

21.1 Guidelines and Procedures for External Peer Review of Academic Departments¹

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Report of the Academic Review Committee*

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Charge to the Academic Review Committee

“The committee will develop two sets of guidelines, one for the review of academic leadership (department directors, deans and provost-level), and a second set of guidelines for the review and continuous improvement of academic departments and schools. Periodic review of both academic leadership and units can contribute significantly to continuous improvement across a variety of metrics where we strive for excellence in education, research, and administration.”

(Email from President Farvardin to the Stevens Community, February 2, 2013.)

This document suggests guidelines for the periodic review of academic departments. Guidelines for the external review of academic leadership are contained in a separate document.

Committee Recommendation

Each department should undergo an external peer review by leading researchers and educators at least once every five years². The purpose of the external peer review is to ensure that the Department’s research and educational directions and achievements are comparable or better than those of similar departments in the best institutions world-wide.

External reviews by accreditation bodies focus on compliance with standards; such reviews-should not be regarded as a substitute for the external reviews described here.

The Dean of the school has general oversight of the external peer review process. Generally, an external review is led by at least two distinguished academics from another university. It is expected that a review will be conducted in less than three months.

¹ While the procedures recommended in this document refer to “departments” it is intended that the procedures should also apply to Programs in Schools/Colleges without Departments.

² In some cases, a department external advisory board whose membership includes eminent academics from other universities may serve the purpose of the external advisory board described here.

Table 1 describes the primary steps involved in the review process, the parties involved, and their roles³. Table 2 suggests some content and criteria for the Self-Study review, which is the first step in the proposed process.

Table 1 - External Peer Review Process Steps	
1. Department completes a self study template.	<p>Completion of the Self Study</p> <p><i>Participants</i> Completion of the self-study will involve faculty members and the Department Chair.</p> <p><i>Self Study Work Product</i> See Table 2.</p> <p><i>Facilitation of Data Collection</i> The Office of Planning and Assessment provides departments with the data necessary to complete the self study, allowing departments to focus on the more qualitative aspects of the self study.</p>
2. An internal review committee comments on the completed self study.	<p>Internal Review of Self Study</p> <p>The Department Chair nominates well-respected faculty from across the university to serve as internal reviewers. The list of internal reviewers is discussed with the Dean and faculty members before a final decision is made. Normally, two internal reviewers will be nominated. The internal review committee's comments are returned to the Dean and Department Chair for consideration in revising the department's self-report.</p>
3. Selection and invitation of external reviewers.	<p>Selection of External Review Committee Members</p> <p>The Department Chair nominates well-respected faculty from highly-regarded peer institutions to serve as external reviewers. One or more senior industry people may be included if appropriate. The list of external reviewers is discussed with the Dean and faculty members before a final decision is made. Normally, two external reviewers will be nominated. However, the appropriate number of reviewers depends on the size and range of sub-disciplines of the unit under review. Recruiting external reviewers that faculty respect and admire contributes greatly to faculty support of the review process.</p>

³ The self-study procedure outlined here is based on: Education Advisory Board of the University Leadership Council, "Improving Academic Program Review", January 2012, The Advisory Board Company, Washington DC

	<p>At least two months before the date of the review, the Department Chair invites the nominees to become the External Peer Review Committee.</p> <p>At least two weeks before the date of the review, the Department Chair sends the self-study materials to the members of the External Peer Review Committee.</p>
4. External reviewers visit campus	<p>External Review of Department</p> <p>External reviewers may solicit input concerning key issues from the Department and from academic leaders across the university. The external reviewers evaluate the self-study submission from the Department and meet with faculty members, administrators, staff and students as required to complete their assessments.</p> <p>The External Peer Review Committee conducts a brief exit interview with the Dean of the school.</p> <p>The External Peer Review Committee is requested to compile a report to comment on the issues raised and to summarize the challenges and opportunities facing that unit. The Committee is requested to submit this report within two weeks of the date of their visit.</p>
5. Department responds to comments made by reviewers.	<p>Department Response to Reviewer Commentary</p> <p>The Department members involved in completing the self study reconvene to digest the comments reviewers have made and either write responses or adjust the self study accordingly.</p>
6. Department representatives meet with reviewers and senior administrators in a roundtable discussion.	<p>Roundtable Discussion of Review</p> <p>The Academic Dean, Provost and the Department Chair read the external reviewer report and any responses developed by the Department, and then compile specific questions that the Department should address during a roundtable discussion.</p>
7. Senior administrators provide final review and determine outcomes.	<p>Final Review and Determination of Outcomes</p> <p>The Academic Dean and Provost comment on the collection of responses from the internal and external reviewers and the Department. The Department writes a proposed action plan in response.</p>
8. Senior administrators acknowledge and accept Department action plan.	<p>Acceptance of Action Plan</p> <p>The Dean and the Provost will acknowledge the receipt of a Department's action plan; they will formally approve the action plan and provide further feedback and support.</p>

Table 2 - Self-Study Content and Review Criteria

Quantitative Data	
Department data is compiled by the Department with assistance from the Office of Planning and Assessment.	
Quantitative data provided will include:	
Faculty demographics and climate survey Faculty honors and awards Research and external funding Faculty workload measures Department support resources Undergraduate and Graduate majors and degrees	Diversity of faculty and students Enrollment Undergraduate and Graduate Completion Rates Student Success Faculty CVs Course catalog(s) Course syllabi
Qualitative Data ⁴	
Review questions and more qualitative data may include:	
Mission, values and goals Historical overview Organizational structure Resources and costs Demand Outreach and service engagement Areas of excellence SWOT analysis Capacity for improvement and adaptability Plans for recruitment of quality students Plans for recruitment of quality faculty Diversity activity and workplace environment	Student quality Learning environment Intended student learning objectives Impact and quality of instruction Effectiveness of instruction management policies Quality of outcomes (e.g., job placement, national certification results, faculty productivity) Feedback systems Current research and scholarship activity Plans for research curriculum

⁴ Where possible, and to avoid redundant efforts, self-study questions and data collection efforts should align with institutional accreditation reviews.