

# A Guide to Academic Unit Review

*Revised September 11, 2025*

## Table of Contents

*Preface* ..... 1

Overview .....2

    Purpose & Characteristics.....2

    Comprehensive Approach.....2

    Definitions .....3

    Compliance and Accreditation .....4

    Frequency of Reviews .....4

3-Phase Review Structure .....5

    Activities and Responsibilities .....5

    Phase I: Self-Study.....7

    Phase II: External Review..... 10

    Review ..... 10

    Phase III: Response and Action Planning ..... 15

AUR Toolbox ..... 17

## Preface

*Academic Unit Review is more than a routine evaluation. It is an opportunity to build on strengths, address challenges, and align with institutional priorities. Well-executed reviews help Texas Tech University shape a future that enhances student success, fosters faculty excellence, and strengthens the university’s impact while supporting its broader mission.*

*By approaching this process as a catalyst for meaningful change rather than a compliance exercise, units can drive forward-thinking improvements. This guidebook provides the tools and structure to support that journey.*

## Overview

### Purpose & Characteristics

The fundamental purpose of Academic Unit Reviews is to provide information, both qualitative and quantitative, and recommendations that can serve as a basis for innovation and improvement toward institutional goals.

Reviews should primarily provide perspectives useful to the academic units whose programs are under review and to their respective college deans. They should also give leaders outside the academic unit an informed overview of the strengths, challenges, and needs of academic units.

Academic Unit Reviews at Texas Tech have the following characteristics:

1. Reviews provide a concise, honest appraisal of an academic unit's strengths and challenges.
2. Reviews are forward looking. While assessment of a unit's current status is important, priorities for continued future improvement are of greatest concern.
3. Reviews are evaluative, not just descriptive. Plans for improvement require academic judgments about the quality of the academic program(s), faculty, students, curricula, resources, and future directions.
4. Reviews incorporate expert assessment provided by prominent faculty at other leading universities and by faculty from other units at Texas Tech.

### Comprehensive Approach

Effective academic year 2026–2027, academic reviews will be conducted at the unit level, with all academic programs within a unit undergoing review concurrently. While individual programs have unique characteristics, this unified approach supports a comprehensive evaluation that goes beyond curriculum and instruction.

By reviewing all programs together, faculty and leadership are better positioned to assess the overall effectiveness, alignment, and strategic direction of the academic unit, including the following broad areas:

- **Mission and Strategic Initiative Alignment**
- **Faculty and Instruction**
- **Research and Creative Activity**
- **Outreach and Engagement**

- **Facilities and Technology Resources**
- **Financial Stewardship and Resource Management**
- **Academic Program Curriculum**
- **Student Support and Outcomes**
- **Key Issues**

This review process applies only to units that house academic programs. Reviews of non-academic units or administrative services are not included in these procedures.

Because Academic Unit Review is a collaborative process, the development of its structure and approach has involved input from colleagues across the university, including representatives from all vice-presidential areas. This cross-campus engagement helps ensure the process is aligned with institutional priorities and supports meaningful, actionable outcomes.

## Definitions

For the purposes of Academic Unit Review, the following definitions apply. These definitions do not necessarily represent how the terms would be defined or used elsewhere.

**Academic Unit:** A department or similar administrative area that includes all academic programs contained within the administrative area. Academic Unit refers to the following:

- a department, area or school residing within a college
- a college or independent school with direct responsibility for a degree program(s)

**Academic Program:** A specific course of study within an academic unit that leads to a particular degree or certificate, with a defined set of required courses and learning outcomes. Academic program refers to:

- bachelor's, master's, doctoral, and professional programs in the official program inventory approved by THECB.
- stand-alone certificates approved by THECB.

The focus of the reviews described in this guide are programs that lead to a credential. However, during each unit review, relevant information may also be provided about any specializations or minors offered in the academic unit, and about any significant core or general education course offerings of the unit.

## Compliance and Accreditation

The Academic Unit Review has a direct relationship with other assessment processes, but serves a distinct purpose within the broader context of institutional effectiveness.

