VCU ACADEMIC PROGRAM REVIEW

SELF-STUDY

**Cohort 3**

School/college:

Department/unit:

Degree program(s):

Self-study chair(s):

Department chair (or equivalent):

Dean:

Date submitted to Office of the Provost:

**OVERVIEW**

Per the [*VCU Academic Program Review Handbook*](https://uploads.provost.vcu.edu/provweb/programreview/handbook.pdf), these self-study guiding questions are designed to encourage conversations for reflection and planning in key areas:

* Teaching and learning with special emphasis on transformative educational innovation, fusion of intellectual disciplines and student success
* Revenue generation through creation of new educational initiatives and online programs
* Research, scholarship and/or creative expression (to focus on work that has been peer-reviewed, critically-reviewed or has received significant recognition due to impact at a local/national/international level)
* Discipline-appropriate opportunities for externally sponsored research growth
* Service (to include contributions to community engagement, inclusive excellence, service-learning, R.E.A.L., patient care, other vital college/school and university priorities and outside/non-VCU professional service)
* Other subjects as determined by faculty and administration in dialogue

Throughout the self-study, faculty should keep in mind three broader questions:

1. Where are we now?
2. Where do we want to go?
3. How will we get there?

Responses should reflect:

* A clear vision of “program excellence” in teaching, research and service
* Quantitative metrics of excellence and data-driven benchmarking against peer and aspirational programs
* Evidence of frank discussions and inclusivity of perspectives
* Analysis, evaluation and application of data, avoiding use of unexplained data
* Evidence of programmatic vision alignment with VCU strategic goals

**CHECKLIST**

Formatting checklist prior to submission:

* Times New Roman 12 pt. font
* One-inch margins
* Single-space between paragraphs
* No footnotes or endnotes
* Tables and figures embedded in the narrative when immediately relevant, and appended when providing additional support (grayscale as default; color only when necessary)

Other checklist items:

* Executive summary is included
* Complete set of program-level questions is answered for each degree program
* Each required question (noted with an asterisk) is addressed
* Narratives are comprehensive but brief and focused on the essentials
* Table of Contents is updated to reflect accurate pagination

Table of Contents

[EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 4](#_Toc84133315)

[BENCHMARKING 5](#_Toc84133316)

[UNIT-LEVEL QUESTIONS 6](#_Toc84133317)

[Mission 6](#_Toc84133318)

[Faculty 6](#_Toc84133319)

[Staff and other resources 8](#_Toc84133320)

[Other unit-level questions as suggested by faculty and/or administration 9](#_Toc84133321)

[PROGRAM-LEVEL QUESTIONS (Insert degree and major here) 10](#_Toc84133322)

[Background 10](#_Toc84133323)

[Curriculum 10](#_Toc84133324)

[Student success 11](#_Toc84133325)

[Faculty 12](#_Toc84133326)

[Other program-level questions as suggested by faculty and/or administration 13](#_Toc84133327)

[Student learning outcomes assessment quality review 13](#_Toc84133328)

[Value: Transparency 14](#_Toc84133329)

[Value: Integrity 15](#_Toc84133330)

[Value: Efficacy 17](#_Toc84133331)

[Self-Study Appendices 18](#_Toc84133332)

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Note to self-study chair: The executive summary should highlight the essential elements of the self-study to include strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Other suggested information includes the unit’s definition of degree program excellence and a few key focal areas for the peer review team to give extra attention.

The executive summary should be no longer than 1-1.5 single-spaced pages. Please delete this note prior to submission.

# BENCHMARKING

Prior to beginning the self-study, unit/program faculty should have established a set of benchmarks that measures the programmatic vision and aligns with VCU’s strategic goals. These benchmarks should be a guiding light for answering the question, “Where do we want to go?” Once the measures are known, the benchmarking process determines who we measure ourselves against. At least three to five peer and aspirational degree programs for the purpose of benchmarking.

The programs and rationale should be entered into the table below. Data gained from benchmarking may be referenced throughout the self-study at appropriate points, and especially to substantiate the faculty’s definition and vision of “program excellence.” Please see the VCU Academic Program Review Handbook for more information. (Add more rows, if necessary.)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| PROGRAM and INSTITUTION | PEER OR ASPIRATIONAL | REASON |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |

# UNIT-LEVEL QUESTIONS

A “unit” is a department, center or office that houses an academic degree program. Unless otherwise stated, responses should cover the period since the last program review. (\* = required question; *italicized* questions are to support rigorous discussion, not required)

## Mission

Effective academic units are mission-driven. A unit mission statement should be clearly defined and appropriate to the disciplinary field(s) in which it operates. Units should use this section of the self-study as an opportunity to evaluate and, if necessary, improve their mission statements.

