



## Analysis of Academic Program Review from U.S. Higher Education Institutions: Implementation and Implications for Vietnamese HEIs

Nhung Tuyet Thi Pham<sup>1,+</sup>,  
Thuy Hoang Ho Nguyen<sup>2</sup>,  
Valerie Osland Paton<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>ESP Department, College of Foreign Languages and International Studies, Hue University, Vietnam;

<sup>2</sup>Department of English, College of Foreign Languages and International Studies, Hue University, Vietnam;

<sup>3</sup>Department of Educational Psychology, Leadership, and Counseling, College of Education, Texas Tech University, United States

<sup>+</sup>Corresponding author • Email: [pttnhung.hufl@hueuni.edu.vn](mailto:pttnhung.hufl@hueuni.edu.vn)

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### ABSTRACT

Assessing the effectiveness and quality of academic programs in higher education is a fundamental task to ensure the long-term viability of a university. This responsibility falls primarily on administrative bodies such as the Ministry of Education and Training and higher education accreditation agencies. This qualitative study examines the handbooks for academic program review from ten US universities, representing various institutional types. These include three research universities (two public and one private not-for-profit), three master's universities (two public and one private not-for-profit), and four bachelor's universities (two public and two private not-for-profit), as classified by the Carnegie Classification system. The thematic analysis of these handbooks reveals three key components: Comprehensive process and procedure, resources to support the implementation of academic program review, and peer evaluation. Recommendations are proposed for Vietnamese higher education institutions to adapt and integrate these practices effectively, thereby enhancing the internal quality assurance of academic programs.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Assessing the effectiveness of an academic program in the implementation process is a crucial task for higher education institutions. After proposing the eligible criteria that an academic program needs to operate (an input stage), the academic programs are expected to demonstrate that they achieved the expected objectives and outcomes through the academic program review (APR) process (Texas Higher Education Department (THED), 2018). The term APR is also known as internal quality assurance of academic programs. This process allows higher education institutions (HEIs) to provide accountable evidence of quality to internal and external stakeholders. At the state level, US administrators often issue policies to manage the quality of academic programs through two stages: opening a new program and assessing a current program. In addition, external stakeholders such as US regional accreditation agencies all have a specific requirement regarding the quality of academic programs. Based on such external requirements of educational leaders, HEIs set up an assessment system of academic program review to ensure they achieve the minimum objectives (MDHE, 2024).

Quality assurance (QA) in higher education is a critical aspect of ensuring the delivery of quality education and the development of a highly skilled workforce. In Vietnam, higher education is a key driver of economic and social

development, and ensuring the quality of higher education institutions is essential for the country's long-term growth and competitiveness. The Vietnamese government has implemented a range of initiatives aimed at improving the quality of higher education in the country, including the development of a national quality assurance policy, such as Circular 17/2021-TTBGDDT, concerning program standards, and the establishment of the National Council of Quality Management to examine the operations of accreditation agencies (MOET, 2021). In order to evaluate the effectiveness and quality of academic programs, HEIs need to provide annual reports to the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) complying with Article 19 of Circular 19-BGDĐT/2020, which concerns the results of continuous quality improvement of training programs and programmatic accreditation status (MOET, 2020). Building an internal quality assurance system for academic programs to assess the effectiveness and provide results for continuous quality improvement of training programs is critical in Vietnamese HEIs.

This paper explores the experiences of higher education institutions in the United States regarding the implementation of internal quality assurance systems aimed at ensuring the excellence of academic programs. It also offers recommendations for creating a toolkit to facilitate the implementation of academic program standards in the context of Vietnamese higher education.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***2.1. Academic Program Review (APR) in US Higher Education Policies***

Program review policies in higher education vary across the US states due to the differences in state legislation, accreditation standards, institutional missions, and budget constraints. However, program review policies in the US share some common elements. The first element is the regular review cycle. Many states require that academic programs undergo periodic review, typically every 5-7 years, to assess their relevance, effectiveness, and quality. Depending on the excellence demonstration of an academic program, some universities can make the decision to extend the review process to a maximum of 7 years. Specifically, to ensure the five-year cycle, HEIs are required to review 20% of an institution's academic programs (THED, 2018).

The second element is multiple stakeholders' involvement in the program review process. Input from various stakeholders, including faculty, staff, students, alumni, employers, and external experts provide a diverse and reliable dataset to facilitate decision making.