- When completed, graduate programs portions of the Academic Unit Reviews will fulfill the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's (THECB) requirements for Periodic Review of Graduate Programs ([Chapter 2, Subchapter I, Section 2.181](#))
- The Student Learning Outcomes (SLO) Annual Report process is a key component of Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACSCOC) reaffirmation ([Comprehensive Standard 8.1 and 8.2.a](#)). Academic Unit Reviews allow programs to reflect on how annual SLO assessment results have informed program improvements, resource decisions, or strategic priorities over the 10-year review cycle.
- While [programmatic or specialized accreditation reviews](#) ensure programs meet professional standards, they are not a substitute for Academic Unit Reviews, which evaluates programs within Texas Tech's institutional context. However, overlap between these processes should be leveraged to minimize administrative burden.

## Frequency of Reviews

Academic Units will be reviewed at least every ten years to remain in compliance with the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board review of graduate programs. The THECB must approve the 10-year review cycle in advance of its implementation.

THECB allows alterations to the schedule, but any changes require prior approval. Any unit or school not able to fulfill the requirements of the AUR process as scheduled will prepare a formal request with clear justification to the Office of the Provost.

The 10-year AUR cycle will be scheduled with program accreditation deadlines in mind. Units may choose to conduct AUR before, during, or after their program accreditation review.



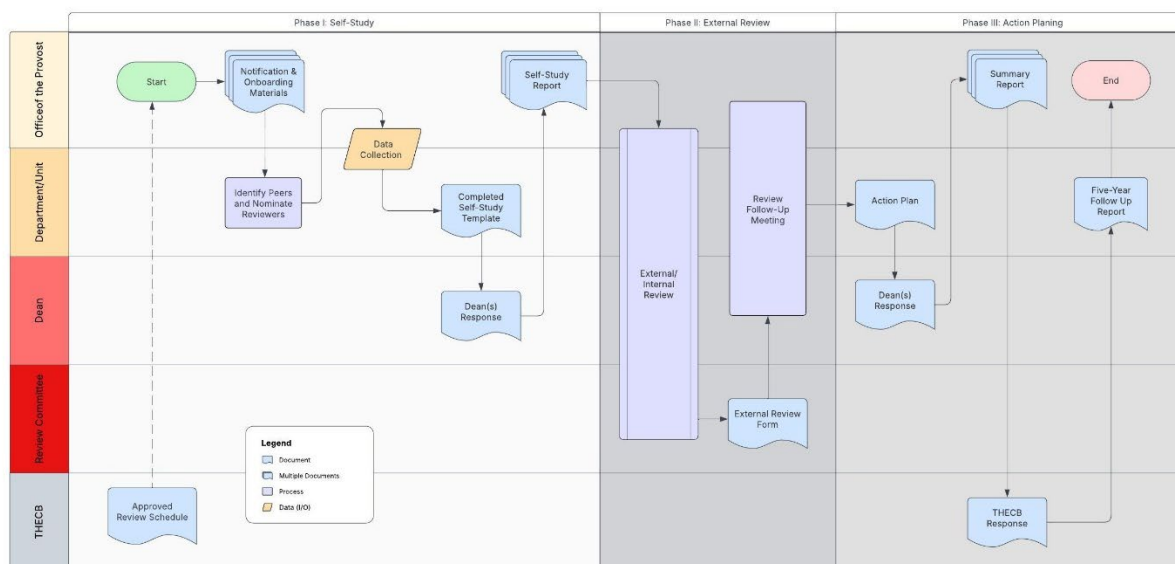
## 3-Phase Review Structure

The following activities, described in greater detail below, comprise an academic unit review:

- 1. The unit writes a Self-study.**
- 2. An external review team visits and provides a formal report.**
- 3. The unit writes a plan of action, confirmed by the college and Office of the Provost.**

## Activities and Responsibilities

The Academic Unit Review process involves collaboration across several roles to ensure a thorough and meaningful evaluation. While each unit leads the development of its Self-Study, other campus leaders and offices provide oversight, support, and guidance at key points. This process map outlines how core groups contribute throughout the review, helping ensure coordination, clarity, and alignment at every stage.



The responsibilities below outline the typical contributions of each individual or group involved in the review process.

