

ACADEMIC SENATE POLICY #S06-238

INDICATORS AND STANDARDS OF GRADUATE PROGRAM QUALITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

An explicit goal of the University's 2005-2010 strategic plan is that the institution "offers high-quality post-baccalaureate education widely recognized for its intellectual value and contribution to society."¹ It further calls for the establishment of "university-level criteria to assess graduate program quality and sustainability"² and for the integration of those standards into a "revised process of academic program review."³

To accomplish this goal, all units with graduate programs will be expected to demonstrate whether University-wide and program-specific indicators and standards of program sustainability and quality are being met. Indicators are areas of evaluation used to identify determine the quality and sustainability of a university, department or program. Standards are those levels of performance towards which the university, department or program seeks to strive.

Units with graduate programs that do not meet a specific University-wide standard will need to explain how they are working towards the standard or why these normative expectations are not applicable to their particular degree program. These explanations and justifications should be included in the department or program's self-study to the APRC.

If a program does not meet any particular criterion, it will not necessarily be interpreted as a statement about the program's quality or sustainability. Instead, this should provide an opportunity for the program's faculty and external reviewers to explain program-specific circumstances and/or to discuss actions that are being or can be taken for program improvement, including, if necessary, a demonstrable need for the investment of additional resources. The APRC will consider all explanations and justifications and compose a concluding action memorandum that either approves relevant exceptions or requires that the unit work toward meeting the standards.

Based on the content of the concluding action memorandum, departments and programs are encouraged to work in collaboration with deans and university administrators to accomplish the goals of the memorandum and to meet the resource needs outlined in the memorandum.

The specific indicators of program sustainability and quality set forth in this policy are divided into two general categories. The intent of the two separate categories is to establish standards—either University-wide or program-specific—against which to measure program quality and sustainability.

Category A in which the Academic Senate specifies the indicators *and* sets the expected minimum University-wide standards and

Category B in which the Academic Senate specifies the indicators and requires the program to set the expected minimum program-specific standards

Such discussion and explanation will provide APRC with the necessary information to produce a well-informed action memorandum at the conclusion of the review process.

Category A.

University-Wide Indicators and Standards of Graduate Program Quality and Sustainability

1. Admission requirements:

One of the most significant factors in maintaining graduate program quality and sustainability is the ability to attract and cultivate outstanding students. An offer of admission invites students to study with our faculty and to contribute to SFSU's mission. Establishing minimum admission requirements emphasizes the significance of the relationship between students, faculty and graduate programs and fosters a climate conducive to maintaining high quality programs. Multiple measures of a student's academic performance, academic potential and life experiences should form the basis for admission of a student to graduate study.

Admission standards based on multiple sources of information will address the different patterns of student experiences and educational backgrounds. The admission standards should help the program faculty determine if a student would be successful at meeting the goals, objectives and outcomes required for each program.

To ensure fairness across populations of applicants, no single admission criterion should be systematically used to include or exclude students from a program. Instead, a composite pattern of information should inform the admission decision. Examples of measures used to assess an individual student's preparedness for a rigorous graduate program are: past GPA, portfolios of past academic or professional experience, discipline specific essays, letters of recommendation and standardized assessments of writing, reasoning and critical thinking skills that are necessary for engaging in graduate study. Indicators of success include:

- a. Evidence of Prior Academic Success: Upon approval of this document, students admitted to graduate programs should have a Grade Point Average of at least 2.75 in the last 60 semester (90 quarter) upper division or graduate units of their academic career.⁴ Within three years of the approval of this document, the normative expectation will be at least 3.0.
- b. Evidence of Competent Writing: Every program should have in place an approved (by the Division of Graduate Studies) means of assessing the writing competence necessary to perform adequately at the graduate level for all candidates for admission to graduate study. Competent writing is defined as, "Provides competent analysis of complex ideas; develops and supports main points with relevant reasons and / or examples; is adequately organized; conveys meaning with reasonable clarity; demonstrates satisfactory control of sentence structure and language but may have some errors that affect clarity".⁵ The assessment procedures that are employed may include a standardized test or may be developed by individual programs.

