

# SUFFOLK UNIVERSITY

## PERIODIC ACADEMIC PROGRAM REVIEW

### **1. Purpose**

Periodic Academic Program Review (PAPR) is designed to strengthen Suffolk University's academic activities, and to align them with the mission and strategic goals of the University, the schools, and their academic departments and programs. It is a developmental process that consists of a set of well-defined procedures created to assist in determining an academic unit's ability to respond to challenges and opportunities, evaluate current strengths and opportunities, set priorities, and aid in shaping plans for the future of the academic unit.

Suffolk University is comprised of three schools: the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS), Sawyer Business School (SBS), and Suffolk University Law School (SULS). Within each of these schools, there are academic departments, and programs which define the nature and character of education at the University. The whole of the University is accredited by the New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE). SULS is also accredited by the American Bar Association (ABA) and is a member of the Association of American Law Schools (AALS). The SBS undergoes a rigorous review process by the membership organization Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB). Within the three schools, departments and/or programs may also seek accreditation or review from external bodies.

The PAPR procedures adhere to four basic principles:

- a. shared responsibility and collaboration by the participants;
- b. allocation of responsibility among the participants based on their respective institutional roles and competence;
- c. ensuring transparency and input from participants at all stages of the process; and

- d. incorporating and reconciling materials and assessments prepared in relevant accreditation processes to promote consistency between accreditation processes (planning and policies as part of any self-assessment and representations made to accrediting authorities) and the ongoing results of review processes.

Because program review is intended to promote institutional improvement, it shall not be used for unrelated purposes, such as altering tenure rights of tenured faculty members. This section should be read in the context of section G subsection III (“Obligations to Faculty with Tenure or Presumptively Renewable Contracts”) of the University Faculty Handbook. PAPR shall not be used as a method for evaluating or assessing individual faculty members’ performance, tenured or otherwise, in regards to their faculty status. Nothing in this document alters the status or scope of existing employment or contractual rights of faculty members.

## **2. Scope and Timing**

Each academic program at the University, regardless of the school in which they are situated, shall be formally reviewed on a regular cycle. Programs shall generally be reviewed on a five-year cycle as reflected in the PAPR schedule.

### **1) Program Definition**

“Program” refers to those separate activities of the University and/or School curricula that are organized to fulfil the academic mission of the institution. Programs include, but are not limited to departments, degree tracks, majors, minors, core and required curricula, course sequences that result in certificates, concentrations, centers, institutes, and other organized academic activities. As units of analysis, each of these academic activities, should be subject to its own review, if it is of sufficient importance to warrant formal review. Programs shall not be defined as an individual course or offerings of a single faculty member.

After soliciting comments and suggestions from faculty members and the University Faculty Senate, the deans, in consultation with the Provost, shall identify programs for regular review.

## **2) Nationally Accredited Programs**

Accreditation by a nationally recognized association, organization and/or regulatory body is important to the standing and reputation of the University, the schools, programs, our faculty and our students. All programs that hold national accreditation shall be reviewed regularly under PAPR, and as much as possible in conjunction with their accreditation review cycle, ordinarily either the year before, during or after such a national accreditation review visit. External accreditation reviews may provide some of the information necessary for program review. However, as such external processes often do not address the specific strategic goals of the University at large or claim to align the program with the broader circumstances and mission of the University's other units, such reviews shall not be considered a replacement for University-based PAPR. The Provost, the Dean and the department chair and/or program director shall coordinate review procedures that complement the national accreditation review and ensure consistency with the standards set forth by relevant national accrediting agencies, associations and commissions.

The processes for PAPR set out in this document are subject to the provisions of the University Faculty Handbook, where Section Two, paragraph 2, states:

Suffolk University recognizes the important role of accrediting associations in shaping the organization and governance of individual schools, departments and programs. Provisions of the University Faculty Handbook [and hence PAPR] must be consistent with the standards set forth by pertinent accrediting agencies, associations and commissions.

## **3) Establishing the PAPR Schedule**

Based on the established five-year PAPR schedule, the Provost, in consultation with the deans of each school, shall circulate by March 31<sup>st</sup> of each year, a new schedule that includes any revisions. The deans shall solicit comments and suggestions from faculty members regarding the PAPR schedule for that year, including requests for review of specific programs. A final schedule for the year shall be circulated by the deans to their faculty by May 31<sup>st</sup>. Revisions, amendments or alterations that take effect within the next two annual cycles of the newly revised PAPR schedule shall be accompanied by an annotation explaining the reason for the revision, amendment or alteration.

