I. Introduction

The systematic assessment of an institution's academic programs is essential for ensuring that a quality educational experience is provided to all students. Internal academic program review is a central component of institutional effectiveness, strategic planning, assessment of student learning outcomes and in achieving organizational goals and objectives. While certainly motivated by standards and requirements established by regional and other specialized accreditation bodies like the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), internal academic program review at Clark Atlanta University (CAU) is recognized as a core component of the institutional mission.

The impetus for academic program review at CAU is faculty driven and is guided by Section 1.4.6.3 of the Faculty Handbook. The Faculty Handbook provides a policy for periodic review of academic programs by the faculty for the purpose of determining, at a minimum, the “quality of academic curricula, the utilization of existing resources, the research and service activities, long-range plans and objectives, adequacy of financial support and the physical facilities, and the appropriateness of the departmental or program structure.”

Assessment of student learning outcomes is a key component of academic program review. Expected educational outcomes must be established for each graduate and undergraduate program offered by the University. Respective faculties with the academic departments should identify what students should know (cognition), think (attitude) and be able to do (behavior) when they will have completed their degree programs as well as the general education curriculum. Moreover, the respective faculties are expected to assess the extent to which established educational outcomes are achieved by their students. Further, results of assessment must be used to enhance curriculums and instructional strategies as well as improve the management of the academic programs.

These regulations establish procedures that are to be followed in implementing Section 1.4.6.3 of the Faculty Handbook and were informed by the work of the Committee on Academic Program Reviews and the Committee on Student Learning Outcomes,¹ two of the Ground Work Committees, established as a part

of our Institutional Effectiveness process. The Committees’ recommendations are codified in these regulations. The rationales offered by these committees in their final reports indicate the following.

Basis for Academic Program Review are the following:

1. A new evaluation criterion for accreditation is the completion of an acceptable Quality Enhancement Plan. Such a plan must demonstrate that Clark Atlanta University is engaged in a process of continuous improvement of our academic quality and effectiveness.

2. A core requirement of quality enhancement is the systematic review of academic programs and services.

3. We must both identify expected educational outcomes, as well as assess whether the outcomes are achieved.

4. Our Strategic Academic Plan identifies the systematic internal review and assessment of academic programs as top priority.

5. The Strategic Institutional Priorities identifies six initiatives, one of which is academic outcomes assessment.

As noted, the periodic academic program review is articulated as item 1.0 Academic Programs, among our Institutional Strategic Plan Focus Areas. Most relevant in this focus area is the affirmation that “Clark Atlanta University will maintain its tradition of providing strong academic programs that are consistent with its mission. The program will be framed by demands for intellectual rigor, critical perspective, and connected learning. The University affirms the importance of providing students with diverse curricular offerings at the undergraduate, graduate and professional levels, and will place high priority on periodic review and evaluation of programs consistent with the benchmarking framework established through the Strategic Academic Plan.”

The Committee on Academic Program Review report further delineates the framework for academic program review at CAU. It warrants repeating here.

1. Preparation for the program review should be carried out and conducted by the faculty with the Dean/Chair/or Program Coordinator playing a role in the process.

2. Program review is evaluative, not just descriptive.

3. Program review is directed toward improvement of the program, not simply assessment of its current status.
4. Programs, departments, and schools are evaluated based on academic criteria, not financial or political ones. They are looked at on the basis of their academic strengths and weaknesses, not on the basis of their ability to produce funds for the institution. While financial and organizational issues are relevant to the review, they are relevant only as they affect the quality of the academic program.

5. Program review is an objective process in which a program, department or school assesses itself, as objectively as possible. Faculty members from other programs, departments, and schools within the University make independent judgments about programs under review. The inclusion of persons who have no vested interest in the results is important.

6. Program Review is an independent process, separate from any other review, i.e., regional, professional accrediting body, or licensing agencies.

7. Program Review results in action. Recommendations are used to bring about desired changes based upon an agreed upon timetable.

Basis for Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes are the following:

- An acceptable Quality Enhancement Plan includes ongoing evaluation of student learning outcomes.

- The institution identifies expected outcomes for its educational programs and assesses whether it achieves these outcomes and provides evidence of improvements based on analysis of those results.

