



**Academic Program Review
Handbook for Reviewers**

January, 2024

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Program Review at WCU

WCU's program/unit review process involves a self-study document and virtual visit by a review team. All program reviews will be conducted online. In specific instances, the Office of Institutional Assessment can make exceptions to the online process if a department/office makes a compelling case that an in-person review would be more appropriate for their particular circumstances (having significant physical resources associated with the program, for instance).

Ideally, the review team consists of two disciplinary experts external to WCU who provide feedback and recommendations for quality enhancement and one reviewer internal to WCU who provides institutional context. Especially large offices/programs may have an additional internal reviewer assigned.

The review visit is designed to accommodate several key activities including interviews with faculty, administrators, program constituents and stakeholders. The final schedule for your virtual visit will be sent to you prior to the review dates.

Determination of the quality in any academic unit is a complex undertaking and must be considered not only in terms of national or professional standards, but also in light of the institutional context and unit-specific mission and goals. To assist you in your evaluation, we will provide you as much information as possible about WCU, the UNC System, and the program under review.

Roles and Responsibilities of the Program Reviewers

Your role as a part of the review team is critical to the ultimate success of our continuous improvement process. We thank you for your willingness to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of our academic program(s).

The duties and tasks expected of you are to:

- conduct an on-site or virtual visit where you will meet with key program constituents, including faculty, staff, administrators, students, and program participants,
- evaluate all program materials provided to you prior to and during the campus visit,
- produce a report summarizing the strengths and weaknesses of the program under review as well as making suggestions for improvement. Typically, the reviewers external to the university take the lead roles in composing the reviewer report. The components of the reviewers' report are in the following section, and the report is due 30 days following the campus visit.

Reviewers' Report and Recommendations: Suggested Format

- 1. Executive Summary** (bullet points or short paragraphs are appropriate for this section)
 - a. Brief outline of program's strengths
 - b. Brief outline of reviewer recommendations
- 2. Introduction**
 - a. Description of visit length and conditions (for example, was the visit virtual or in-person, etc.)
 - b. A brief summary and description of meetings conducted by the review team.
- 3. Standard 1: Analysis of Alignment**
 - a. The importance of the program within both the University and its respective College - In what ways does the program's curriculum and mission align with the University's [current strategic plan](#)?
 - b. Does the program's curriculum support any other programs on campus (for example, Liberal Studies)?
- 4. Standard 2: Analysis of Curriculum Quality**
 - a. Undergraduate curriculum (if applicable): Provide a brief description of each of the following:
 - i. The coherence of the program's curriculum, amount of time needed to complete the curriculum, the efficacy of its various course modalities (online, hybrid, and/or in-person), and its alignment with disciplinary standards
 - ii. The program's planning and assessment strategies (can the program document its effects on student learning? Is the program routinely evaluated and the results used to make improvements? Do all faculty have an opportunity to participate in planning and assessment activities?)
 - iii. Please identify strengths of the curriculum and potential areas of improvement.
 - b. Graduate curriculum (if applicable): Provide a brief description of each of the following:
 - i. The coherence of the program's curriculum, amount of time needed to complete the curriculum, the efficacy of its various course modalities (online, hybrid, and/or in-person), and its alignment with disciplinary standards
 - ii. The program's planning and assessment strategies (can the program document its effects on student learning? Is the program routinely evaluated and the results used to make improvements? Do all faculty have an opportunity to participate in planning and assessment activities?)
 - iii. Please identify strengths of the curriculum and potential areas of improvement.
- 5. Standard 3: Analysis of Student Data** – Please include your observations on the following topics (including information on both undergraduate and graduate student populations, if applicable):
 - a. Student enrollment patterns and recruitment/retention strategies
 - b. Efficacy of student advising efforts/structure
 - c. Student opportunities for relevant co and extra-curricular activities
- 6. Standard 4: Analysis of Faculty Resources (optional)**: Please include your observations on the following topics:
 - a. Adequacy of faculty numbers and expertise to cover all areas of the curriculum

- b. Evidence of a positive, productive work environment for all faculty in the program (adjuncts, instructors, tenure-track, and post-tenure).
 - c. Rational and coherent performance standards for faculty review, tenure, and promotion.
- 7. Standard 5: Administrative Structure and Financial Resources** - Please include your observations on the following topics:
- a. Processes in place to ensure efficient and effective decision-making, including evaluation of program administrators
 - b. Support and training opportunities provided for faculty serving in leadership roles
 - c. Adequacy of budget to support the mission and goals of the program.
 - d. Effective and appropriate use of program staff, as well as ability to meet staffing needs
 - e. Adequacy of facilities and laboratories, instructional technology, and any other resources to support the mission and goals of the program
- 8. Summary of Program's Strengths and Areas for Improvement**
- a. General impressions of the program
 - b. Overall, what are the programs areas of strength?
 - c. Overall, in what areas could the program make improvements?
- 9. List of Specific Recommendations** (Please provide numbered recommendations, along with a brief rationale for each).

Review teams are encouraged to address issues that arise during the review that fall outside of this suggested template.

Honoraria

Each external reviewer will receive a \$1200 stipend for their work. Each internal reviewer will receive a \$750 stipend. The stipend will be submitted for payment following receipt of the External Review Report, which is due no later than 30 days following the campus visit.

Self-Study Report

The self-study report is a document written by the program under review, in which the program provides a brief, yet comprehensive, response to each standard listed below.

Reviewers will be provided with a program's self-study document at least one month before the scheduled review.

