

**Graduate Academic Program Review**  
**Guidelines and Procedures**

2024-25

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## **Rationale**

Since 2010, graduate education at Grand Valley State University (GVSU) has realized a significant increase in the number of programs. This growth has been executed through the addition of facilities, faculty, and associated curricula. The addition of graduate programs has been in response to apparent and realized demands within specific fields and/or professions. Establishing a new degree program follows a prescribed process that outlines various program components including the curriculum, required university resources, and the need for additional faculty. An equally important aspect of graduate education is the regular assessment and review of programs after they have been established. A regular review process allows programs to highlight what they do well, and an opportunity to establish what modifications and resources are required to enhance the quality of the program.

Graduate Academic Program Review is conducted by the Graduate Council at GVSU. The findings and recommendations of the program review are forwarded to the Provost, the appropriate Academic Dean, and associate provost for the Graduate School for consideration and action. This document contains two sections: 1) Criteria and Standards of Graduate Academic Program Review and 2) Procedures for Academic Program Review.

## **Criteria and Standards of Graduate Academic Program Review**

The following guiding principles establish the nature and boundaries of graduate academic program review:

1. A graduate academic program is a course of concentrated study that leads to a masters, specialist, or doctoral degree.
2. The assurance report of a graduate academic program under review is to be incisive, not voluminous, supplemented with compact appendices that are used to present statistical analyses and other information. The assurance report should go beyond the audit dimensions of compiling and presenting statistical data and should emphasize explanation and evaluation.
3. The assurance report must be set in the context of the university mission. The assurance report should be viewed as an opportunity for program self-reflection and to ask why the graduate program follows current guidelines, curriculum, and procedures and how these efforts could be improved or changed and meet the mission of the university. A final component of the assurance report is the opportunity to envision where the program wants to be in the next six to ten years and how the program will contribute to the GVSU Strategic Plan.

Two main elements structure graduate academic program review; 1) program quality elements and other quality indicators and 2) program viability elements. Program quality and viability elements are specified below in standards couched in the form of statements and questions that

should be answered in the assurance report. Please note, **due to the wide diversity of graduate program offerings at GVSU every question may not apply to a specific program.**

The assurance report should be a narrative rather than a simple response to the specific questions. **Responses to questions should be based on information derived from the previous five (5) years.** In addition, the assurance report will be **no more than 20 pages**, not including appendices and data tables. The development of the assurance report should include participation from all faculty and staff involved in the delivery of the graduate program.

### **Procedures for Academic Program Review**

The procedures outlined below are guidelines for conducting program review, the assignment of program review tasks, the timetables for completing the tasks of program review, and the criteria and standards of program review. The following guidelines generally structure the academic program review process:

#### **I. Procedures for Academic Program Review:**

- A. The graduate academic program is the unit of review.
- B. Graduate academic program review will be conducted on or about a six-year cycle or matched with an external accreditation review.
- C. The academic program review process will commence in the Fall Semester of each academic year.
- D. Appropriate University offices will provide the basic information and data required for the graduate program assurance report. The information provided shall be current and reliable, and in a usable form. These data should be reported in such a way that specific comparisons can be made between the state of the graduate program at the time of the current review and the previous review (if applicable). For those graduate degree programs with external accreditation requirements, the assurance report or accreditation report for the site review team can be included with the additional data required for internal review.
- E. The basic elements of the review process include:
  1. Notice. The Provost in consultation with the Graduate Council Curriculum and Program Review Committee, and the associate provost for the Graduate School will establish the review cycle for each program. Programs to be reviewed in an upcoming academic year shall be notified in October of the prior academic year (e.g., October 2023 for program review September 2024) in which the review is to be conducted. Unit heads and graduate program directors shall be provided with the guidelines and procedures for program review.
  2. Organization of the Graduate Program Review Team. Each program selected for review will be assigned a Graduate Program Review Team established by The

Graduate Council. The Graduate Program Review Team shall be composed of at least two members of the Graduate Council.

