An Introduction and Guide to Academic Unit Review

The Office of Academic Affairs

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Purpose of Review
The academic unit (department/school) review is a constructive, data driven, analytic, improvement oriented effort to identify unit – level patterns, issues, and steps to advance strategic goals. Reviews are conducted on a seven-year cycle and are a collaboration of the unit, the college, and the Office of Academic Affairs (OAA). The scope of the review includes all research areas; undergraduate, graduate and professional academic programs, and outreach and engagement efforts.

The review is accomplished by the following activities, described in greater detail below:
1. The unit writes a self-study.
2. An external review team visits and provides an informal and formal report.
3. The unit writes a plan of action, confirmed by the college and OAA.

I. The Self-Study
The self-study is not a description of the unit but a data and constituent-informed analysis that leads to the identification of key issues and potential steps to address them. Units and the college may elect to emphasize some areas over others given current challenges and/or strategic plan elements. Specific questions for the self-study are provided on pages 7-10.

The self-study will include the following sections. Typically, it will be 30-40 pages in length.

- Executive summary
  - Overview of the unit
  - Mission and purpose
  - External reputation

- Faculty
  - Recruitment, mentoring, and retention
  - Diversity
  - Intellectual life of the unit
  - Trends in academic appointments

- Research agenda and foci
  - How and how well are we creating new knowledge?
  - Funding patterns and trends
  - Interdisciplinary research

- Educational programs and students (graduate/professional/undergraduate)
  - Student academic preparation and engagement in learning
  - Graduate student recruitment, time to degree, and placement
  - Recent and planned curricular and programmatic changes
  - Enrollment and degree completion patterns and trends
  - Instruction and student satisfaction
  - Role of technology in instruction
  - Use of student outcomes assessment
  - Advising and academic support/mentoring
• Outreach and engagement
  o Current pattern and potential activity

• Infrastructure and resources
  o Finances, staffing, and academic support
  o Status of technology needs
  o Space issues

• Governance
  o Recent leadership succession and impact
  o Effectiveness of internal governance: POA and P&T

II. The External Review Team Visit
The external review team should be considered experts in the field whose opinions will carry weight with the entire unit. The team members should not have any ties to The Ohio State University. Their names and a short biographical sketch should be provided to, and approved by, the college and the vice provost for academic programs.

The external review schedule will include the following:
• An opening orientation session with the dean and vice provost for academic programs
• Meetings with:
  o The vice president for research, vice provost and dean of the graduate school, vice provost and dean of undergraduate education
  o The unit chair/school director
  o Regular faculty
  o Untenured faculty
  o Representative groups of undergraduate and graduate students
  o Representatives from units or centers with collaborative research interests
  o The dean and college senior staff/leadership team
• An exit session where the external team reports findings to the chair
• A separate exit session where the external team reports findings to the provost, college dean, vice provost for academic programs, vice provosts, vice president for research, vice provost for graduate studies and dean of the graduate school, vice provost for undergraduate studies and dean of undergraduate education, and assistant provost

Additionally, the team should have morning and afternoon breaks on first full day, and open time in the evenings for the team to work (no social events). Please see the sample schedule on page 11.
III. Elements of the Plan of Action

The plan of action process consists of:

- a meeting with the unit chair, college dean, provost, vice provost for academic programs, and assistant provost and
- a document that outlines the steps to be taken.

The plan of action document should define the overall status and trajectory of the unit by outlining both short-term and long-term steps the unit will take in response to the external team’s recommendations.

What happens in the meeting:

- The provost, vice provost for academic programs and assistant provost should be given a draft version of the plan of action document in advance.
- This draft should consist of actions the unit plans to take as a result of the unit review and external team’s recommendations.
- Part of the meeting may be used to discuss overall reactions to the external team’s report.

Unit faculty should play a key role in all phases of the unit review and action planning process, provide input, receive updates, and have access to copies of all studies, reports, and plans. The final plan of action document will be shared with OAA and the college dean.