The third one is a data-driven approach. APR committees typically gather and analyze data on program enrollment, graduation rates, student satisfaction, faculty productivity, multiple-year results of program outcomes and resource support to inform their quality of the academic program. These data normally meet the national requirement such as IPEDs. In addition, each state might have additional state requirements. For example, the Missouri Department of Higher Education (MDHE) also accepts data from Missouri State Advanced Student Achievement. Because these data are updated annually for multiple years, it is convenient in the benchmarking process (MDHE, 2024).

Fourth, the APR report requires the academic program's alignment with institutional and college objectives and assesses the program's contribution to achieving those goals. The common evidence for this requirement is program outcomes assessment results - the evidence that students achieve the knowledge and skills upon their graduation, together with program outputs such as retention rate, graduation rate, or employment rate.

The fifth element is the evidence of continuous improvement from the assessment process. The review process should be used to identify areas for improvement and guide the development of a plan for program enhancement. For instance, Texas state has specific requirements in the review process. Doctoral programs shall be reviewed by at least two external consultants and master's programs by at least one. For the second review cycle, the next five-year cycle, the process must include a programmatic self-study and a review by external consultants with discipline expertise who are employed by institutions of higher education outside of Texas (THED, 2018). In Missouri higher education, the five-year review requests that an institution provide enrollment, graduation and staffing data of the program, as well as a brief summary of program performance in the self-study report. If the program is performing as well as or better than the projections in the original program proposal, the program will be approved without conditions. Some institutions use this criterion to be qualified for a seven-year review cycle.

Lastly, if any academic program fulfills the programmatic accreditation standards by an external body, they may use the accreditation to satisfy the review requirements. Since not all academic programs get programmatic accreditation, this APR is of great necessity to ensure the minimum quality (MDHE, 2024).

**2.2. Academic Program Review (APR) in US Regional Accreditation**

All US regional accreditation agencies require HEIs to demonstrate that they meet these standards through self-study and on-site evaluations (ACCJC, 2024; HLC, 2021; MSCHE, 2015); NECHE, 2021, NWCCU, 2023); SACSCOC, 2024). To ensure that HEIs are providing high-quality education to their students, the accreditation standards from these agencies often include standards about institutional effectiveness which require HEIs provide quality education and meet certain expectations related to governance, administration, and educational offerings.

*Table 1. US Regional Accreditation Standards About APR*

Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, Western Association of Schools and Colleges - (ACCJC)	Higher Learning Commission (HLC)	Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, Western Association of Schools and Colleges - (ACCJC)	Higher Learning Commission (HLC)	Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, Western Association of Schools and Colleges - (ACCJC)	Higher Learning Commission (HLC)
Standard 1B Assuring Academic Quality and Institutional Effectiveness: criteria 5	Criterion 4. Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement	Standard 1B Assuring Academic Quality and Institutional Effectiveness: criteria 5	Criterion 4. Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement	Standard 1B Assuring Academic Quality and Institutional Effectiveness: criteria 5	Criterion 4. Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement
...The institution engages in continuous, broad based, systematic evaluation and planning. The institution integrates program review, planning, and resource allocation into a comprehensive process that leads to accomplishment of its mission and improvement of institutional effectiveness and academic quality...(Standard 1B, criteria 5)...	The institution ensures the quality of its educational offerings. The institution maintains a practice of regular program reviews and acts upon the findings...	Institutions organized and systematic assessments, conducted by faculty and/or appropriate professionals, evaluating the extent of student achievement of institutional and degree/ program goals	...The institution develops, approves, administers, and on a regular cycle reviews its academic programs under institutional policies ... Review of academic programs includes evidence of student success and program effectiveness and incorporates an	...The institution demonstrates a continuous process to assess institutional effectiveness, ...The institution uses an ongoing and systematic evaluation and planning process to inform and refine its effectiveness, assign resources, and improve student learning and achievement...	...The institution conducts periodic reviews of its degree programs. The program review process includes analysis of student achievement of the program's learning outcomes...

			external perspective. Faculty have a substantive voice in these matters.		
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APR is a process used by universities and colleges to assess the quality and effectiveness of their academic programs since it is a requirement from the regional accreditation agencies. All six regional accreditation agencies include APR in the accreditation process and share three common similarities (ACCJC, 2024; HLC, 2021; MSCHE, 2015); NECHE, 2021, NWCCU, 2023); SACSCOC, 2024). The first similarity is the purpose of this requirement. The primary goal of academic program review in all six regional accreditation agencies is to ensure that institutions are providing high-quality academic programs that meet the needs of students and contribute to the overall mission of the institution. The second similarity is the self-study report. The academic program review process typically begins with a self-study by the institution, which includes a comprehensive evaluation of the program and its outcomes. The third similarity is the peer review. After the self-study, a team of peer reviewers will verify the information contained in the self-study to provide additional input and recommendations.