1. What is our unit’s mission?\*

1. Is our unit’s mission relevant and aligned with VCU’s mission, or does it require updating? (Please explain answer and revise mission, if necessary.)\*

*For conversation (not required)*

* *How is our unit’s mission related to the university’s mission and current strategic plan?*
* *How does our mission challenge and/or advance the boundaries of our field?*
* *How does our mission communicate the distinctiveness of our unit?*
* *How does our mission address teaching and learning, research and/or public service?*

1. Where is our unit’s mission published (e.g., website, *Bulletin*), and is it consistent and current across publications? (If not, please address discrepancies.)\*

## Faculty

Faculty play a critical role in determining the quality, effectiveness and continuous improvement of VCU academic units and degree programs. This section allows units to reflect on key issues related to faculty. A complete picture will reflect all faculty perspectives.

1. Are all faculty academically qualified to teach in the discipline (i.e., possess a master’s or doctoral degree in the teaching discipline, or a master’s degree with 18 graduate hours in the teaching discipline)? If not, what is the justification?\*

Note: Please ensure all faculty credentials are current and loaded in the designated VCU system (Xitracs).

1. What are our faculty achievements of note in teaching and learning, research/scholarship/creative expression, sponsored research (if applicable) and patient care? A table is acceptable.\*

Note: Reports of research/scholarship/creative expression should focus on work that has been peer-reviewed, critically reviewed or has received significant recognition due to impact at a local/national/international level. Examples from non-traditional and emergent areas, such as digital humanities, may be reported here along with traditional examples.

1. How do we rate our faculty’s productivity in research, scholarship and/or creative expression compared to faculty in the field, and especially in our peer and aspirational programs? Please provide evidence to support response.\*

*For conversation (not required)*

* *How is faculty productivity, for tenured and tenure-line faculty, defined in our discipline?*
* *What are the baseline expectations in our unit?*
* *Do we adhere to and apply our baseline expectations evenly across the faculty?*

1. What is our mechanism for rating our faculty’s commitment to and delivery of excellent teaching and learning, and what is our critical assessment of the rating mechanism?\*

1. Given what we know about our faculty’s commitment to and delivery of excellent teaching and learning, where are our strengths and where can we improve? Please provide evidence.\*

1. What are our unit’s definitions of faculty diversity, inclusion and equity?\*

1. What are our goals for faculty diversity, inclusion and equity (i.e., inclusive excellence), and to what extent are we achieving our goals through faculty recruitment *and* retention? Please provide explanations and evidence.\*

*For conversation (not required)*

* *How do our faculty recruitment and retention goals and practices reflect a commitment to diversity, especially with respect to underrepresented faculty?*
* *If we have experienced high faculty turnover, to what types of institution are our faculty going?*
* *Do we conduct exit interviews? If so, what can we learn from the data?*

1. How are new hires selected, oriented, supported and integrated into our unit? How might we improve onboarding and mentoring?\*

* Full time faculty (with special attention to junior faculty)
* Term vs. tenured or tenure-track
* Adjunct faculty

*For conversation (not required)*

* *What faculty development opportunities do we provide?*
* *Could we provide additional faculty development opportunities? If so, what would that look like?*

1. How do we define and determine faculty workload? Do we implement faculty workload in a fair and consistent fashion? Please provide explanations and evidence.\*

*For conversation (not required)*

* *Do we see inequities in service distribution? If so, who is most negatively affected, and to what do we attribute those inequities?*

1. Overall, how will building on and/or addressing our faculty’s greatest strengths and/or opportunities for improvement contribute to the goal of excellence?\* (This question does not require duplication of prior responses. It is an opportunity to think strategically about program excellence.)

## Staff and other resources

Staff are vital university employees in academic units. This section provides the opportunity to reflect on key issues related to staff. Additionally, this section allows for reflection on non-personnel support resources.

* 1. How are we doing at recruiting and retaining highly qualified staff?\*

*For conversation (not required)*

* *Do we provide staff development? How can we improve staff development?*
* *How can we increase the efficiency of available staff?*
* *Do we conduct exit interviews of departing staff? If so, what do the results suggest?*
* *Are staff priorities aligned with unit mission?*
  1. How do we define staff diversity, inclusion and equity (inclusive excellence) for our unit? How are we doing in each area? Please provide evidence.\*

* 1. What is our assessment of resources needed for technology, lab space and other non-personnel operational requirements?\*

*For conversation (not required)*

* *Is there a particular resource that, if we had it, would make a major, measurable difference in our unit’s or program’s quality and/or effectiveness?* 
  1. What efficiencies can we create through a strategic re-thinking of existing resources?\*

## Other unit-level questions as suggested by faculty and/or administration

# PROGRAM-LEVEL QUESTIONS (Insert degree and major here)

The purpose of these questions is to facilitate reflection and planning for degree program excellence. Unless otherwise stated, responses should cover at least five years or the period since the last program review and be tied to the program’s most recent action plan. Benchmarking data should be referenced throughout.

