THE OFFICE OF ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

An Introduction and Guide to Academic Unit Review

FOR DEPARTMENTS AND SCHOOLS

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Preface

Academic unit review can be among the most meaningful experiences departments, schools and colleges have at The Ohio State University. These periodic studies of a unit’s progress and potential are profoundly important to developing a shared future vision as colleagues come together to chart their unit’s next strategic milestones. Through academic unit review, those colleagues also develop a richer understanding of how their unit’s activities contribute to Ohio State’s core goals of teaching and learning, research and innovation, outreach and engagement, and resource stewardship. And with that understanding, they can more effectively help their unit and the university forward.

Reviews are aligned with college and department strategic planning and chair appointments. Academic unit reviews are scheduled every eight years. The results of the external reviews thus inform our units’ strategic documents.

PURPOSE OF AN ACADEMIC UNIT REVIEW

The review of an academic unit (a department or school) is an evidence-based, improvement-oriented effort to identify unit-level strengths, issues, and steps to advance its strategic goals, which should be in alignment with those of its college.

Reviews are conducted on an eight-year cycle and are a collaboration of the unit, its college, and the Office of Academic Affairs (OAA). The review includes all research areas; undergraduate, graduate and professional academic programs; and outreach and engagement efforts.

The following activities, described in greater detail below, comprise an academic unit review:

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.

Unit faculty should play a key role in all phases of the review and action planning process, provide input, receive updates, and have access to copies of all studies, reports, and plans.
THE SELF-STUDY

The self-study is not a description of the unit. Rather, it is an evidence-based, and constituent-informed analysis that leads to the identification of core strengths, key issues and potential steps to address them. A unit and its college may elect to emphasize some areas over others, guided by—for example—resource challenges or college strategic plan goals. Specific questions for the self-study are provided in appendix B.

The self-study, typically 30 to 40 pages in length, will include the following sections:

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 is new knowledge being created
- 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
- Current pattern and potential activity

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

Governance
- Recent leadership succession and impact
- Effectiveness of internal governance: Pattern of Administration and Appointments, Tenure and Promotion processes
THE EXTERNAL REVIEW TEAM VISIT

The external review team members 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 and strategic planning.

*The external review schedule will include the following:*

- An opening orientation session with the dean and vice provost for academic and strategic planning
- Meetings with:
  - The vice president for research, vice provost and dean of the graduate school, vice provost and dean of undergraduate education
  - The department chair/school director
  - Tenured faculty
  - Untenured faculty
  - Representative groups of undergraduate and graduate students
  - Representatives from units or centers with collaborative research interests
  - The dean and college senior staff/leadership team
- An exit session at which the external team reports findings to the chair/director
- A separate exit session at which the external team reports its findings to the provost, college dean, vice provost for academic and strategic planning, 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 associate director of institutional research

The team will 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 in appendix C.

THE PLAN OF ACTION

The plan of action should outline both short-term and long-term steps the unit will take in response to the external team’s recommendations.

A draft of the plan of action is shared with the college dean, provost, vice provost for academic and strategic planning, and associate director of institutional research. These officers, together with the unit chair/director, then meet to discuss overall reactions to the external team’s report and review the plan in light of that feedback.

