

# **GRADUATE PROGRAM REVIEW POLICY**

## **Texas Southern University**

### **The Purposes of Graduate Program Review**

Graduate program review at Texas Southern University exists to ensure that programs are functioning at the highest possible levels of academic quality and are operating in ways that are consistent with the missions of the university and the Graduate School. In having reviews performed of its graduate programs, the university complies with section 5.52 of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's rules. The process of graduate program review serves as a means to inform faculty, administrators, students, and university governance bodies of the strengths and weaknesses in our programs. Graduate program review is a tool for critical reflection and change. Through careful documentation and analysis, faculty and students can take advantage of the review process to assess the quality, centrality, demand, and costs associated with specific programs and subsequently develop plans for program improvement. Program reviews should result in a set of recommendations crafted by faculty and endorsed by academic administrators that include concrete strategies and benchmarks for achieving improved quality. In some cases, reviews may point to the need to significantly restructure a program or, in exceptional cases, initiate program closure.

Graduate Program Reviews follow a process that includes:

- The creation of an appropriate degree of common standards and performance for graduate programs across the university
- The generation of information for departments and related units for their own use in assessing program strengths and weaknesses
- An assessment of the quality of the educational experience of TSU graduate students
- An assessment of progress toward strategic goals at the department, college, and university level, including the ways in which graduate programs complement and sustain the undergraduate curricula
- Meaningful comparisons with discipline-specific standards, peer institutions, and related TSU units
- The identification of strategies for program improvement
- The dissemination of recommendations to faculty governance groups and academic administrators who have responsibility for setting priorities and allocating resources

Information generated in program reviews may be used by faculty to refine and revise curricula, to recruit new students, to provide information to accrediting or professional associations, to argue for new or reallocated resources, to bolster proposals for external funding, and/or to modify faculty

assignments. The results of reviews may also be used by university administrators to guide strategic decisions regarding program development and resource allocation. Graduate Program Reviews occur on a periodic basis, primarily through a process of self-study complemented by external critique. The review process is grounded in both university-wide standards and criteria specific to discipline-based and interdisciplinary programs.

### **Self-Study**

Graduate Program Review begins with a self-study by the appropriate graduate faculty. Departments may determine how best to conduct the self-study (who is involved, how the internal process works). It is advisable that those who know the program best (faculty and students) and those responsible for carrying out the recommendations of the review (graduate program coordinators, department chairs and members of executive committees) be closely associated with the self-study.

The unit of analysis for reviews may vary across departments and disciplines. For example, in some areas the review will focus on a single degree or related degrees in a single department (such as the M.S. in Mathematics or the M.Ed. and Ed.D. in Counseling). In other areas, a review may entail one or more degrees that cut across programs (such as the M.S. and Ph.D. in Environmental Toxicology). Because the circumstances vary across programs and departments, the decision as to the appropriate level of analysis will be made jointly by the dean of the college or school and Graduate School in consultation with the Graduate Council.

The format and emphasis of the self-study should be determined by the relevant program faculty. Typically the self-study will consist of qualitative and quantitative analyses of descriptive material and contain the following sections:

**1. General Program Characteristics:** The beginning point of the self-study is the 18 Characteristics of Texas Doctoral Programs which will be provided by the Graduate School for doctoral programs. The same information must be provided by masters only programs (Bold items indicate 18 Characteristics requirements). The Graduate School will assist with the collection of data. A description of the degree program, including the educational objectives and curriculum, should be provided. There should be a discussion of how this degree program enhances departmental, school/college, institutional, and disciplinary objectives, including those aspects of the program which make it unique and those which are interdisciplinary. When appropriate, the self-study should compare and contrast program characteristics with those of comparable or exemplary programs at similar universities. The discussion should include:

- How does the program align with stated program and institutional goals?
- What knowledge and skills are students expected to master? How is student attainment of knowledge and skills assessed? What are the results of the assessment and how is that used for improvement of the program?
- What contributions are program graduates expected to make in academic, industrial, government, nonprofit, or other sectors?
- How has the program evolved since its inception, especially in the past five years?

