PROGRAM PURPOSE

In the interests of continuous improvement, and in alignment with the College's goals and NECHE accreditation standards, the Office of Academic Affairs (OAA) will coordinate and fund *cycled, external program reviews* on behalf of its division's departments, programs, and offices. In order to signify its formative, forward-looking nature, the program is titled "Continuous Improvement Program," or CIP. Broadly defined, the CIP will be the mechanism by which academic departments, programs, and offices engage in purposeful self-study and invite external, independent evaluation on a rotating, recurring basis in order to promote continuous improvement and effectiveness. While mandatory for departments that are not otherwise accredited by discipline-specific bodies, all departments are encouraged to participate in the program.

PROGRAM STRUCTURE

LEADERSHIP
The Office of Academic Affairs (OAA) will provide program coordination. For academic departments, school deans, in cooperation with department chairs, will ensure successful implementation of continuous improvement activities. For administrative units, VPs/AVPs will ensure successful implementation of these activities.

PARTICIPANT SELECTION
Participation for all academic departments, programs, and/or offices ("units") is mandatory during the course of a cycle (10 years; 5-7 units per year). Units have the ability to make choices related to the nature of their reviews, and units that undergo specialized accreditation may or may not choose to participate. If units that undergo specialized accreditation choose to participate, timing should be such that their CIP program review leads into their upcoming external accreditation review. Funding for each review may vary, but is expected to be between $2,000 and $5,000.

PROCESS
The CIP process will be as follows:
1. Units have significant control over their external reviews. They may choose from existing standards, such as those defined by professional or disciplinary organizations, or develop their own standards against which they will be evaluated. It is also possible that "specialized" rather than comprehensive reviews will be approved, especially for administrative programs/offices (e.g., Financial Aid wants to review its aid packaging strategy; Registrar's office wants to review its Web-based course registration process; etc).
2. Units are required to submit the following form to initiate the review process:
   o description of proposed reviewers' credentials ("Nomination for External Reviewers" form), including any potential conflicts of interest between the reviewer and any member of the unit; the "Nomination" form should be submitted with enough lead time in order to properly review and schedule the potential visitor(s)
3. Units are required to conduct a self-study related to the standards (or specialized area) chosen. This self-study will be provided to all external reviewers, to the school dean (or, for administrative units, the appropriate associate/assistant vice president), to the OAA and/or his/her designee(s) ("Self-Study Analysis" guide). Self-studies should also include analysis of the following (note that for some specialized reviews, these items may not be applicable or may need to be modified):
   o alignment of unit goals/standards to unit mission and of unit mission to College mission (note: units must articulate mission statements if they have not already done so)
   o description and appraisal of how goals/standards are being met/not being met, including related evidence; e.g., assessment data
   o description of unit's ongoing assessment plan, including outcomes and related measures
   o description of how the unit has demonstrated its commitment to diversity and inclusion
   o description/analysis of the governance and decision-making process in the unit
   o description/analysis of the working relationships between and among unit administrators, faculty, and/or staff within the unit, within the school (if relevant), within the division (Academic Affairs), and within the College
   o description/analysis of how unit supports, counsels, mentors, and/or reviews "junior" faculty and/or staff

   The OAA will provide data relevant to the review, when available and appropriate (e.g., for academic departments/programs: student headcounts, graduates, credit hours generated, course sections, budget details, faculty/staff headcounts, etc).

PROCESS, CON'TD.

4. Units may recommend external reviewers to their respective school dean and to the OAA ("Nomination for External Reviewers" form); 1-3 reviewers will conduct each unit's visit (note: there will be only one visit per unit). The vetting process will include an independent review of credentials conducted by the OAA and a "conflict of interest" disclosure from the unit and school dean (identifying what relationships, if any, exist between a member of the unit and the proposed reviewer). The OAA will approve all external reviewers. Approved reviewers will be sent a letter of agreement which details visit logistics (as available), compensation, and expectations for the review.

5. External reviewers are expected to meet with relevant campus constituents to verify, clarify, and/or expand upon the unit's self-study. Reviewers are required to meet with unit leaders and the OAA and/or his/her designee. Unit leaders are expected to provide a briefing folder to all campus interviewees; the folder should include justification/plan for the review, the self-study, and the reviewers' brief biographies. When there is more than one reviewer scheduled, one of them must be named the "lead" reviewer; this will be the person charged with coordinating the visiting team and with managing communications between the team and the unit.

6. The compensation for external reviewers is $1,000, plus expenses, unless otherwise approved by the OAA. Visits are expected to last 2 days/1 night. External reviewers are expected to review the unit's self-study prior to their visit, meet with all relevant personnel/constituents during their visit, submit a draft report to the unit for factual accuracy review, and submit a final report to the unit, to the respective school dean (or, for administrative units, the appropriate associate/assistant vice president), and to the OAA in a timely manner following the visit ("Evaluator Report" guide).

7. Following the visit and resulting report, the unit, the respective school dean (or, for administrative units, the appropriate associate/assistant vice president), and the OAA will meet to discuss recommendations/conclusions and begin the negotiated process of creating an implementation agreement. The implementation agreement will be finalized and signed by the OAA, the respective school dean (or, for administrative units, the appropriate vice president or associate/assistant vice president), and the respective unit leader ("Implementation Agreement" form).

8. An *ad hoc* committee may be empanelled if either the unit or the OAA feels the committee is necessary to assist in the interpretation of the evaluator report and/or in the creation of an implementation agreement.

9. Units will be required to submit an interim, "mid-cycle" report which details their progress in meeting the goals of the implementation agreement 3-4 years following the visit.

10. School deans and VPs/AVPs may require more frequent contact with unit leaders to monitor progress and/or adjust plans; e.g., annual meetings.

11. While not required, units outside the Academic Affairs division may petition to participate in CIP. Such units will need the support of their respective divisional vice president and will be required to follow the same policies and procedures as outlined herein.

TIMELINES/DURATIONS

o Nominate external reviewer (typically, 1 month between nomination and approval)
o Prepare self-study (~3-6 months)
o Schedule reviewer's visit (typically, a 1 ½ day visit)
o Reviewer's report (expected within 6 weeks of visit)
o Implementation Agreement meeting (ASAP following receipt of reviewer's report)
o Finalized Implementation Agreement (typically, within 4-weeks of meeting)
o Implementation activities (variable, and specified in the Agreement)
o Interim report (mandatory mid-cycle, typically 3-4 years after the agreement is finalized; recommended annual for implementation agreements that might require greater administrative input)

SUPPORT/RESOURCES

The OAA supports and guides the program review process by providing printed materials, in-person consultations, and regular communications to current and prospective participants. The OAA will conduct periodic assessment of the program in order to seek feedback from faculty and administrators with respect to the program's operation.