

Academic Program Review: Policies and Procedures

Iowa State University

July, 2002

I. INTRODUCTION

The April 1990 Strategic Plan for Iowa State University committed the university to begin implementing during the 1990-91 academic year a comprehensive periodic review of all academic programs, involving both self-study and external peer review, as an essential part of ongoing strategic planning. The program reviews are to include the instructional (undergraduate and graduate), research, and outreach activities of the units undergoing review. The use of student outcomes assessment is to be included in the discussion of instructional activities. All academic programs of the university are to be reviewed on a regular seven-year cycle, although individual colleges may choose a shorter cycle (e.g., five years) for the review of programs. The reviews of academic programs may be scheduled to coincide, or otherwise be coordinated with, other reviews (such as those for accreditation or other external purposes) or to address a special concern about a particular program.

This document, which consists of a revision of the original document published in 1990, describes the process to be used throughout the university to conduct the review of academic programs. The colleges or other units that have administrative responsibility for academic programs may designate additional or more detailed procedures for the review of programs within their administrative jurisdiction, although the common elements for all academic program reviews specified in this document should be met.

This document will be revised as needed. There was a thorough review of the university-wide program review process following the Spring 1992 reviews, based on the experience gained during the first two years the process has been in place. In 1998, additional revisions of the policy for reviewing academic programs addressed the importance of student outcomes assessments for guiding departmental plans and policies. At any time, suggestions for clarifications and changes in the process should be submitted to the provost.

II. PURPOSE OF ACADEMIC PROGRAM REVIEW

Above all else, the purpose of periodic program review is to provide a mechanism to ensure the improvement of academic programs on a continuous basis. Program review is a process for monitoring the status, effectiveness, and progress of academic programs, recognizing and responding to program strengths and weaknesses; identifying important directions in the disciplines or professions that need to be addressed; assessing the relationships among and contributions to other academic programs and the overall mission of the university; selecting among the opportunities and options available to the programs; and recognizing the implications of the choices made. Thus, program review is a process by which the future directions, needs, and priorities of academic programs can be identified. As such, program review is inextricably linked to strategic planning, resource allocation, and other decision-making at the program, department, college, and university levels.

There are two key dimensions to academic programs to which attention should be paid during the review: (1) how a particular program at Iowa State University compares with the best programs of its type in the United States; and (2) how the unit fits within and contributes to Iowa State University. External review of the program by recognized peers from distinguished programs of other universities and, where appropriate, from the professional sectors is used to seek an assessment about the first dimension. (The procedure to be used for the external review is specified in Section V.) The second dimension should be evaluated by the unit as part of the self-study and by the dean and members of the Office of the Provost as part of their review. To encourage input from other university units, the associate provost with responsibility for coordinating program review will notify all colleges and academic units and the Faculty Senate Curriculum Committee of the programs that will be undergoing review during the upcoming academic year. Comments, concerns, or suggestions received from these sources will be provided by the associate provost to the dean, who, in turn, will inform the unit in time for the issues that arise to be addressed in the self-study.

The criteria for program review are described in detail in Section IV. The criteria are:

1. Quality of faculty, students, and the instruction, research, and outreach programs of the unit
2. Demand for the programs and graduates
3. Centrality to the university mission
4. Comparative advantage/uniqueness
5. Financial considerations and adequacy of resources

First and foremost among these criteria is program quality.

The outcome of program review should be well-designed and agreed-upon action plans for phased improvement of the university's academic programs. The plans that emerge should be explicit, realistic, and viable, and should reflect the aspirations of each unit. The program review process should focus on improvements that can be made using resources that currently are available to the program. Consideration can also be given, however, to proposed program improvements and expansions that would require additional resources; in such cases, the need and priority for additional resources must be clearly specified.

III. RESPONSIBILITIES FOR CONDUCTING ACADEMIC PROGRAM REVIEW

The primary responsibility for overseeing the review of an academic program lies with the college dean who has administrative responsibility for the program. In the case of a program or unit that is administered by more than one dean, the responsibility should be shared. In consultation with the relevant department or program executive officers, and subject to review by the provost, the dean will determine the program units to be reviewed, as well as the timing of the reviews.

It is anticipated that the most common unit for review will be a single academic department or a single interdisciplinary program. However, for various reasons, a separate review may be warranted for a subunit of a department; alternatively, related programs that involve or affect more than one department or college may be reviewed together. An entire college, including all of its programs, may be reviewed as a unit, if proposed by the college and approved by the provost. Regardless of specification of the unit, the intention is for the review to encompass all instructional (undergraduate and graduate), research, and outreach activities of the unit.

