

# UW-Madison Academic Program Review Guidelines

<http://apir.wisc.edu/programreview.htm>

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## A. Purpose of Academic Program Review

UW-Madison has a long history of conducting regular reviews of academic programs. The purpose of program review is to examine strengths and challenges, to celebrate accomplishments, and to reflect on, and plan for, the future.

Program review is a platform for exploring ways to maintain and enhance the quality of academic programs. Program review provides the opportunity to set priorities, to articulate a strong case for those priorities, and to develop strategies for a program to be at the forefront of its field in any budgetary environment. Occasionally, program review may provide a venue in which to consider discontinuing or recombining academic programs as a way to strengthen priority areas. Program review requires significant investment of faculty and staff time.

See Appendix I for a flowchart that shows the steps of program review as outlined below.

In all contexts, the review should be student-focused and address issues related to student learning. Program review should include information on the learning goals that have been established for the program and how they relate to institutionally established learning goals for programs at the undergraduate, graduate, and professional level. (See <http://provost.wisc.edu/assessment/> for more information on assessment and learning goals.) Program review should also address how the academic program under review contributes to advancing the major strategic priorities of the school/college and university.

## **B. Using the Program Review Guidelines**

The overall structure for program review applies to all academic programs. However, each school/college dean's office may use their own self-study guidelines and instructions to review committees. See Appendix II and Appendix III for UW-Madison Guidelines for Structuring the Self-Study.

In some units, programs will be reviewed in the context of departmental review; this is acceptable as long as there is a student-learning focus on the academic programs in addition to what is usually a faculty-centered focus of departmental review.

The UW-Madison Academic Program Review Guidelines primarily serve the regular ten year review cycle for majors, named options, and certificates. Initial five year program reviews should follow the UW-Madison Guidelines for Conducting Five-Year Reviews of Academic Programs ([http://apir.wisc.edu/uapc/FiveYrReviews\\_April2013.pdf](http://apir.wisc.edu/uapc/FiveYrReviews_April2013.pdf))

Accreditation reviews meet the needs of program review in a regular ten year cycle for most programs and in a five year review for most new programs. Graduate programs require review supplemental to an accreditation review to meet the needs of the Graduate School. See <https://kb.wisc.edu/gsadminkb/page.php?id=31653> .

## **C. Governance**

The responsibility for program review rests primarily with the deans, as the school/college chief executive and chief academic officer (FPP Ch 3.01, 3.08). The Board of Regents requires that UW institutions conduct program review on a regular basis and provide annual reports to the UW System Administration. UW-Madison's accrediting body, the Higher Learning Commission, requires institutions to maintain a regular practice of program reviews (HLC Criterion 4.A.). Program review is coordinated by the office of Academic Planning and Institutional Research acting for the Office of the Provost. In partnership with the Office of the Provost, the Graduate School contributes to the coordination of graduate programs (degrees, named options, grad/professional certificates, doctoral minors and capstones), while the Graduate Faculty Executive Committee (GFEC) holds an oversight

governance role (FPP Ch 3.07.B). The University Academic Planning Council (UAPC) is the shared governance committee that is charged with setting policy related to program review (FPP Ch 6.52).

## **D. Review Cycle**

Continuing programs: UAPC policy at UW-Madison requires that **a program review for each academic program (degree/majors, named options, and certificates) must be completed at least once every ten years. Expectations are that program review will be initiated with charging of the self-study at the eight year mark to assure that reviews are completed within ten years.** Deans may convene additional reviews at any time within the ten year cycle.

New programs: All new academic programs must be reviewed five years after implementation ([http://apir.wisc.edu/uapc/FiveYrReviews\\_April2013.pdf](http://apir.wisc.edu/uapc/FiveYrReviews_April2013.pdf)). The Office of the Provost will conduct five year reviews of new degree/majors. The Office of the Provost will prompt the dean to conduct five year reviews of new named options and certificates. New programs will also be contacted by the Graduate School three years after program implementation and asked to complete a Three Year Check-In document to be reviewed by the Graduate Faculty Executive Committee at a regularly scheduled GFEC meeting (<https://kb.wisc.edu/gsadminkb/page.php?id=58939>). After the five-year review, new named options will be reviewed with the major on a ten year cycle.

## **E. Step 1: The Dean Initiates the Program Review**

The program review is usually initiated by a charge memo from the dean to the lead member of the program faculty, usually a department chair or the chair of a program's executive committee. Annually, the Provost's Office will notify the dean's offices about which programs are in the eighth year of the ten year cycle and due to be charged with program review.

