The University of Texas at Tyler
Office of Continuous Improvement and Accreditation

Academic and Student Support Services

External Review Handbook

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2025-2026

Introduction

An external review of UT Tyler academic and student support services is an essential function of the institution's quality review process and provides perspectives not available on campus. The results of the external reviews are included with other assessment and evaluation information in determining the quality, efficiency, and contributions toward student success of each unit. Additionally, the self-assessment and systematic review information contribute to planning for continuous quality improvement. Both qualitative and quantitative criteria are included in the review and the various criteria may be weighted differently for each review. Flexibility in the application of the review criteria is appropriate to accommodate the specialized missions of the individual academic support services, offices, and programs. The following factors serve as guidelines in the preparation and planning of the external review.

Guiding Principles

- UT Tyler is committed to external reviews as an integral part of strategic planning, institutional effectiveness and to ensure continuing quality enhancement toward fulfillment of the UT Tyler mission;
- All academic support services fulfill their respective mission and purpose within the context of the UT Tyler mission;
- The external review is considered to be an appropriate assessment effort in the systematic evaluation of performance and accountability;
- Participation in the review process emphasizes self-assessment and demonstrates a concern about quality, an ability to be self-critical and a willingness to act upon identified concerns;
- Relevant groups within the University are included in the review process, especially when recommendations may refer to or affect particular groups.
- Self-regulation protects institutional autonomy and promotes innovation and accountability.
- The external review process should consider the fundamental principles of "best practice" using well recognized and credible profession-wide standards specific to the discipline for quality assurance.

External Reviewer Selection

An approval process for all external reviewers is required. Reviewers are selected with particular reference to their records of experience and thoughts relative to broad issues of education within their respective disciplines. External reviewers should be of appropriate rank or stature in their respective discipline and not affiliated with U.T. Tyler to ensure a strong review is provided and that there is no appearance of a conflict of interest.

Nominations are required for prospective external reviewers. External reviewers must be full-time employees in an institution nationally recognized for excellence in higher education.

Ideally, the director/executive director provides the names of *two* potential external reviewers to the appropriate assistant vice president or vice president. The recommendations should include the nominee's CV and a signed UT Tyler *Ethical Obligations* Form (Appendix A). The assistant vice president may recommend additional names of potential external reviewers if desired. The assistant vice president/vice president makes the final selection of external reviewer.

Internal Contractual Process

The program coordinator/department chair follows the UT Tyler Financial Services and Contract Processing Procedures.

Fee for Service and Payment of Expenses

External reviewers receive a $1,000 fee for service plus documented travel and accommodation expenses are reimbursed up to $1,500. The expenses are funded through the department and department reimbursement is transferred from the Office of the Provost or appropriate vice president. Exceptions may be made on service fees and/or travel and accommodation reimbursements on a pre-approved case by case basis.

External Review Process
Responsibilities of the Department

Pre-Visit

- ☐ Review the *Academic and Student Support Services External Review Guidelines.*

- ☐ Schedule meetings with the assistant vice president/vice president and the Office of Continuous Improvement and Accreditation (OCIA) to discuss the review process, expectations, and timeline.

- ☐ Provide the names of at least two potential external reviewers, their CVs, and the signed University of Texas at Tyler *Ethical Obligations* to the assistant vice president.

- ☐ The assistant vice president may recommend additional names of potential external reviewers.

- ☐ The assistant vice president/vice president makes the final selection of reviewer.

- ☐ Contact the prospective external reviewer finalist to provide information details on the scope and responsibilities of the external review, fee-for-service, and payment for related travel expenses.

- ☐ Review and follow the UT Tyler Contract Processing Procedures and arrange for transportation and lodging per assistant vice president/vice president guidance.

- ☐ Prepare the Self-Study Report that includes all relevant components agreed upon with the assistant vice president/vice president. (Appendix B *Self-Study Guidelines*).

- ☐ Survey departmental staff, including graduate assistants, and appropriate stakeholders. (Appendix C – Example Survey)

- ☐ When appropriate to the unit, include professional benchmark standards and criteria from the appropriate national professional organization and/or the appropriate CAS Professional Standards for Higher Education in the Self-Study report. If the department completed the CAS Self-Audit Guide (SAG), those results may be included in the Self-Study Report.

