Texas A&M-Corpus Christi
SACS: Self-Study Report

2.7.2 The institution offers degree programs that embody a coherent course of study that is compatible with its stated mission and is based upon fields of study appropriate to higher education. (Program Content)

Compliance Status: Compliance

Narrative

Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi offers degree programs that embody a coherent course of study that are in alignment with the University's mission and are founded upon the fields of study appropriate to higher education.

Compatibility with Mission Statement
All degree programs at Texas A&M-Corpus Christi are dedicated to realizing the University's mission of (1) "preparing graduates for lifelong learning and responsible citizenship in the global community," (2) providing "undergraduate and graduate students with a challenging educational experience," and (3) "closing historical educational gaps." Reviewed and updated in 2008, the Texas A&M University Board of Regents approved this mission statement and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) granted final approval on July 30, 2009. Section 5.45 of THECB rules requires that new baccalaureate and master's programs be within the existing role of the University's mission. The Texas Education Code requires THECB review of the mission statement of the University and its table of programs every four years. The last four-year review in 2003 concluded with THECB approval of a new mission statement and an expanded table of programs on April 24, 2003. The A&M System Board of Regents approved the same request on July 26, 2002. The University arranged for a postponement of the next review from 2007 to 2009 to allow an international consulting company to analyze the needs of the community and students and to examine current and future offerings.

Coherent Course of Study
A&M-Corpus Christi ensures the coherence and appropriateness of each course of study through a comprehensive process that includes four main components. Initial program approval at the department, college, university and system levels requires the demonstration of coherence, alignment of program mission with University mission, and appropriateness to higher education. The annual catalog review process requires thorough examination and approval of all new and changed courses of study by disciplinary, college level, and university-level committees and councils, ensuring that coherence and mission alignment are maintained. Continuous program assessment combines a rigorous internal program monitoring and assessment process with regular external program reviews to enhance program quality and to ensure ongoing program coherence, alignment with mission, and appropriateness to higher education.

Program Approval
The coherence and appropriateness of each program is initially affirmed in the approval process for new programs, as outlined in the Texas A&M System Regulation 03.02.02. According to this
regulation, all new and revised programs must be approved by the chancellor and the board of regents before being presented to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. University Rule 03.02.02.C1 affirms this procedure and specifically outlines the approval process within the University [7]. After being recommended by the faculty and departmental or college-wide curriculum review committees in the individual colleges, new graduate degree proposals are reviewed by the Graduate Council; both undergraduate and graduate proposals are reviewed by the Faculty Senate and then the Provost's Council before receiving approval by the president. At each level of review coherence, alignment with mission, and appropriateness to higher education are addressed. For illustration, the minutes of the approval bodies that reviewed the Master of Art in Communication program are attached [8] [9] [10] [11] [12]. The THECB has approved all degree programs at A&M-Corpus Christi and they are listed on the THECB's Web site in its list of approved programs [13].

Catalog Review Process

A&M-Corpus Christi annually produces both an undergraduate and graduate catalog [14] [15]. The associate dean(s) of each college, acting under the direction of the dean, oversees the preparation of catalog copy in the colleges. All additions of new courses and revisions to academic policies, degree requirements, and program curricula in the college sections of the University catalogs are approved through the faculty curriculum review process of the relevant college and by the dean of the college [16]. The colleges then forward the proposed graduate and undergraduate catalog copy to the Office of the Provost, which coordinates the university-level review.

Following a preliminary review, the provost or designee forwards substantive changes in the college sections of the proposed undergraduate catalog to the Faculty Senate, along with proposed changes in University-level undergraduate admission standards, academic policies, and degree requirements. The Faculty Senate Academic Affairs Committee completes a thorough review of the catalog changes and provides its recommendations to the full Faculty Senate. Action by the full senate completes the faculty review of the undergraduate catalog.

The dean of graduate studies and the associate dean of graduate studies, working with the Graduate Council, oversee the revision of the general sections of the graduate catalog. These sections include University graduate admission requirements, degree requirements, academic policies, and related academic matters. The dean of graduate studies, associate dean of graduate studies, and the Graduate Council conduct a thorough review of the proposed changes in the college sections of the graduate catalog. The Graduate Council Curriculum Committee reviews the course syllabi of proposed new graduate courses. Subcommittees of the council focus on the other catalog changes proposed by the specific colleges. Following approval by the full Graduate Council and the dean of graduate studies, the proposed graduate catalog copy is returned to the provost for additional review. Substantive changes in the graduate catalog are then forwarded to the Faculty Senate. The Academic Affairs Committee reviews the proposed changes and provides its recommendations to the full Faculty Senate. Action by the full senate follows.

All programs are presented in the undergraduate and graduate University catalogs in a common format, illustrating the coherence in each program or course of study. Each college section of the catalog begins with an introduction to the college and includes the college mission, specific guidelines for admission, programs offered, special policies and regulations, and any information
regarding supplemental certifications.