Standard 1 – Program/Alignment

Standard 2 – Program/Curriculum Quality

Standard 3 – Program/Students

Standard 4 – Program/Faculty Resources

Standard 5 – Program/Administrative Structure and Financial Resources

Institutional Profile

Western Carolina University is a regional comprehensive university with nationally and internationally recognized teacher-scholars dedicated to student learning. WCU is classified as a Carnegie Master's (Larger Programs) institution with Community Engagement designation. WCU is a coeducational residential public university within the University of North Carolina system. The University offers courses in the arts, sciences, technologies, humanities, and professions through degree programs at the bachelor's, master's, and doctorate levels. Western offers the advantages of a large university while maintaining its small college atmosphere. WCU is one of three NC Promise institutions in the University of North Carolina system, offering \$500 per semester tuition to in-state students. The institution was founded in 1889.

The Regional University: As a regional university, WCU is committed to serving constituents within its geographic domain by offering services and appropriate educational programs. WCU strives to take advantage of its locational advantage by capitalizing on assets unique to the region. As a result, WCU's educational portfolio and services are influenced by its location and the opportunities within it. Although WCU has a defined region as specified below, it will utilize venues outside of the region including national and international sites for educational purposes and training.

WCU's Region: WCU's core geographical region is defined as the 17 western most counties of North Carolina. As such, it is obligated to work most closely with educational, governmental, and business entities in this area. Historically, WCU has provided educational programs and services to an extended region as far east as the I-77 corridor (extends from Charlotte through Statesville, NC). Further, WCU has multiple programs that will interact with its larger economic region extending from Atlanta in the west, Raleigh in the east, Knoxville in the north, and Greenville/Spartanburg in the south.

Mission: Western Carolina University creates learning opportunities that incorporate teaching, research, service, and engagement through on campus, off campus, on-line and international experiences. The university focuses its undergraduate, master's and three doctoral programs, educational outreach, research, creative, and cultural activities to sustain and improve individual lives and enhance economic and community development in Western Carolina and beyond.

Vision: To be a national model for student learning and engagement that embraces its responsibilities as a regionally engaged university.

Location: Cullowhee, North Carolina, near the Great Smoky and Blue Ridge mountains, fifty- two miles west of Asheville. Main campus covers approximately 600 acres. Instructional sites located in Asheville and Hickory, NC, Jamaica, and Colombia.

Academic programs: Approximately 110 degree programs, with more than 220 majors and concentrations for undergraduates in addition to over 42 graduate-level programs of study. Residential programs enroll approximately 80% of students, with the remainder enrolled in online programs.

Calendar: Two semesters (August to December and January to May) and multiple summer sessions.

Class size: More than 75% of classes have fewer than 30 students; the average freshman class size is 23; the student/faculty ratio is 17 to 1.

Accreditations: Western Carolina University is accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (1866 Southern Lane, Decatur, Georgia 30033-4097; telephone number 404-679-4501; www.sacscoc.org) to award bachelor's, master's, and doctor's degrees. Last SACSCOC reaffirmation: December 2017. The university holds 21 special program accreditations and is a member of more than 30 state and national associations and organizations to which its professional programs are related.

Enrollment: The most up-to-date enrollment data can be accessed by using the links below to view our publicly accessible Tableau dashboards:

[UNC System Fact Sheets](#)

Select any one of the University of North Carolina System institutions to view institutional and student characteristics, impact and operational data. There are 8 sections within the factsheets, providing summary data pertaining to: • Institutional Characteristics • Admissions • Enrollment • Student Success • Faculty and Staff • Revenues and Expenditures • Undergraduate Tuition and Financial Aid • Impact and Engagement Note: Fact sheets are updated twice annually, once in the fall after the fall census data has been finalized (typically in November) and once in the spring after the IPEDS finance data has been finalized (typically in April). The title of the factsheet is driven by the fall term (e.g., 2021 Fact Sheet is first published in November of 2021 with some remaining 2020 data and updated in April 2022. 2022 Fact Sheet is published in November of 2022).

[WCU Quick Facts](#)

Dashboard showing high level institutional descriptive enrollment statistics.

[University Organizational Chart-Public Dashboard](#)

[Student Enrollment Summary Dashboard](#)

Headcount enrollment by term shown across 7 years. Filtering is available to limit the selection of data being displayed. For example, choosing "female" from the Gender filter will then re-populate the bars/lines/data in the display to reflect the elected criteria. Filters are available for modality of attendance (student type), student level, enrollment status (new, first time, new transfer, continuing, old returning), degree seeking status/intent, FT/PT enrollment, Race/Ethnicity, Citizenship, Gender, Residency (in-state/out-of-state), and Age.

[North Carolina County Enrollment](#)

Dashboard showing enrollment of in-state students, by county of permanent residence.

[Credit Hours and Course Enrollments](#)

This dashboard shows Course Enrollments or Student Credit Hours for the applicable time period.

[Retention, Graduation and Persistence Trends by Cohort](#)

This dashboard shows the first-time, full-time freshmen cohorts 1-year retention and 4-year graduation rates by the year and term the student cohort matriculated at the institution. This dashboard reflects the official IPEDS reported methodology for tracking first-time students' persistence and success. Filtering is available for a number of student attributes as described above. 11

Points of Contact

Our office is here to assist you, as needed. Please feel free to contact us with questions about the assessment process, travel arrangements, scheduling, or any other topic.

Dr. Karen Price, Dir. of Assessment, kjprice@email.wcu.edu, (828) 227-2580

Ms. Tierney Cody, Assessment Coordinator, tcody@email.wcu.edu, (828) 227-2683

Mr. Logan King, Admin Support Specialist, kingr@email.wcu.edu (828) 227-2264