- ☐ Provide the Self-Study Report to the reviewer approximately 30-60 days in advance of the site visit.

Campus Visit

☐ Schedule opportunities to meet with students, faculty and staff, college/school deans, and appropriate campus stakeholders. Include appropriate representatives from campus instructional sites. (Appendix D – Sample Campus Visit Schedule)

☐ Schedule time for campus tour(s) as appropriate.

☐ Provide time for the reviewer to work alone during the visit.

☐ Schedule an exit interview for preliminary external review report findings with the provost, assistant vice president/vice president, department director, staff, as well as with faculty and other administrators as appropriate.

Post-Visit

☐ Coordinate with the Provost or vice president's office for transfer of funds to process fee-for-service and approved travel-related expenses. Reviewers are compensated upon receipt of the External Review Report.

☐ Provide the Self-Study Report, External Review Report, and the department's *initial* response to the appropriate supervisor and AVP/VP. Finalize the response plan with the supervisor and AVP/VP.

☐ Collaborate with OCIA to integrate external review documents, findings, and action plans in the unit's annual assessment plan.

Responsibilities of the External Reviewer

Pre-Visit and Self-Study Review

- ☐ Sign and return UT Tyler Contractual Forms and Ethical Obligations Form.

- ☐ Review the Self-Study document, supporting documentation, and program website information. Communicate with the department to request clarification on any additional information as needed.

- ☐ Coordinate with the external review team leader for travel and lodging requirements.

- ☐ Provide a preliminary list of any staff or administrators (by titles/positions) for campus interviews outside of the program/department.

Campus Visit

- ☐ Visit the UT Tyler campus to meet with administrators, professional staff and students directly involved with the department or unit as well as with professionals from collaborating offices.

- ☐ Visit may include the UT Tyler Longview University Center, the UT Tyler Palestine instructional site and/or the UT Tyler Houston Engineering Center, and with online-only students served by the department. Virtual meetings may be facilitated as needed.

- ☐ Complete a thoughtful and principled review based on professional judgement of generally recognized practices in higher education

- ☐ Complete a preliminary report to share during the exit interview at the conclusion of the campus visit.

Post Visit and External Review Report

The External Review Report includes findings based on information from the Self-Study and support documentation; the campus visit; and interviews with staff, students, administrators, faculty, and community stakeholders.

The typical External Review Report includes the following information:

- ☐ A general description of the department/program's alignment with the UT Tyler vision, mission statement, and strategic plan as well as with the division strategic plan.

- A brief statement on the general process of the review, including a list of those who participated in the review. (Rosters may be provided by the department)

- Overall strengths based on quantitative and qualitative data.

- Overall concerns based on quantitative and qualitative data.

- Evidence that the department uses assessment performance information for continuous quality improvement.

- Recommendations for continuous quality planning e*mphasizing student outcomes.*

- Other information relevant to support continuing quality planning.

- If there is more than one reviewer, a single report authored by both reviewers should be submitted.

- The External Review Report should be provided to the director/executive director and to the assistant vice president and/or the vice president within approximately 30-60 days following the campus site visit.

- Payment of approved travel-related expenses and the fee for service are processed upon submission of the External Review Report.

Responsibilities of the Office of Continuous Improvement and Accreditation

Pre-Visit and Self-Study Review

- The external review process is assessed for ongoing improvement by OCIA in collaboration with the department and vice president's office.

- Provide resources to assist with the self-study faculty survey as needed.

Campus Visit

- Meet with the External Reviewer to provide information on institutional planning and effectiveness and how the program assessment and evaluation is integrated into the institutional processes.

Evaluation and Assessment of the External Review Process

☐ Assess the external review process for ongoing improvement in collaboration with the department and vice president's office.

☐ Refine and update the UT Tyler external review process as appropriate.