The final plan of action document will be shared with OAA and the college dean. It should be integrated into the department or school’s strategic plan.
### TIMELINE AND ACTIVITIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>APPROXIMATE TIME FRAME</th>
<th>RESPONSIBILITIES</th>
<th>COMMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12 months prior to external review team visit</td>
<td>Hold one-hour kickoff meeting</td>
<td>Dean, chair/director, vice provost for academic and strategic planning, and associate director of institutional research meet to discuss the review.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 months prior</td>
<td>Choose date for review</td>
<td>OAA works with the unit and college to select the review date.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 months prior</td>
<td>Nominate candidates for the external review team</td>
<td>Department/school nominates 8 to 10 reviewers from top programs and provides their contact and bio information as well as brief justification for nomination; list must be approved by the college and vice provost.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11 months prior</td>
<td>Invite review team</td>
<td>College dean extends invitations, sends instructions and selects a team lead. College makes travel arrangements and reserves accommodations at the Blackwell Inn (see Appendix D: External Review Team Instructions).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 months prior</td>
<td>Hold logistics and data meeting</td>
<td>Department chair/school director meets with the associate director of institutional research and planning to discuss logistics and data for the self-study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 months prior</td>
<td>Launch self-study</td>
<td>The chair/director organizes and initiates the self-study. The process should be transparent to the department.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 months prior</td>
<td>Develop itinerary</td>
<td>The department sets the visit itinerary and schedules meetings for external team (see Appendix C - Sample Schedule for External Review Team).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 month prior</td>
<td>Distribute final materials</td>
<td>The college sends the self-study, visit itinerary, college and (if applicable) unit strategic plan to the external review team and associate director of institutional research and planning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 week prior</td>
<td>Do final check</td>
<td>The college verifies that the team has the self-study and answers any questions from the team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Host external review team</td>
<td>See Appendix C - Sample Schedule for External Review Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within 4 weeks of visit</td>
<td>Receive external review team report</td>
<td>The external review team sends the department/school, college, and vice provost for academic and strategic planning a 5-10 page report.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within 10 weeks of visit</td>
<td>Develop Plan of Action</td>
<td>See Plan of Action on page 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 months after visit</td>
<td>Meet to discuss Plan of Action</td>
<td>See Plan of Action on page 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After meeting with provost</td>
<td>Integrate plan of action into unit strategic plan</td>
<td>The chair/director, in consultation with the faculty and the college, modifies the unit’s strategic plan to incorporate the plan of action (if a strategic plan exists).</td>
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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 point of contact for correspondence with team members and with OAA
  – Confirm the visit schedule with OAA (developed in collaboration with unit chair/director)
  – 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
  – Follow up with external review team
- Schedule the plan of action meeting with the unit chair/director 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 in appendix B
- 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 appendix)
- 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
- Schedule the chair/director for participation in the plan of action meeting
- Through established planning, reporting, and budgeting processes, enable the chair/director to regularly and routinely monitor progress against the action plan

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

• External reputation
  – How do others see the unit and how does the unit want to be viewed?
  – 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?
  – 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?
  – What are the unit’s strengths and weaknesses? How have these changed over time? What should be done?

Faculty

• Recruitment, mentoring, and retention
  – How are faculty working together to help colleagues be successful and valued members of the unit?
  – 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?
  – How has the unit enhanced and addressed work-life issues for faculty (and staff)?
  – How clear is the P&T process with regard to communication and implementation?
  – 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?
  – How do the salaries compare against benchmarks? What planning is in place to address salary compression, if it exists?
  – How does the unit assess its ability to recruit and retain faculty members?
  – What does the future look like with regard to attracting and retaining top scholars?
  – How is hiring linked with program planning, research priorities, and future directions?
• Diversity
  – What is the status of efforts to enhance representation, involvement, and the climate to create a truly diverse intellectual community?
  – 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?
  – What special opportunities are there for sharing 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 is new knowledge being created
  – 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
  – 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?
  – What are the strengths and weaknesses of graduate student support, mentoring, and training for careers (faculty and non-faculty)?
  – 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?
  – Is the size of the graduate program appropriate?

• Recent and planned curricular and programmatic changes
  – 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?
  – 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
  – How do enrollment plans align with university/college plans?
  – 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
  – How are teaching loads borne across the unit? What strategies might enhance instructional quality and impact?
  – What is the distribution of regular faculty across course levels and areas? Does this distribution maximize student and faculty productivity? If not, what might be done to address this?
  – How are Student Evaluations of Instruction used?

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

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

• Advising and academic support/mentoring
  – 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 AP&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 and strategic planning 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 separately, 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, provost’s leadership team, vice president for research, and associate director of institutional research
• Team departure by cab/shuttle or unit chair, according to preference
APPENDIX D: EXTERNAL REVIEW TEAM INVITATION

Subject: Interest in Review of << >> at Ohio State

Dear Dr. << >>,

I’m writing to invite you to assist us with the review of Ohio State’s department of << >>. The review process is a partnership between the department, the college and the Office of Academic Affairs. We consider such reviews to be an improvement process that builds on and supports our strategic planning efforts.