### Unit Leader/Department Chair

- Leads Self-Study development
- Nominates External Reviewers



- Coordinates the External Review visit
- Participates in meetings and discussions
- Responds to External Review report
- Develops and implements action plan
- Tracks and reports progress

### **Academic College**

- Approves External Reviewer nominations
- Reviews and approves Self-Study
- Meets with External Review team
- Responds to External Review report
- Approves action plan with unit
- Monitors progress and follow-up
- Advocates for needed resources
- Aligns outcomes with College goals

### **Graduate School**

- Reviews graduate program content in Self-Study
- Participates in review meetings as needed
- Contributes to response and action plan for graduate issues
- Ensures alignment with Graduate School policies and priorities

### **Office of the Provost**

- Provides timeline, templates, and data
- Reviews Self-Study for completeness
- Approves External Reviewers
- Coordinates External Review logistics
- Facilitates leadership meetings
- Ensures alignment with institutional goals
- Maintains records and reports
- Tracks follow-up and compliance

The assistant vice provost for Academic Program Strategy & Innovation will oversee the AUR process, including guidance and training for academic units engaged in the review process. The dean of the Graduate School should also be consulted by the graduate programs undergoing review. Representatives from Vice Provost of Outreach &

Engagement, Vice Provost for Faculty Success, Vice Provost for Academic Innovation & Student Success, and others will be involved in those matters connected to their areas of responsibility.

## Phase I: Self-Study

### Notification & Onboarding

To initiate the self-study process, the administrative manager of the AUR meets with the unit leader/department chair individually to review the self-study format. After the Onboarding meeting the following will be identified as quickly as possible:

- Peer and Aspirant Institutions
- External Reviewer Nominations
- Self-Study Team
- Key Issues

### Self-Study Team

Since the Self-Study involves significant work and spans all aspects of a unit or program, the unit leader/department chair is urged to appoint a team to guide the effort.

At the Onboarding meeting, the unit leader will name an individual to head the self-study process for their unit. This may be the unit leader or another faculty member. This person will serve as the point of contact with the Office of the Provost, and all data requests will go through this person.

It is also beneficial to have other individuals offer their perspectives. Staff who are familiar with the OPA Annual Program Evaluation process and the resulting action plans and improvement efforts are also ideal members of the AUR Review Team.

A typical Self-Study team may include:

- Unit leader/Department chair
- Program directors/coordinators
- Program faculty
- Staff administrators

Note: The self-study should be shared with all members of the unit's faculty, whether they are part of the Self-Study Team or not. The Self-Study document should represent a

consensus, or it should state the nature of any differences if a consensus cannot be reached.

## Unit Review Portal (Watermark P&SS)

Once the Self-Study Team is identified, members will be granted access to the *Watermark Planning & Self-Study portal*.

All units will complete the Self-Study Template using Watermark Planning & Self-Study. This platform provides a centralized space for gathering data, documenting responses, uploading supporting materials, and submitting the final report. Access instructions and support resources are available at <https://www.depts.ttu.edu/provost/curriculum/unit-review/> For questions about using the system, please contact [rachel.frazier@ttu.edu](mailto:rachel.frazier@ttu.edu).

## Self-Study Template

The Self-Study is a critical component of Academic Unit Review, providing an opportunity for reflection, assessment, and strategic planning. The Self-Study is not a description of the unit. Rather, it is an evidence-based, reflective analysis that leads to the identification of core strengths, opportunities, and potential steps to address them.

The Self-Study must contain enough information for a preliminary evaluation and serves as a starting point for the external reviewers' in-depth review of the unit. The report will follow the outline below with variations as needed by discipline and degree level. Institutionally held data and documents will be provided to complete certain sections of the Self-Study. However, the unit is encouraged to include other relevant evidence as appropriate.

### Part I: Unit

- **UNIT OVERVIEW & MISSION** - Analyze the unit's structure, leadership practices, and alignment between the unit's mission and institutional goals.
- **FACULTY & INSTRUCTION** - Assess the composition, support, and effectiveness of faculty in teaching and contributing to a positive academic environment.
- **RESEARCH & CREATIVE ACTIVITY** - Examine the unit's contributions to scholarship, including productivity, funding, and alignment with institutional goals.
- **INTERNAL & EXTERNAL PARTNERSHIPS** - Explore the unit's collaborations across campus and with external stakeholders and the community to enhance teaching, research, and engagement.





- **FACILITIES, TECHNOLOGY, AND INFRASTRUCTURE** - Assess whether the unit's physical and digital resources support its academic and research missions effectively.
- **RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP** - Evaluate how the unit manages its budget, allocates resources, and supports staff in fulfilling its mission.