### **3. The PAPR Process**

The PAPR process is characterized by six distinct steps, as set out below:

#### **1) Program Self-Study**

- a) The full-time faculty involved in a program shall conduct a self-study of the program. The self-study will be aided by available University-generated data related to the program. The Dean and the department chair or program director, if any, may request data that will allow a department or program student analysis (including such measures as the numbers of students served in classes managed by the program, the number of majors and minors), and may ask for the data needed to measure faculty inputs (such as hours teaching or students taught). The Office of Institutional Research and Assessment will strive to accommodate all reasonable requests for data needed for a productive self-study. The self-study should also weigh the costs and benefits of attaining the goals needed to fulfill the mission of the program. Program revenue data are deemed confidential and may not be distributed to anyone not directly involved in the PAPR process (other than the Faculty Senate if requested as provided below), or anyone outside the University, without the approval of the Dean and the Provost.
- b) A suggested structure, and set of evaluative criteria, for the self-study are set out in Appendix 1, in the spirit of providing some further guidance for a productive program review – subject to accreditation requirements, and especially likely to be useful in CAS and SBS. This self-study process will generate an analysis of the program’s strengths and opportunities for improvement, as well as prioritized recommendations, which will inform the ultimate action plan. All full-time members of the faculty within the program under review are expected to participate in the self-study, to review the report, and to write a dissent if they so wish. Once the self-study report is completed, it shall be forwarded to the dean of the school.

#### **2) Program External Review**

Each program review at the department level or higher under review shall include a report by at least one and not more than three external reviewer(s) to assist in the evaluation of the program, unless accreditation agencies serve as outside reviewers. For programs involving modest

resources, the Program Director or Head, and the Dean, may agree to waive the external review. However, it should be noted that accrediting bodies increasingly expect an external perspective as a component of program review.

The reviewer(s) shall have expertise covering the significant areas of the program. The department shall prepare a list of potential outside reviewers; the Dean may choose the reviewer(s) from this list, or may choose other reviewer(s), who must then be approved by the full-time faculty in the activity under review. All reviewers should be “arm’s length” evaluators and any conflicts or ongoing relationship to the program reviewed should be made known to the Dean before any selection is made. The external review shall be made after the completion and submission of the self-study. The reviewer(s) shall be supplied with a copy of the self-study and the program standards, but shall not be supplied with University-generated data unless approved by the Dean and Provost.

The reviewer(s) shall review all appropriate materials; visit the program and school; and meet with available program staff, faculty, department chair or program director, Dean or designee, and when appropriate the Provost or designee. The reviewer(s) is/are then expected to file a written report regarding the visit within one month of the review.

The report prepared by the external reviewer(s) shall be forwarded to all full-time faculty members of the program under review and the dean of the school.

### **3) Review by the Dean**

Once the external review report is submitted, the Dean shall review the final written record created during the review process (including the self-study, all generated data, the report of the reviewer(s), and other relevant information). The Dean may seek further input from the program, faculty and/or the University Faculty Senate.

After this review, the Dean shall prepare a report and recommendations regarding:

- a) strengths and opportunities for improvement specific to the program;
- b) whether resources – including faculty, staff, and facilities – are appropriate to the program;

- c) whether to expand, merge, or otherwise restructure the academic program (noting that program closure is subject to a separate process, as set out in the University Faculty Handbook); and
- d) further specific actions necessary to ensure that the program is not inconsistent with the strategic plan and mission of the University.

The Dean may accept, reject, add to or revise the recommendations or the priorities suggested in the program self-study. The resulting report and recommendation of the Dean shall be sent to the chair of the department or program director, who shall distribute it to, at a minimum, the full-time faculty members of the program. The full-time faculty involved in the program under review shall have two weeks to submit comments to the Dean for consideration. In an addendum to the report, the Dean shall respond to all the comments submitted and explain how and why were included in or rejected from the report.

#### **4) Review by the Provost**

After receiving the Dean's report and recommendation and any comments submitted by the faculty members of the program under review, the Provost shall discuss with the Dean the recommendations presented. The Provost may confer with others when determining the appropriateness and feasibility of the Dean's recommendations.