- The institution places primary responsibility for the content, quality and effectiveness of its curriculum with its faculty.

- The institution identifies competencies within the general education core and provides evidence that graduates have attained those college-level competencies.

The report from the Committee on Student Learning Outcomes clarifies the linkages between assessment and student learning. The report notes that:
1. The assessment of student learning begins with educational values.

2. Assessment is most effective when it reflects an understanding of learning as multidimensional, integrated, and revealed in performance overtime.

3. Assessment works best when the programs it seeks to improve have clear, explicitly stated purposes.

4. Assessment requires attention to outcomes but also and equally to the experiences that lead to those outcomes.

5. Assessment works best when it is ongoing, not episodic.

6. Assessment fosters wider improvement when representatives from across the educational community are involved.

7. Assessment makes a difference when it begins with issues of use and illuminates questions that people really care about.

8. Assessment is most likely to lead to improvements when it is part of a larger set of conditions that promote change.

9. Through assessment, educators meet responsibilities to students and to the public.

These principles form the substance and intent of internal academic program review, including assessment of student learning outcomes.

II. Purpose

The purpose of these regulations is to provide instruction and clarification to academic units as they conduct their internal program reviews. These regulations are to be used in conjunction with the Standards for Internal Academic Program Review in (1) the conduct of the school/department/or program’s self-study, and (2) the writing of the self-study report. These regulations also address the role, composition and purpose of the Internal Review Teams, which are charged with the responsibility of reviewing and evaluating the self-study report against the standards and making appropriate recommendations.

Assessment of student learning outcomes can be conducted as a separate and distinct process. However, in order to promote comprehensive program review as well as minimized duplication of effort required by both program review and assessment of student learning outcomes, these regulations call for the inclusion of a readily identifiable section in the program self-study report that addresses...
assess assessment of student learning outcomes. This topic is covered as an identifiable section of Standard 5, Curriculum, in the Standards for Internal Academic Program Review. The minimum content of this section is discussed below under the heading, “Content.”

It should be emphasized here that these regulations are not intended to be prescriptive, rather their purpose is to provide a degree of structure and continuity to the internal academic review process. Departments and programs may use other specialized or discipline-specific program assessment references as appropriate in conducting the self-study process as long as they do not alter the minimum criteria for program assessment contained in the Standards for Internal Academic Program Review. Any deviations from the Standards must be approved in writing by the Office of the Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs.

III. Time Lines and Procedures

A. The Self-Study Cycle:

Individual academic program assessment will occur on a five- (5) year cycle. If a school, department or program is scheduled for review by an external specialized, professional or licensing agency in the same year as the internal assessment is scheduled, it may request a modification of the five-year review cycle from the Office of the Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs. The request must be made in writing.

B. Notification:

Schools/departments or programs will be notified of the date that their self-study report is due one (1) academic year in advance. Notification will be made by the Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs in writing to or through the office of the Dean in which the unit is located. Upon notification, the preparation for the self-study process should commence.

C. Conducting the Self-Study:

The self-study report must be completed in the Fall Semester of the academic year immediately following the official notification that the unit is scheduled for review. The period of assessment is the prior academic year.

D. Program Data:

Data for the review should cover that from the previous academic year. The Office of Planning, Assessment and Research (OPAR) will provide data needed for the self-study. The use of data developed by the school, department or program is permissible, as long as the validity of such data
is documented. It would be useful for units planning to conduct a self-study to consult with OPAR on possible data needs in the year prior to the actual self-study.

E. Submission of the Self-Study Report:

An original and three (3) bound copies of the unit’s completed self-study report should be submitted to the Office of the Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs no later than January 31. A copy should also be provided to the School Dean.

F. Appointment and Role of an Internal Review Team:

By January 31, the Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs in collaboration with the Dean and departmental/program faculty will appoint a team to review the unit’s self-study report. The Internal Review Team will conduct a series of activities designed to review and evaluate the school/department/program’s self-study report between February and April. This will include (1) evaluation of the report, (2) interviews with faculty, students and staff, and (3) a review of additional data as needed.

G. Submission of the Internal Review Team Report:

The final report of the Internal Review Team will be submitted to the Office of the Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs by April 15. A final copy of this report will be provided to the Dean and departmental chair or program coordinator.