☐ Collaborate with the department to integrate all external review reports, action plans and follow-up statements into the department's annual assessment plan

Appendix A

The University of Texas at Tyler
ETHICAL OBLIGATIONS OF EXTERNAL REVIEWERS

UT Tyler graduate program reviews are based upon a peer review process that requires program reviewers to make decisions about the program quality, effectiveness, and relevance. In order to maintain the credibility of those decisions, external evaluators are responsible for conducting reviews that uphold the highest level of integrity in all aspects. Integrity of the process mandates at least the following ethical obligations and understandings. External
reviewers must affirm that they have no conflict of interest related to UT Tyler and to the program under review.

Eligibility of External Evaluators and Obligations of UT Tyler Faculty and Administrators

The process for the external review of a UT Tyler program based on the professional judgment of external reviewers demands informed review, thoughtful analysis, and reasoned decision making. External evaluators must haves subject-matter expertise and must currently serve as a faculty member in a program nationally recognized for excellence in the discipline.

UT Tyler program faculty and administrators have an obligation to select external reviewers with the highest caliber of integrity. It is paramount that evaluators are qualified in their external reviewer role to provide actionable advice based on their review of the self-study information and verified through interviews with faculty, students, administrators, and staff.

Confidentiality

Without a commitment to confidentiality by all external reviewers and in all aspects of the review process, external evaluators cannot freely execute their responsibility to conduct themselves with professional integrity in accreditation activities and decisions.

External program reviewers must maintain complete confidentiality in all activities and decisions. Confidentiality applies to all documents, correspondence, and discussions relative to all phases of the external program review. External reviewers may not disclose information about the program, including discussions with the program and institutional representatives before, during, or following the review process. Written documents include but are not limited to the program self-study, program or institutional resource material and support evidence, and the external review report.

External program reviewers may not use generative AI to create all or part of the external review report. No UT Tyler documents, including the program self-study report or institutional resource material, may be uploaded to a generative AI platform. Generative AI may not be used to analyze any UT Tyler data provided as part of the external review.

Conflict of Interest

External reviewers should not accept appointment to serve when a conflict of interest or the *appearance* of conflict of interest, exists. External reviewers affirm electronically that they have no conflict of interest with UT Tyler or the program under review as part of the process of accepting a formal invitation to serve.

UT Tyler relies on the personal and professional integrity of individual external reviewers, expects them to be sensitive to potential conflicts of interest in the review process, and assumes reviewers will act accordingly. If it is discovered that a conflict of interest situation may have affected the external program review, the Provost and Graduate School Dean may initiate further program evaluation to determine the validity of the original findings of the external reviewer.

As examples, an evaluator would have a conflict of interest if the individual

- Is employed at a Texas higher education institution;
- has been a consultant at UT Tyler within the last ten years;
- has been an employee of UT Tyler or any UT System higher education institution;
- has been a candidate for employment at UT Tyler within the last ten years;
- is a graduate of UT Tyler;
- has a close personal or familial relationship with persons at UT Tyler;
- has a strong bias regarding UT Tyler;
- has any other relationship that could serve as an impediment to rendering an impartial, objective professional judgment regarding the program/unit evaluation.

Acknowledgements

I acknowledge that I have read the *UT Tyler Ethical Obligations of External Reviewers* policy and my signature below affirms that I am eligible to serve as an external reviewer for the [PROGRAM NAME]   , without conflict of interest as defined in the policy.

PROSPECTIVE EXTERNAL REVIEWER: _____ DATE: _____

I acknowledge that [External Reviewer Name] meets the required eligibility qualifications and no conflict of interest or appearance of conflict of interest exists.

DIRECTOR: _____ DATE: _____

ASSISTANT VICE PRESIDENT:_____DATE: _____

SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT: _____DATE: _____

Appendix B

Self-Study Guidelines

I. **Department Overview**

A. Purpose

Provide the UT Tyler University Description (Source – OCIA) and a brief description of the department's alignment with the UT Tyler vision, values, mission, and strategic plan. Summarize recent notable department recognitions and accomplishments.

- Resource: Department
- Request Time: N/A

B. Department Strategic Plan

Provide the 5-year goals and initiatives for the department and current progress status. Include progress notes as needed.