Within the college section, each department has a section that provides information on the degrees available in that area. Each degree program is accompanied by a program description, admission requirements for that degree, and the degree requirements. All undergraduate degrees include a section that outlines the University core curriculum requirements, requirements for the major or college, and courses needed for specializations or minor areas of study. The remaining portion of each degree section has a common, yet distinct format depending on the program and the language used to describe areas of specialization. Each degree very clearly lists the courses required for the fulfillment of the degree. In degree programs like history, all of the courses available to fulfill the history elective option are listed. At the conclusion of each department's section, contact information is provided. Despite the differences in degree programs, each college section uses a similar format that enables the reader to easily navigate each degree description.

All of the undergraduate courses are listed together near the end of the catalog and are grouped alphabetically by the course prefix. Graduate courses are similarly listed with the degree information in the appropriate college section of the graduate catalog.

**Continuous Program Assessment**

A&M-Corpus Christi has implemented a rigorous process of program assessment. The final draft of the Momentum 2015 Strategic Plan, updated in summer 2007 to identify an institutional theme focused on the accountability and assessment of all institutional processes, expresses the University’s commitment to this process: "The University will perform ongoing assessment of academic and administrative programs, to the extent practicable, to promote a solid base of institutional knowledge." The document outlines a set of principles, the first of which is "Provide Excellent Academic Programs and Instruction," with the corresponding performance target, "Provide students with excellent instruction and challenging academic programs that advance intellectual competencies and perspectives and develop disciplinary knowledge and expertise." The assessment of academic programs consists of two main components: annual internal program evaluation and five-year external program reviews.

**Internal Program Assessment**

The first assessment is an annual process of internal program evaluation. WEAVEonline is the A&M-Corpus Christi-approved electronic software used for the documentation of unit plan objectives, measures, findings, and follow-up actions for academic and administrative departments on campus. An internal memorandum requests that college/department plans connect to the University strategic plan. Specifically, "The annual report for a college should take into consideration the performance and annual reports of the programs within it as well as the strategic plan for the college and the University." The Office of Planning and Institutional Effectiveness assists and coordinates the University-wide assessment efforts, providing resources, recommending assessment-related materials, as well as technical support. For illustration, sample annual reports are attached, for the bachelor of science (BS) in nursing, the bachelor of science in mathematics, the master of science (MS) in curriculum and instruction, the master of business administration (MBA), and the doctor of education (Ed.D.) in curriculum and instruction. Attached also is a unit plan list that demonstrates that all programs were assessed in the 2007-2008 assessment cycle. Finally, to demonstrate that these reports are then...
discussed internally, the minutes from meetings of the mathematics and nursing faculties are attached [26] [27].

External Program Reviews
The University has developed a set of academic program review guidelines, according to which "each academic program will be reviewed at least once every five (5) years unless a different schedule is approved by the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs and the appropriate Dean [28]." The program review is initiated by the associate vice president for academic affairs or, in the case of graduate programs, the dean of graduate studies and associate vice president for research and scholarly activity [29]. These reviews consist of a self-evaluation report and an external review report. A committee of faculty members in the program prepares the self-evaluation and submits it to the provost's office. The external review team typically consists of one to two faculty members from peer institutions who prepare a report and submit it to the provost's office.

The guidelines for the undergraduate program review instruct the self-assessment team to address the way in which the program relates to the profession and to the college and University mission. The report further requires a discussion of the curriculum and learning outcomes as they compare to peer institutions, and a program profile outlining the program's distinctive characteristics [29]. The guidelines for the graduate program review require the self-assessment team to address the program's mission/goals/vision, students enrolled, program profile, and institutional support [30]. This process ensures a thorough consideration and evaluation of coherence and suitability to higher education.

The review reports of the undergraduate criminal justice program illustrate the process [31] [32], as does the review of the graduate English program [33] [34]. The associate vice president for academic affairs or the dean of graduate studies and associate vice president for research and scholarly activity work with faculty and college deans on any subsequent action [35]. The criminal justice program, for example, responded to the review by increasing the number of core courses in the major through inclusion of a research methods course, which aligns the program with others in the state, and by providing for better sequencing of courses to ensure that student learning advances progressively [36]. The annual process of catalog updates ensures that program review recommendations receive timely follow-up, thus maintaining curricular coherence.

Accreditation
In addition to external reviews, A&M-Corpus Christi also works with discipline-specific accrediting agencies. The reaccreditation processes are coordinated by the associate vice president for academic affairs and the dean of graduate studies and associate vice president for research and scholarly activity. The University's College of Business has been granted full accreditation for all its programs by the board of directors of the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business [37]. The music program in the College of Liberal Arts is an accredited institutional member of the National Association of Schools of Music [38]. The undergraduate and graduate nursing programs are accredited by the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education [39]. The clinical laboratory science program is accredited by the National Accrediting Agency for Clinical Laboratory Sciences [40]. The bachelor's degree program in geographic information science is accredited by the Applied Science Accreditation Commission of ABET [41]. The bachelor's degree programs in electrical engineering technology and mechanical engineering technology are accredited by the Technology...
Accreditation Commission of ABET [41]. Finally, the Counseling and Educational Psychology Department's master's programs in community counseling, school counseling, and marriage and family counseling, as well as the doctor of philosophy in counselor education are accredited by the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs [42].

