline, and the professional context for curriculum.

- a. *Curriculum.* Describe the program's curriculum. Are there ways to improve the curriculum?
 - i. Does the curriculum reflect the best thinking in the discipline?
 - ii. How does the curriculum relate to disciplinary standards and those at programs at peer institutions? What internal and external measures are employed to ensure that the curriculum is relevant and current?
 - iii. Have changes been made since the last program review? If so, please describe them and explain why they were made and the outcomes of the changes.
 - iv. How coherent is the curriculum? What is the rationale for the selection and organization of the courses in the curriculum? How does the program ensure that the curriculum is structured in a logical, sequential, and coherent manner?
 - v. How does the program ensure an appropriate balance between breadth and depth?
 - vi. In what ways is the program's curriculum distinctive?
 - vii. How do the course offerings contribute to campus-wide curricular needs? Please specifically address liberal learning and the FSP program.
 - viii. How diverse is the curriculum? Is it as open and inclusive as it could be?
- b. *Learning outcomes.* What are the program's learning outcomes? How are they measured?
 - i. Are the current learning outcomes appropriate for our students? If not, how should they be changed?
 - ii. How is assessment of student learning outcomes used in reviewing and modifying curriculum, advising, and other program elements?
 - iii. Based on the learning outcomes assessment, in what areas is the program doing well? What curriculum areas need improvement based on the outcomes assessment?
- c. *Research.* Is undergraduate research built effectively into the curriculum? How is success in terms of undergraduate research measured by your program?
- d. *Interdisciplinary Opportunities.* Does the program's curriculum offer appropriate interdisciplinary opportunities? What is the overall quality of its interdisciplinary offerings? Are there areas for improvement?

- e. *Class Sizes.* What are the optimal class sizes for the program's course offerings and how are they determined? Are these optimal class sizes maintained? Why or why not?
- f. *Technology.* Is there an appropriate use of technology in the program? How does the use of technology compare with what is practiced elsewhere?

3. Students

Programs must ensure that their courses, advising resources, and academic services are tailored to the students they serve.

- a. *Student population.* What is the size and demography of students enrolled in the program? Are we serving all subsets of students (majors, non-majors, students at each stage of their education, men, women, students of color, special admits, students with special needs, etc.) appropriately? How does the program promote diversity among its students?
- b. *Enrollment.* Describe program enrollment patterns and trends for the last five years.
 - i. What is the potential for future enrollment in the program as compared to past enrollments and existing resources?
 - ii. What is the optimal number of majors and minors? Why?
 - iii. Describe program enrollment patterns, e.g., numbers of entering freshmen, graduating seniors, majors, minors, and internal and external transfer students. How do these compare with institutional and national enrollment patterns?
 - iv. What recruitment strategies, if any, does the program use to increase enrollment?
 - v. How academically qualified are the students admitted to the program compared to the general profile of TCNJ students?
- c. *Advising.* How does the program ensure that students are provided with appropriate advising?
 - i. Describe the student advisement process for majors and minors. Do students regard this process as appropriate to their needs?
 - ii. Are students successfully completing The College's and program's requirements in a timely manner?
 - iii. Does the advisement program adequately support students in making curricular decisions, and co-curricular or post-graduate plans?
- d. *Co-curricular activities.* Are appropriate co-curricular activities provided to enhance the students' college experience? Describe the groups or organizations for students within the program. What do they do for students and how do they enhance the programs? How many students participate in these activities? How do these activities compare with those at comparable institutions?
- e. *Preparation for life after graduation.* Have students gained the skills and experience necessary for success after college? What measures does the program use? Are students being adequately advised and trained for graduate studies, professional schools, and entering the job market? Describe alumni/ae patterns regarding graduate education and career choices.

4. Faculty

Programs should ensure that faculty receive the support necessary to assure effective instruction, curriculum development, and appropriate scholarly or creative activities.

- a. *Quality of teaching.* What is the program doing to ensure excellent instruction? Are there areas in which the department can improve?
- b. *Support of teaching.* Do faculty have the necessary knowledge and skills to provide all students with excellent instruction that is respectful of individual needs and views? Do they have the necessary knowledge and skills to help all students meet the learning goals? How does the program foster the professional and pedagogical development of faculty as teachers? How does the program encourage faculty to develop new curricula?
- c. *Support of scholarship.* What are the expectations for faculty scholarship and are they being met? How does the program foster professional development of faculty as scholars? What can be done better to support faculty scholarship?
- d. *Faculty Satisfaction.* Is there a positive, productive work environment for faculty? Is the department's environment conducive to supporting faculty development?
- e. *Support of new faculty.* Are new faculty members given adequate mentoring and support to meet the goals set by The College for tenure and promotion? Do new faculty members feel welcomed by the college community and are they integrated into the life of the institution?
- f. *Support of service.* Are faculty members appropriately serving the department and the College? In what ways do faculty lend their professional expertise as teachers and scholars to off-campus constituencies? Are faculty who engage in cross-disciplinary activities properly rewarded for their efforts?
- g. *Hiring.* What should be the program's hiring priorities when new positions become available?
- h. *Diversity.* How well does the program promote diversity among its faculty with respect to gender and racial issues, as well as research and professional interests?
- i. *Faculty Involvement.* Are faculty members actively involved in the College community? Are they accessible to students and colleagues?

5. Administration and Resources

Programs should ensure that resources are being appropriately used to meet program goals and objectives.

- a. *Structure and Leadership.* Does the program's administrative structure function as effectively and efficiently as possible? Are there areas in which improvements could be made? Are support and training sufficient for faculty serving as chairs and in other leadership positions?
- b. *Program staff.* Is the program's staff being used effectively and appropriately? Could these individuals be enabled to better support the program? Are faculty serving in non-chair administrative roles receiving enough training?
- c. *Work Loads.* Is the work of the program shared equitably? How does the use of faculty members for duties and service outside the program affect the program?
- d. *Infrastructure.* Is the infrastructure currently available to the program (e.g., physical space, computer hardware and support, special instrumentation or facilities) enabling the department or program to support its mission, implement its curriculum, and meet its scholarly and creative goals? How is the program maximizing its use of available resources?
- e. *Library.* Are current library holdings adequate to support the program? If not, which specific areas are weak?