Examples of standardized tests that provide such evidence are the GRE Analytical Writing Component and the GMAT. If a program chooses to require the GRE, then students applying to graduate programs shall submit scores from the Graduate Record Exam (GRE) General Test [or the Graduate Management Admissions Test (GMAT), if specified by the program] to the Graduate Admissions office. Students in programs which choose this option and who score below a 4.0 on the Writing component of the GRE or the GMAT may be admitted to the program in Conditional Classified status with the stipulation that the program provide additional writing training or provide the student with writing experiences leading to a portfolio of graduate-level writing examples.

- c. English Preparation of Non-Native Speakers: All students, regardless of citizenship, whose native language is not English and whose preparatory education was principally in a language other than English, shall be required to attain a score of 550 (written test) or 213 (computer test) or 79-80 on the IBT (Internet Based Test) on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or an equivalent score (6.0) on the International English Language Test Scheme (IELTS).⁶
- d. Qualitative measures of the potential for success in a graduate program (including but not limited to portfolios, evidence of relevant work experience, or life experience) as approved by the Division of Graduate Studies.

2. Program requirements:

Programs should continually strive towards excellence through, among other strategies, working towards the University-wide program requirements seen below. In addition to providing a uniform level of quality that all programs can strive towards, having these common standards also provides a level of certainty from knowing University expectations. This reduces the possibility of subjective decision-making and creates an atmosphere where all can work together towards a common goal—the excellence of our graduate programs. Excellence in our graduate programs is to be determined through multiple measures rather than relying upon any one indicator of achievement. No single measure should be used to judge the quality or sustainability of a program. Instead, a composite pattern of information and achievements should be used to inform any judgment of program quality or sustainability.

- a. Number of course offerings per semester: A minimum of two graduate-level courses (exclusive of supervisory and independent study courses) leading toward the post-baccalaureate degree shall be offered by the program or concentration each semester.⁷
- b. Frequency of course offerings: Courses required for graduation shall be offered at least once every two years.⁸
- c. Path to graduation: Programs shall prepare and publicize course schedules that clearly state a path to graduation that enables students to graduate within five years.⁹
- d. Graduate Approved Program (GAP): The distribution of course units on the GAP shall include the following elements:
- At least 50 % of the units on the GAP must be from exclusively (not paired) graduate courses.
 - Another twenty percent of units on the GAP may be from either exclusively graduate or paired courses (students always register in the graduate part of the course).
 - A final thirty percent of the units on the GAP may be from upper division undergraduate courses, paired courses (in this case the students may register in either the graduate or the undergraduate part of the course), or graduate courses.
- e. Class size: A program's typical graduate class size should be between 8 and 30. Seminar classes should be maintained at no more than 15 and no less than 5.
- f. Number of graduates: The average number of students graduating from a degree program or going on to a doctoral program in a related field per year over a five-year period shall be at least five.¹¹

3. Faculty requirements:

- a. Number of faculty in graduate program: Each graduate program shall have a minimum of two tenure/tenure track faculty holding a terminal degree or equivalent and a full-time faculty

member serving as Graduate Coordinator.¹² Colleges and departments should monitor, recognize and value the work and contributions of graduate coordinators.

b. Faculty per concentration: Each concentration within a program shall have at least one tenure/tenure track faculty member who has demonstrated expertise in and commitment to the field represented by the concentration.¹³

Category B.

University-wide Indicators with Program-Specific Standards

In addition to the University-wide standards, each program should also develop standards for its own programs that allow it to measure each program's unique qualities. The areas in which these standards should be established are described below. This list does not imply that programs cannot or should not develop their own standards in other areas of achievement. The University supports the development of program specific standards in all areas of department and program activities.