(\* = required question; *italicized* questions are to support rigorous discussion, not required)

## Background

* 1. When was the original degree program approved, and when was the last time the unit undertook a comprehensive review of the program with the goal of making improvements? (An extensive history of the program is not required. Instead, provide a succinct response that is sufficient to give an uninformed reader context. A table format of highlights and milestones is acceptable.)\*

* 1. What is the degree program’s stated purpose? Is the degree program’s purpose relevant, or does it require updating? Please explain with evidence.\*

* 1. Where is the degree program’s purpose published (e.g., website; Taskstream; *Bulletin*)? Is it consistent and current across all publications? If not, please bring all publications current.\*

* 1. How do we define “program excellence” for this degree program? Where are we now relative to this definition? Be specific. Include a discussion of peer and aspirational degree programs at other institutions to contextualize responses and for benchmarking.\*

## Curriculum

The VCU faculty is responsible for the content, quality and effectiveness of the curriculum. The faculty develops educational programs that embody a coherent course of study, are compatible with the stated mission and goals of the institution, and are based upon fields of study appropriate to higher education. This section of the self-study gives units the opportunity to evaluate their curriculum.

1. What is our process for curriculum oversight and review? Do we see opportunities for improvement? If not, why? If so, how?\*

1. Where and how are our program requirements published? Are program requirements for each program clearly defined and identical across all publications (i.e., website, *Bulletin*)?\*

*For conversation (not required)*

* *Could a prospective student understand all of the requirements for successful program completion based on publicly available information? How do we know?*
* *Do we see opportunities for curricular “clean up?” For example, removing courses from the system that we no longer offer.*

1. Do we consider any aspects of our curriculum to be especially innovative as compared to the field? What are they and why (please provide evidence)?\*

*For conversation (not required)*

* *Do we see a need to create or revise courses to update our curriculum? If so, what are they?*
* *Are any of our existing on-campus degree programs potentially suitable for a hybrid or online modality? Do we see any opportunities for our unit to offer a new program(s) in a high-demand area(s)? If so, please list the program(s) and briefly describe the potential market demand.*
* *Is our unit incorporating any no-cost/OER (open educational resources) or low-cost course materials into courses in our programs? If so, how?*

1. How is our program structured to engage students in research, scholarship and/or creative expression? Students’ noteworthy achievements may be included as supplemental evidence.\*

1. What have we done to engage our students in other areas of REAL (relevant, experiential and applied learning) (e.g., internships; service-learning; civic engagement; other)? Students’ noteworthy achievements may be included as supplemental evidence.\*

1. Overall, what are the strengths and weaknesses of our curriculum?\*

*For conversation (not required)*

* *What do our students say?*
* *What do our graduates say?*
* *What do our industry partners/employers say?*

## Student success

Closely aligned with the curriculum and student learning outcomes assessment is student success. Students are the heart of VCU. Student success is a key indicator of a degree program’s quality and effectiveness. For this section, units should evaluate the success of their students with a view toward continuous programmatic improvement. The unit’s responses should be grounded in most recent student success data.

1. How do we define student success in our unit?\*

*For conversation (not required)*

* *What are the characteristics or behaviors of a successful student in our program? What does a successful student in our program look like?*

1. How do we rate our student success metrics for this degree program and what can we do to improve them? Please provide benchmarks from peer and aspirational programs to contextualize self-ratings. Ensure that the standard data provided by VCU IRDS are referenced with discrepancies and gaps noted in the responses.

* 1. Enrollment trends?\*
  2. Retention trends?\*
  3. Time-to-degree and graduation trends?\*
  4. Post-graduation student achievements?\*

*For conversation (not required)*

* + *Can we do anything different or creative to reduce our students’ debt load that might improve 1-4? If so, what?*
  + *Do we see new opportunities to incorporate no-cost/OER (open educational resources) or low-cost course materials into courses in our program that might improve 1-4? If so, how?*
  + *What skills and knowledge make graduates of our degree program distinctive compared to graduates of peer programs in the Commonwealth and/or US? Can we make any improvements that would enhance their distinctiveness?*

1. How might our course schedule assumptions and/or course schedules themselves be supporting or hindering the success of our students?\*

1. Overall, what are our greatest student success-related strengths and opportunities for improvement? Please provide evidence, including student input, if possible.\*

## Faculty

* 1. Does an academically qualified faculty member coordinate this program? Please explain if not.\*

(Note: The faculty member may be a program director, director of graduate studies or department chair. The designated faculty member must be an expert in the field that is represented by the academic program.)