The dean's charge memo typically includes the following elements: a request that a self-study be written; information about whether to use school/college guidelines or these institutional guidelines; a description of specific issues to be addressed; and a due date for completion and submission of the self-study. The memo may also provide directions for how to obtain assistance with data resources. Ideally, the dean's summary memo from the previous program review is attached as a reference for a starting point. A template for the self-study charge memo is available at <https://kb.wisc.edu/vesta/page.php?id=25130>

Note that the Provost's Office initiates five-year reviews for new degree/majors.

The dean, provost or dean of the Graduate School may initiate a review at any time if deemed necessary.

## **F. Step 2: The Program Faculty Prepare the Self-study**

The program faculty prepare a self-study according to the instructions in the charge memo. A template for the self-study is available at <https://kb.wisc.edu/vesta/page.php?id=63649> . The self-study need not review the previous decade in detail; it should reflect on the recent past and the present as a context for approaches to strengthening the program. The self-study is a reference against which progress can be measured at the next program review.

Program review is conducted using institutional data whenever available and follows curricula approved at the school/college level. Links to relevant data are provided at <https://kb.wisc.edu/vesta/page.php?id=56637> Programs with low levels of enrollment or degree/certificate award production must be specifically addressed in the review.

When complete, the program faculty submit the self-study to the dean or to the university official who requested that it be prepared.

### **G. Step 3: The Review Committee**

The review committee is appointed and convened by the dean or the university official who requested the review. The review committee is typically comprised of three or more faculty members or experts. Members are usually university faculty; external members or other experts may be included. A member of the program faculty may serve as a consultant. For graduate programs, a member of the Graduate Faculty Executive Committee (GFEC) must be requested from the Graduate School to serve as a member of the review committee. The GFEC member will not serve as chair.

The dean or the university official who requested the review will provide the review committee with a written charge that outlines the expectations of their work. This charge will specify a number of items, including naming the chair of the committee and will provide any guidelines for the work of the committee and a due date for the report (<https://kb.wisc.edu/vesta/page.php?id=24167>).

The chair of the committee is responsible for scheduling and convening the meetings, setting the meeting agendas, making any specific assignments to review committee members, overseeing the process, producing the report, getting feedback from the committee, and submitting the final report to the dean or the university official who requested the review. Detailed advice and instructions for the chair of the review committee is provided at <https://kb.wisc.edu/vesta/page.php?id=27625>.

### **H. Step 4: Completing the Program Review**

The review committee report is submitted to the dean or the university official who requested the review. The dean or university official sends the report to the program faculty to review for any errors of fact and may request a response to any major issues.

The dean or dean's designee leads a discussion at the academic planning council of the school/college about the program review documents - the self-study, the program review committee report, and any program response (FPP Ch 3.08).

The dean or dean's designee prepares a final summary of the review. This summary identifies program strengths and recommendations for improvement or any requirements for follow-up reports that the dean may choose to make to the program (<https://kb.wisc.edu/vesta/page.php?id=36061>).

**This document becomes a public summary of the review and is a very useful document for reference over the time period between reviews and at the point of initiating the next program review in the ten-year cycle.** The dean sends the final summary of the review, the review committee's report, and the program's response, if any, to the provost and, for graduate program reviews, the dean of the Graduate School. Self-studies for accreditation reviews must be also submitted to the provost. The dean will provide self-studies not related to accreditation reviews to the provost and dean of the Graduate School on request.

For graduate programs, the GFEC conducts a discussion of the program review and the dean of the Graduate School provides written comment back to the program faculty.

The director of APIR provides a response to the program director and faculty that the review has been completed.

## **I. Annual Reports on Program Review**

The office of Academic Planning and Institutional Research (APIR), a unit of the Office of the Provost, tracks the program review status of all academic programs (degree/majors and certificates). APIR also collects information on program review from dean's office, is the repository for all program review summary material, and provides deans with at least annual summaries of which program reviews are upcoming, due, and past due for review.

Summary information about program reviews is reported annually to the University Academic Planning Council for discussion and consideration of broad program review issues that may require action. APIR provides a summary report to UW System Administration as mandated by the Board of Regents.

APIR requests the following information at least annually from deans' offices:

- A list of program reviews that were completed in the prior year.
- The dean's final summary of each program review including the review committee's report and the program's response and the self-study, if requested (see section H).
- A status report on the review of any programs that were identified as low-award producing in the prior year (see section K).
- A status report on program reviews that are at the eight-year mark or later in the 10-year cycle, including confirmation that the review has been charged, a status update on the self-study, the review committee's progress, and the expected submission date for the review committee's report to the dean and the timeline for the dean's final summary.
- Any additional information that may be requested.