Despite the common similarities, each regional accreditation has specific requirements. The first difference is the standards. Some include the APR in the institutional effectiveness namely ACCJC, NWCCU, and SACSCOC. The other three regional accreditation agencies embed them into the teaching and learning or academic program standard. The second difference lies in the peer review process. Some regional accreditation specifies the use of external reviewers meanwhile others leave that decision to the institutions themselves. The third difference is APR frequency. The frequency of academic program review varies among the six regional accreditation agencies, with some requiring reviews every five to seven years and others more frequently. Fourth, the scope of academic program review also varies among the accreditation agencies, with some focusing more on the academic program itself, while others may also include a review of related administrative and support services. Fifth, the specific requirements for academic program review also vary between the accreditation agencies, with some requiring extensive documentation and others relying more on oral presentations and discussions with faculty and staff. Lastly, the emphasis placed on different aspects of academic program review also varies from one accreditation agency to another, with some placing a greater emphasis on student outcomes, while others may place more emphasis on faculty qualifications, resources, and facilities. Despite the three core same requirements, it is important to note that the specific requirements for academic program review may also vary for individual institutions, depending on their size, complexity, and mission.

### 2.3. Academic Program Standards in Vietnam Higher Education

In 2021, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) stipulated the standards for academic program in Circular 17, requiring universities' programs to provide information related to the program's objectives, output standards, input standards, workload, structure and content, teaching methods and assessment of learning outcomes, faculty and support staff, infrastructure, and educational technology (MOET, 2021). Based on these general requirements, the MOET established specialized councils to develop program standards for different disciplines. Depending on the specific characteristics of each discipline, the councils integrated additional specific requirements appropriate to the training needs and societal workforce demands.

Some updated information from the Circular 17 includes: 1. The circular uses Vietnam Qualification Framework (VQF) and program standards for specific disciplines as the framework to manage the quality of academic programs consistently (MOET, 2016). As a result, the same programs teaching at different institutions would not be claimed with the program learning outcomes (PLOs) too high or too low. VQF and program standards also serve as a guideline to benchmark in the accreditation process. The term “program standards” in this document indicates the core and minimum requirements that each academic program needs to meet. In addition, HEIs could have all their autonomy and flexibility to design the PLOs toward the regional and international standards. 2. The document mentions specific requirements about the stakeholder’s engagement in the program review, especially the program review committee. 3. The Circular emphasizes the program outcomes assessment. The frequency of “program outcomes assessment” in the circular is very high. This quality management approach aligns with international

requirements that institutions not only claim PLOs to internal and external stakeholders but also provide evidence of program outcomes assessment upon their graduation. 4. The circular addresses the good IQA practices for academic programs. One good practice of academic programs not only provides evidence of student learning but also indicates how the academic programs used the evidence of student learning in the continuous quality improvement. This is the IQA philosophy that most higher education is trying to achieve. This approach allows the academic programs to build up a sustainable “health protection system” to get ready for national and international accreditation (Pham, 2019).

To determine whether the programs meet the standards as required by the MOET and declared by the universities, specialized councils will additionally be responsible for conducting periodic evaluations every five years of implementation, in accordance with the requirements outlined in Circular 17. Currently, the appendix of the new circular supports the development process for universities and program standards, which facilitates designing programs according to regulations as well as general requirements for output standards of the national qualification framework. However, specific guidelines for implementation, especially the process of conducting periodic evaluations every five years, are still absent. Examining the United States' experience in the deployment process and evaluating the effectiveness of academic programs annually will support the thorough evaluation process of specialized councils in Vietnam Higher Education. This study tries to answer the question “How is the APR applied across three distinct types of American universities to uphold the quality of academic programs?”.

### 3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

#### 3.1. Research questions

In terms of policy, the majority of regional accrediting bodies in the United States have integrated the Academic Program Review (APR) into their accreditation standards. This research seeks to address the following question: “How is the APR applied across three distinct types of American universities to uphold the quality of academic programs?” To undertake this inquiry, three specific research questions are posed:

1. What is the comprehensive procedure for reviewing academic programs?
2. What resources are employed to facilitate the implementation of academic programs review?
3. How are academic programs assessed on an annual basis?