The unit being reviewed is responsible for preparing a self-study. (A suggested outline is presented in Section IV.) It is anticipated that the dean who administers the program will assign to the

relevant chair the responsibility of seeing that the self-study is completed in a timely manner. Faculty associated with the program should be involved in the preparation of the self-study and should have an opportunity to review and comment upon the self-study report before it is submitted to the dean.

Guidance and assistance to the unit preparing a self-study should be provided, to the extent possible, by the associate provost and the college associate or assistant dean, who are assigned responsibilities for coordinating program reviews, and by the Office of Institutional Research. In particular, the unit should be given access to relevant data or other information available at the department, college, or university levels and should be provided assistance in presenting, analyzing, and interpreting relevant data.

The staff of the Parks Library will provide each of the units undergoing review a comprehensive report on library collections and services that support the unit's instruction, research and outreach activities, to be incorporated into the self-study report. The Academic Information Technologies unit will provide information on university-wide computation facilities and services, which can be supplemented by relevant information on computation facilities and services available at the college, department, and program levels. The administering dean should ensure that appropriate consultation and interaction occur during the program review process between the unit undergoing review and the Library and Academic Information Technologies.

While the dean has the primary responsibility for overseeing the review of the academic programs within the college, central administrators also should be involved in the review process, as specified in detail in subsequent sections of this document. The central administration review group for all academic programs includes the administrators who hold the positions of provost, vice provost, or associate provost. Further information about the responsibilities of the participants at various stages of the program review process is provided in subsequent sections of this document.

IV. SUGGESTED OUTLINE AND CONTENT FOR THE SELF-STUDY REPORT

Below is a suggested outline for the self-study report that indicates what should be included or addressed in the self-study of units undergoing program review. The outline is intended to fit a typical academic program area that includes instructional (undergraduate and graduate), research, and outreach activities. Appropriate modifications should be made for units that vary from the usual range of activities of academic units. As described in the previous section, some of the information to be included in the self-study will be available from units outside the area being reviewed. Because much of the data provided through the Office of Institutional Research is available only at the university, college, and department levels, reviews of individual programs within departments, or of interdisciplinary programs, will require the unit conducting the self-study to collect much of the relevant data itself.

- I. Introduction
 - A. Identify unit being reviewed
 - B. Brief description of the self-study process
 - C. Organization of the unit
 - D. Brief history of the unit; development and progress during the past 5-10 years (or since the last program review)

II. Mission

- A. Mission of the unit; philosophy and focus of the instructional, research, and outreach programs of the unit
- B. Relationship to the college and university mission

III. Description of the unit, its programs, and relevant policies

Include the descriptive information identified below for each of the areas listed. Also describe and document recent trends and changes. Where appropriate, discuss relevant policies (e.g., hiring, assignments and responsibilities, annual evaluation, promotion and tenure policies for faculty; admissions policies for students). The categories and types of information listed below were developed to apply to most units that offer major degree programs; appropriate modification should be made for the review of units that offer minors only.

- A. Program definition (identify each of the unit's instruction, research, and extension/outreach programs to be evaluated by the self-study; also describe participation in, and contributions to, inter-unit programs, as appropriate)
- B. Faculty classification (FTE by rank; headcount, in total and by gender, ethnicity, age, rank, tenure status, graduate faculty membership, and highest degree). This information should be provided separately for tenure-track faculty; adjunct and temporary faculty; and collaborators and affiliate faculty.
- C. Graduate assistant classification (FTE by funding source; headcount, in total and by gender, ethnicity, and assistantship categories of teaching assistant, research assistant, and administrative assistant)
- D. Staff classification (FTE by category of position and funding source; headcount, in total and by gender, ethnicity, and categories of positions)
- E. Student majors and advising and other student support services (number of majors, in total and by classification, gender, ethnicity, age, state and nation of residency, enrollment in on- and off-campus credit and non-credit programs, full- or part-time status; number of applicants, number admitted, and number enrolled; number of degrees awarded annually; description of advising and other student support services provided; for graduate programs, entering graduate student undergraduate quartile rank and summary listing of undergraduate institutions attended, student admission status, and performance on relevant graduate admission tests, e.g., GRE, GMAT)
- F. Instruction provided to non-majors (student credit hour production per year for non-majors, in total and by college and major served; and listing of courses taken by significant numbers of non-majors)
- G. Facilities and Equipment Instrumentation (available campus- or college-wide, as well as those dedicated to the program)
- H. Information resources and services (relevant library collections and special facilities,

staffing, and local online bibliographic access that support the program; computation facilities and services available for the program)