## **J. Role of Program Review in Considering Proposals for New Programs and Program Restructuring**

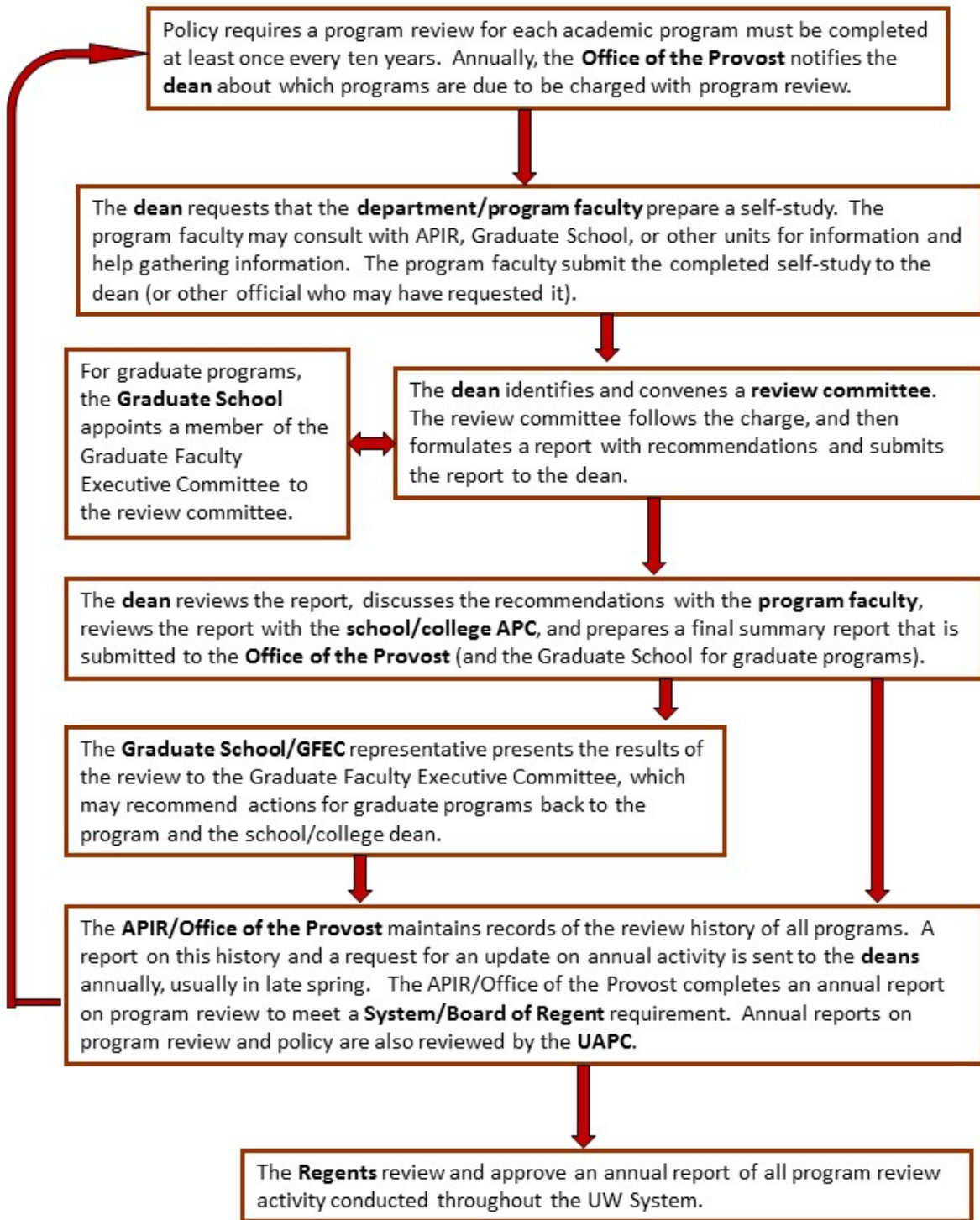
For academic units submitting proposals for new programs or for program changes and restructuring, program review must be up to date for all programs in the academic unit (at the department and the school/college) for such proposals to be considered by GFEC and UAPC. In addition, the proposing unit will be asked to provide a rationale for existing programs that are low-award producing as part of the request for adding academic programs. Being up to date on program review is one marker that the unit has the capacity to meet the various commitments associated with the delivery of academic programs. Generally, proposals will be put on hold until all past due program reviews are conducted so that the new program or program changes can be considered in the fuller context of the academic unit.