**Part II: Academic Programs** *(Complete this section for each program in the Unit)*

- **ACADEMIC PROGRAM & CURRICULUM** - Evaluate the quality, relevance, and impact of the unit's academic offerings in meeting student, workforce, and societal needs.
- **STUDENT OUTCOMES** - Reflect on student enrollment, retention, completion, course performance, and job or graduate school outcomes to evaluate how well students are progressing through the program.
- **STUDENT EXPERIENCES & SUPPORT** - Review how the unit supports students in achieving academic and career success through advising, mentoring, and co-curricular opportunities.

**Part III: Key Issues**

- **KEY ISSUES** - Examine known challenges that the unit currently faces or critical questions on which the unit would like feedback.

**Part IV: Executive Summary**

- **SUMMARY STATEMENT** - Reflect on key findings from Self-Study and identify priorities and opportunities to guide the unit's future direction.

## Key Issues

In addition to the core questions, the self-study addresses 2-3 specific issues raised by the unit under review, deans, and/or the university administration. The Key Issues are identified early in the process in order to guide the focus of the review.

Key Issues should focus on long-term, strategic issues that are of importance to the unit's academic strategy or standing in the field, and that would benefit from external reviewer feedback. They may relate to the unit's faculty operations, research focus and strategy, governance, and decision-making, undergraduate or graduate teaching and learning, collaborations with other units or areas of the University, or operations of the unit. Some of the Key Issues may be explored at a broader level in other sections of the Self-Study, however, this section allows for a more focused and in-depth analysis of those priority areas.

A list of guiding questions is provided to help identify Key Issues. Once the unit has agreed on their set of Key Issues, they are submitted to the Academic Program Review team, who will then share them with the Dean(s) and Office of the Provost for their feedback. Occasionally, the Provost and/or Dean may request additional topics be added to the unit's list.

## Data Provisioning

The Office of the Provost, in partnership with Institutional Research, Office of Research & Innovation, and others, will compile a robust data profile on each unit.

The goal is to alleviate the burden of gathering large amounts of complex institutional data so that the Self-Study Team can limit the time spent documenting what *has been* in favor of describing what *should be*.

It is important to note that **data by itself does not represent the quality of an academic unit**. Instead, data should be seen as a point from which to start a conversation: what does this data tell us? Are there trends that provide insight into areas of future exploration?

## Dean(s) Review

After a unit completes the Self-Study, it's submitted to the College Dean and Graduate School Dean, as needed, for review. The Dean(s) will carefully read the document to ensure it is accurate, complete, and aligned with college goals. This includes checking that the narrative reflects the unit's strengths and challenges, that data are interpreted appropriately, and that the content meets the expectations outlined in the review guidelines. Approval indicates that the Self-Study is ready to be shared with the External Review team.

In order to provide members of the External Review Team with ample time for its review, the self-study should be completed and approved at least four weeks in advance of the scheduled Site Visit.

## Phase II: External Review

### Review Team

The role of the external reviewers is important in the Academic Unit Review process. External reviewers, as recognized experts in the disciplinary/professional field of the unit undertaking program review, are used to provide critical judgment and to ensure the

objectivity of the program review process, and to determine how the program compares to other programs in the region and nation.

The External Review Team will consist of:

- At least two (2) specialists in the discipline from institutions outside of Texas and with no formal ties to Texas Tech University
- At least two (2) Texas Tech tenured faculty members from outside the unit's college

The External Review Team provides an objective, informed assessment of the academic unit's quality, effectiveness, and future potential. Team members review the unit's Self-Study and supporting materials, conduct interviews with stakeholders during a campus visit, and submit a written report summarizing their observations and recommendations. Their feedback is intended to help the unit reflect on its strengths and challenges and identify opportunities for improvement and growth.

The external reviewers promote comparisons with similar programs at other institutions, provide faculty and administrators a wider perspective, and ensure that the academic program being reviewed is current and not isolated from the larger academic community. The external reviewers prompt academic units and the university to address issues that may come to light during the program review process and facilitate an institutional and program response to the program review.

Reviewers should bring an informed and unbiased view to the assessment of the program. Reviewers should consider whether the plans of the unit are appropriate, considering such factors as the current condition of the program, trends in the discipline, the quality of the faculty, and the characteristics of the students and the community the program serves. Reviewers will be provided with a list of issues/questions to be addressed in their report, but they are free to address other issues that arise during the course of their review.

### Criteria and Process for Selection of External Reviewers

In consultation with the academic unit, College Dean and Graduate Dean, the Office of the Provost will form the External Review Team. Academic units may recommend the names of at least three, but no more than seven, external reviewers to the Office of the Provost, and provide links to website bios or CVs if available. The Office of the Provost has the discretion to enhance or modify the composition of the external committee based on information in the Self-Study, including Key Issues. In some cases, the Office of the Provost may select reviewers that have not been nominated by the academic unit.