- Resource: Department
- Request Time: N/A

C. Summary of services and/or programs –

Table summary in comparison with peers (peers may be determined with vice president)

- Resource: Department
- Request Time: N/A

II. **Department Personnel**

A. Administrative structure for the department
- Resource: Department
- Request Time: N/A

B. Professional Staff

Provide current job descriptions and credentials for each of the professional staff and include graduate assistant job descriptions)

- Resource: Department/HR Office
- Request Time: N/A/2 weeks

C. Staff Professional Development

Table Summary of professional development (3 most recent years)

- Resource: Department/Program
- Request Time: N/A

III. **Department Resources**

A. Fiscal

Budget and expenditure totals for 3 years

- Resource: Program
- Request Time: N/A

B. Facilities

Describe physical space available and needed (include a detailed description of plans for renovations, expansions, etc.)

- Resource: Program
- Request Time: N/A

IV. **Student Information (Examples of relevant student information based on department function)**

A. Student Demographics

B. Student Achievement Tables

V. **Program or Department Quality and Student Academic Success**

A. Student Academic Success –

Describe department/unit initiatives and include data collected to track correlation or effect on effect student academic success.

- Resource: College/School Assessment Professional
- Request Time: 1-2 weeks

B. Professional Organization and/or Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) Standards – Self-Audit Report (as appropriate, confirm with OCIA)
- Resource: Department/Program
- Request Time: N/A

C. Student Outcomes and Student Learning Outcomes

Provide the department/unit assessment plans

- Resource: Department/Program/OCIA
- Request Time: 1 week

D. Self-Study Survey Report(s) (See Appendix C for Sample Survey Prompts)

- Resource: Department/Program
- Request Time: N/A

E. Other Measures of Quality

- Resource: Department/Program
- Request Time: N/A

VI. **Staff Proposed Action Plans for Improvement based upon Self-Study**

APPENDIX C

SAMPLE Academic and Student Support Services Campus Visit Schedule

Department Name
External Reviewer Name
Campus Visit Dates

Day of Arrival			
Time	**Attendees (Names)**	**Event**	**Location**
----		Airport Pick-up	Pounds Fields Airport
----		Drop off at Hotel	Hotel name
----	Department Director	Dinner	Restaurant name
Campus Visit Day One			
Time	**Attendees (Names)**	**Event**	**Location**
8:30 A.M.	Department Director or Staff	Pick up from Hotel	
9:00 A.M.	Department Director and Staff	Department Meeting	Room ----
10:15 A.M.	BREAK		
10:30 A.M.	Administrators	Meet with Student Success Administration	Room ----
11:30 A.M.	Students	Lunch with Students	The Met Dining Room
1:00 P.M.	Student Success Directors and Coordinators	Student Success Meeting	Room ---
2:00 P.M.	Department Director	Campus Tour	
2:45 P.M.	BREAK		
3:00 P.M.	AIE Office	Meet with Assessment Staff	STE 378
4:00 P.M.	Return to Hotel	Writing Time	
6:00 P.M.	Department Staff	Dinner with Department Staff	Restaurant name
Campus Visit Day Two			
Time	**Attendees (Names)**	**Event**	**Location**
8:30 A.M.	Department Director	Pick up from Hotel	
9:00 A.M.		Work on Preliminary Exit Report	Room ----
10:30 A.M.	Department Director and Staff, Dean of Students, VPSA	Exit Interview	Room ----
11:30 A.M.		Leave for airport	Pounds Fields Airport

APPENDIX D

Self-Study Survey - EXAMPLE

Staff and administrators are invited to complete this brief survey as part of the external review Self-Study. Please share your thoughts and recommendations in the short-answer items below. The survey results will be included in the Self-Study as aggregate data and all survey responses are anonymous.

Identify department or unit strengths:

_____

Describe how the current department or unit strengths could be enhanced in the next five years:

_____

Identify department or unit challenges:

_____

Describe recommendations to address the challenges:

_____

Recommend ONE short-term priority you would implement for student engagement/success and include resources necessary to accomplish this initiative.

_____

Other Comments:

_____