## **K. Low-Award Producing Programs**

Consult the low-award program policy in Appendix IV. Low-award producing programs require the same commitment to the curriculum and academic activities as more robust programs. Generally, degree/majors are considered low-award producing if fewer than five degrees in a five-year period are awarded in a program. Certificates are considered low-award producing if fewer than ten awards in a five-year period are awarded in a program. This will trigger a request from APIR to the dean to conduct a low-award review as described in the Low-Award Program Policy.

## Appendix I. Flowchart of the Annual Program Review Cycle

### Flow Chart – Annual Program Review Cycle at UW-Madison



JLM/SK, APIR, April 2016

## Appendix II. Guidelines for Structuring the Self-Study for a Degree, Major or Named Option

The self-study provides an opportunity for program faculty to think in a focused and strategic way about the value and quality of the programs that are delivered. A self-study should be in the range of 15-25 pages, not including appendices. Programs may include appendices, however, links are preferred, especially for syllabi or CVs. Guiding principles for the self-study include:

- Focusing on the recent past and key points over the past decade as context for present and future improvements
- Concentrating on the academic program and student experience
- Reviewing program learning goals and assessment of learning
- Understanding the current student experience with regard to academics, advising, climate, and career development
- Identifying program strengths and recommendations for improvements.

Program faculty should use standard data sources such as those provided at <https://kb.wisc.edu/vesta/page.php?id=56637> . A self-study template is available at <https://kb.wisc.edu/vesta/page.php?id=63649> . In some cases, a review will need to address specific program or department issues that are outside of these questions. In such cases, the initiating memo from the dean should specify these other program issues.

### Components of the Self-Study

#### A. Response to previous program review recommendations

*Summarize recommendations from the previous program review and how they were acted upon.*

#### B. Overview of the Program

*Describe the mission and goals of the program and how its structure (both of the program and of its governance) support them. Consider the following questions:*

- Provide current degree/major requirements as approved at the school/college level.
- How does the mission of the program fit with the home department/unit, the school/college, and the mission of the university?
- What are the approved learning goals for each of the programs being reviewed (i.e. bachelor's, master's or doctoral degrees)?
- What is the program's structure? For example, is it a single program or does it have informal tracks/concentrations, formal named options or certificates?
- Describe any substantial and structured collaborations with other programs, such as dual, double or joint degrees and benefits of these arrangements?
- If the program is not the only program within the home unit, what are the other programs? If there are several programs in the same academic home, how are they related to one another and what impacts do they have on student learning?
- How do the program's governance model, program committees, and membership criteria lead to active faculty engagement? How does succession planning work for leadership?



C. Program Assessment and Evaluation

*Summarize the assessment plan used to evaluate the extent to which students are meeting program learning goals and how the program is engaged in a coherent process of continuous curricular and program improvement.*

- What has the program learned through assessment of learning goals? Provide key evidence.
- What changes have been made as a result of assessment?
- What are the emerging changes in the discipline? What is being done and can be done to move forward and seize emerging/future opportunities?
- If relevant to the program, how do leaders within industry, business, government, or non-profit organizations become involved in offering advice and perspectives on the program and the curriculum?

D. Recruiting, Admissions, and Enrollment

*Analyze current practices and trends to determine if enrollment levels are consistent with plans and program resources. Discuss relevant program data in the context of the following:*

- Are admissions practices and enrollment levels consistent with plans, program resources, and career outcomes?
- What effort has the department/program made to enhance student diversity (traditionally underrepresented groups in field)? Have those diversity efforts been successful?
- If applicable, what do trends in application volume, admits, and enrolled students signal about program strength? For graduate programs, does the program directly admit students? If so, how does the program ensure student integration and success beyond the admitting advisor?

E. Advising and Student Support

*Discuss the process by which students get regular advising and accurate program information. Reflect upon the following:*

Undergraduate:

- Who does advising for the program? Describe how advisors are hired/selected. How are students transitioned between advisors when personnel changes?
- Describe how students are assigned to advisors. What is the ratio of advisors to students? How often do students to meet with an advisor?
- What other responsibilities do the advisors have in the unit?
- What material is available on the website or in print to support advising of undergraduates? How is that information kept up to date and accurate?
- What [training and professional development](#) is expected and/or supported for advisors? Do advisors make use of the [Advisor Gateway and the Advisor Notes System](#)? How are advisor [performance reviews](#) conducted?
- How is the impact of the advising assessed? Is advising in alignment with [the Guiding Principles](#) and [Core Competencies](#) for Academic Advising?