* 1. What is the proportion of student credit hours in this program taught by full time and part time faculty in this program? What is our assessment of the adequacy or appropriateness of this figure?\*

## Other program-level questions as suggested by faculty and/or administration

## Student learning outcomes assessment quality review

**Overview**

Whereas the curriculum is designed for student learning, the process of student learning outcomes (SLO) assessment is designed for faculty learning. SLO assessment is how faculty learn if the curriculum is working as predicted. The curriculum is the hypothesis, and assessment is the test.

Note to self-study chairs: The assessment quality review is a specialized review within the larger program review. It is best led by the unit’s designated individual responsible for *annual* SLO assessment. Faculty are encouraged to place these findings in dialogue with the larger self-study for comprehensive reflection and planning.

Central support for this section is provided by the director of academic program integrity and assessment in the Office of the Provost, who also maintains an Assessment Quality Review Handbook. Please contact the director to obtain the handbook and for guidance.

**Assessment Quality Review Framework**

The framework for reviewing the quality of assessment practices comprises three values and four standards.

Value: Transparency

Standard 1: Goals and expectations for student learning

Value: Integrity

Standard 2: Curriculum alignment

Standard 3: Assessment methods

Value: Efficacy

Standard 4: Using assessment findings

Below, the values and standards are briefly explained. For each standard, suggestions for discussion lead to a prompt for writing. A written response is required for each of the four standards. Additional information and explanations of the values and standards are available in the Assessment Quality Review Handbook*.*

### Value: Transparency

Transparency means to make mission statements, goals and expected learning outcomes explicit and readily available for use by faculty and students and for examination by the public. Transparency invites us to better communicate about the designs of the curriculum, expectations for student learning and our students’ collective achievements.

**Standard one: Goals and expected outcomes for student learning**

Goals are general and outcomes are specific and concrete. Goals express the degree program’s aims for students (e.g., prepare students to become critical thinkers) while learning outcomes name the knowledges, skills and abilities a student can demonstrate at the conclusion of the program.

**A. Discovery and reflection for standard one**

Are goals and outcomes for student learning public and available to students, faculty and other stakeholders?

[Note: Evidence for meeting this standard can include the following: VCU Bulletin; department web page; sections of syllabi from key program classes; advising materials. For AQR purposes, while publishing learning outcomes in the bulletin is necessary, it is insufficient in terms of satisfying this standard: placing goals and outcomes in locations where they are readily available to students and other stakeholders.]

Are the learning outcomes relevant and measurable? Are the expectations for student learning stated in terms that are observable and therefore measurable? Are concrete, observable action verbs used when possible?

Effective learning outcomes:

* Use verbs of cognition, psychomotor skills, or affective learning (values and attitudes).
* Focus on what students should do not on what the instructor teaches.
* Identify what students should be able to demonstrate, represent, or produce over time.
* Serve as guidelines for content, instruction, grading, and assessment.
* Identify specifically what should be learned and demonstrated by the end of the program.
* Convey to learners exactly what is to be accomplished.

**B. Planning for standard one**

Based on the discovery and reflection above, summarize the status of the learning outcomes for the program. To what degree are they relevant and valid? And to what degree do the learning outcomes inform design and maintenance of the curriculum?

If the status of the learning outcomes is unsatisfactory, what is the plan to address the shortfall? What are the goals? What committee or persons will be tasked to develop and see the plan through? What timeline is reasonable for accomplishing this?

### Value: Integrity

*Integrity* comes from a Latin word meaning entire. Since coming into English in the 14th century, *integrity* has taken on senses of completeness and soundness. Consider words such as *integral*, *integrate*, and *integration*. When integrity is an operating value in assessment, the curriculum is explicitly aligned with the learning outcomes and assessment processes are integrated into the culture of the department.

For additional context on *Integrity* and its two related standards (Curriculum Alignment and Assessment Methods) in the Assessment Quality Review Handbook.

**Standard two: Curriculum alignment**

A reliable test of integrity is to ask: How intentional is the curriculum in terms of the stated learning outcomes? Where and when are students provided opportunities to learn and practice the outcomes? How public (transparent) is information about the design of the curriculum in terms of the expected learning outcomes?