#### 3.2. Data Collection

For this research study, a sample of 10 American universities was purposefully selected to investigate both commonalities and distinctions in the implementation of academic program reviews. These 10 universities encompass a variety of institutional types, including 3 research universities (2 public and 1 private not-for-profit), 3 master's universities (2 public and 1 private not-for-profit), and 4 bachelor's universities (2 public and 2 private not-for-profit), as categorized by the Carnegie Classification system.

#### 3.3. Data Analysis

The primary method of data analysis employed in this study is thematic analysis. The researchers systematically grouped key terms and concepts found within the documents under investigation into major thematic categories. These themes were then further categorized into three overarching dimensions: the overall procedure/process, the tools/resources utilized for implementation, and the peer evaluation process.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1. Results

#### 4.1.1. Comprehensive Procedure for Reviewing Academic Programs

The analysis reveals common themes in this stage, highlighting that all institutions develop an academic review process. The institutions require that the degree programs scheduled for an Academic Program Review be informed approximately one year in advance to allow ample preparation time. To ensure consistent implementation, the process is initiated by participating in a mandatory APR Orientation session approximately 12 months prior to the review.



The process typically consists of three steps for four-year institutions, but five steps for research institutions. As for a research institution, the Academic Program Review process can be conceptualized into five stages: Nominating members for the external review team, Preparing the self-study, Establishing the itinerary for the on-site visit, Generating the response document within 30 days, and Attending the post-review meeting and reporting session.

To facilitate implementation, the institutions provided workshops for academic programs to comply with the institution's requirements. Most institutions had specific policies, such as review cycles, APR preparation timelines, committee charges, and budgets for reviewers. However, there were slight differences in policies among different types of institutions.

Regarding the cycle, most institutions followed a 10-year cycle, meaning all academic programs within an institution needed to undergo at least one review every ten years. Depending on the excellence of the programs, some had approval for the next cycle ranging from five to seven years. Therefore, for other institutions looking to develop their own cycle, it is necessary to balance the number of academic reviews each year, considering the number of excellent, good, and average programs to ensure a relatively equal number of reviews in the 10-year cycle.

*Table 2. 10-year cycle APR (University of Illinois, 2024)*

**Ten-Year cycle:**

**The entire academic program will be reviewed on a ten-year cycle. The following is the tentative schedule.**

<b>2020-2022</b>	Middle States Accreditation Self-Study
<b>2022-2023</b>	Biology, Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, Chemistry, Computer Science, Earth Sciences, Physics and Astronomy
<b>2023-2024</b>	Classics, Philosophy, Religion, French and Francophone Studies, German, Italian and Italian Studies, Russian, Spanish and Portuguese, Mathematics [ <i>Moved from 2022-23</i> ]
<b>2024-2025</b>	English, Creative Writing, Art & Art History, Theater and Dance, Center for Civic Learning & Action [ <i>1<sup>st</sup> review</i> ] { <i>Five year interim report from the Center for Global Study and Engagement</i> }, Environmental Studies/Science [ <i>Moved from 2022-23</i> ], Health Studies [ <i>Moved from 2022-23</i> ], Neuroscience [ <i>Moved from 2022-23</i> ]
<b>2025-2026</b>	Data Analytics, Film Studies, History, Economics and Quantitative Economics, Political Science, Psychology, Writing Program, Music [ <i>Moved from 2024-25</i> ]
<b>2026-2027</b>	American Studies, Latin American, Latinx & Caribbean Studies, Anthropology and Archaeology, International Studies, Security Studies, Medieval and Early Modern Studies
<b>2027-2028</b>	East Asian Studies (Chinese and Japanese), Middle East Studies, International Business and Management, Law & Policy, Sociology, Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies, Judaic Studies
<b>2028-2029</b>	Africana Studies, Clarke Forum, Center for Sustainability Education (CSE), ALLARM, College Farm, Center for Global Study and Engagement, Educational Studies
<b>2029-2030</b>	Advising, Internships, Career Center, ADS/SOARS, Library, Trout Gallery
<b>2030-2032</b>	Middle States Accreditation Self-Study
<b>2032-2033</b>	Begin the cycle again

Most institutions decided the review process at the college level, typically consisting of three phases: preparation, on-site visit, and follow-up.

To facilitate implementation, all institutions had specific timelines and submission requirements for reviewed programs to prepare documents, saving time for college and department-level review before submission at the institutional level.