H. Program Quality Enhancement Plan:

A Program Quality Enhancement Plan will be developed for each degree-granting program. It should identify the unit’s plans to address those issues raised in its self-study report and the report of the Internal Review Team. This plan should be submitted to the Office of the Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs by June 30.

I. Documentation of Academic Assessment Process:

A copy of the unit’s self-study report, the report of the Internal Review Team and the Program Quality Enhancement Plan should be provided to the Office of Planning, Assessment and Research and the Office of the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs by July 1.

IV. **Self-Study Process**

A. Preparation:
Notification that a unit is scheduled for review of its academic program should signal the official beginning of preparation for the upcoming self-study process. While each unit is free to initiate those steps it deems appropriate in preparation for conducting the self-study, at a minimum these steps should include (1) discussion of the process at meetings with department faculty, staff, and students; (2) outlining preliminary plans for conducting the self-study; (3) discussions regarding the types and sources of data needed; and (4) the identification of any special issues relevant to effectively conducting the process.

B. Role of the Faculty:

The internal review of a unit’s academic program is a faculty-driven process. As such, there should be clear documentation that faculty are fully engaged and involved in the preparation, planning, and conduct of the review process. Additionally, faculty should be actively involved in the preparation of the self-study report and the Program Quality Enhancement Plan.

C. Gathering Data:

The Office of Planning, Assessment and Research will provide units with data needed for the self-study. Based on the discussions held during the preparation period, advance consultation with this office should be sought on any special data needs. Units may also use data generated internally. Documentation for such data should be addressed in the report.

D. Writing the Self-Study Report:

Instructions on the writing of the unit’s self-study report are contained in Section V below.

E. Questions:

Questions about the regulations and Standards for Internal Academic Program Review should be referred to the Office of the Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs. Questions related to data needed for the self-study should be directed to the Office of Planning, Assessment and Research.
V. The Self-Study Report

Ongoing assessment of any school, department, or program must flow from its mission, goals and objectives. The process should identify expected outcome measures, the collection and analysis of relevant data, and a set of actions to be taken based on the assessment results. Such assessment must also allow for feedback into the school, department or program. A chart depicting how this process should flow is shown below.

**Academic Program Assessment**

Mission → Program Goals → Objectives → Outcome Measures

⇑

Action ← Report Generation & ← Data Analysis ← Data Collection

Discussion

Program reviews are conducted against a set of standards. These standards frame the essential process used by educational institutions in determining the quality of academic programs and should form the basis for the self-study and the self-study report. The ten (10) standards adopted for use are the following:

1. Program Mission, Goals and Objectives
2. Organization, Governance, and Resources
3. Faculty
4. Strategic Plan/Annual Review
5. Curriculum (Including Assessing of Student Learning Outcomes)
6. Student Services
7. Support Staff
8. Support Services and Facilities
9. Off-Campus Programs
10. Distance Learning

Specific descriptions of each of the above-noted standards are found in the *Standards for Internal Academic Program Review*. A thorough and comprehensive examination of the degree to which the unit’s academic
A program meets these standards should be documented in the self-study report.

A. Content:

The self-study report should be a concise, well-written document which clearly addresses the unit’s review of how well it has satisfied each standard. Appropriate data should be used to support this review and any conclusions reached. The self-study report should be a totally self-contained document. The use of appendices and references to other documents is permissible; however, the report should include all information necessary to determine how well a unit meets a particular standard. For example, when discussing the unit’s mission rather than indicating that “the mission statement is contained in the university’s catalog, which is attached,” the mission should be fully stated in the report itself.