**A. Discovery and reflection for standard two**

Is the curriculum mapped accurately to student learning outcomes? A curriculum map identifies where expected outcomes are explicitly supported in the curriculum, where outcomes are reinforced, and gaps in the curriculum where outcomes that have been overlooked.

Is the curriculum map public and available to students, faculty, and other stakeholders? If students and faculty have access to and use the map, then they can better understand the design and purpose of the curriculum. When students see connections between their learning experiences, their learning is deeper and more lasting.

Does the curriculum map indicate that students have multiple opportunities to learn and practice the expected outcomes? Students need multiple opportunities to develop and practice applying knowledge and skills. A curriculum should have a developmental arch for learning outcomes, from introductory level to appropriate levels of mastery upon graduation.

**B. Planning for standard two**

In the light of the discovery and reflection, provide an analytic summary of the degree to which a curriculum map (or similar tool) is integrated into curriculum planning, assessment and communication among faculty (including adjuncts) and students.

Looking forward, what actions, if any, are called for to improve and/ or maintain the validity and relevance of the curriculum map to reinforce and reflect on curricular alignment? How will this plan be developed and implemented?

**Standard three: Assessment measures and methods**

Validity is the key concept when considering this standard. Because the context of learning outcomes assessment typically does not have the controls of controlled experimentation, strict psychometric standards for validity are not applicable. Nevertheless, validity of an assessment measure can be approached as a matter of common sense: Does the assessment measure what students have been taught and what faculty expect students to learn? Is the measure appropriately challenging and rigorous?

See the Assessment Quality Review Handbook for additional information about assessment measures and methods.

**A. Discovery and reflection for standard three**

Are direct and indirect measures used to measure each learning outcome? Ideally, a combination of direct and indirect evidence should be collected to assess each outcome. This may not be appropriate or feasible for every outcome. In cases where administering a direct and indirect assessment is not feasible, direct assessment is preferred because it yields direct evidence of what students know and can do.

Are the assessment measures rigorous and valid? That is, do the measures yield data that can provide useful understanding of student learning in terms of the learning outcomes? Consider also the rigor and challenge of the measure. For example, if a majority of students are found to “exceed” expectations, does this suggest that the measure and performance targets need to be reviewed?

NOTE: Special attention is mandatory when one measure is used to assess multiple outcomes. The measure must yield evidence that is unique to each outcome. A holistic score or rating assigned to multiple outcomes is of little use in terms of understanding student learning.

**B. Planning for standard three**

In the light of the discovery and reflection, prepare a summary analysis of the degree to which assessment measures and methods are valid and rigorous, producing findings about student learning that are trustworthy and useful. It is not necessary to exhaustively discuss the validity of each measure; one or two illustrations of strong and weak assessment measures are adequate.   
  
Looking forward, what are the action items to be implemented to address shortcomings regarding the validity of the assessment measures? How will this action plan be carried out? Who or what committee is responsible and what is a reasonable timeline?

### Value: Efficacy

Assessing student learning is not an end in itself: assessing learning outcomes is a process of intentional inquiry into the efficacy of the curriculum followed by considering the findings to inform actions to sustain, update, or make improvements to benefit student learning. As assessment expert Barbara Walvoord says, “The purpose of assessment is action.”

**Standard four: Improving student success**

Regular, scheduled discussion among the faculty members about assessment findings, what they mean and what actions are warranted is necessary. [VCU’s assessment policy](https://policy.vcu.edu/universitywide-policies/policies/assessing-student-learning-outcomes-in-degree-and-certificate-programs.html) requires that programs (or their administering departments) establish a process for faculty to discuss student learning, plan for improvements and document assessment efforts.

**A. Discovery and reflection for standard four**

What process or procedures are in place for bringing faculty together to discuss student learning, the curriculum, and assessment findings?

What is the program’s history of documenting assessment efforts, reporting findings?

What is the program’s history of using assessment findings to inform plans for improving student success, including making changes to the curriculum? What is the program’s history of carrying through with these improvement plans?

**B. Planning for standard four**

In the light of Discovery and Reflection, summarize and analyze the culture and history of the program faculty using assessment findings to further understanding and improvement of student success and the efficacy of the curriculum.. How does the program get this work done, or, on the other hand, what are the impediments to this value and standard?

Looking forward, what can be done to sustain or make improvements to this standard?

# Self-Study Appendices

Note for self-study chairs: Please title each appendix separately (e.g., Appendix A, Appendix B). To ensure each appendix is displayed in the Table of Contents under the Appendices section, highlight each heading and designate it as a “Heading 2” using the headings in MS Word. Please delete this note prior to submission.