

# Policy on the Review of Academic Units

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## **I. Overview of the Unit Review Process**

Periodic review of an academic unit's pursuit of excellence can contribute significantly to the enhancement of the unit's progress and respond to the University's responsibility for efficient use of resources. Each academic unit on campus shall undergo a review at no more than seven-year intervals. Centers contained within a unit shall be reviewed along with the unit. The primary goal of this review will be to improve the unit's effectiveness and quality--by providing the unit and the administration with a clear assessment of the unit's strengths and weaknesses and by providing the unit with the opportunity for periodic self examination. Each dean is responsible for preparing and circulating a schedule of reviews for his or her units, for initiating the reviews, and for reporting to the Provost on the results of the reviews.

The review process shall have several components: an internal self-study including the accumulation of relevant data, external review of the unit, and proper utilization of the results of the review. An internal committee will be selected and charged with the self-study and the accumulation of data. An external committee will be selected and charged with the external review. In order to ensure proper utilization of the results of the review, the internal self-study and the external review reports should be made available to the unit, the Dean, and the Provost in a timely manner. The entire length of time required for the review from the beginning of the self-study to the completion of the external review should be no more than one-year, and ideally no more than six months. The arrangements for the external review and the conduct of the self-study should be done concurrently, so that the external review can occur immediately after the completion of the self-study.

The campus has an unusually wide variety of units that include performing arts departments and professional schools that undergo accreditation reviews or have other external constraints. Thus, the review procedures must allow flexibility--in the time period between reviews, in the composition of the committees, and in the data gathered. For example, units requiring accreditation may wish to adjust the timing of their academic reviews to coincide with the accreditation reviews so as to maximize the value of the review process, or they may, with the approval of the Provost, have the accreditation review serve as all or a portion of the unit review. To the extent possible, however, all reviews should address common criteria.

## **II. Selection of Review Committees**

The Dean of the unit under review shall have primary responsibility for the selection of the external review committee, according to procedures outlined in the College Plan of Organization or bylaws, and for ensuring the completion of an appropriate self-study. It is the Dean's responsibility to ensure that the composition of the committees is in concert with the goals of the review. Where the College or School is not departmentalized or where the unit reports directly to the Provost, the Provost shall have responsibility for selecting the committees. If an accreditation review is approved to serve as the external review, then the accreditation review committee serves the function of the external review committee.

The internal self-study committee shall (where appropriate) include faculty, students (undergraduate and graduate where appropriate), and staff members and shall (where appropriate) include faculty from outside the unit.

The external committee will usually consist of three to five off-campus scholars or professionals of significant accomplishment who can be relied upon to provide an objective and authoritative assessment of the unit. In making these appointments, the Dean shall solicit nominees from the Chair of the unit under review. For units that undergo accreditation or other externally organized reviews, the information supplied by the accreditation or other review team should be fully utilized; this may eliminate the need for an external review committee or make it possible to use a smaller, more focused, external committee. The scope of the required additional review will be at the discretion of the Dean, in consultation with the Provost. The external committee members should be provided with a copy of the internal self-study a few weeks in advance of their visit to campus.

## **III. Charge to Committees**

In addition to accumulating factual data and soliciting and reporting the views of unit members and other interested parties, the internal self-study committee should develop a coherent picture of what the unit does and how it operates. The committee should provide its assessment of how successful the unit is in fulfilling its mission, and how well it functions as an organization. The unit's success in fostering diversity and providing a supportive climate for all its members should be discussed. The committee report should include the unit's strategic vision of its future directions and a realistic assessment of the actions necessary to move it to a higher level of achievement.

A particular responsibility of the external committee is to assess how the unit and its programs compare with disciplinary norms. This includes scholarly success and stature, the choice of areas of study, the structure of academic programs, and the quality of graduates and their placement. The external committee should also provide its view of the appropriate future directions of the unit, and of the actions needed to move it to a higher level of achievement.

The quality of the review will depend critically on the nature of the charge given to the review committees. At a minimum, the committees will receive copies of this policy on Review of Academic Units. Detailed charges, specific and appropriate to the functions and responsibilities of the unit at the time of the review, should also be given by the Dean. The following points define the issues to be addressed, but should be construed merely as illustrative of these issues.