3. Review Team Liaison. The Graduate Program Director of each program shall liaison to the Graduate Program Review Team and assist with coordinating efforts, providing information, and offering expert counsel as requested.
4. Assurance report. The core of graduate program review is the program's assurance report to be provided to the Graduate Program Review Team, the dean of the academic college, the associate provost for the Graduate School, and to the external reviewer(s).
  - i. The assurance report may be compiled by the graduate program as a whole or by a small committee who teach in the program. The assurance report shall reflect the views of the graduate faculty in the program under review.
  - ii. The assurance report shall be **no longer than twenty (20) pages**. An additional twenty pages can be used for extended data and information presentation as outlined above. The program should also provide under separate cover a two page biosketch of all faculty members teaching in the graduate program.
5. External Reviewers. One or two External Reviewers from outside the university with recognized expertise in the field shall be provided for each program being reviewed. With the approval of the Provost, the Graduate Council Curriculum and Program Review Committee may accept the recent report of a nationally recognized accrediting agency in lieu of external reviewers.
  - i. In March/April preceding the academic year in which the program review is to be conducted, the chair of Graduate Council Curriculum and Program Review Committee and the associate provost for the Graduate School requests from the graduate program director and unit head a list of 8 to 12 teacher-scholars qualified to serve as external reviewers. To the extent possible the list should include scholars from the peer and aspirational graduate programs. The chair of Graduate Council Curriculum and Program Review Committee and the associate provost for the Graduate School will consult with the unit head and the dean of the academic college to choose one to two External Reviewers.
  - ii. After the External Reviewers are confirmed, they shall be provided with a copy of the Guidelines and Procedures for Academic Program Review, the assurance report for the graduate program, and such other documents deemed useful in providing an understanding of the graduate program and the GVSU environment.
  - iii. The External Reviewer(s) shall conduct a site visit of one and one-half days and shall have the opportunity to meet with the appropriate academic dean, the unit head, the graduate program director, faculty and staff members, students, and relevant administrators (e.g., Vice-provost for Research Administration, Dean of Library, etc.). The External Reviewer(s) also shall inspect laboratory, library, and other facilities and resources of the graduate program. The External Reviewer(s) and the

Graduate Program Review Team shall have the opportunity to meet together with all of the groups or individuals, with the exception of the meeting with the Provost, which only the external reviewer(s) and the associate provost for the Graduate School will attend.

- iv. After the campus visit, the External Reviewer(s) shall provide a written report to the Graduate Program Review Team. The report shall focus on “Program Quality” as defined in the Guidelines and Procedures for Academic Program Review. This report shall be considered by the Graduate Program Review Team and shall be appended to the Graduate Program Review Team’s own report to the Graduate Council Curriculum and Program Review Committee. The report of the External Reviewer(s) (or the report of an accrediting agency if accepted in its place) shall also be appended to the report that the Graduate Council Curriculum and Program Review Committee addresses to the Graduate Council, Provost, the dean of the academic college, the associate provost for the Graduate School, the unit head, and the graduate program director.

6. Duties of the Graduate Program Review Team:

- i. The chairperson of the Graduate Council Curriculum and Program Review Team and the associate vice provost for the Graduate School shall consult with the academic dean of the graduate program under review to determine the key questions and concerns to be addressed in the review.
- ii. The Graduate Program Review Team shall review the assurance report and conduct, along with the External Reviewer(s), its own inquiry. It should hold meetings or interviews with the dean of the academic college, unit head, graduate program director, faculty and staff members, and students. It may conduct focus group sessions, tours of facilities, or interviews with alumni/ae or employers of program graduates.
- iii. The Graduate Program Review Team shall prepare a report that is shared with the entire Graduate Council Curriculum and Program Review Committee and then forwarded to the Graduate Council. This report shall include its evaluation of the assurance report and of the program, and it shall make recommendations about the program. This report shall be concise, limited to no more than eight pages. The Graduate Program Review Team report shall be accompanied by the assurance report. One week before submission to the Graduate Council, this report should be shared with the graduate program for correction of errors of fact.

7. Duties of the Graduate Council Curriculum and Program Review Committee:

- i. Review the report submitted by the Graduate Program Review Team.
- ii. Collate the final complete review package and distribute the materials to the program or unit and solicit comments and corrections.
- iii. Complete the final review package and forward to the Graduate Council.