1. Program planning and quality improvement processes. Each program shall outline the processes through which they plan for their degree program's future and use the results of student learning outcomes assessments and the review of the standards indicated in this document to enhance the quality of their degree programs. The Self-Study should include specific examples of ways the program planning and assessment process is used to enhance degree program quality.

2. Student experiences:

a. **Assessment of Student Learning:** Chief among these program-specific standards should be student learning outcomes. The cumulative, programmatic assessment of student learning has been identified as a major educational priority by the University, the CSU system, and the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. In response, each graduate program shall engage in and report on its assessment of student learning. Such assessment shall include the following:

- i. The establishment of programmatic learning objectives to be placed within the context of the planning process discussed in the 6th Cycle Guidelines
- ii. The determination of where in the curriculum those objectives are being attained
- iii. The development and implementation of assessment strategies to measure their attainment
- iv. The use of findings from the assessment endeavor to structure curricular improvement and enhance student learning

Program review self-studies shall include a section describing an instructional unit's assessment endeavors for each of its graduate degree programs and concentrations and show how the results of those endeavors are leading to program improvement.

b. **Advising:** With the goal of fostering outstanding academic advising, each program shall identify its standards for high quality advising (e.g., frequency, content, outcomes) and evaluate its degree of success in meeting these standards.¹⁴

c. **Writing proficiency:** The 2005-2010 University Strategic Plan has an explicit goal that the institution "ensures that its graduates write proficiently." Self-studies should focus attention on

how this is occurring in each academic program being offered. As the strategic plan indicates, this should include setting forth “criteria, at all levels including the master’s thesis [and all other culminating experiences], that define performance expectations for writing” and measuring “students’ proficiency in writing and their capacity to reflect critically on work in their chosen discipline.”¹⁵

d. **Culminating Experience:** A central component of the assessment endeavor at the graduate level is the evaluation of the quality of the student’s culminating experience. Each program shall have explicit program-specific standards for the culminating experience and determine the extent to which these standards are being met. Although collaborative projects may involve up to three persons, each student’s role in culminating experiences shall always be individually defined. Every culminating experience shall include a writing component for every student.

3. The Program and the Community:

a. **Professional Engagement of Students and Alumni:** It is essential that academic programs foster the professional engagement among their students and alumni. Each program should identify specific efforts intended to engage students in their chosen field (through, for example, research, internships, collaborations with faculty, conference participation, publications) and describe its degree of success in these efforts. Additionally, the program should describe its success in tracking alumni and in involving them in the program’s endeavors.

b. **Civic Engagement:** Given the University’s commitment to community service learning and civic engagement on the part of students, faculty, and staff, graduate programs should demonstrate how they are contributing to such a commitment being realized.

c. **Equity and Social Justice:** The 2005-2010 Strategic Plan directs the University to demonstrate “commitment to its core values of equity and social justice.” Self-studies should demonstrate how the programs under review are responsive to this goal, in terms of the diversity of their students and employees, the content and delivery of their curricula and support systems, and opportunities for engagement in meaningful discourse and activity.

d. **Internationalization:** The 2005-2010 Strategic Plan calls upon the University to provide its “students, faculty, and staff with international experiences, perspectives, and competencies.” Self-studies should discuss how the programs under review are addressing this priority.

4. Faculty experience:

a. **Research and professional engagement:** There is an innate connection between research or professional development and graduate education, as faculty use their research and scholarly activities in teaching students and as students frequently participate in faculty research or professional development. Units with graduate degree programs should describe their faculty’s research and professional development efforts, their connection to teaching graduate students, and the other benefits that graduate degree programs receive from faculty research efforts.

b. **Colleges and departments shall monitor, recognize and value faculty supervision of culminating experiences as a central component of faculty members’ teaching load.**

c. **Programs shall articulate the discipline-specific standards for teaching graduate courses and the extent to which these standards are met.**

d. Interdisciplinarity: Given the university's commitment to interdisciplinary approaches to learning, if an academic program considers itself to be interdisciplinary, it should describe its interdisciplinary philosophy and how the faculty shapes the curriculum to reflect that philosophy. It should also evaluate the effectiveness of any interdisciplinary collaboration with allied programs across the campus.