#### A. Charge Concerning Quality of Undergraduate Instruction

The self-study and external review committees should attempt to evaluate the nature of the undergraduate experience by addressing the quality of the intellectual environment, the teaching, and the curriculum. As appropriate to the discipline, this might involve issues such as the following:

1. How well does the curriculum fit the philosophy and purpose of the undergraduate program? Does it reflect both adequate generalization and specialization? Does it reflect up-to-date thinking in the field?
2. How well is information fluency assured for all undergraduate majors? How well is information technology incorporated in instruction? Are graduates of the program prepared to use information resources and technology at a level appropriate to the discipline?
3. Do the courses offer sufficient breadth and depth? Are proper sequences established among courses? Is there a well-established departmental honors program and are there opportunities for honors and independent study projects? Is there a capstone course or other senior experience designated to integrate the undergraduate work and to provide a transition to graduate school or career?
4. Are there sufficient numbers of courses and seats offered to meet the needs for majors, other programs for which the unit provides service, and general education? Are the courses offered with adequate frequency?
5. Do all programs (for majors, for general education, service courses for other programs, and electives for personal enrichment) motivate students and foster learning, follow the catalog descriptions, and use up-to-date materials that reflect current thinking in the field? Where possible, courses should be visited.
6. For laboratory courses: Is the apparatus adequately maintained? Are all lab manuals easily updateable and maintainable using modern software? Are all lab manuals accurate and up-to-date? Do students have adequate workspace, or are they overcrowded?
7. What has been the outcome of the teaching assessment process, which was described in the information package?

8. How does the unit collect information on student learning outcomes and use this assessment in curriculum revisions?
9. Is there recognition for superior academic performance?
10. What is the availability of financial assistance, honors programs, experiential learning programs, and assistance in developing potential? Is there an environment that fosters collaboration, learning, and community morale?
11. What is the availability of lectures, readings, performances, informal group meetings, off-campus experts in the field, and undergraduate organizations? What communication is there about current action and concerns, as well as research, scholarship, and creative activity in the field?
12. What is the nature of the contact with faculty, especially mentoring, other than in the classroom and during formal office and advising hours? What kind of in-and-out-of-class contact with other students is there, particularly those from diverse racial, economic, and cultural backgrounds?
13. Does the academic unit support and enforce University policy on academic integrity? Are faculty aware of undergraduate referral procedures?

#### B. Charge Concerning Quality of Graduate Instruction

The committees should attempt to evaluate the nature of the intellectual environment of the unit. This would involve, among other considerations, the following:

1. The quality of the graduate courses. Where possible, some courses should be visited.
2. How well is information fluency assured for all graduate students? How well is information technology incorporated in instruction? Are graduates of the program prepared to use information resources and technology at a level appropriate to the discipline?
3. The combinations of courses that define particular programs. Are they the right combinations? Are certain courses missing? Is there appropriate balance?
4. The content and substance of the different graduate programs within the unit and their relationship to what is important in the discipline.
5. The general intellectual environment of the department, independent of the formal graduate program (e.g., active speaking series, collaboration of faculty, team research, scholarship, and creative activity, people who appear to be excited by the newness of ideas in the unit, and the like).

6. The funding of graduate students as fellows and teaching and research assistants. Where assistantships are involved, what is the appropriateness of the assignments to the students' development as instructors, scholars, and/or artists?
7. Does the academic unit support and enforce University policy on academic integrity? Are faculty aware of graduate referral procedures?
8. What is the nature of the contact with faculty, especially mentoring, other than in the classroom and during formal office and advising hours? What kind of in- and out-of-class contact with other students is there, particularly those from diverse racial, economic, and cultural backgrounds?

#### C. Charge Concerning Advising

The committees should attempt to evaluate the quality of the advising systems for undergraduate and graduate students.

1. Is there a sufficient level of advising to support student needs and wishes appropriately? Does it encourage students to make acceptable progress toward their degrees? Does it make appropriate referrals to other services outside the unit?
2. Do students receive adequate and current information about courses and programs in the unit? To what extent do students have access to current information about requirements, deadlines, and important opportunities within the unit, such as special events, student groups, opportunities for research, scholarship, and creative activity, and the like? Do majors receive adequate and current information about graduate programs, financial aid and scholarship opportunities, career interests, and experiential learning programs?
3. Do students receive adequate and current information about programs, courses, services and opportunities outside the unit, including adequate advising about the general education program?
4. What is the reputation of the advising staff with students, faculty, alumni, parents, and others?

#### D. Charge Concerning Service Activities

It is important that service contributions of the unit be evaluated carefully, particularly in those units where service can be a major component of activity, such as in education and agriculture. A survey of service clients may be essential in order to respond fully to this charge. Issues to be addressed include the following:

1. What is the nature and extent of service offered by the unit and what audiences are the recipients of this service? Is the extent of the service offered commensurate with the objectives and capacity of the unit?
2. What has been the reaction towards the service from the recipients of it? What is the reputation of the unit among the recipients of the service? Are there objective measures of the quality of the service (e.g., manuals, curricula, and the like)?

#### E. Charge Concerning Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activity

The external review committee should be asked to address the following questions in their review.

1. What is the committee's assessment of the dissertations recently produced with regard to quality, area of inquiry, importance, innovation, and the like?
2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the department in research, scholarship, and creative activity?
3. What are the major foci of unit research, scholarship, and creative activity and how do these relate to the field in terms of importance and innovation? Does the unit lack foci, are its efforts in research, scholarship, and creative activity scattered?
4. Who are the leading faculty in research, scholarship, and creative activity? How might other faculty be assisted in improving their productivity?
5. Are the resources that are presently available being used in the best possible ways? What might be some alternative uses of the same resources that might be more productive?
6. How can a minimal amount of resources, such as one line or a small amount of money be effectively used to increase the capacity of the unit for research, scholarship, and creative activity?