- I. Financial resources and indicators (budget by funding source; expenditures by expenditure classification and funding source; sponsored funding received; tuition generated by majors and by total SCH production; student scholarships and fellowships; and number and percentage of faculty with external funding)
- J. Distribution of grades given by the unit

IV. Self-evaluation of programs

For each program identified in Section III A above, the self-evaluation should address the relevant criteria for program review listed below. The emphasis of the evaluation should be on the assessment of quality, provided in narrative form. Included should be a discussion of the status of the program relative to similar programs at appropriate peer universities. Suggested, but not required, indicators for the criteria and sources of evaluative information are provided below (designated by ' and presented in italics); to the extent possible, comparative data for programs at peer universities should be included.

A. Quality

1. Faculty quality and productivity

- *Educational qualifications and relevant experience*
- *Teaching, research, and outreach awards given by national professional associations*
- *Refereed publications, citations, and patents*
- *Juried exhibitions, invited lectures, shows, and recitals*
- *Publications of textbooks and adoption by other universities of teaching innovations developed by ISU faculty*
- *Selection of faculty for prestigious invited memberships (e.g. the National Academy of Science)*
- *Prestigious positions held in major national organizations, as members of review panels, and as editors of journals*
- *Productivity indicators, such as SCH/FTE, publications/FTE*

2. Quality of entering students

- *ACT scores and high school rank of undergraduate majors*
- *Scores of entering graduate students on relevant admissions tests reg., GRI, GMAT)*
- *Numbers of national awards, fellowships, and scholarships (e.g., National Merit Scholars, NSF Fellowships)*

3. The quality of the curriculum, instruction, and support services; assess both on-campus and off-campus credit and non-credit programs and their comparability

- *National ratings by academic peers*
- *Relevant accreditation status*
- *National student awards and honors*
- *Performance of students on state or national tests (e.g., GRE subject tests, MCAT, certification tests)*
- *Placement of graduates (jobs, graduate schools and professional programs, postdoctoral appointments)*
- *SCH production by tenure-track faculty, by nontenure-track faculty, and by teaching*

assistants

**Student retention, average time to complete degree, and graduation rates*

**Grade-point-average of students at time of graduation*

**Results of student evaluations of instruction and advising*

**Results of student exit interviews, alumni surveys, and employer surveys*

4. The effectiveness of student learning in the program

Examine the quality of the curriculum, instruction, and support services in helping students achieve the intended learning outcomes of the program. Address both on-campus and off-campus credit programs and the way in which student outcomes assessment has demonstrated their comparability in terms of outcomes. If the program has established special requirements, describe the ways in which assessment results have been used to validate them.

Summarize student outcomes assessment results since the last review, documenting student achievement of the intended outcomes. Include the following: (a) the intended learning outcomes of the program; (b) for each outcome, a description of experiences in the curriculum that provide students with opportunities to achieve the outcome; (c) for each outcome, a description of the faculty-designed learning assessments and other assessments (e.g., student exit interviews, alumni surveys, and employer surveys) that were used since the last review; (d) the results of the faculty-designed and other assessments; (e) the ways in which student outcomes assessment results have been and will continue to be used to improve curriculum, instruction, and planning.

**Grade-point-average of students at time of graduation*

**Placement of graduates (jobs, graduate schools and professional programs, postdoctoral appointments)*

**Performance of students on state or national tests (e.g., GRE subject tests, MCAT, certification tests)*

**Student retention, average time to complete degree, and graduation rates*

**Results of student evaluations of instruction and advising*

**National student awards and honors*

**Relevant accreditation status*

**National ratings by academic peers*

5. Research quality and focus of the unit

6. Extension/outreach quality and focus of the unit

**Results of clientele surveys*

**Evaluations by program participants*

**Participation of extension faculty in collaborative research, and instruction.*

B. Demand (recent trends, current levels, and projections)

1. Instructional demand, overall and by majors and non-majors (see descriptive information in Section III E and F above)

2. Employment demand for program graduates

**Placement of recent graduates*

**Projections of labor market demand in areas relevant to the program*

3. Demand for extension/outreach programs
**Results of surveys of citizens' needs for outreach programs relevant to the unit*
4. Significance of research programs (i.e., significance to society of the research, scholarship, or artistic contributions of the program.)