Table 3. APR Preparation Timeline (Texas A&amp;M, 2024)

## II. APR Preparation Timeline

The schedule below is meant to facilitate planning by giving schools and units a general sense of the external review process as well as any hard deadlines that apply. Schools often need to designate earlier deadlines in order to review materials at the dean's level prior to submission. Units must work closely with school leadership on all planning and preparation activities.

<b>By October 1</b>	The VPAA or their designee notifies all units that are to be reviewed in the following academic year. The units' leadership (usually the dean's office) will also be notified.
<b>By October 31</b>	<p>The unit's designated academic contact completes and submits the on-line <a href="#">Program Review Planning form</a>. <b>Please review the sample form in Appendix A.</b></p> <p>The unit's designated academic contact submits a list of potential external reviewers that has been approved by the unit's dean or their designee.</p> <p><i>If not attached initially, the primary contact for the program review will be sent a request to update the form referenced above to add this attachment.</i></p>
<b>By December 10</b>	The VPAA notifies all designated contacts (i) whether to plan for a fall or spring term review, and (ii) who will be invited to serve on the Review Committee.
<b>At least two months before review</b>	Self-Study provided to the VPAA.
<b>At least one month before review</b>	Review Visit Schedule, approved by the unit's dean, is submitted to the VPAA.

Regarding the APR committee charges, all institutions included them in their institutional policy. The committee comprised representatives from all colleges, with each member having a 2-year commitment. Replacement of members was allowed only for half of the committee with new members. The Committee worked in cooperation with the Provost, under whose auspices Academic Program Reviews were conducted. The committee's participation began with reviewing the self-study and working with the provost to identify salient issues for the External Review Committee to consider.

In addition to internal self-study review, academic programs were also reviewed by external reviewers. The budget for reviewers ranged from 1000-2000, plus travel expenses, with at least two external reviewers selected based on criteria such as subject-matter expertise, affiliation with aspirant institutions, no record of affiliation with the program, absence of conflict of interest, and membership in programs nationally recognized for excellence in the discipline. A public announcement was made for the selection process. The on-site visit typically lasted one-and-a-half days, during which the External Review Committee examined the unit's self-study and responded to any specific issues identified by the provost and the Academic Strategy Committee.

### 4.1.2. Resources to facilitate the implementation of academic program review

To support academic programs in preparing for the APR, all institutions provide resources such as templates for writing the self-study report and peer evaluation.

The template for the self-study report enables multiple academic programs to provide consistent documents for the institutions. All institutions require an executive summary outlining:

1. Strategic priorities: Including the process used to arrive at those priorities, the rationale for those priorities (reinforcing a current strength, addressing a weakness, etc.), and where appropriate, a description of how those priorities align with the University's priorities.

2. Current situation of the unit: Including data about faculty, students, and programs.
3. Overview of how the unit currently assesses the performance and impact of its programs and activities.
4. The unit's vision for the next eight to ten years and a plan for achieving this vision.

For research institutions, the self-study report templates include resources for:

1. Data sets: Normally exported from the institutional research office, including data available to demonstrate high-quality education.

2. Financial resources overview: Providing data on the department's financial status.

3. Demographics: Including demographic information for faculty, staff, and students, broken down by percentages of women and underrepresented groups for faculty and staff, and for students, percentages of women, underrepresented, non-resident, and international.

4. Student quality & experience: Including students' American College test (ACT) and high school rank, as well as data on degrees granted and mean terms to degree.

5. Education & teaching: Covering faculty information, teaching evaluations, and instructional units.

6. Research: Including information about grants and faculty research grant amounts.

7. Programs: Providing enrollment and degree information by level and program.

8. Summary table: Offering an overview in a single spreadsheet that includes a college and the departments within it, showing the percent change over a 5-year period.

For four-year institutions, the self-study template includes four components:

1. Goal setting: Outlining the program's goals and its approach to teaching and learning, including where the department wants to be in five to ten years, and including the department's mission statement.

2. Implementation: Detailing how the program seeks to achieve its goals (curriculum, sequencing of courses, teaching practices), and how it evaluates whether it meets those goals.

3. Data collection: Assembling evidence and collecting data on goals and initiatives evaluation, curriculum evaluation, and student learning assessment. If sufficient data are not available, the department should note what data should be collected.

4. Self-study conclusions: Providing the department's own "pre-review" assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of its program(s), especially in regards to curriculum, sequencing of courses, teaching practices, and scholarship.