The review is tentatively scheduled for <<tentative date>>. In the happy event that you are able to help us, we’ll send you the department’s self-study approximately three weeks in advance of the visit. You and two other reviewers will meet with me and the vice provost for academic and strategic planning on <<date>>, and then meet with the chair, faculty, students, and other college stakeholders on <<dates>>. A final meeting with the provost, dean and a team from Academic Affairs will take place on <<last day at 1:00>>. At that meeting, we will want to have a report on your findings. We’ll have you on your way just after that meeting so you can get home that evening.

I truly appreciate your consideration of this request. We have reviewed over 70 departments and colleges over the past nine years. The success of this effort is predicated on the expertise of reviewers like you. I’d appreciate hearing from you no later than <<one week>>, about your availability and interest in participating in this important process.

Best,

Dean<< >>
APPENDIX E: EXTERNAL REVIEW TEAM INSTRUCTIONS

The college is responsible for communicating with the external review team. This includes inviting the candidates, sending the self-study, selecting a team lead, and providing instructions and expectations for the review. The following section includes text that the college may want to use to set expectations for the external review team.

Dear << >>,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the review of the department of << >>. We believe that an academic unit review can be among the most meaningful experiences departments, schools and colleges have at The Ohio State University. These periodic studies of a unit’s progress and potential are profoundly important to developing a shared future vision as colleagues come together to chart their unit’s next strategic milestones. Your input is perhaps the most important in this process. It is highly valued by the department, the college, and the Office of Academic Affairs.

As I indicated, we will offer you an honorarium of $1,500 and cover the cost of travel, lodging and other incidentals during your visit to Ohio State. We have identified <<dates>> as the best days for your on-campus visit. We would like you to arrive on << >> in time for an orientation dinner at 6:30 with the vice provost for academic and strategic planning and me. At this initial meeting we will have an opportunity to talk openly about our expectations for this review and go over the schedule that we have prepared for your visit. This will also be a time when you will be able to raise any questions that you may have about the materials that you will receive prior to your arrival, the process that we are following in conducting these reviews, or other matters that you would like to discuss.

In the attached document I have included an introduction to the academic department review process at The Ohio State University.

Someone from my office will be in touch with you very soon about travel and other arrangements for your visit. In the meantime please feel free to contact me if I can be of assistance in making your visit a pleasant and productive one.

Sincerely,

Dean << >>

Attachment:
An introduction to the Academic Department Review process at The Ohio State University

The review of a department is an evidence-based, improvement-oriented effort to identify unit-level strengths, issues, and steps to advance its strategic goals. Reviews are conducted on an eight-year cycle and are a collaborative effort of the department, its college, and the Office of Academic Affairs (OAA). The review includes all research areas; undergraduate, graduate and professional academic programs; and outreach and engagement efforts.

What to expect:

One month before the review you will receive the unit’s self-study. The self-study will include the following sections:

• 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 is new knowledge being created
  – 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
  – Current pattern and potential activity

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

• Governance
  – Recent leadership succession and impact
  – Effectiveness of internal governance: Pattern of Administration and Appointments, Promotion and Tenure processes
Schedule

While you are at Ohio State, you can expect to meet with the following individuals and groups. If you think you should speak with others not included in this list, please let us know so that we can arrange a meeting.

• The dean and vice provost for academic and strategic planning (for orientation and instructions)
• The department chair/school director (early on the first morning)
• Tenured faculty
• Untenured/junior faculty
• Representative groups of undergraduate and graduate students (separate sessions)
• Representatives from departments or centers with collaborative research interests
• The dean and college senior staff (on the second morning; may be a breakfast meeting)
• The chair/director (a session at which the external team reports its findings)
• The provost, dean, the provost’s leadership team, the vice president for research, and the associate director of institutional research (a session at which the external team reports its findings)

There will be morning and afternoon breaks on the first full day and open time in the evenings with no social events scheduled.

Reporting out and final report and assessment

A unique aspect of Ohio State’s academic unit review is a one-hour report out session with the chair and a second hour with the provost, the provost’s leadership team, and the dean of the college.

We ask that you submit your formal report (5-10 pages) within 30 days of your visit. This should be sent to the dean, Vice Provost Michael J. Boehm (boehm.1@osu.edu) and Associate Director of Institutional Research and Planning Jay Johnson (johnson.1043@osu.edu).

After your report is received, the department chair/school director will meet with the provost, dean, and vice provost for academic and strategic planning to create an action plan that will be integrated into the strategic plan and direction for the unit.

Contacts

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