# A Revised Proposal:

# Expectations for Degree Program Curriculum and Re-designed Campus Processes

Presented by **Bruce Fox**, Chair of Liberal Studies Committee and member of University Assessment Committee;

**Rob Till**, Chair of University Assessment Committee; **Craig Bain**, Chair of University Curriculum Committee, and

**Niranjan Venkatraman**, member of University Graduate Committee and University Assessment Committee

Feedback can be sent directly to:

Bruce.Fox@nau.edu, Robert.Till@nau.edu, Craig.Bain@nau.edu, Niranjan.Venkatraman@nau.edu

**Introduction**

We offer this document to the Faculty Senate as part of a campus-wide process of collaboratively designing and refining a proposal entitled “Expectations for Degree Program Curriculum and Re-designed Campus Processes”. We begin by providing background for the proposal and summarizing the impetus for and key ideas of the original proposal. We continue with describing the process of gathering feedback on the original proposal and then revising the proposal based on strengths and areas of concern identified by the University community. Next, we present the revised proposal that outlines shared curricular expectations for quality degree programs, how these expectations would frame review of degree programs as part of the Academic Program Review process, and re-designed campus processes that support these expectations. Finally, we detail our request for action by the Faculty Senate regarding the revised proposal.

**Background**

Faculty members, as part of a Curriculum and Assessment Work Group[[1]](#footnote-1), convened in the summer of 2013 to discuss enhancing excellence in teaching and learning on campus. The faculty work group recognized a compelling need to integrate curriculum, assessment, and program review processes on campus. Doing so, will:

1. Provide opportunities for faculty in degree programs to clearly articulate how degree requirements facilitate their students’ learning and to demonstrate what their students are learning (especially in their designated field of study);
2. Provide opportunities for faculty in degree programs to clearly and meaningfully examine the quality of student learning during Academic Program Review; and
3. Ensure that we have institutional practices that satisfy the requirement of NAU’s regional accreditor (the Higher Learning Commission) that all accredited institutions engage in practices of assessment of student learning for continual improvement.

**As a result of our discussions, we think that to enhance and strengthen faculty stewardship of the outstanding education provided at NAU we must clearly articulate expectations for degree program curriculum and re-structure campus curriculum and assessment processes to support these expectations. These shared expectations should drive the development, approval, and review of curricula.**

**Summary of the Original Proposal**

The original proposal identified that concepts of curricular design should drive the development, approval, and periodic review of curricula. Broadly speaking, a faculty committee would collectively set the expectations for curricular design (not content) of degree programs. Faculty committees would apply those expectations in decision making regarding curriculum proposals, and faculty committees and academic leaders would utilize those expectations in providing feedback during periodic degree program reviews (Academic Program Review/ Accreditation). In addition, the work group recommended re-designing the curricular-focused committee structures and reporting processes to ensure consistency in the enhancement of excellent student learning at NAU. Recommended elements included incorporating findings from faculty reflections on classroom practices and student learning (Continuous Course Improvement Documents) into faculty Statements of Expectations (SOEs), peer feedback on curriculum proposals based on curricular expectations, consistent periodic reviews of curriculum and assessment as part of Academic Program Review/ Accreditation (with peer feedback provided to the degree program and leadership), and connected annual and periodic reporting.

**Process of Soliciting Feedback**

We solicited and integrated feedback from the following groups: Advisory Council on Curriculum &Assessment (ACCA); Faculty Senate Executive Committee; Provost’s Academic Leadership Council (PALC); Academic Associate Deans Academy (ACADA); University Assessment Committee (UAC); Faculty Senate; Liberal Studies Committee (LSC); University Curriculum Committee (UCC); Academic Chair’s Council (ACC); University Graduate Committee (UGC).

**Summary of Feedback on the Original Proposal**

Input from the University community included strengths and areas of concern.

Strengths of the proposal:

* Formal adoption of expectations for curriculum design and assessment;
* Merging of curriculum and assessment processes, since useful data about students’ ability to achieve learning outcomes (assessment) should drive curriculum design;
* Incorporation of a review of curriculum design and assessment of student learning into the Academic Program Review process; and
* Assurance that we have institutional practices that satisfy the requirement of NAU’s regional accreditor (the Higher Learning Commission) that all accredited institutions engage in practices of assessment of student learning for continual improvement.

Areas of concern included the following:

* Implementation issues (*i.e.,* “too much, too fast”);
* Workload for chairs and faculty;
* Workload and training of committee members to quickly adapt and learn a new process;
* Requirement of the Continuous Course Improvement Documents (seen as “busywork”);
* Perceived duplication of reporting requirements for programs that have discipline-specific accreditation; and
* Perceived limitations on curricular design (*i.e.*, standardization of curricula).