*Table 4. Sample self-study report (University of Madison, 2024)*

## Appendix C: Sample Self-Study Format

Self-studies are limited to 20 pages, excluding appendices. Some suggestions in this sample format may not be applicable to all units.

### 1. Executive Summary: Vision and Strategic Goals

- a. Vision statement (less than one page) and a brief description of how this vision was arrived at
- b. A list and description of the goals of the unit and strategies for achieving the goals
- c. Relationship to the University's strategic plan (<https://strategicplan.virginia.edu/>)

### 2. Current Status of the Unit<sup>3</sup>

- a. Current academic stature, including national rankings and metrics of excellence
- b. Distinguishing characteristics of the unit compared with others in the field
- c. Description of a unit's activities and programs, including those which are new or planned (e.g. new degrees, certificates, high-impact educational experiences, etc.)



- d. Enrollment (for schools and departments) and participant (for research center and other units) trends over time (last 3-5 years suggested)
- e. Performance and diversity of faculty/staff of the unit, including recent achievements, research strengths, sponsored research support, patents, artistic performances, and public service
- f. Performance and diversity of students in schools/departments (e.g., graduate student placements) or participants in activities of other units

**3. Unit's Current Assessment Activities**

- a. Description of how the unit currently assesses the quality and impact of its activities and how it is making progress towards its goals
- b. Description of how the unit has used its assessment activities to evaluate and/or modify the curriculum, enhance program management, and/or make other improvements within the unit
- c. For schools and departments, include the following in the appendix: a five-year schedule for the assessment of undergraduate and graduate student learning outcomes for the school/department

**4. Plan for the Future**


- a. Assessment of the direction of the field(s) in which the unit operates for the next eight to ten years. Indicate how the unit will position itself in the changing context of higher education

**5. Integrated plan for improvement over the upcoming eight- to ten-year period (Action Plan)**

- a. an overarching strategic vision and agenda for the unit
- b. short-term (2-3 years) and long-term (4-8 years) goals for the unit
- c. a timeline for meeting these short- and long-term goals;

Each component in the self-study report is supported by a separate template to facilitate writing. The most crucial information in the APR is the five-year data set. The quantitative data mostly pertain to program outputs, such as scores on licensure, GPA, employment rate, graduation rate, etc. It is important to document the percentage rate across the years to understand the pattern of increase or decrease and to identify evidence-based strengths and weaknesses to make recommendations and propose future strategic plans.

Table 5. Data Set in Comprehensive Academic Program Review (Dalton State College, 2024)

 <b>COMPREHENSIVE ACADEMIC PROGRAM REVIEW</b>						
<b>Indicators of Measures of Quality</b>						
<b>Student Output</b>	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	% Change
Exit scores on national/state licensure (if applicable)						
Graduating majors' mean GPA						
Employment rate of graduates (if available)						
Number of students entering graduate/professional programs						
Describe the extent to which students have achieved current program outcomes during this program review cycle (most recent year).						
Describe the extent to which students have achieved current student learning outcomes during this program review cycle (most recent year).						

For research institutions, the self-study report also includes benchmarking data with peer and potential institutions. The data are presented in percentages and analyzed at the college, department, and semester levels. The data set often includes student data, faculty data, and other data related to academic programs.

Student data includes:

- Student enrollment by degree program
- Student demographics (gender, ethnicity, domestic vs international) by level
- Average SAT/GRE scores and GPA for enrolled students by level; also compared to the average for the affiliated academic college (by semester and academic year)
- Degrees awarded by degree program
- Number of applied/admitted/enrolled students for degree program by degree program and by level (fall semesters only)
- Average time to degree by degree program (by academic year)
- Average retention rates by degree program (by academic year)
- First time in college

Faculty data includes:


- Average annual faculty salary by rank (by academic year converted to nine-month salaries); this includes full-time faculty only and is divided among tenured/tenure-track individuals and non-tenure-track individuals
- Average faculty salary by rank relative to institution and relative to peer institutions with comparable degree programs; this will include full-time faculty only
- Faculty demographics (gender, ethnicity, age) by rank (divided by full time and part-time)
- Teaching load per faculty rank by level (by academic year)
- Faculty to student ratio; also compared to other degree programs within the affiliated academic college

Other Data includes

- Semester credit hours taken by major (regardless of degree program), by level (by academic year)
- Semester credit hours taught in degree program courses (regardless of major of student taking the course) by level (by academic year)
- Courses taken by major
- History of courses taught
- Outside-degree program students by gender and level
- Outside-degree program students' summary by gender and level

The primary purpose of the APR is to provide recommendations for follow-up. The action plan developed after the review plays a significant role in facilitating continuous quality improvement. Key components of the follow-up include identifying issues/concerns, outlining specific actions, defining expected outcomes, setting a timeframe for achievement, assigning personal responsibility, and identifying the resources needed.

