

# Manual of Policy and Procedures

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## Purpose

Consistent with its mission, Vermont State Colleges is dedicated to providing academic programs that are of high quality and remain current. Towards that end, the VSC Board of Trustees adopts this policy in order to ensure that VSC colleges regularly engage in practices designed to foster the continuous improvement of programs. Through the procedures outlined in this policy, faculty involved in delivering VSC academic programs periodically, systematically, and collaboratively review evidence regarding their effectiveness in achieving desired student learning outcomes, and commit to making the changes needed to ensure continuous program improvement.

Thus the Board of Trustees charges the colleges with, and establishes guidelines for, the regular review and continuous improvement of academic programs. This policy applies to associate, baccalaureate, and graduate degree programs. Generally, four to six disciplines will be reviewed annually, establishing a five-year review cycle for all programs.

In adopting this policy, the Board affirms that the responsibility for program improvement rests ultimately with the college President, who may at his/her discretion utilize additional procedures in order to improve the quality of one or more academic programs.

This policy is designed to complement Policy 109: Annual Enrollment Review.

## Academic Program Review: Policy and Procedures

### Standards

The VSC Board of Trustees has adopted the following standards for high-quality programs. The purpose of Academic Program Review will be to determine the extent to which degree programs:

1. assist in meeting regional, state, and/or student needs;
2. integrate liberal, professional, and career study;
3. maintain currency;
4. achieve defined student learning outcomes as demonstrated through valid and reliable assessment processes;
5. utilize effective strategies for continuous improvement; and
6. help students prepare for life after graduation.

### Schedule and Processes for Review

In December of each year, the Council of Presidents (COP) will recommend to the Board of Trustees' Education, Personnel, and Student Life Committee (EPSL) the programs/disciplines to be reviewed during the following year, how these programs should be clustered for review.

### **Three Approaches to Review**

The VSC Board of Trustees provides colleges and their programs three ways to meet the Board's standards for regular review and continuous improvement of academic programs. Option 1 involves preparing a program "self-study" document with ten specific components. Option 2 permits representatives of VSC programs in a given discipline cluster to work together to design a customized approach to the self-study. Option 3 is provided for programs that are nationally accredited or approved through Vermont's Results Oriented Program Approval (ROPA) process.

VSC will assess programs clustered by discipline on a system-wide basis to determine (1) how well they meet the Board's standards for high-quality programs (listed above), (2) how the programs might be strengthened by specific program improvement measures, and (3) if and how collaboration across colleges might benefit the programs and their students. New programs in their first three years are ordinarily exempt from review, although a president may choose to have new programs reviewed.

In the spring semester of the year when a program is scheduled for PReCIP review, the Academic Dean will meet with senior majors, using a structured interview protocol, and will prepare a written report of this interview, which shall be submitted to the program head and to the President.

### **Option 1 and Option 2: Preparatory phase**

VSC requires all programs not formally accredited by a national accrediting association to participate periodically in one of the Academic Program Review processes detailed below.

- 1) In May of each year, normally in conjunction with the VSC Academic Retreat, faculty from programs scheduled for review in the following year will be invited to attend a special meeting to launch the Academic Program Review process. At this meeting:
  - a) The VSC chief academic officer will explain:
    - i) the Academic Program Review process, including the option to add custom-designed questions;
    - ii) the recommended timeline and campus process for preparing a program self-study;
    - iii) data that will be generated by VSC as well as those that are to be collected by the program/college; and
    - iv) resources that are available to assist those involved in program review and program assessment processes.
  - b) Programs in each cluster will determine whether they want to design a customized approach to the self-study. If all programs in a cluster choose to pursue the customized approach, representatives of those programs must collaboratively decide how they will organize to conduct this process and the deadlines they will set for their work. (See description of Option 2 starting on the bottom of page 3.)
  - c) Each cluster of programs, meeting with the academic dean who has been assigned to chair the review committee for that cluster, will discuss and generate ideas for potential outside members of review committees.

**Option 1: The standard system-wide review process**

- 1) During the year of the review, each program shall prepare a self-study that contains the following components:
  - a) a brief description of the program;
  - b) an analysis of curricular coherence and currency as well as pedagogical development;
  - c) an analysis of educational outcomes based on clearly defined student learning outcomes for the major and a comprehensive program assessment plan;
  - d) a description of regular processes designed to ensure continuous improvement of the program;
  - e) a description of the program's efforts to help prepare students for life after graduation;
  - f) longitudinal enrollment, retention, and graduation data, and a description of strategies to improve retention and graduation rates as well as, if appropriate, any plans to increase enrollment;
  - g) a review of job placement and/or continuing education trends among recent graduates;
  - h) commentary on the Academic Dean's report of his/her meeting with senior majors;
  - i) an analysis of program strengths and weaknesses; and
  - j) a plan that details program improvement strategies and any other anticipated changes.
2. By June 30<sup>th</sup>, the Presidents shall submit to the Chancellor the self-study that has been prepared for each program under Option 1 review.
3. By June 30<sup>th</sup>, the Council of Academic Deans (CAD) will establish committees to review the program self-studies. Generally, each committee will consist of five to eight individuals, including VSC faculty and administrators and at least two members external to the VSC.
4. Before September 30<sup>th</sup>, each committee will meet to review self-studies and by November 1<sup>st</sup>, submit an analysis of the self-studies to the Chancellor, college Presidents, and program heads. These reports will include recommendations for strengthening programs and any recommendations for program collaboration across colleges.
5. A program may comment on the review committee report in writing to the Chancellor.
6. Prior to the December EPSL meeting, COP will review all committee reports, along with any written comments submitted by programs. At this time, COP will also prepare a brief written response to the program committee report regarding how successfully programs under review employ continuous improvement strategies to meet the Board of Trustees' standards for high quality programs, as well as how these continuous improvement strategies meet the specific college's needs, and inter-program collaboration.
7. At the December EPS Committee meeting, the CAD, COP and EPSL Committee members will discuss the continuous improvement strategies recommended for the programs under review. EPSL Committee members will acknowledge the reports and written responses of COP and will submit them to the Board of Trustees.