**Changes to the Proposal Based on the Feedback**

In response to campus feedback, the proposal was revised. With the revised proposal, we:

1. Address the concerns of “too much, too fast” and workload for faculty, chairs, and committee members by clarifying the timeline for implementation, removing the Continuous Course Improvement Document from the proposal, and reducing the workload of University Curriculum and Assessment Committee members by removing the responsibility of reviewing and providing feedback as part of the review of degree programs within the Academic Program Review process.
2. Clarify that the Expectations for Degree Program Curriculum will be used as a framework for review of degree programs during Academic Program Review and these expectations will guide the development and review of curricula.
3. Recognize that it will take time for all degree programs to achieve the stated expectations and that it is necessary to have campus processes and Academic Program Review Action Plans that are based on these shared expectations. In so doing, degree programs can actively work towards achieving the expectations prior to Academic Program Review and utilize their Action Plans to sustain momentum between their Academic Program Review processes.
4. Clarify that the frequency of “reporting” will not differ from current requirements.
	1. Annual Assessment Reporting requirements will remain the same. As set forth in the policy originally passed by the Faculty Senate in 2002-3, and renewed in 2012-13, all degree programs, regardless of whether the degree program has discipline-specific accreditation, are required to submit an Annual Assessment Report providing documentation of at least one of the three phases of the assessment process [Phase I-Planning, Phase II-Data Collection, Phase III-Use of findings for continual improvement]. Degree programs are already expected to utilize their assessment findings for the continual improvement of their curriculum.
	2. Non-accredited degree programs will continue to participate in NAU’s Academic Program Review process (every 7 years). Following Academic Program Review, units will continue to be required to develop an Action Plan that sets strategic plans for continual improvement, including curriculum.
	3. Currently, accredited degree programs must assemble evidence that they have achieved certain standards in the design of their curriculum and the achievement of student learning outcomes (*i.e.,* assessment). For this reason, degree programs that have discipline-specific accreditation generally do not participate in NAU’s Academic Program Review process, per discretion of the Provost.
5. Highlight that four of the six expectations (Mission; Learning Outcomes; Systematic Assessment; Using Assessment Findings) set forth in the proposal are required aspects of the Annual Assessment Reporting and Academic Program Review processes. The remaining two expectations (Curriculum Design with a Curriculum Map; Strategic Course Learning Design) ensure quality curriculum and meaningful assessment (using evidence of student learning to drive changes in curriculum and learning design).
	1. These expectations do not prescribe how faculty will structure their degree programs or their courses nor do they prescribe the content of the degree or any courses. Rather they require that degree programs are explicit and transparent about how their curriculum facilitates students’ achievement of degree program student learning outcomes.
	2. These expectations emphasize the current requirement of the incorporation of regular assessment into curricular processes with the goal of identifying where and how to improve degree programs through the engagement of faculty collectively in discussions and broader strategies to intentionally design curriculum to enhance student learning.
6. Merge the curriculum and assessment committees at the university level, and incorporate curriculum expectations and a peer-review feedback process at both the college and university committee levels. The University Curriculum and Assessment Committee (UCAC) would coordinate the Undergraduate, Graduate, and Liberal Studies Program Committees’ review of curricular proposals and oversee and coordinate the college-level Curriculum and Assessment Committees (CCAC) to ensure consistent application of expectations in the peer review process. We recognize that the Undergraduate, Graduate, and Liberal Studies Program Committees have responsibilities beyond the review of curricula. This model proposes that the UCAC supports the committees’ responsibility related to the review of curricular proposals, not the other important responsibilities that these committees have. The timeline for implementation of changes in committees is dependent upon the capacity to train and support committees in adapting to new processes.
7. Continue to maintain that the Faculty Senate charge academic leaders with identifying and providing support to degree programs to prepare for their Academic Program Reviews, as well as providing support for implementing Action Plans following the Academic Program Review process.
8. Continue to address the requirement of NAU’s regional accreditor (Higher Learning Commission) that all accredited institutions engage in practices of assessment of student learning for continual improvement.

**Expectations for Degree Program Curriculum**

Expectations for Degree Program Curriculumwill guide the development, approval, and review of curricula. The University Curriculum and Assessment Committee will collectively set the expectations for degree programs. University and College Curriculum and Assessment Committees will apply the expectations in decision-making regarding curriculum proposals and provide peer reviewed feedback to programs. Academic leaders and degree program faculty will utilize the expectations in developing strategic plans for the improvement of student learning as part of the Academic Program Review’s Action Plan. Similarly, accredited degree programs will continue to use their accreditation process to demonstrate that they have achieved standards in the design of their curriculum and the achievement of student learning outcomes (*i.e.,* assessment). Department chairs/ directors will engage degree program faculty in activities to align degree programs with expectations and collaborate with academic leaders to identify methods for providing support to adapt degree programs so they achieve expectations.