Post-Baccalaureate:

- How are advisors assigned and matched to students? How many advisees does each faculty member have?
- How often are program contacts and student handbooks updated and made available online? Is the handbook inclusive of program learning goals, program requirements as well as a program-level grievance procedure?
- How are students transitioned between advisors when personnel changes?
- How often and in what manner is satisfactory progress monitored? Do students receive written annual feedback on their academic progress?
- How is the impact of the advising assessed?

F. Program Community and Climate

*Where applicable, evaluate exit survey and climate survey data. Describe the efforts taken to foster overall program diversity, a climate of respect and inclusion, and a sense of community by considering the following:*

- Discuss efforts to welcome, orient, and retain new students. What is offered to connect students within the program, as well as with the greater campus community?
- What efforts are there to enhance faculty/staff representation of traditionally underrepresented groups in the field? How does the unit rate its ability to attract and retain a diverse faculty/staff?

G. Degree Completion and Time to Degree

*Referencing relevant institutional data and campus goals, describe efforts to help students make timely progress to degree. Include the following in your discussion:*

- Use institutional data sources to examine and evaluate progress to degree metrics and comparison to peers.
- What efforts have been made to improve progress to degree performance and completion rates?
- Do students from educationally underrepresented groups (racial/ethnic minority, low-income, first generation in college) succeed in the program at rates comparable to other students? How are equity gaps addressed?

H. Career Services and Post-Graduation Outcomes

*Evaluate student career outcomes, exit survey, and alumni survey data, and reflect upon how these outcomes are consistent with program goals.*

- What do students do after graduation? How does the program prepare them for careers or further academic training?
- What career resources are available to students?
- What is the range of student career outcomes, and are these outcomes consistent with program goals? Does the program track the career progression of its graduates?

- I. Overall Analysis of the Self-Study and the State of the Program: outline key findings from the self-study, including primary program strengths and challenges, and priorities the program has identified for improvement.

## **Additional Considerations for Graduate Students**

J. Funding

*Discuss the program's student funding data and mechanisms, along with any goals for providing funding guarantees. Include a discussion of funding issues, such as:*

- How is the program ensuring PhD students have adequate funding and taking steps to provide a multi-year funding guarantee upon admission? Are there opportunities for graduate students to secure individual extramural support? What efforts are made to ensure PhD students have funding?
- To what extent is the program making use of funding for diversity efforts?

K. Professional Development and Breadth

*Discuss the professional development opportunities of graduates and consider the following:*

- How does the program encourage students to participate in professional development opportunities that will enhance their skills and support their career goals?
- What resources and guidance are available for exploring academic and/or non-academic careers?
- How is the program using Individual Development Plans, which are recommended for all graduate students and required for those with NIH funding?
- What opportunities and funding are available to attend and present at professional meetings?
- To what degree does the program offer teaching experience and teaching-related professional development to graduate students?
- How does the typical graduate's program ensure exposure to breadth training? Does the program require a doctoral minor for doctoral students or evaluate other breadth requirements?

### **Appendix III. Guidelines for Structuring the Self-Study for a Certificate Program**

The self-study provides an opportunity for program faculty to think in a focused and strategic way about the value and quality of the certificates that are delivered. A certificate self-study should be in the range of 10-15 pages, not including appendices. Programs may include appendices, however, links are preferred, especially for syllabi or CVs. Guiding principles for the self-study include:

- Focusing on the recent past and key points over the past decade as context for present and future improvements
- Concentrating on the academic program and student experience
- Reviewing program learning goals and assessment of learning
- Understanding the current student experience with regard to academics, advising, climate, and career development
- Identifying program strengths and recommendations for improvements.

A Certificate Self Study Template is available at <https://kb.wisc.edu/vesta/page.php?id=30664> .