C. Centrality to the University mission

1. Relationship of the program to ISU's mission as a land-grant university with an institutional orientation toward science and technology
2. Interrelationships of the instructional program with other programs at ISU
**SCH to non-majors, by college and major served (see III F above)*
**Courses taken by non-majors, by college and major served see III F above)*
3. Contributions to providing a liberal education for ISU students, including the development of literacy in science and technology; environmental awareness; communication and analytical skills; humane and ethical values; knowledge of the intellectual, historic, and artistic foundations of our culture; and international and multi-cultural awareness and sensitivity
4. Interrelationships of research programs with other programs at ISU
5. Interrelationships of extension/outreach programs with other programs at ISU

D. Comparative Advantage/Uniqueness

1. Areas of overlap or duplication with other programs offered at ISU
2. Areas of focus and program uniqueness/differentiation from programs offered at other Regent universities; other colleges and universities in Iowa; peer comparison universities; and other universities in the region and nation
3. Program distinctiveness in terms of students served (geographic area, gender and minority status, nontraditional students, etc.)
4. Program distinctiveness attributable to interrelationships with other ISU programs and proximity to federal government labs or facilities

E. Financial Considerations and Adequacy of Resources

1. Financial considerations and efficiency
**Direct departmental expenditures per SCH produced*
**Direct departmental expenditures per student major and per graduate; where appropriate and possible, comparable indicators of expenditure efficiency may be provided for service activities*
**Average section size*
**Student-to-faculty ratios*
**Faculty salary comparisons*
**Average teaching load of faculty and teaching assistants*

2. Adequacy of resources
 - a. Faculty
 - b. Support staff
 - c. Facilities
 - d. Equipment/instrumentation
 - e. Supplies and services
 - f. Information resources and services (Library, Academic Information Technologies)

V. Unit planning (next 5-10 years)

The planning process within the unit should be described. Particular attention should be given to ways in which instructional, research and outreach programs will be changed or improved within currently available university resources. Requests for increased university funding must include detailed documentation of the need for additional funds and specify the unit's priorities for additional funds.

- A. Planning process
- B. Goals and strategies
- C. Timetable and implementation plan
- D. Relationship to, and consistency with, college and university plans

VI. Other issues or information deemed appropriate

Include a summary of the results of any recent accreditation reviews or other external program reviews.

VII. Appendices

- A. Tables, charts, and graphs that are referred to in the body of the self-study, but are not included therein
- B. Roster of current faculty and staff
- C. One-page summary curriculum vitae for each faculty member
- D. Relevant catalog materials
- E. The unit's student outcomes assessment reports since the last review
- F. Copies of other reviews, reports, policy documents, student recruiting brochures, and other items appropriate to the self-study

V. THE EXTERNAL REVIEW

A. Purpose of the External Review

The purpose of the external review is to provide a mechanism for an academic unit to

benefit from an assessment by, and the advice of, recognized peers from outside Iowa State University.

B. Selection of the External Team and the Schedule for the Review

The review team is to be composed of recognized peers from distinguished programs at other universities and, where appropriate, from the professional sectors. The primary responsibility for selection of the members and chair of the review team for academic departments or programs lies with the college dean to whom the unit reports. In the case of programs or units administered by more than one dean, the responsibility should be shared. For college-wide reviews, the provost should select the members and chair of the review team. For programs that are not administered through a college, the administrator to whom the program reports should perform the responsibilities identified herein as those of the dean.

The dean's responsibility includes soliciting nominations for team members from faculty and the chair of the unit and from the members of the central administration review group (defined in Section III above), and forming the actual team. In this activity, the dean will be sensitive to issues of conflict of interest at all levels. The proposed members of the review team should be reviewed by the office of the provost before invitations are issued. The dean is also responsible for coordinating the schedule for the visit with the unit undergoing review and with the members of the central administration review group. The schedule should be arranged to include entrance and exit interviews with the leadership of the unit; the dean who has administrative responsibility for the program being reviewed; and the members of the central administration review group designated by the provost. Each of these should be separate meetings. Opportunities should also be arranged for team members to meet with faculty members of the department; chairs of related programs; and a sampling of undergraduate and graduate students. The schedule should be arranged to accommodate the reviewers' need to have time to work individually and as a team. The length of time the team is on campus will vary with the size and complexity of the program; a two- or three-day visit should be sufficient for a review of the programs included in most academic departments.

C. Materials, Information, and Questions Provided to the Review Team

Well in advance of the scheduled visit, the dean should provide the following to each member of the review team. A copy of this material should be available to the unit undergoing the review and to the central administration review group.