A successful, high-quality academic ***degree program*** requires degree program faculty members to demonstrate a shared vision of their curriculum goals and to ensure that their curricular structures assist students in achieving the stated learning outcomes of the degree program. Faculty will ensure implementation of the following:

1. **Mission & Purpose of a Degree Program**
	* Broadly describes how and for what purpose the degree program prepares students
2. **Degree Program Student Learning Outcomes**
	* Explicitly articulates what students will know and be able to do upon completion of the degree
3. **Curriculum Design with a Curriculum Map**
	* Clearly describes why and how learning opportunities are structured in a particular manner, including:
		+ Scope: Breadth and depth of the degree program;
		+ Progression: Learning experiences progress logically, developing the learner to levels of expertise appropriate for the degree program;
		+ Alignment: Course learning experiences, course student learning outcomes, and degree program student learning outcomes support the mission and purpose of the degree program; and
		+ Integration: Clear relationships exist among the parts of a curriculum.
	* Provides a visual representation of the progression, alignment, and integration of the degree program through a well-organized Curriculum Map
4. **Strategic Course Learning Design which supports Degree Program Student Learning Outcomes**
	* Course learning design demonstrates the principles of good curriculum design (scope, progression, alignment and integration)
5. **Systematic Assessment of Degree Program Student Learning Outcomes**
	* Faculty regularly assess students’ achievement of Degree Program Student Learning Outcomes
6. **Use of Assessment Findings for Continual Improvement**
	* Faculty collectively use assessment findings to identify and celebrate program strengths as evidenced by student learning, and to inform curricular and learning design modifications to enhance student learning

**Re-structured Campus Curriculum/Assessment Committees**

Merge the curriculum and assessment committees at the university level, and incorporate curriculum expectations and a peer-review feedback process at both the college and university committee levels. A merged University Curriculum and Assessment Committee (UCAC) will oversee and coordinate college-level Curriculum and Assessment Committees (CCAC), as displayed in Figure 1, below. The UCAC would:

* Set University-wide expectations for degree programs;
* Provide a forum for campus-wide discussion of curriculum and assessment;
* Coordinate the Undergraduate, Graduate, and Liberal Studies Program Committees
* The Undergraduate, Graduate, and Liberal Studies Program Committees would review and recommend curriculum, to the Provost, based on expectations;
* Coordinate the College Curriculum & Assessment Committees (CCAC) which:
	+ Review and provide feedback on Annual Assessment Reports; and
	+ Review, provide feedback based on expectations, and recommend curriculum to the appropriate university-level committee (Undergraduate, Graduate, and Liberal Studies).

**This model proposes that the UCAC coordinates and supports the Undergraduate, Graduate, and Liberal Studies Program Committees’ responsibilities related to the review of curricular proposals based on the shared expectations. The UCAC would not be involved in the other important responsibilities of these committees.**



Figure 1. Proposed curriculum and assessment committee structure

**Tentative Timeline for Implementation**

Spring 2014

* + The Advisory Committee for Curriculum & Assessment (ACCA) would develop an implementation plan for incorporating curriculum expectations into the Academic Program Review process.
	+ The ACCA will obtain feedback on the implementation plan and process from the UAC, UCC, UGC, and LSC and report their plan to the Faculty Senate Executive Committee in fall 2014.
	+ Academic leaders will identify the types of support needed by degree programs to achieve these expectations and incorporate methods to provide support to faculty and degree programs to achieve expectations.

Academic Year 2014-2015

* The Advisory Committee for Curriculum & Assessment (ACCA) would develop a roll-out plan for re-structured committees to begin in AY 2015-16. This will include identifying the training and support necessary to integrate university-level committee processes and coordinate the support of college-level committees.
	+ The ACCA will obtain feedback on the roll-out plan for re-structuring committees from the UAC, UCC, UGC, and LSC and report their plan to the Faculty Senate Executive Committee.
* Academic leaders will continue to identify the types of support needed by degree programs to achieve these expectations and work to incorporate methods to provide support to faculty and degree programs to achieve expectations.

Academic Year 2015-2016

* Academic leaders will continue to identify the types of support needed by degree programs to achieve these expectations and work to incorporate methods to provide support to faculty and degree programs to achieve expectations.
* Pending progress and development of roll-out plan, committee re-structuring will begin.

**Request to the Faculty Senate**

Tentatively expect to have the Faculty Senate Executive Committee review this proposal at the November 18th meeting, with the request that it be an Action Item at the December 2nd Faculty Senate meeting.

We request that the Faculty Senate:

1. Approve the Expectations for Degree Program Curriculum that will frame both the review of degree programs as part of the Academic Program Review process and the development and approval of curricula;
2. Approve the re-structuring of curriculum and assessment committees and processes to ensure that our campus structures and processes support degree programs to achieve the Expectations for Degree Program Curriculum;
3. Charge academic leaders with:
	1. Identifying and providing support to degree programs to prepare for their Academic Program Reviews and to implement their Action Plans following the Academic Program Review process;
	2. Identifying and providing support and training to committee members in college and university-level curriculum and assessment committees; and
	3. Examining the extent to which degree programs achieve faculty-driven curricular expectations.
1. University Assessment Committee: Yuly Ascension, Julia Ragonese-Barwell, Kathee Rose. University Curriculum Committee: Chuck Hammersley, James Palmer, Peggy Pollack, Jennifer Prior, Gioia Woods. Liberal Studies Committee: Bruce Fox, Ro Haddon. At large: Charles Balch, K. Laurie Dickson, Suzanne Pieper, Melinda Treml [↑](#footnote-ref-1)