For each of the areas contained in the Standards for Internal Academic Program Review, a narrative statement should be included in the self-study report. The narrative should include, at a minimum, the following:

1. A brief description of the unit’s current compliance with the standard.
2. A discussion of how the unit evaluates or assesses compliance with the standard.
3. An indication of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the unit’s compliance with the standard.
4. A discussion of the data used in the assessment of the standard, including an indication of a baseline upon which the compliance is determined. These should be, to the extent possible, quantifiable indices.
5. A discussion of how the unit compares with the baseline data level set.
6. An indication of any barriers identified which hinder compliance with the standard.
7. Specific recommendations the unit identifies to improve compliance with each standard.
8. A brief summary of the results of the unit’s assessment with compliance to the standards, to include a discussion of how the assessment was carried out and the resulting outcomes.
As noted above, the program self-study report should contain an identifiable section on Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes. This section comes under Standard 5, Curriculum, and should contain, at a minimum, the following:

- Statement on established student-learning outcomes.
- Description of measures used for assessing student-learning outcomes. This section should also describe the involvement of faculty and students in assessment activities.
- Discussion of assessment results.
- Discussion of and supporting evidence of use of assessment results for program enhancement with particular attention to curriculum, instructional strategies, and program policies and procedures.

B. Format:

The self-study report should be written in a narrative style and should be formatted identically with the standards. The issues to be covered under each standard are contained in the accompanying Standards for Internal Academic Program Review. The report should be written in standard 12-point type and double spaced. All pages should be sequentially numbered. A table of contents should be included showing the location of each standard in the report. A brief introductory section may be included immediately before the standard by standard narrative.

C. Copies:

An original and three (3) copies of the final report should be made. The copies should be printed front to back and bound securely.

D. Transmittal:

A cover memorandum should accompany transmittal of the self-study report to the Office of the Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs.
VI. Internal Review Teams

A. Role:

The role of the Internal Review Team is to evaluate the unit’s self-study report against the Standards for Internal Academic Program Review, conduct additional inquiry through the review of supporting data, faculty and student interviews. The Team should utilize any other appropriate means needed to provide information by which a determination can be made as to the validity of the unit’s self-assessment. The Team’s report should be a standard-by-standard evaluation of the unit’s report and include specific recommendations for improvement. This must be done in a collegial fashion adhering to the highest standards of professional ethics and confidentiality.

B. Composition and Appointment:

The Internal Review Team will be composed of faculty appointed by the Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs in consultation with the faculty, Chair, and Dean of the department/program/or school. The size of the Team will range from three to five members depending on the size of the unit to be reviewed. At least one or two of the members of the team will come from within the department, the remaining members must come from outside the school/department/ or program under review. The Chair of the team must be a member from outside of the unit and will be appointed by the Provost.

C. Final Report and Debriefing:

A final written report of the findings of the Internal Review Team will be completed and submitted to the Office of the Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs no later than April 15. This report should include a set of recommendations for improving the quality of the unit’s academic program as they relate to the standards. A draft of the report will be submitted to the unit prior to its being finalized. The unit may submit any comments or responses to the team for further consideration in finalizing the report. These comments may be incorporated into the final report by the Team or they may be submitted as a separate attachment with the final report.

D. Presentation to Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs:

A meeting should be scheduled by the Internal Review Team to formally present the final report to the Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs. This meeting should include the Vice President for Planning, Assessment and Research, the Dean and the Department Chair/Program Coordinator. The purpose of the meeting is to present the findings and
recommendations of the Team’s review. The Dean/Chair/Program Coordinator should share the results of this meeting with the faculty.

VII. Follow-Up Actions

A. Schools/Departments/Programs:

The purpose of academic program review is to improve the effectiveness and quality of a unit’s program. It is important, therefore, that the findings of the review process lead to meaningful action by the school, department or program. Upon receipt of the final Internal Review Team Report, a Program Quality Enhancement Plan should be developed. Included in this plan must be a specific set of actions directed to support the student-learning outcomes assessment. This plan must be developed by June 30 and should be linked to the unit’s strategic plan and should indicate those actions to be taken to improve the quality and effectiveness of academic programs. Where appropriate, reference should be made to the findings in the self-study report and the report of the Internal Review Team. The unit’s annual reports should be used to provide updates on the status of these implementation plans.

B. School Deans/Department Chairs/Program Coordinators:

Unit heads are encouraged to use the findings of the academic program review process to guide management of their schools/departments/ands programs. They should be used to frame the modification of policies and procedures, to set program priorities, guide budget requests and the utilization of resources.

C. Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs:

The information and findings of the academic program assessment process will be used to provide a framework for the oversight of the effectiveness of the Division of Academic Affairs. They will guide policy-making and implementation, the allocation of resources, and support the general strength and quality of the institution’s academic programs.