- In what ways is this program distinct or comparable to similar programs at other universities?
- Who are peer institutions and which institutions does the program aspire to?
- **What is the date of the last external review?**
- **What is the external program accreditation, including the name of agency and date of last accreditation action?**

**2. Program Curricula:** An assessment of curriculum should illustrate the educational experiences of graduate students, the quality of those experiences, and the interconnections between the graduate and undergraduate curriculum. Questions to address include:

- What are the educational experiences of enrolled students, both required and elective and how does the program measure these?
- For doctoral students, what are the average and range of credit hours completed? (Include individual programs of study for 10 representative students who have achieved candidacy over the preceding seven years in the appendix).
- For master's students, provide a representative program of study and description of the capstone or concluding requirements (thesis, examination, projects, etc.).
- Provide a schedule for all graduate courses offered over the past three years, including the number of courses taught weekdays, evenings, weekends, and summers.
- What is the nature and degree of curriculum integration between the undergraduate and graduate programs?
- How is the graduate curriculum integrated with research opportunities across the campus?
- For doctoral programs, what curricular experiences are employed to prepare graduates for entry into college teaching, organizational management or other leadership roles?
- How are information and instructional technologies utilized in the curriculum?
- Where applicable, how are internships or other field experiences integrated into the curriculum?

**3. Faculty:** Faculty characteristics should focus on those aspects of faculty appointments that are directly relevant to graduate education, including teaching, advising, and research. The Higher Education Coordinating Board defines Core Faculty as “full-time tenured and tenure-track faculty who teach 50 percent or more in the doctoral program or other individuals integral to the doctoral program who can direct dissertation research.” Adjunct graduate faculty, visiting graduate faculty, and research faculty are referred to herein as associate graduate faculty. The same standards apply for masters only programs. Questions to address include:

- How many graduate faculty are assigned to the program, how has the number fluctuated in the past five years, and what plans are in place to fill current vacancies? **Provide a complete list of graduate faculty who have taught in the last three years using the SACS Faculty Credentials Roster and include complete cv's. Please indicate "Core Faculty".**
- How many associate graduate faculty (adjunct faculty, emeriti faculty, special consultants, or visiting faculty) are appointed in the program, and what are their roles and responsibilities?
- What is the average and range of graduate advisees per graduate faculty member over the previous three years, and the number of master's thesis and dissertation committees chaired by each graduate faculty member and on which faculty serve in non-chair roles?
- **For each of the three most recent years, provide average of the number of discipline-related refereed papers/publications, books/book chapters, juried creative/performance accomplishments and notices of discoveries filed/patents issued separately per core and associated faculty.**
- **For the previous three years, provide the total number of semester credit hours in organized teaching courses taught per academic year by core faculty divided by the number of core faculty.**
- **For each of the three most recent years, provide the average of the number of core and associate faculty receiving funds, average external funds per core and associate faculty, and total external funds per program per academic year.**

**4. Quality of student applicant pool:** Describe the characteristics of applicants and enrolled students, including special attributes of students that may affect recruitment and admissions processes. Questions to address include:

- What evidence is there of student demand for the program?
- What types of students are most attracted to the program and most likely to enroll and succeed?
- **Please describe the admission factors and criteria used by the program.**
- What recruitment activities are used to attract the most qualified and capable students, including special efforts to attract students from traditionally underrepresented populations?
- **Please provide enrollment headcount by ethnicity.**
- **Please provide the percentage of full-time students.**

**5. Student progress and outcome measures:** Here the focus is on the success of students in achieving program completion and moving into post-graduate placements. Questions to address include:

- What procedures are in place to orient new students to the program, assign advisors, and assure success in the first semester of enrollment?
- **For each of the three most recent years, provide the average of the graduates' time to completion of the degree. How many students do not complete the degree within the prescribed time limits and why?**
- **Please provide the number of degrees per year for the three most recent years.**
- **Please provide the ten year graduation rate for each of the last three years for doctoral programs. Provide the five year graduation rate for each of the last three years for masters programs.**
- What are the sources and levels of financial support for students (including summers) and how does that support change as students move through the program? **For the prior year, please provide the number of full time students with at least \$1000 of annual support and the percentage of full time students receiving at least \$1000 of support.**
- **For those receiving financial support, please provide the average monetary institutional support provided per full-time graduate student for the prior year assistantships, scholarships, stipends, grants, and fellowships (does not include tuition or benefits or loans).**
- How are the responsibilities of teaching and research assistants integrated into program goals and the requirements for degree completion? How are teaching and research assistants prepared by the program for their duties? How are they monitored and assessed in their duties?
- What opportunities and expectations are there for students to participate in professional meetings and publication? **For the three most recent years, please provide the number of discipline-related refereed papers/publications, juried creative/performance accomplishments, book chapters, books, and external presentations per year by student FTE.**
- What awards or other recognitions have students received while enrolled or after graduation?
- **How successful are students seeking professional licensure/certification?**
- **What are the initial and subsequent employment placements of graduates? For each of the three most recent years, please provide the number and percent of graduates by year who are employed (including those continuing studies at a higher level), unemployed, underemployed, and number of graduates whose employment history is unknown.**
- How do current students and program alumni assess the quality and relevance of their graduate education experience? **An assessment by students and alumni is required.**

## **6. Program Resources and Facilities:**

- What are the financial resources available to the program?
- What are the on-campus and off-campus facilities used to support the graduate program (classroom space, laboratory space, and faculty and student office space, computer networks) as well as faculty for their research and scholarly activity?
- How adequate are those facilities to achieving program goals?
- What library resources are used by the graduate program and are they adequate? (The self-study committee should consult with the appropriate University librarian before preparing this section of the report and should reflect the librarian's input in the self-study report).

## **7. Other measures of quality determined by the program, such as:**

- national rankings and/or ratings
- extramural (state, national or foundation) programmatic support
- appointment of postdoctoral students
- significant outreach and/or public service activities related to graduate education
- external fellowships and awards given to faculty and students by disciplinary and/or professional associations
- special seminars or symposia offered by the program

## **8. Administration**

The self study should describe the administration of the program. Issues to be included are:

- Relationship of the program to its college or school and to the Graduate School.
- Administrative infrastructure including support staff.
- Significant issues in the administration of the program.

## **9. Self-assessment:**

The final section of the self-study is the self assessment *by the faculty* of the program's strengths and areas for improvement. Based on the data collected, as well as other sources of judgment, program faculty will address three questions in this analysis:

- What characteristics of the program should be maintained?
- What characteristics of the program should be ended?
- What characteristics of the program should be changed?

The answers to these questions will then lead to an action plan that sets goals and objectives with specific timelines. If major changes are anticipated, the needed resources and their potential sources should be identified.

### **10. Appendices:**

- Sample programs of study
- Faculty Roster and Faculty CV's
- Faculty Teaching Assignments (for each faculty member – courses taught, credit and contact hours per semester for most recent three-year period)
- Program Handbook
- Thesis/dissertation titles for past three years

**A note on format:** The format guidelines presented above are not intended to be either exhaustive or limiting. Individual programs should emphasize those specific areas that are most appropriate and present the information in ways that reflect program standards and priorities. The self-study will be most useful if it is concise, complete, well-organized, and reflective of the particular mission of the program under review.

**A note on standards of quality:** The Graduate School has not established a university-wide set of standards applicable to all master's and doctoral programs. Rather, we have delineated a range of indicators we believe should be used as benchmarks in any assessment of program quality. The interpretation of those indicators and the setting of benchmark standards is the responsibility of individual programs, which will draw on disciplinary standards and established best practices. It is program faculty and peers who will analyze the collected data and make the appropriate judgments regarding overall quality and areas for improvement.

### **Submission**

One copy of the self-study is to be submitted to the provost, the dean of the college or school, and the Dean of the Graduate school on or before November 1 of the academic year in which a program is to be reviewed. The dean of the college or school may also provide an assessment of program and its self study. The program and dean of the college or school will meet with the Graduate Council to discuss the self study promptly. If any revisions are found necessary, the program will complete these revisions by December 1. The self study will be forwarded to the external examiners on December 1.