Academic units are encouraged to nominate individuals from reputable institutions who are active, respected members of the discipline and profession, particularly in the academic programs and areas of interest of the unit undertaking program review.

Academic units should nominate reviewers who are likely to understand the issues and circumstances of the academic unit and Texas Tech University, particularly those who come from or have experience in programs similar to those of the academic unit. The academic unit may also indicate priorities and preferences regarding the strategic make-up of the review team, which the Provost's Office will take into consideration.

If the academic unit includes separate programs or areas, the unit should recommend external reviewers who are most appropriate for specified programs or areas. The academic unit should take care to recommend reviewers who will provide a balance in representing the programs and areas of the unit. While it's important for the team to bring a range of perspectives, they do not need to represent every program or discipline within the unit.

Academic units must disclose in writing to the Office of the Provost any potential conflicts of interest for an external reviewer in conducting the unit review, including:

- Former or current mentors of faculty members
- Faculty members or administrators who are currently employed or who have been employed at Texas Tech University
- Faculty members or administrators who have applied for positions or are likely to apply for positions at Texas Tech University

Academic units should NOT contact the individuals recommended or solicit vitae or biographical information from potential external reviewers, until the Office of the Provost has selected the external reviewers. Premature contact with potential external reviewers may create an awkward situation for the university and for those individuals not invited to serve as external reviewers.

The Office of the Provost, in selecting reviewers generally adhere to the following criteria, although in some circumstances may warrant exceptions (e.g., reviewers not from academia, but from professional or industry settings, and reviewers from out of state in case of niche programs, etc.):

1. The reviewer must have an outstanding record of current scholarship and experience in the discipline.

2. The reviewer must have strong peer or aspirational institutional affiliations (we demonstrate a commitment to excellence when we are willing to be critiqued by the best)
3. The reviewer should not have any conflicts of interest that might prevent a very candid and thorough evaluation.

## Internal Review Team Selection

In addition to the external reviewers, each Academic Unit Review will include two internal reviewers. These individuals provide a university-wide perspective and help ensure consistency across reviews.

Internal reviewers are selected from units that are scheduled for review in the following academic year. This rotation builds familiarity with the review process before their own unit undergoes review. Reviewers are chosen in consultation with the Office of the Provost to avoid conflicts of interest and to balance representation across colleges.

Internal reviewers are expected to read the self-study materials and related documentation in advance, actively participate in review team meetings, and site visit activities, and contribute to the team's discussions and final report. Their role is to provide thoughtful feedback on the unit's strengths, challenges, and opportunities, while also bringing a university-wide perspective that connects the review to broader institutional priorities and practices.

## Site Visit Schedule

The External Review Team will come together to spend two days on campus meeting with students, staff, faculty, and administrators, and then prepare a joint written report with comments and recommendations.

The site visit typically takes place over two days and includes a series of meetings and interviews designed to give the External Review Team a clear understanding of the unit's operations, strengths, and areas for improvement.

*Welcome Dinner* - The night before the first full day of the site visit the External Review Team dines with campus leadership. In addition to greeting the team, the dinner is intended to deepen the team's understanding of the charge and the institutional context of the review. The initial dinner should include all members of the External Review Team, including Texas Tech faculty representatives, and Office of the Provost staff; other individuals may be included as relevant to the unit's context and/or future direction.

*Overview and Tours* - The first morning of the visit begins with a meeting with the Self-Study Team to review procedures and note any special issues for the review. As appropriate, there may be a tour of the facilities.

*Meetings with Stakeholders* - During the two-day site visit, the External Review Team will engage in a series of structured meetings with individuals and groups who can speak about the academic unit's mission, activities, and outcomes. The team will meet with a range of stakeholders, which may include:

- The unit leader or department chair
- Faculty (tenure-track and non-tenure-track)
- Staff and academic advisors
- Undergraduate and graduate students, if applicable
- College leadership (dean, associate deans)
- Collaborating units or campus partners (such as student support services or research offices)

These conversations help the review team better understand the unit's academic programs, research or creative activity, student support, governance, and resource needs. The visit offers a more dynamic view of the unit's operations and culture, complementing the Self-Study written materials and enriching the Review Team's final recommendations.