#### F. Charge Concerning Recommendations

Many recommendations that would improve a given unit might not be feasible because of the expense involved and the requirements of other units within the University. Therefore, the committees are encouraged to focus their recommendations upon what can and should be done within existing resources, unless the Dean expressly indicates otherwise. Where a committee feels that additional resources must be added in order for the unit to be able to function (e.g., facility improvements because of unsafe laboratory conditions), the committee should recommend the minimum addition that will satisfy the unit's requirements. Since there will always be competition for scarce resources that involves units not being reviewed by these committees, recommendations that many

positions or large amounts of funds be added to the unit are not likely to be useful and turn attention away from what realistically can be done.

#### **IV. Unit Reports**

1. The internal self-study and external committee reports should be factual and explicit.
2. The Chair of the unit under review will distribute the self-study report to the faculty and will deliver a copy to the Dean who will transmit it to the members of the external review committee in advance of their visit to campus. The external review committee should be asked to submit their final report within thirty days of their campus visit, and upon receipt, the Dean shall transmit a copy of the report to the Chair of the unit under review. The Chair of the unit under review shall distribute the external review report to the faculty immediately upon receipt and, with the advice of the faculty, may respond to the report within thirty calendar days of the Chair's receipt of that report. Should the Chair of the unit under review respond to the report, the response shall be attached to that report as a permanent appendix.
3. The Dean shall prepare an evaluative report of the unit under review, giving due consideration to (a) internal self-study and (b) the report of the external review committee and any response by the Chair, and after consultation with the Chair shall transmit it promptly to the Provost along with copies of the internal self-study and the external review.
4. The Provost shall promptly convene a meeting with the Dean and the Chair of the unit under review to discuss the documents received.
5. The Provost shall prepare a summary report on the unit review, giving due consideration to (a) the internal self-study, (b) the report of the external review committee and any response by the Chair, and (c) the Dean's evaluative report. The summary report shall endorse various recommendations and, as appropriate, discuss their financial implications and agenda for implementation. The Provost's summary report shall be transmitted to the Dean, the Chair, and the faculty of the unit within thirty calendar days of the meeting with the Dean and Chair. It will also serve as the required Institutional report to the Board of Regents.

#### **Appendix: Information to be Provided to the Committee**

The internal self study shall include and be informed by information regularly collected and published by the Office of Institutional Research and Planning, additional information provided by the Dean's office, an assessment of information resources provided by the University libraries, and information derived from unit files including information generated from internal and external accreditation reviews. The resulting information package should be appropriate to the functions and responsibilities of the unit. For academic departments and Colleges or Schools that are not departmentalized, the items in the package should include the following (depending on the specific degrees offered):

1. Five-year numbers of undergraduate and graduate students (full-time and part-time), degrees awarded, mean length of time to complete bachelors degree(s), numbers of faculty and staff (full-time, part-time, and budgeted FTE), graduate assistants, credit hours taught to majors and non-majors, SAT/ACT scores of majors, GRE scores and undergraduate GPA of graduate students, contracts and grants received, faculty salary comparisons, and expenditures of non-restricted funds.
2. Information on the number of applications for admission to the graduate program, the quality of schools that are represented, the number of acceptances, identification of specializations and number of students in each, and other similar material concerning the appeal of the program to prospective graduate students.
3. Positions accepted by recent professional Master's and Ph.D. graduates, awards and honors received by recent graduates, entry level salary of graduates, and frequency distribution of years required to complete professional masters and doctoral programs.
4. The abstract pages from all Ph.D. dissertations since the last review.
5. Summaries of recent achievements in research, scholarship, and creative activity of the faculty and of recent graduate students. These should include an indication of the quality of the journals and presses involved, and citation counts of publications, or other evidence of the importance of the faculty's achievements; the curriculum vitae of each faculty should also be made available.
6. Courses offered, categorized by audience (graduate students, undergraduate majors, general education, service to other units, electives).
7. Undergraduate curriculum and any requirements for admission to major.
8. Advisors, number and FTE (separately for faculty and staff), for undergraduates and graduates, and for theses and dissertations.
9. Description of the advising system for undergraduates and graduates, including the procedures for selection, training, coordination, and monitoring of the advising staff.
10. Description of the process used to assess teaching, and of the procedures used for the selection, training, coordination, and monitoring of the teaching staff, including teaching assistants.
11. Results of student questionnaires on advising and teaching.
12. Plan of Organization of the unit, including committees and memberships.

13. Appropriate statistics computed from the above data.

14. Information on departmental resources both physical and financial.