### **The External Review**

The external examiners' panel will be identified in the early of fall of the academic year of the review. The panel will consist of at least three members for doctoral programs and two for masters only programs—all senior faculty members from other universities with recognized expertise in the appropriate discipline or field – one chosen by the department, one by the dean or school, and one by the provost for doctoral programs and one senior faculty member from another university chosen by the department and one by the provost for masters programs. The external

review will be scheduled by the Graduate School in consultation with the program under review. It will typically take place early in the spring semester. The agenda of the external review panel will generally include:

- Initial meeting with the department chair, graduate program coordinator, school/college dean, and dean of the Graduate School to discuss the self-study and orient the panel to the program as well as the schedule
- Meetings with graduate faculty in the program
- Meetings with graduate students and selected graduate alumni/ae
- Meeting with the provost and associate provost
- Meeting with the university librarian
- Tour of program facilities
- Meeting with the school/college dean and graduate dean
- Exit interview with the department chair, graduate program coordinator, school/college dean, Dean of the Graduate School, associate provost, and the provost.

At the conclusion of the visit, the panel will submit a report within two to three weeks, addressed to the program faculty and copied to the school/college dean, the dean of the Graduate School, and the provost. The report will be organized around the following questions:

1. To what extent is this program central to the mission of the Texas Southern University and the school or college and department where it is located? What changes would be necessary to increase the program's centrality?
2. What is the quality of the program's curriculum with respect to scope, depth, currency, and student requirements for degree completion? What changes would be necessary to improve the current level of quality?
3. What is the quality of the program's faculty with respect to teaching and advising effectiveness, scholarly or creative productivity, impact on the discipline or field, and external recognition? What changes would be necessary to improve the current level of quality?
4. What is the quality of the program's students with respect to academic qualifications, diversity, and success after graduation? What changes would be necessary to improve the current level of quality?
5. What is the quality of the program's resources with respect to its teaching, research, and service obligations? What changes would be necessary to improve the current level of quality?



6. Is the demand for this program on the part of a) prospective students and b) postgraduate placements indicative of a high quality program with social utility? How is the current level of demand likely to change in the next three to five years?
7. Are action plans clear, appropriate, and feasible? Does the panel have recommendations for changes in the plans?

### **Final Assessment**

Within two weeks after receiving the report, the program faculty may write a response or rejoinder, addressed to the dean of the college or school and the Dean of the Graduate School, to correct errors of fact or offer alternative interpretations. The two deans in consultation will forward the report and any addendum from the department together with their comments to the associate provost and provost. Within thirty days the provost will convene a meeting of the program chair, the dean of the college or school, the Dean of the Graduate School, and the assistant provost for Institutional Assessment, Effectiveness, and Planning to discuss the findings and action plans. After the meeting, the provost will provide a written response to the chair and faculty of the program with copies to the dean of the college or school and the Dean of the Graduate School confirming the action plans proposed, directing additional steps for improvement as necessary, or directing the orderly closure of the program. One year after the external review, the program will document its progress on the action plans, and the provost will convene a meeting of the program chair, dean of the college or school, Dean of the Graduate School, and the associate provost to review progress on the action plans for improvement.

### **Applicability**

These policies and procedures apply to all graduate degree programs offered by the Texas Southern University.

### **Addendum for Professionally Accredited Programs**

For those professional graduate programs that choose to seek accreditation from external associations, the process for graduate program review will be modified in the following ways:

In general, graduate program review will occur in the year *following* the completion of the external accreditation process.

The self-study prepared for the accrediting agency will serve as the internal self-study for the program review process. In some cases, supplemental material may be requested if the self-study does not address critical benchmarks required by "Guidelines for Self-Study." It is assumed that the need for supplemental materials will be relatively rare, given the comprehensive nature of the accreditation review process.

At the beginning of the academic year in which the graduate program review process is to occur, the program will submit to the provost, dean of the college or school, and the Graduate School a) the self-study prepared for the accrediting agency; b) the final report of the accrediting agency, including the determination of compliance with standards, official comments on program strengths and weaknesses, the final determination on continuing accreditation, and any materials written by

the program as responses or rebuttals to the accrediting agency's findings and conclusions. The program should provide a cross-reference or index that indicates where in the self-study the specific items in Graduate School's protocol are addressed.

In addition, the program should submit an action plan following the procedures outlined on page 5 of "Graduate Program Review Policies and Procedures."

The external review panel required by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board will then be impaneled as outlined on page 7.