*Review Team Time* - On the second day of the visit, and prior to the exit interview, the team is provided two to three hours to begin drafting the report and to prepare its comments for the exit interview, including initial commendations and recommendations.

*Exit Interview with Unit and Institutional Leadership* - The final activity of the site visit is an exit interview. The external review team meets with the unit leadership, Dean(s), and Provost to deliver an oral summary of its initial findings. The review team may also have confidential information to share during this interview, and, upon request, every effort should be made to provide an opportunity to speak privately with the Provost or other university leaders.

## Expenses

The costs associated with Academic Unit Reviews are shared between the Office of the Provost and the unit under review, except for the on-site meals, which are fully covered by the Office of the Provost.

## **Shared Expenses**

*Honorarium for External Reviewers* - A standard honorarium is provided to each external reviewer in recognition of their time and expertise.

*Travel for External Reviewers* - Includes transportation, lodging, and related expenses for external reviewers to attend the on-site portion of the review.

## **Covered by the Office of the Provost**

*Welcome Dinner* - A dinner for the review team and Office of the Provost is provided to welcome the external reviewers and initiate the review process.

*On-Site Lunches* - Lunches for the reviewers are paid for by the Office of the Provost. Attendees may include the Dean(s) and other individuals the team needs to speak with.

## **Not Covered**

The following expenses are not funded by the Office of the Provost and are the responsibility of the unit, if desired:

- Receptions or social events beyond the scheduled meals
- Faculty or staff dinners outside of the official review program
- Transportation for facility tours
- Gifts or tokens of appreciation for reviewers

Units should plan for these costs in advance and work with the Office of the Provost to ensure timely processing of reimbursements and payments.

## **External Review Report**

The External Review Team will submit a written report directly to Office of the Provost no later than two weeks after the Site Visit. The reviewers' report is part of the process intended to help guide future decisions about the unit under review, and concrete suggestions for improvement are expected. At a minimum, the reviewer's report should address each of the major areas of the Self-Study, focusing on the Key Issues.

## **Phase III: Response and Action Planning**

Phase III begins after the conclusion of the External Review site visit. This phase focuses on reflection, prioritization, and implementation. The goal is to ensure the review results in meaningful, measurable improvement that aligns with the unit's mission and the university's strategic priorities.

## Initial Response and Action Plan

After receiving the External Review Team's report, the unit has 30 days to draft a preliminary Response and Action Plan. This document summarizes how the unit interprets the key findings and identifies concrete actions it will take to address recommendations from the Self-Study, the External Review Report, and discussions during the site visit. The plan should identify which recommendations the unit intends to address, propose specific actions, and describe who will be responsible for leading them. It should also include an estimated timeline for each item and any anticipated resource needs. A template is provided to help guide the structure of the Response and Action Plan.

## Response Meeting

Once the draft plan is complete, the unit meets with representatives from the Office of the Provost, college leadership, and the Graduate School (as applicable). This meeting serves several purposes:

- Clarify any questions or themes from the External Review Report
- Confirm which areas are most urgent or aligned with institutional priorities.
- Discuss feasibility of proposed actions and potential university-level support
- Share any additional university feedback or expectations

The meeting is designed to be collaborative and solution-focused, helping units refine their thinking before finalizing the plan.

After the feedback meeting, the unit revises and finalizes the Response and Action Plan. The final version is submitted to the Office of the Provost within a specified timeline. Once accepted, the plan becomes a shared reference point for tracking progress and guiding future conversations.

## Compliance Reporting

After administrative review and approval of the University Response, Office of the Provost staff will compile a summary of the Self-Study for graduate programs, Reviewers' Report, and University Response to fulfill the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's (THECB) requirements for Periodic Review of Graduate Programs ([Chapter 2, Subchapter I, Section 2.181](#))





## Implementation and Follow-Up

Units are expected to carry out the actions identified in their plan over the next several years. Progress should be monitored internally as part of the unit's normal planning and assessment activities.

Five years after the completion of the review, the unit will submit a brief written update. This Five-Year Progress Update should summarize:

- Actions completed to date
- Remaining items and updated timelines
- Any changes to priorities or strategy
- Measurable outcomes and impact

This update will be reviewed by the Office of the Provost and may inform future planning, resource allocation, or subsequent reviews.

## AUR Toolbox

<https://www.depts.ttu.edu/provost/curriculum/unit-review/toolbox.php>