5. Resource support: Given the critical importance of resource support to program sustainability and quality, each instructional unit shall determine the resources—internal and external-- it requires to support high-quality graduate education. The need for resources, and potential strategies for identifying their sources, should be specified in the program planning process.

a. Internal support. The unit should carefully determine whether it has a sufficient number of qualified faculty to coordinate the program, deliver its curriculum and properly serve students; how many students it should regularly admit; and its needs in terms of, for example, clerical staff and technical support, equipment and supplies, and space (offices, classrooms, laboratories, studios, etc.).¹⁶

b. External support. Additionally, each unit shall evaluate its needs, capabilities and results regarding extramural funding. Here, the unit will need to clarify its capacity to pursue extramural funding and the availability and relevance of such funding to support activities in its academic area.

***** Approved by the Academic Senate at its meeting on February 28, 2006*****

Endnotes

- ¹ Commission on University Strategic Planning. 2005. Goal 3 in University Strategic Plan Goals 2005-2010—A Summary. San Francisco, CA: San Francisco State University, p. 9.
- ² Commission on University Strategic Planning. 2005. Strategy 1 in Goal 3 Strategic Plan. San Francisco, CA: San Francisco State University, p. 39.
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ The 2.75 and 3.0 criteria represent an increase from the current Title 5 minimum GPA requirement of 2.5. Note that the focus is on the applicant's record in courses taken most recently. For deserving candidates who do not meet the requirements, the department may request a Waiver of College Regulations from the Division of Graduate Studies.
- ⁵ This definition corresponds to the 4.0 scores on the Analytical Writing Section of the GRE.
- ⁶ This follows the current CSU policy on TOEFL. Note: A new TOEFL will be implemented in Fall 2005. Concordance of scores for the new TOEFL is not available. IELTS standards for the CSU have not yet been established. However, concordance tables indicate that an IELTS score of "6" would be similar to the CSU standards for TOEFL.
- ⁷ This represents a minimum number of course offerings needed to mount a viable program that serves both full- and part-time students, as articulated in the recommendations for graduate program quality contained in the 1989 CSU "Dinielli Report" and accepted by the CSU Board of Trustees.
- ⁸ This would ensure that graduate students can enroll in these courses during their tenure at SFSU and maintain appropriate progress toward graduation.
- ⁹ Students should be able to plan their "roadmap to graduation" during their first semester of graduate work. Ideally, a five-year course schedule should be posted on the program's web site and updated frequently.
- ¹⁰ This was articulated as recommendation 8 in the 1989 Dinielli Report and accepted in concept by the CSU Board of Trustees.
- ¹¹ This is a measure of program sustainability that conforms to long-standing CSU and SFSU expectations and practice. [Reference: CSU coded memorandum AP 71-32 entitled "Performance Review of Existing Degree Major Programs" re. "low-degree-production programs."] The five-year average figure takes into account the inevitable fluctuations in enrollment of small programs.
- ¹² This should, at least in many instances, ensure adequate programmatic breadth, adequate advisement and supervision of graduate students, and student exposure to different teaching styles, research methods, and approaches to the field.
- ¹³ This allows for a minimum level of intellectual and administrative oversight, as well as continuity in the advisement and supervision of students.
- ¹⁴ See recommendation 3 of the 1989 "Dinielli Report."

¹⁵ See the University Strategic Plan at: <http://www.sfsu.edu/strategicplan> and the recommendations of the University Writing Taskforce at: <http://www.sfsu.edu/~ugs/wtf.html>.

¹⁶ See the section on “funding graduate and post-baccalaureate program quality” in the CSU Academic Senate 2004 report entitled “Rethinking Graduate Education in the CSU” at: <http://www.calstate.edu/AcadSen/Records/Reports/index.shtml>