8. Duties of the Graduate Council:

- i. The Graduate Council shall review the report of the Graduate Program Review Team and accompanying documents. The Graduate Council may seek such additional information as it deems necessary to make a systematic, fair, and useful evaluation. The Graduate Council shall prepare a draft report addressed to the Provost, with copies to the appropriate academic dean, associate provost for the Graduate School, unit head, and graduate program director of its evaluation and recommendations for the graduate program.
- ii. The Graduate Council shall provide the draft report of the Graduate Program Review Team to the graduate program director for correction of facts or comments. If the graduate program director chooses to respond, the Graduate Council will consider this response when revising its report or standing by its original report. In either case it will append the response of the program to its final report which it forwards to the Provost, with copies to the graduate program under review, and to the academic dean and the associate provost for the Graduate School. If desired, a further response by the graduate program may be made to the report of the Graduate Council. This response should be addressed to the Provost, with copies provided to the Graduate Council, the dean of the academic college, and the associate provost for the Graduate School.

**II. Availability of Graduate Program Review Reports.**

After the graduate program review is completed, the results (the various reports and responses) shall be available through the Office of the Provost, no later than June 30<sup>th</sup> of the current calendar year, for examination by members of the University community.

**III. Timeline for the Continuing Process of Graduate Program Review**

- A. Notice. Programs to be reviewed shall receive notice from the associate provost for the Graduate School **on or around March 31<sup>st</sup> of the academic year** in which the review is to be conducted.
- B. Identification of Potential External Reviewers. Programs to be reviewed shall provide a list of 8-12 potential reviewers to the associate provost for the Graduate School **on or around July 1<sup>st</sup>** of the year in which the review is to be conducted.
- C. Organization of the Graduate Program Review Team. The Graduate Program Review Team shall be organized by the Graduate Council by the **end of September** of the year in which the review is to be conducted.
- D. Provision of Required Information and Data. When possible, the data for the previous five year period for which data are to be provided shall be forwarded by the Office of the Provost and the Graduate School to the graduate programs to be reviewed on or about the date the Provost provides notice that they will be reviewed in the coming academic year. **On or around August 1** of the year in which the review is to be conducted, the

Office of the Provost shall provide the remaining data required to the departments and programs to be reviewed, and also shall provide the Graduate Program Review Team with the full set of departmental, program, divisional and University information and data it requires.

- E. Assurance report Development and Availability. The graduate program shall develop the assurance report so that the report is available to the External Reviewers and the Graduate Program Review Team **no later than the working day closest to October 10**.
- F. Site visit of the External Reviewers. The site visit of the External Reviewers shall generally be conducted between the receipt of the assurance report and **February 1**.
- G. Report of the External Reviewers. The External Reviewers shall provide the report of findings and recommendations **within 14 days of the completion of the site visit**.
- H. Graduate Program Review Team Activities and Report. The Graduate Program Review Team shall conduct its deliberations so that its report is available to the Graduate Council **no later than the working day closest to March 15**.
- I. Graduate Council Activities and Report. The Graduate Council shall conduct its deliberations so that its draft report is available to the graduate program under review no later than the working day closest to **March 31**. The graduate program shall have one week from receipt of the reports to provide to the Graduate Council corrections of fact or comments to the reports of the Graduate Council.
- J. Graduate Council Final Report. After receiving the response from the department or program, the Graduate Council will revise its draft to correct any errors of fact and to comment upon the graduate program response. **By April 30**, the Graduate Council will then forward its final report to the Provost, to the graduate program reviewed, to the academic dean, and to the associate provost for the Graduate School. The Graduate Council report will include the reports of the external reviewers and the Graduate Program Review Team, the program/departmental response, and the original draft of the Graduate Council report if there have been substantial changes in the final report caused by the graduate program's response.
- K. Response to the Final Graduate Council Report. Any response to the final report of the Graduate Council shall be made to the Provost within two weeks of the receipt of the final version of the Graduate Council report.

**IV. Addendum:**

Steps to be taken by the Provost following receipt of the Graduate Council Program Review report and the graduate program's response.

- A. Reports are discussed by the Provost with the academic dean, the associate provost for the Graduate School, the chair of the Graduate Council Curriculum and Program Review Committee, and other individuals identified by the Provost.
- B. The Provost sends to the graduate program a written commentary on the review process and recommendations.
- C. The Graduate Council and the Provost separately report to the Senate on the results of the program reviews for the academic year.