IV. Timeline and Activities (6 – 9 months)

1. The college dean identifies units for review for the year and shares this list with the vice provost for academic programs.
2. The dean, unit chair, vice provost for academic programs and assistant provost for academic programs meet to discuss the process.
3. The unit and dean select and contact three external team members. The team members should have no previous ties to The Ohio State University.
4. The unit writes the self-study.
5. The self-study is sent to the external team, dean, vice provost for academic programs, and provost one month before external team visit.
6. The external team visits for typically 2 ½ days.
7. At the end of the visit the external team shares its findings in two meetings:
   a. with the unit chair,
   b. with the provost, college dean, vice provost for academic programs, vice provosts, vice president for research, vice provost for graduate studies and dean of the graduate school, vice provost for undergraduate studies and dean of undergraduate education, and assistant provost for academic programs
8. The external team submits the official team report within one month of external team visit.
9. The academic unit reviews the external team’s report.
10. The chair develops a draft plan of action document.
11. The chair, dean, provost, vice provost for academic programs, and assistant provost for academic programs meet to discuss the plan of action within six months of external team visit.
12. The plan of action document is finalized and submitted to the dean and provost.
13. The plan of action document is revisited in subsequent meetings, performance reviews, planning and budgeting cycle, and future unit reviews.
Appendix A: Primary Roles: College, Unit, and OAA

College

- Establish a long-term schedule of program reviews by unit, by academic year, and expected team visit dates (should be staggered throughout year)
- Work with unit to identify external reviewers; honoraria (discipline/college norms have ranged from $1,000-$1,500, plus hotel and meal expenses)
- Secure accommodations for the team, typically at The Blackwell Inn
  - Ensure one of the guest rooms has work space for the team, if possible
- Work with the unit to schedule, identify, and reserve meeting spaces for the team visit
- Serve as the primary source for correspondence with team members and with OAA
  - Confirm the visit schedule with OAA (developed in collaboration with unit chair)
  - Send self-study and supporting materials (including team visit schedule) and college/institutional context and “charge” to external review team at least three weeks prior to the team visit
  - Send self-study (with supporting materials) to OAA with finalized team visit schedule
- Schedule the plan of action meeting with the unit chair and OAA and embed action plan progress in annual interactions with the provost and OAA

Unit

- Establish strategy, process, and emphases for the self-study based on the outline and questions provided by OAA (pages 7 – 10)
- Review information provided by OAA and other university sources, including unit and college sources
- Compose a brief, analytic self-study (approximately 30-40 pages, plus data and supporting materials in appendices on a CD)
- Co-host the external team during the visit
- Arrange for transportation of the team to and from the airport and the Blackwell Inn
- Write the first draft and final version of the plan of action document
- The chair participates in plan of action meeting and regular follow up on progress via established planning, reporting, and budgeting processes

Office of Academic Affairs

- Review policy coordination and oversight
- Provide data and logistical support to college and unit
- Coordinate scheduling of the opening meeting with dean/chair and exit session with external team (location, time, attendees)
- Assist with review of self-study drafts, verify and approve review team and visit schedule
- Ensure appropriate sessions are on the calendars of vice provosts, provost, vice president for research, vice provost for graduate studies and dean of the graduate school, and vice provost for undergraduate studies and dean of undergraduate education
Appendix B: Discussion Questions for Self-Study

Executive summary

- Overview of the unit and background
- What is our unifying and overarching goal (mission)?
  o What is the unit mission and purpose?
  o To what degree/in what ways are the unit’s activities linked to the mission of the unit, the college, and the university?
  o When was the mission last reviewed and discussed? Is there a process for reviewing the mission and purposes of the unit?
  o Does the mission effectively link unit strengths in research and teaching with societal needs and opportunities for the future?
  o How deep and extensive is knowledge of the mission, vision, goals among faculty members, staff, and stakeholders?

- External reputation
  o How do others see the unit and how does the unit want to be viewed?
  o What is the unit’s sense of its reputation among other institutions and peers? What are the gaps between where the unit is now and where it wants to be?
  o What are the emerging trends in the discipline? What is being done and can be done to move forward and seize emerging opportunities? Do these changes in the discipline suggest a need to refocus or adjust priorities?
  o What are the unit’s strengths and weaknesses? How have these changed over time? What should be done?