Table 6. Recommendations for follow-up in comprehensive program review (Dalton State College, 2024)

 <b>DALTON STATE</b>		<b>COMPREHENSIVE ACADEMIC PROGRAM REVIEW</b>
<b>Recommendations for Follow-Up and/or Action Plans (if needed)</b>		
<u>Issue/Concern:</u>		

<u>Specific action(s):</u>	
<u>Expected outcomes:</u>	
<u>Time frame for achievement:</u>	
<u>Person(s) responsible:</u>	
<u>Resources needed:</u>	

#### 4.1.3. Peer Evaluation

##### *Annual Assessment of APR*

The Program Review Committee oversees evaluations conducted by a Review Team appointed and charged by the Provost. The Provost consults with the degree program undergoing review and/or the Program Review Committee regarding the selection of Review Team members. The composition of the Review Team may vary but typically includes both internal and external members. Specifically, it will include at least two members from faculty and academic administration who are not affiliated with the program under review, appointed by the Provost after soliciting recommendations from the Program Review Committee. The Review Committee usually consists of three members.

Each unit collaborates with its dean to create a list of potential reviewers, which is then submitted to the Provost for selection and invitation. The unit is expected to nominate potential reviewers with expertise aligning with its activities and representing a diverse range of academic, professional, and pedagogical specialties and perspectives.

For some four-year institutions, academic programs must provide more specific information on reviewer selection. This includes:

- A plan to ensure that reviewers represent a range of expertise appropriate for the unit and discipline, typically accomplished by providing categories such as areas of specialty (e.g., Mathematics including the categories of analysis, algebra, and geometry/topology). The plan should explain the rationale for the categories, whether they represent the breadth of the discipline or reflect current or emerging strengths of the department.
- A list of at least ten potential reviewers, grouped by category and ranked by preference within each category. This provides guidance on whom to invite initially and, in the case of declined invitations, whom to invite next.
- For each potential reviewer, provide an email address, title, institution, and area(s) of expertise. If possible, include a link to the reviewer's departmental page or other professional site containing information about their expertise and accomplishments.

In some research institutions, additional information is required regarding the selection of reviewers for program reviews. This includes a brief description of the process used to select reviewers, an explanation of how the chosen reviewers represent a diverse range of academic, professional, and pedagogical specialties and perspectives, and a

statement detailing any prior interactions each potential reviewer has had with the unit or its members. These interactions could include collaborations on scholarly projects, academic degrees received, mentorship relationships, or past participation in program review committees. Any special considerations that the Provost should be aware of when determining the composition of the committee should also be listed. The Provost will ultimately select the members of the Review Committee and issue invitations.

During each program review, one member of the Program Review Committee or a faculty member chosen by the committee serves as the Program Review Committee Monitor. In addition to their regular responsibilities as a Review Team member, the Monitor is tasked with conferring with and reporting to the Program Review Committee. Based on their knowledge acquired as a member of the Program Review Committee, the Monitor helps ensure consistency in the individual reviews within the overall review process. Notably, this individual is not affiliated with the program under review.

Typically, a reviewer team consists of three members. However, research institutions offering master's and doctoral programs often have additional policies specific to these higher-level programs. For doctoral programs, the policy mandates the appointment of at least two external reviewers with subject-matter expertise, employed by institutions outside the state. The Provost appoints these reviewers after consulting with the unit under review, and they are brought to campus for an on-site review. These reviewers must confirm that they have no conflict of interest and must be affiliated with programs nationally recognized for excellence in the discipline. Similarly, for master's programs, at least one external reviewer with subject-matter expertise, employed by an institution outside of Texas, is appointed by the Provost after consultation with the unit under review. This reviewer is provided with the self-study materials and can be invited to campus or conduct a remote desk review. Like the doctoral program reviewers, this reviewer must affirm that they have no conflict of interest and must be part of a nationally recognized program in the discipline.