1. A copy of the university program review document
2. The unit's self-study report
3. A list of specific questions the review team is asked to address. This list is to be developed by the dean after receiving suggestions from the unit undergoing review and from the members of the central administration review group. It is anticipated that most of the specific questions will fall within the categories identified in section D below.
4. A preliminary schedule for the visit (with the understanding that the team may

request additional or follow-up interviews or may otherwise choose to modify the proposed schedule)

5. A schedule for submission of the team's preliminary and final report
6. Information about arrangements for the team's transportation, lodging, and meals and payment of the agreed-upon honorarium

D. Focus of the External Evaluation

The external review team should focus its evaluation and recommendations on the following major areas, as appropriate to the program(s) undergoing review.

1. Quality and appropriateness of the curriculum, instruction, advising in bringing about student learning, as well as the quality of other student activities and support services of the unit.
2. The unit's effectiveness in planning and improving programs, as well as the unit's effectiveness in incorporating information about student learning into the planning process.
3. Quality of students, admissions requirements, and recruitment efforts
4. Faculty quality and productivity
5. Quality, range, and focus of research, scholarship, or artistic activities of the unit
6. Quality and appropriateness of extension/outreach programs and activities
7. Quality of personnel policies and practices (faculty recruiting, affirmative action, mentoring, development, and evaluation)
8. The collegial environment within the unit and with other units of the college and university (i.e., among and between faculty, staff, and students within the unit and between the unit and other units of the institution, including other program units, the college, and the university administration)
9. The on-going relationship between the unit and relevant constituencies external to the university (e.g., alumni, employers, and special interest groups)
10. Adequacy of resources and support services available to the unit
11. National standing and reputation of the program
12. The unit's plan for future development

In addition, the team may wish to offer its observations and insights about how the unit contributes to the mission and plans of the college, other academic units, or the university as a whole. However, the dean and the central administration review group have the primary responsibility for assessing these aspects of the unit and its programs.

The team's recommendations should focus on improvements that can be made using resources that currently are available to the program. If recommendations are made for changes that would require additional resources, the need and priority for additional resources should be clearly specified.

E. Team Reports

The external review team should present its major findings and recommendations during the exit interviews. A preliminary draft of the team's report should be provided to the dean, who, in turn, will distribute the preliminary draft to the unit and to the central administration group, so that the team can correct any factual errors before the report is finalized. A final report should be provided to the dean by the review team within six to eight weeks of the visit. The dean will distribute copies of the final report to the unit and to the central administration review group. The report is to be made available to all members of the unit being reviewed.

F. Unit Response to the Report of the External Review Team

Following receipt of the final report of the external review team, the unit being reviewed will provide the dean with a written response to the report's findings and recommendations. The dean will distribute copies of the unit's response to the central administration review group. A meeting of the dean with this group will be held to discuss the review of the unit.

VI. FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES AND ACTION PLANS

Following the meeting of the dean with the central administration review group, the dean will meet with the chair and the faculty of the unit to discuss the program review and to determine what actions should be taken. In addition to consideration of the external review team's findings and recommendations, the discussion should include aspects of the review that concern how the unit contributes to other units of the university and how its activities and goals relate to college and university strategic plans. Following this meeting, an implementation plan for agreed-upon actions should be developed jointly by the dean and the chair. Copies of the implementation plan should be distributed to the faculty of the unit and to the central administration review group and should be incorporated into future college strategic plans. The dean is responsible for monitoring, on a continuing basis, the progress of the unit.

VII. REPORTS TO THE BOARD OF REGENTS

The associate provost to whom the provost has assigned the responsibility for coordinating academic program review will develop an annual report to the State Board of Regents that will include the following.

- A. An updated schedule of recent and future academic program reviews
- B. A list of the academic programs to be reviewed during the upcoming academic year
- C. A list of the academic programs that were reviewed during the previous academic year

- D. For each program reviewed during the prior year, a summary of the major issues that emerged and the plans to implement agreed-upon recommendations, including specific descriptions of how outcomes assessment information was used in the review.

A draft of this report will be submitted to the deans and to the central administration review group for their review and suggestions before it is submitted to the State Board of Regents.

VIII. EVALUATING AND REVISING THE ACADEMIC PROGRAM REVIEW PROCESS

Iowa State University's academic program review process should be reviewed at least every five years to determine if it is functioning as intended and to incorporate appropriate changes into the process. The university-wide program review process was instituted for the first time during 1990-91, and an initial evaluation of the review process was carried out after two years. A later review was undertaken during the 1997-98 academic year. The academic program review process will be reviewed during the 2002-2003 academic year.