Faculty

- Recruitment, mentoring, and retention
  o How are faculty working together to help colleagues be successful and valued members of the unit?
  o What initiatives have been developed or are in place to provide mentoring and support for new faculty members, those working toward successful transition from associate to full professor, and throughout the career cycle? How effective have these efforts been?
  o How has the unit enhanced and addressed work-life issues for faculty (and staff)?
  o How clear is the P&T process with regard to communication and implementation?
  o What has been the impact of new hires/departures over last 3-5 years on quality (research productivity, teaching quality) and diversity? Is there a trend?
  o How do the salaries compare against benchmarks? What planning is in place to address salary compression, if it exists?
  o How does the unit assess its ability to recruit and retain faculty members?
  o What does the future look like with regard to attracting and retaining top scholars?
  o How is hiring linked with program planning, research priorities, and future directions?

- Diversity
  o What is the status of efforts to enhance representation, involvement, and the climate to create a truly diverse intellectual community?
  o What are the trends in minority and gender representation among faculty members?
How does the unit rate its ability to attract and retain a diverse faculty? What should be done to continue and/or enhance progress?

What is the impact of these developments on curricula, academic support, or research for the unit and on student or unit development?

• **Intellectual life of the unit**
  - How well do unit faculty engage and interact with each other as scholars and lifelong learners?
  - What is the degree and quality of scholarly interaction among faculty and students?
  - Are there special opportunities to share research and information among individuals and groups?
  - Is there a sense of community, openness to new ideas, opportunity to participate, and actual involvement at all levels of faculty rank? If not, what might be done to enhance such involvement?

• **Trends in academic appointments**
  - How has the proportion of classes taught by T/TT faculty changed?
  - How has the proportion of the faculty FTE changed by track?

**Research agenda and foci**

• **How and how well are we creating new knowledge?**
  - What are the focal points of the research agenda?
  - What are the current strengths and weaknesses of the research program?
  - Is research increasing in quality? quantity? impact?
  - What steps must be taken and how should the unit move forward over the next 5 years?

• **Funding patterns and trends**
  - What implications do changes/trends in levels, areas, and sources of research funding have for research quality and productivity in the unit?

• **Interdisciplinary activity**
  - What is the current pattern and amount of interdisciplinary activity?
  - What potential activity and opportunities should be explored?
  - What are the obstacles to developing collaboration in teaching, research, and service with other programs? How can these be addressed?

**Educational program and students**

• **Student academic preparation and engagement in learning**
  - What are the trends and impacts of changes in student quality? How does the unit seek to enhance its ability to attract and retain high-quality students?
  - In what ways has the unit improved recruiting for undergraduate and graduate students? How involved are students in the academic life of the unit (research, planning, curriculum)?
  - In what ways should the unit seek to enhance interdisciplinary and international opportunities for its students?
• **Graduate student recruitment, time to degree and placement**
  o What is the status and track record of PhD placements in recent years? Are graduates seeking and obtaining quality positions? What are the economic/market issues?
  o What are the strengths and weaknesses of graduate student support, mentoring, and training for careers (faculty and non-faculty)?
  o Is the unit aware of career trends in its fields for graduate students? Is it taking steps to prepare them for new and different careers?
  o Is the size of the graduate program appropriate?

• **Recent and planned curricular and programmatic changes**
  o How have programs changed or planned to change in response to broader trends in the discipline? In what areas might the unit be a leader or innovator in moving the discipline forward?
  o To what extent are programs aligned with college and university goals? How is the unit identifying and enhancing opportunities for collaboration with other disciplines as shaped by these goals?

• **Enrollment and degree completion patterns and trends**
  o How do enrollment plans align with university/college plans?
  o What are the “sticking points” in undergraduate and graduate student academic performance and timely degree completion? What has been/is being/should be done to address these issues?

• **Instruction and student satisfaction**
  o How are teaching loads borne across the unit? What strategies might enhance instructional quality and impact?
  o What is the distribution of regular faculty across course levels and areas? Does this distribution maximize student and faculty productivity? What might be done to address this?
  o How are Student Evaluations of Instruction used?

• **Role of technology in instruction**
  o What progress has been made to effectively integrate technology to enhance student learning, faculty performance, and the quality of programs and services?
  o What are the unit’s goals and plans to enhance the benefits of integrated technology use?