Program faculty should use standard data sources such as those provided at

<https://kb.wisc.edu/vesta/page.php?id=56637> . Each certificate must be reviewed separately

because each as different target populations, administrative and admissions structures. All program reviews begin with a self-study (completed by program faculty); the focus of a certificate self-study will typically include the following elements:

1. Program Description and Context – include program requirements, mission, learning goals, relationship with other units, and for capstone certificates, links to a graduate program
2. Demonstration of Need and Recruitment/Outreach – include populations targeted, data to demonstrate need, and efforts to recruit/inform students
3. Program Administration and Resources – include a description of academic administration and a description and evaluation of the fiscal model (if appropriate)
4. Advising and Student Services – include processes for monitoring student progress to completion
5. Faculty/Staff Participants – include a list of participating faculty, instructional staff, administrative staff with their role and department affiliation noted
6. Student Enrollment – include total number of students enrolled/declared in the program compared to program enrollment goals; address low enrollment policy (if applicable)
7. Curriculum – include evidence that required courses have enrollment capacity to certificate progress and completion
8. Assessment – includes the assessment plan and a summary of annually conducted assessment activities, including an analysis of the extent to which the program is meeting the learning goals. This assessment evidence should form the basis for any proposals for curricular changes.
9. Program Completion – include comments on number of certificates awarded annually (as recorded by the Office of the Registrar) relative to program goals; for capstone certificates include placement of “graduates.”
10. Overall Analysis of Self-Study and State of the Program – include recommendation and proposals for academic or administrative improvements

## Appendix IV. Policy on Low Award Producing Academic Programs (Degree/Majors and Certificates)

<http://apir.wisc.edu/programreview.htm>

*Revisions adopted by the University Academic Planning Council, June 16, 2016*

*Adopted by the University Academic Planning Council, June 21, 2010*

*Revised from May 1995 Program Review Guidelines*

Definition of low award producing:

- The standard for triggering low award producing status in a degree/major is fewer than five (5) degrees have been awarded in five (5) years. This standard applies to UW-Madison's graduate and professional degree/majors (master's degrees that are associated with a PhD may not be identified as low award producing). It also applies to all UW-Madison undergraduate degree/majors that have counterparts at fewer than half of other UW institutions.
- For undergraduate degree/majors that have counterpart offerings at more than half of all UW institutions, the degree productivity standard is no less than 25 degrees are awarded in a five (5) year period, excluding all world language programs and individually designed programs<sup>1</sup>. UW-Madison degree/majors that have counterparts at more than half of other UWs typically have strong enrollments and would rarely drop below this higher threshold.
- The standard for triggering low award producing status in a certificate is fewer than ten (10) certificates have been awarded in five (5) years. Certificates that have zero (0) awards over a five (5) year period will be automatically discontinued without review. This applies to all UW-Madison undergraduate, graduate/professional, and capstone certificates.

A low award producing program will be scheduled for review in the academic year following the program's identification as low award producing. The provost will request a focused review from the dean, and specify a schedule for a status report. The schedule may be adjusted by mutual agreement.

In general, the expectation is that either a compelling case will be made for continuation, or the low award producing programs will be discontinued or reorganized. For some programs, they may award few degrees because they serve a specialized audience. For other programs, when few degrees are awarded it may be a signal that the commitment of program faculty has waned or that the program does not serve student or societal needs.

The following possibilities for handling low award producing programs should be considered:

- Discontinue the program.
- Merge smaller programs into an appropriate larger program with a more inclusive scope.
- Merge several low-enrollment programs into one more inclusive title.

If a low award producing program is important to the program faculty, they should develop a written rationale based on the following criteria and other criteria that may emerge:

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<sup>1</sup> Definition aligns with UW System Policy ACIS 1, "Monitoring Low-Degree-Producing Academic Degree Programs", July 1, 2016.

- What is the demonstrated student need, even at a low level, for graduates with this specific credential?
- Does the program fill a specific academic niche unique to UW-Madison or in some way necessary for the University's identity, or for the fulfillment of the mission of the program, school/college, or university?
- What is the cost of the program? No program is without cost so a clear recognition of all costs is important. All programs incur costs in terms of record keeping and a range of monitoring activities for the school/college, the Registrar's Office, the Graduate School, the Office of the Provost, and others.
- Is faculty time and effort best invested in such a program? Time must be devoted to learning outcomes assessment, review of the program, recruitment of students, curriculum development, advising, catalog and website maintenance, course scheduling, and similar activities. Programs with few or no students that are formally offered still need to have a full curriculum available to a student who seeks to enroll in the program.
- What are the compelling reasons why none of the options outlined above (discontinuing the program or merging this major into a larger major) are viable alternatives?
- Does the program have a stable academic home, usually a department?

The director of APIR, the provost, and the UAPC will review reports on the status of low award producing programs. If a low award producing program is continued, and remains in low-award status it will be reviewed again after five years. If student participation increases and the program is no longer low-award status, it will go into the 10-year review cycle.