**Undergraduate Degrees**

The undergraduate academic degree programs of A&M-Corpus Christi follow a similar structure in their degree plans. Following Section 61.822 of Subchapter S of Chapter 61 of the *Texas Education Code*, which requires the THECB to "develop a recommended core curriculum of at least 42 semester credit hours" [43] and THECB Rules 4.21-4.35, which delineate the implementation of the core curriculum [44], A&M-Corpus Christi requires all undergraduate students to dedicate approximately one-third of every undergraduate degree program (45 semester hours) to the University core curriculum, which provides the foundation for further study. Individual academic programs may require courses contained in parts of the University core curriculum to satisfy particular degree requirements. The University's Core Curriculum Committee, in consultation with discipline faculty, assesses the coherence and effectiveness of the program, as illustrated in the most recent report submitted to the THECB [45] [46].

To ensure increasing levels of knowledge integration, each program's requirements for majoring in a discipline are divided into several components. At the initial level may be a set of prerequisites that provide a foundation for students to enter the curriculum of the discipline. Next are the introductory and core courses of the major that establish the foundation in the discipline. Finally, options are available under major-related courses that give students the opportunity to choose pathways for further study in the discipline. The bachelor of arts in English and bachelor of science in nursing degree plans illustrate the framework upon which all degree programs base their requirements [47] [48]. Several programs feature capstone courses that allow students to integrate knowledge and skills. In addition, students may have hours designated in their degree to use as free electives that allow them to explore other areas of interest or create an academic minor area of study.

**Graduate Degrees**

A&M-Corpus Christi's graduate catalog outlines the general degree requirements for master's and doctoral programs [49]. Following admission to the program, students work closely with the degree coordinator and program faculty on a degree plan, which must be filed with the Graduate Studies Office. The degree programs, course descriptions, and degree requirements are published in paper and online versions of the graduate catalog [15]. During each catalog cycle, the integrity and coherence of the program is first assessed by the faculty, and then the Graduate Council. The Graduate Council is chaired by the dean of graduate studies and associate vice president for research and scholarly activity, and consists of three graduate faculty members from each college. The council's mission includes the evaluation of "curriculum and program requirements, academic standards, [and] grading policies and practices [50]." The council oversees the annual catalog review process and approves the catalog copy, which contains all graduate degree programs, course descriptions, and degree requirements. The master's degree in history and doctorate in coastal and marine systems science illustrate the framework upon which graduate degree programs base their requirements [51] [52].

**Distance Education**
All courses offered through online modes of delivery are reviewed by the faculty, the department chairs or program coordinators and the deans of the respective college to ensure that they meet all standards for content and rigor that are applied to courses offered face to face. When the online course matches an existing face-to-face course offered at the University, the syllabi for the two courses are compared and the department chair or program coordinator certifies content and academic rigor to the dean of the college. The dean then reviews the syllabi with the recommendation of the department chair or program coordinator and approves the online course offering. When the online course does not match an existing face-to-face course offered at the University, a syllabus from a similar course offered at an accredited institution of higher education is compared against the syllabus for the proposed online course. The department chair or program coordinator certifies content and academic rigor to the dean of the college. The dean then reviews the syllabi with the recommendation of the department chair or program coordinator and approves the online course offering. Examples of these comparisons and the certifications of the deans are provided in the supporting documentation [53] [54] [55] [56] [57] [58] [59] [60]. Copies of the syllabi for both the online courses and the face-to-face courses to which they were compared are housed in the offices of the respective deans.

**Appropriateness to Higher Education**

The THECB uses the United States Department of Education Classification of Instructional Programs taxonomy [61] for postsecondary disciplines as the basis for the Texas Classification of Instructional Programs [62]. All degree programs at A&M-Corpus Christi have designated Classification of Instructional Programs codes in accordance with THECB policies [2]; therefore, A&M-Corpus Christi programs are aligned with postsecondary programs throughout Texas and the United States. All programs are approved by The Texas A&M University System, where they have been found to meet the standards on quality and appropriateness, as well as by the THECB in sections 5.45 [63] and 5.46 of its rules [64].

**Conclusion**

Through a multifaceted and rigorous program of review and assessment, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi ensures that it offers degree programs that embody a coherent course of study that is compatible with its stated mission and are based upon fields of study appropriate to higher education. This begins with the proposal process for new academic programs and continues through both the annual catalog review and the rigorous academic program assessment cycles. Thus coherence, mission alignment, and appropriateness to higher education are assured.

**Evidence**

- UD 042 3.10.5-05 TAMUCC New Mission Statement
- BD 063 Aproval of Amended Mission 2009
- SD 037 THECB 5-45 Criteria for New Baccalaureate and Master's Degree Programs
- SD 042 THECB Approval Mission
- BD 064 07-31-02 Mission BOR approval
- BD 004 TAMUS 03-02-02 Approval Procedures for Degree Programs, Administrative Changes, etc
- UD 139 AMCC 03-02-02-C1 Development of New Academic Degree Programs