McCausland College of Arts and Sciences
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

POLICY: Academic Program Review Guidelines

DATE: February 6, 2026 (Revised)

I. POLICY

Academic program review provides units within the College an opportunity to reflect on and assess their program relative to their peer and peer aspirants. This process generally occurs in several stages over the year. The first stage is the departmental or program self-study; units will be provided with data from the Assessment and Analytics Manager for review as they prepare the self-study. The second stage involves an external review with a report; department/program faculty then prepare a response to the review team's report, and the process concludes with the discussion of the review with the Office of the Dean. The Dean's Office submits the external review team's report and the faculty's response to the report to the Provost's Office. The Dean may meet with the external review team 4-6 months later to communicate feedback and decisions.

All external reviews are governed by University Policy ACAF 2.20 Academic Program Review. The guidelines in this document provide additional information specific to the McCausland College of Arts and Sciences.

II. COLLEGE CONTEXT

The McCausland College of Arts and Sciences at the University of South Carolina encompasses a wide range of disciplines, with nationally recognized programs in the arts, humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and mathematics. It is known for its outstanding research productivity and commitment to graduate and undergraduate education. Within the broad mission of the University, the College has developed the following mission, vision, and values statements.

A. Mission

The McCausland College of Arts and Sciences is a community of students, faculty, and staff dedicated to the discovery, dissemination, and application of knowledge about the natural and human worlds and the places where they intersect. The college is committed to enriching the academic experiences of graduate and undergraduate students and to excelling in faculty research, scholarship, and creative activity. As the heart of a major research university, the college catalyzes positive change in the local community, the state, the nation, and the world.

B. **Vision**

The McCausland College of Arts and Sciences aspires to transform the lives of our students and improve the world they will inhabit by creating and sharing knowledge at the frontiers of inquiry.

C. **Values**

The McCausland College of Arts and Sciences stands for the values of a liberal arts education, including critical inquiry, disciplined thinking, scientific investigation, broadened horizons, collaborative effort, and refined judgment. A liberal arts education prepares individuals to face an increasingly complex, diverse, and changing world with open, nimble minds and expansive, humane sympathies.

D. **Strategic Goals**

The College defines its broad responsibilities through the following strategic goals:

1. Faculty Excellence

   Build and nurture a diverse faculty that will demonstrate excellence in teaching, research, scholarship, creative pursuits, and community engagement.

2. Student Academic Experience
   a) Provide innovative, inspiring, and effective instruction to undergraduate students to prepare them for citizenship, future success, and fulfillment in a competitive world.
   b) Maximize beyond the classroom learning opportunities to broaden and enhance post-graduation opportunities for undergraduates.
   c) Recruit high caliber graduate students of all backgrounds and provide high quality educational and state-of-the-art research experiences to prepare them for citizenship, future success, and fulfillment in a competitive world.

3. Community Engagement
   a) Engage prospective students, parents, alumni and the community at large to improve recognition of CAS impact at the university, local, national and international level.
   b) Communicate the value of a liberal arts education and promote numerous career options for liberal arts and sciences majors.

4. Instructional and Research Space

   Identify and seek opportunities to invest in facilities necessary to support the changing needs and demands of CAS faculty, staff and students.

Source: McCausland College of Arts and Sciences Mission and Strategic Goals

E. **Department Review**

Within this larger context, you are asked to undertake a review of your department/program (unit), including each degree program associated with it. Throughout your review, you will collectively examine the mission of your unit and how it links to that of the College and University using these guiding questions.

- Whom does the department or program serve?
- What should it be doing that it is not doing?
- What is it doing that it should not be doing?
- What does it do well?
- What can be improved?

III. SELF-STUDY PURPOSE AND GENERAL QUESTIONS

One of the most valuable parts of the program review process is the self-study. The self-study report reflects both where you have been and where you are headed. Working together, the members of your unit should address the following questions:

- What are the unit's mission, vision, and values statements?
- What are your unit's strategic goals?
- What are the strengths of your unit?
- What key challenges, issues, and opportunities does your unit currently face?
- What metrics will be used to know when the unit has achieved its goals?

Units may decide to ask and answer no more than five additional questions in their self-studies; please be sure that any additional question is not only asked but also answered in the self-study in order to facilitate substantive responses from both the external review team and the Dean's office. Units are encouraged to review the broad topics and focused questions in the table below and identify additional questions they believe are important considerations for the review of their department/program.

Topic	**Questions**
Research and Scholarship	• Please provide a frank assessment of the frequency, significance, and reputation of the faculty's scholarly work and other accomplishments. • How does the program's faculty compare in productivity and influence with the faculty of peer and peer-aspirant programs/departments? • Are the areas of research pursued by the faculty considered to

Topic	Questions
	be of great importance to the discipline at present and in the foreseeable future? • Are there new areas of research that should be pursued by the faculty because of special opportunities, including those of an interdisciplinary nature, at the University of South Carolina? • Do the research and teaching missions exist in an appropriate balance? • To what extent has the faculty seized and created opportunities for teaching and research, productive collaborations, and the acquisition of research support? • For a program of its size, does the faculty try to cover too many areas, spreading itself so thin that distinction is difficult to achieve, or too few areas, resulting in inadequate coverage of important fields?
Teaching and Learning	• Are the undergraduate programs coherent and congruent in breadth and depth with the national curriculum of the discipline? • Do the programs adequately prepare their graduates for the kinds of educational and career opportunities open to them? • Do graduate and undergraduate enrollments reflect national trends in the attractiveness of the discipline to students? • How can the program improve recruiting of graduate students?
Contingencies/ Future Planning	• Do new, promising disciplinary directions require additional staffing or other support? • Have any disciplinary lines of inquiry been exhausted or superseded? • Should retiring faculty be succeeded by persons in the same specialties? • Which activities are least essential for the maintenance of a respectable program? • Which would benefit most from new investments, and why? • Does the program's vision of its evolution represent the wisest use of available resources?

IV. REVIEW GUIDELINES

- Academic degree-granting units in the College should be reviewed at least once every seven (7) years.
- A unit review comprises the review of ALL degree programs offered by that unit. External program reviews are not required for degree programs reviewed by an external accreditation agency.
- Each review is a fresh evaluation of the unit, not simply an update from the previous comprehensive academic program review.

- Unit Self-Study and External Review Panel reports should follow the formats outlined in Appendices 1 and 2 of ACAF 2.20 Academic Program Review.

A. Review Process Steps

1. A notification letter is sent from the Dean to the unit regarding the upcoming program review and schedule.
2. The Assessment and Analytics Manager meets with the unit to discuss data needs for the Statistical Profile and Assessment of Academic Program sections of the self-study.
3. Unit initiates the process of completing the self-study.
4. Unit sends external reviewer suggestions to Associate Dean.
5. Review panel finalized; charge letter is sent to reviewers to confirm participation including general review information, schedule and honorarium.
6. Unit completes self-study; self-study submitted to Associate Dean for review and comment.
7. Academic program review occurs six weeks after self-study completed. Note that reviewer visits are scheduled by the unit.
8. Review report received by Dean's Office from reviewers (one month after visit).
9. Associate Dean forwards review report to unit with request for a written response in one month.
10. Unit response to external review report received by Dean's Office (one month after received by unit).
11. Meeting scheduled with the Dean, Associate Dean and Chair/Director to discuss the review report and departmental response.
12. Memo to the unit from the Dean summarizing the review outcomes and agreed upon action steps.
13. At the discretion of the Dean, a meeting may be scheduled with Dean, Associate Dean, Chair/Director and Review Panel to discuss the review outcomes.