The Provost may add additional members to the Review Team as deemed appropriate. The Review Team's Chair is typically a member not affiliated with institutions, designated by the Provost when the Team is constituted. The Team evaluates the degree program based on a written charge prepared by the Provost after consultation with the Program Review Committee.

Institutions frequently use a structured rubric to assess the self-study report, aiding the peer review process. This rubric is an analytical instrument with predefined scores, aiding in scoring and analysis for enhancement. Both internal and external reviewers utilize the same rubric for feedback. Several regional accreditation bodies provide detailed guidelines on rubrics and indicators for evaluating academic programs, given the significance of Academic Program Review (APR) in their accreditation criteria. These guidelines promote uniform comprehension and execution of the review process.

#### *Post Evaluation Process*

Continuous quality improvement is integral to the review process, with institutions implementing post-evaluation procedures to ensure that feedback from peer reviews is effectively utilized. Most institutions conduct a mid-cycle review process after one year, followed by a five-year report, to monitor and enhance the quality of academic programs. The follow-up report, typically spanning 10 to 15 pages, highlights key achievements and addresses challenges faced by programs, detailing how institutional and departmental resources were leveraged to improve program quality. The one-year report focuses on short-term goals, while the five-year report addresses long-term goals. These reports should outline goals achievable with existing resources, as well as those requiring additional resources. They should include a list of expected tasks and actions, with completion dates and responsible personnel identified. Additionally, specific milestones and measurable outcomes should be defined to demonstrate satisfactory progress towards these goals.

#### **4.2. Discussion**

The primary objective of this document analysis is to identify the best practices for ensuring the quality of academic programs across higher education institutions (HEIs) in compliance with higher education policies (THED, 2018; MDHE, 2024). The insights gained will be used to develop a toolkit for IQA of academic programs in Vietnamese HEIs (MOET, 2021).

After analyzing APR documents from ten representative universities in the US (Colorado College, 2024; Dalton State College, 2024; University of Madison, 2024; Texas A&M, 2024; University of Illinois, 2024; University of

Dallas (2024) and identifying a lack of toolkit to streamline implementation and evaluation of program standards in Vietnam HE (MOET, 2021; MOET, 2020), the researchers have formulated recommendations regarding essential components for such toolkits. These components include a comprehensive procedure for reviewing academic programs, resources to facilitate program implementation, and mechanisms for peer evaluation.

To streamline workload and foster a culture of continuous quality improvement, the toolkit should incorporate an APR cycle, a practice observed in many US higher education institutions spanning ten years (University of Madison, 2024; University of Illinois, 2024; University of Dallas, 2024). To support this cycle, the toolkit should offer a sample APR preparation timeline, ensuring that committees and faculty across disciplines understand each step's requirements and corresponding actions. This timeline typically aligns with the academic year, with APR announcements disseminated to relevant academic programs at its commencement. Drawing from best practices in initiating APR policies, structuring APR committees, and fostering collaboration among committee members, Vietnamese higher education institutions (HEIs) can gain valuable insights. Notably, APR committees in the US are permanent, with members rotating every two years and representing various colleges and departments.

In terms of tools and resources for APR implementation, report templates, financial allocations, and human resources play pivotal roles. Vietnamese HEIs can emulate the concise 15-20-page report format, supplemented with quantitative data to demonstrate program effectiveness and expedite preparation (Colorado College, 2024; Dalton State College, 2024; Texas A&M, 2024). Additionally, the inclusion of long-term and short-term improvement plans in reports, along with associated timelines, enhances accountability. To ensure data accuracy, Vietnamese HEIs may consider establishing institutional research offices, crucial for compiling comprehensive data packs—a cornerstone of APR reports.

Efficient implementation of academic programs review hinges on adequate financial resources for peer reviewers and meticulous selection processes. Vietnamese HEIs can refer to peer review budgets, determine optimal onsite visit durations, and adhere to established guidelines for consistent and valuable program evaluations. Leveraging internal reviewers can further enrich feedback on program sustainability.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Many countries have focused on managing program quality to achieve desired outcomes and effectiveness. Policymakers have issued various requirements to ensure all academic programs undergo rigorous quality assurance. Analyzing experiences from different types of HEIs reveals key themes that Vietnam can adopt to implement the APR process. This approach is suitable for ensuring high-quality academic programs. Understanding the specific cycle, timeline, and resources needed for APR implementation will benefit emerging outcome quality management in Vietnam. The findings provide a framework for Vietnamese HEIs to develop detailed strategies that align with their context and culture.

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