• **Student outcomes assessment**
  o How does the unit gauge student performance, achievement, and satisfaction within the unit?
  o What is the current status of student outcomes assessment?

• **Advising and academic support/mentoring**
  o How does the unit support and enhance the quality of advising?
Outreach and Engagement

- **Current pattern and potential activity**
  - How well is the unit connecting learning and new knowledge with the needs of external groups and society?
  - What opportunities and threats have been identified?
  - What role do alumni have in the unit and its efforts to enhance its value to society?
  - How is outreach integrated into research and learning experiences to create a coherent system of knowledge dissemination and creation?

Infrastructure and resources

- **Finances, staffing, and academic support**
  - How do financial resources align with future unit needs (human resources and infrastructure)?

- **Status of technology needs**
  - What are the unit’s current and future technology needs for instruction, research and office support?
  - What is the current and desired role of technology as a means to improve student learning and enhance overall support and productivity?

- **Space issues**
  - What kinds of space and facility issues does the unit face?
  - What are the projections for future needs?

Governance

- **Recent leadership succession and impact**
  - What leadership changes have occurred in recent years? What has been the impact of these changes? What are the rules/norms that govern succession and leadership within the unit?
  - What is the status of training/professional development in the unit to foster effective leadership and governance? What is planned?
  - What is the process for how “service assignment” appointments are made? How are “service” appointments allocated?

- **Effectiveness of internal governance: POA and P&T**
  - What findings emerge from consideration of internal governance (POA) processes? What changes or issues might be pursued and addressed?
  - Do leaders communicate and cultivate a clear vision and collaboration within the unit?
Appendix C: Sample Schedule for External Review Team

Day 1
- Arrive at Port Columbus (late afternoon); transportation to the Blackwell Inn arranged by the unit chair
- Dinner with team and team charge by vice provost for academic programs and dean (usually starts at 6:30 p.m. at the Blackwell Bistro)

Day 2
- Meeting of unit chair and team
- Meeting of team and vice president for research, vice provost and dean of the graduate school, vice provost and dean of undergraduate education
- Separate meetings with faculty by sub-fields/interests as appropriate
- Meeting with junior faculty only
- Meeting with support staff
- Lunch (could be working brown bag lunch with undergraduate and then graduate students)
- Meeting with undergraduate majors (representative group)
- Meeting with graduate students (master’s and doctoral separate if appropriate)
- Meetings with other unit committees (curriculum, graduate studies, etc…)
- Facilities/program area tour
- Dinner (team only)
- Evening open – team members draft observations, conclusions, recommendations

Day 3
- Breakfast for team
- Meeting with dean and senior college staff/leadership team
- Meetings with other colleagues, centers, programs connected with the unit
- Time for additional follow-up activities or requests
- Working lunch (catered or at Faculty Club near exit session location)
- Session with chair/director alone to give brief review of findings
- Reporting out session: provost, college dean, vice provost for academic programs, vice provosts, vice president for research, vice provost for graduate studies and dean of the graduate school, vice provost for undergraduate studies and dean of undergraduate education, and assistant provost for academic programs
- Team departs by cab/shuttle or unit chair, according to preference
Appendix D: Information and Data Resources

- College Profile and Budget Information
- Faculty and Support Staff FTE’s and Ratios
- OHR Faculty and Staff Salary Benchmark Reports
- HERI Faculty Survey Results
- Research Award and Expenditure Data
- Course FTE and Headcount by Course Level and Section Type
- Course Enrollment by Course Level and Instructor Type
- Persistence and Graduation Rates
- Number of degrees awarded
- GRE Scores/Admissions Criteria – applied, admitted, enrolled
- Graduate Student Survey Results
- Survey of Earned Doctorates
- NRC Data
- Ph.D. Time to Degree and Placement Data
- National Survey of Student Engagement Results

Other Documents for the Self-Study and External Team:

- Pattern of Administration Document
- Appointment, Promotion and Tenure Document
- University Academic and Diversity Plans and Reports
- College and Unit Strategic Plans
- Budget Information
- Major, Minor, and Graduate Program Curriculum Sheets/Requirements
- General Education and Major Program Assessment Reports
- Faculty CV’s

Contacts

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Academic Unit Review Web Site:
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