Should the Provost accept the Dean's recommendations, those recommendations shall become the program's provisional final action plan, which shall be sent to those faculty involved with the program under review within a week.

If the Dean's recommendations are not accepted, the Provost shall direct the Dean to prepare a new report and recommendation for the program, which shall be reviewed by the program faculty and the Provost. Should the Provost accept the Dean's revised recommendations, those recommendations shall become the program's provisional final action plan, and shall be sent to the faculty involved with the program under review within a week.

If, after the submission of a second report and recommendation, and after reviewing any comments generated by the new plan, the Provost and Dean cannot agree to a final action plan, the Provost shall prepare a program report and recommendation, termed the contested provisional final action plan.

## **5) Senate advice and mediation**

In cases where there are serious disagreements about the provisional final action plan, the University Faculty Senate may serve as a source of advice, and/or as a mediator. The involvement of the Senate may be invoked in one of two ways:

- a. Automatically, when there is a contested final action plan; or
- b. Upon request, following the issuance of a provisional action plan. Such a request may come from the Provost, a Dean, the appropriate program director or chair, or any three faculty members in the program under consideration.

The Senate shall either take on the case (if it believes it can play a productive role in the process) or provide a summary response. If it agrees to provide advice and/or mediation on a case, it shall establish a 3-person taskforce from among its members (which shall not include any faculty members from the program under review) to address the concerns related to the PAPR, take steps to bring the parties together to reach agreement, and report back to the full Senate on the results. The goal is to get to the point where a final action plan commands broad support.

## **6) Acceptance and implementation of an action plan**

If, within a month of the program receiving a copy of the provisional final action plan, there is no request for advice from the Senate, the review is complete, and implementation of the Dean's recommendations will be effected by the school and University.

In cases where the Senate provides advice and/or mediation, the process shall lead to revised final action plan written by the Dean. If this plan is accepted by the Provost, the review is complete, and the recommendations will be effected by the school and University.

If, after Senate involvement in the process, the Provost still does not agree with the Dean's recommendations, the Dean's report and a report by the Provost shall be sent to the President. The President shall review both the Dean's and the Provost's reports and recommendations and decide on the appropriate final action plan regarding the program. The President's decision regarding a program action plan is final. Once the Provost accepts the Dean's recommendations for a final action plan, or alternatively the President decides on the appropriate action plan regarding a program, the faculty involved with the program will implement the recommendations with support from the school(s) and University.

## **APPENDIX 1. RECOMMENDED STRUCTURE FOR PERIODIC ACADEMIC PROGRAM REVIEW**

The five broad criteria enumerated below should be sufficient to guide the typical academic program review. However, these general criteria should be applied flexibly, so that each program receives a thorough examination adapted to its nature and circumstances. The faculty in each program shall participate in establishing ways to measure its activities in relation to these criteria.

### **STANDARD I. MISSION AND GOVERNANCE**

The mission, goals, and expected outcomes of an academic unit should be congruent with those of the University, reflect the academic unit's standards and guidelines, and consider the needs and expectations of a distinct discipline of interest.

### **STANDARD II. INSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENT AND RESOURCES**

The University demonstrates ongoing commitment and support through available resources to enable the academic unit to achieve its mission, goals, and expected outcomes.

### **STANDARD III. CURRICULUM AND TEACHING-LEARNING PRACTICES**

The academic unit's curriculum is developed in accordance with its mission, goals, and expectations for student success and reflects the school and the University's standards and guidelines as well as the needs and expectations of the discipline. There is an appropriate design to the course of study and a demonstrable link between the learning experience and the success of the student. The teaching-learning environment for the educational experience of the program fosters student achievement.

### **STANDARD IV. STUDENT PERFORMANCE AND FACULTY ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

The academic unit is effective in fulfilling its mission, goals, and expectations. Student learning is consistent with the mission, goals, and expectations of the unit. Alumni satisfaction and accomplishments of its graduates attest to the effectiveness of a unit's program offerings. Faculty activities are consistent with the mission, goals, and expectations of the unit. Data on program effectiveness are used to promote ongoing improvement.

### **STANDARD V. ASSESSMENT OF STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT**

Each academic unit will analyze available assessment data to determine strengths and opportunities for improvement, and to identify specific steps needed to address these. The academic unit will evaluate its current standing among peers and offer strategies to achieve future aspirations.