## **Option 2: Self-designed review process**

Programs pursuing Option 2 must by November 1<sup>st</sup>, collectively submit to CAD a plan that specifies how, through a customized process and report template, each program in the cluster will be reviewed to ensure that it is of high quality and remains current.

- 1) Besides its unique elements, the plan for the customized process must include the following elements:
  - a) a system-wide review committee process,
  - b) recommendations regarding the proposed outside membership of the review committee,
  - c) guidelines for individual program self-studies that include but are not limited to:
    - i) an analysis of educational outcomes based on clearly defined student learning outcomes for the major and a comprehensive program assessment plan,
    - ii) commentary on the Academic Dean's report of his/her meeting with senior majors,
    - iii) an analysis of program strengths and weaknesses, and
    - iv) a plan that details program improvement strategies and any other anticipated changes.
- 2) By December 1<sup>st</sup>, CAD will submit to the COP any plans for a customized review that it would endorse.
- 3) By January 2<sup>nd</sup>, the VSC chief academic officer will inform the programs that have submitted a plan for review under Option 2 whether that plan was approved by COP, whether COP determined that additions or changes to the plan are required, or whether COP was unwilling to approve the customized review proposed.
- 3) By June 30<sup>th</sup>, the Presidents shall submit to the Chancellor the self-study that has been prepared for each program under Option 2 review.
- 4) By June 30<sup>th</sup>, CAD will establish committees to review the program self-studies. Generally, each committee will consist of five to eight individuals, including VSC faculty and administrators and at least two members external to the VSC.
- 5) Before September 30<sup>th</sup>, each committee will meet to review self-studies and by November 1<sup>st</sup>, submit an analysis of the self-studies to the Chancellor, college Presidents, and program heads. These reports will include recommendations for strengthening programs and any recommendations for program collaboration across colleges.
- 6) A program may comment on the review committee report in writing to the Chancellor
- 7) Prior to the December EPSL meeting, COP will review all committee reports, along with any written comments submitted by programs. At this time, COP will also prepare a brief written response to the program committee members regarding how successfully programs under review employ continuous improvement strategies to meet the Board of Trustees' standards for high quality programs, as well as how those continuous improvement strategies meet the specific college's needs, and inter-program collaboration.

- 8) Before the December Board of Trustees meeting, EPSL will review all committee reports and the written responses of COP.
- 9) At the December EPSL Committee meeting, CAD, COP and EPSL Committee members will have an opportunity to discuss the continuous improvement strategies recommended for the programs under review.

### **Option 3: Process and timeline for accredited programs**

Programs that are nationally accredited as well as those approved by the State of Vermont's Results Oriented Program Approval (ROPA) process are required, as a condition of continued accreditation, regularly to engage in program outcome assessment and continuous improvement processes. Accredited programs that have undergone accreditation reviews since the last PReCIP review are reviewed by COP and by EPSL through procedures detailed below. An accredited program that has not undergone an accreditation review since the last PReCIP review must prepare a self-study under the procedures of either Option 1 or Option 2 above.

- 1) By June 30<sup>th</sup>, Presidents of colleges with accredited or ROPA-approved programs scheduled for review shall submit to the Chancellor all reports pertaining to these programs that have been received from accrediting associations—or, in the case of ROPA-approved programs, from the Vermont Department of Education—since the last VSC review. Program self-studies prepared for accreditation reviews need not be submitted to the Chancellor.
- 2) In the year during which an accredited program is scheduled for PReCIP review, the Academic Dean will meet with senior majors, using a structured interview protocol, and will prepare a written report of this interview, which shall be submitted to the program head and to the President.
- 3) Documents received from the accrediting association as well as the dean's report on an interview with senior majors shall be conveyed to the Chancellor under a memo from the President, which may clarify or respond to conclusions addressed in these documents.
- 4) COP will review all accreditation and ROPA-related reports prior to their submission to EPSL, and will report to the program review committees how successfully accredited programs under review employ continuous improvement strategies to meet Board of Trustees' standards for high-quality programs.
- 5) In December before the Board of Trustees meeting, EPSL will review all accreditation reports and the related recommendations of COP, and will submit a resolution to the full Board of Trustees regarding the status of continuous improvement efforts in accredited programs under review.

Signed by:



Timothy J. Donovan, Chancellor