Guidelines for Units Undergoing Academic Program Review
(based on APR report approved by University Senate on October 10, 2013)

The following guidelines pertain to units on the Atlanta campus of Georgia State University. Separate guidelines apply to programs at Perimeter College.

A. The Purpose of Academic Program Review

Academic Program Review (APR) is an opportunity for units to evaluate and continue to improve the quality and relevance of their academic programs in support of unit, college, and university missions and strategic plans. Periodic program review is mandated by our accreditation agency (The Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools or SACSCOC) as well as by the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia.

APR focuses on the issues of viability, productivity, and quality. Through APR the unit may demonstrate that its teaching, research and service activities (1) are aligned with the missions and strategic plans of both the University and the College and (2) are productive, viable, and of high quality.

B. The Timeline of Academic Program Review

Units undergo APR every seven (7) years. The Office for Institutional Effectiveness sets the cycle each year, grouping similar units together where possible.

Each review cycle takes two years. In Year 1, a unit plans and produces a Self-Study Report, and the unit Chair prepares a response. Year 2 is dedicated to review and action planning. The Dean prepares a response, and the Self-Study Report, Chair’s Letter, and Dean’s Letter are provided to the unit’s External Review team. The unit then hosts a site visit of the External Reviewers, who prepare a report. All the above documents are reviewed by the University Senate Academic Program Review Committee (APRC), which produces a brief report, making substantive observations about the fit between the unit’s goals, objectives, and proposed initiatives and the existing Mission and Strategic Plan of the university, as well as the viability, quality, and productivity of the unit’s programs. Finally, the unit Chair, the relevant Dean’s office, and the Provost collaborate on preparing an action plan for the coming years.

Once the action plan is approved, the unit’s Dean supervises its implementation. The Dean issues an annual follow-up report indicating which of the action steps have been completed,
revised, or are still in process, annotating the action plan with any changes that are necessary due to changing accreditation mandates or emerging opportunities.

C. The APR Funding Domain

APR is expected, wherever possible, to be a budget-neutral process, with its major focus on non-resource-dependent program quality improvements. The cost of quality improvements—whether for faculty lines, staff, infrastructure, operating budgets, or graduate funding—will need to be met, for the most part, by reallocations elsewhere within the relevant unit or college or from sources external to the university.

It is expected that Action Plan commitments as well as the corresponding college-level resource allocations for APR will be two-directional in nature. That is, units that have been evaluated positively in terms of their productivity, quality, viability, and connection to the University and College missions and strategic plans will gain resources while units that have been negatively evaluated on these criteria will experience redirection of existing funds.

D. Administering Academic Program Review

Units work closely with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE), in particular with the Associate Provost of Institutional Effectiveness and the Director of Academic Program Review. OIE facilitates and guides the efforts of all parties involved in a unit’s review, including:

- planning and executing APR cycles;
- overseeing the formation of self-study committees and unit orientation;
- setting up external reviewer visits;
- supervising and carrying out data collection, storage, and exchange;
- coordinating the various levels of internal review;
- aiding in the development of action plans;
- providing the unit self-study committee, external reviewers, and APRC members with institutional context;
- helping connect the content of the self-study report to the university mission and strategic plan;
- answering questions on the analysis of data and report creation;
- helping resolve data consistency issues; and
- checking unit and external reviewer reports for compliance with reporting guidelines and deadlines.

Questions on APR can be addressed to the Director of Academic Program Review at apr@gsu.edu.
E. The Four Stages of Academic Program Review

A unit’s review cycle consists of four stages: 1) the unit Self-Study Report; 2) Review and Analysis; 3) Action Plan; and 4) Follow-up Reporting. Each of these stages is described in detail below.

**Stage One: Unit Self-Study Report**

1. The Structure of the Self-Study Report.

   The Self-Study Report is structured to enable the unit to demonstrate its alignment with the University Mission and Strategic Plan, Board of Regents and SACSCOC requirements, and best practices of peer and aspirational institutions. The unit should also, where necessary, document alignment with its College’s Strategic Plan. In addition, where accreditation mandates or emerging strategic opportunities are deemed relevant to a unit’s self-study, OIE staff, Deans’ office staff, and members of the unit confer at the unit’s orientation meeting to craft any additional relevant operational measures to be included in that unit’s self-study effort.

   a. The *University Strategic Plan* sets out five overarching goals for Undergraduate Education, Graduate Education, Research, the University’s Contribution to Cities, and Globalizing the University. The template for the Self-Study Report enables units to report on their effectiveness in contributing to these areas.

   b. The *Board of Regents* requires that APR be undertaken at least every seven years, and the Self-Study Report must link the unit to the University Mission and Strategic Plan. It must provide measures of the unit’s student, faculty, and staff diversity, as well as evidence of the unit’s quality, viability, and productivity. The template for the Self-Study Report contains relevant measures in these requisite areas.

   c. *SACSCOC* requires evidence of the quality of a unit’s educational programs, including student learning outcomes, descriptions of administrative and educational support services, and measures of both research and community/public service within a unit’s educational mission, if appropriate. The Self-Study Template reflects these measures.

   d. The Template also draws on *Best Practices* comparisons with peer and aspirational institutions.
2. Production and Approval of the Self-Study Report

While the process for completing the Self-Study Report may vary from unit to unit, all units should adhere to the following minimum guidelines:

a. The chair of the committee must be a tenured faculty member.

b. Unit administrators (chair, center directors) must assist the committee in compiling and contextualizing information.

c. The full faculty of the unit must vote to approve the final Self-Study Report.

d. The Dean of the appropriate college must approve the final Self-Study Report.

e. Once the faculty of the unit and the Dean have approved the final Self-Study Report, it can be forwarded to the external reviewers.

3. Form and Content of the Self-Study Report

The length of the Self-Study Report is to be no longer than 30 pp., in single-spaced Times New Roman, 12 point font. The Self-Study Report is divided into four parts:

1. “Where Is Your Unit Now?”
This section documents the viability, quality, and productivity of the unit’s programs. It describes the strengths and weaknesses of the unit in meeting BOR and SACSCOC requirements and the goals of the University Mission and Strategic Plan, and considers the unit within the context of other programs at GSU. This section is, in turn, organized in five parts, structured according to the goals set forth in the University Strategic Plan:

1a. Undergraduate Education
1b. Graduate Education
1c. Research
1d. Contribution to Cities
1e. Globalizing the University
Questions to be addressed may include the following:

- What goals and action steps were set in the unit’s previous action plan and to what extent have they been completed?
- What are current trends in the unit’s discipline/field in instruction, service, and research, and how does the unit’s work address these?
- What is the unit’s reputation and what makes it distinctive from units in its field at other institutions?
- What is the unit’s role on campus? How has the unit advanced the performance outcomes of the university? How has it fostered linkages with other campus units to advance performance outcomes?
- What are the three to four most critical challenges and opportunities facing the unit?
- What is the evidence of quality of teaching and learning?
- How do surveys of recent degree recipients support the quality assertions?
- How successful has the unit been in recruiting and retaining top quality faculty?
- What is the evidence of the research strengths of the unit?
- What is the caliber of students attracted to the unit, their academic success, and placement following graduation?
- What constitutes "quality" in graduate education in the field?

2. “How Adequate Are Your Unit’s Current Resources?”
This section measures the adequacy of the unit’s current resources in meeting BOR and SACSCOC requirements and the goals of the University Mission and Strategic Plan. It should consider how realistic the unit’s current goals are given its existing resources. In discussing the adequacy of resources, the unit should consider the context of other programs at GSU: where does the unit overlap the work of other units on campus, and where does it offer unique contributions? Where does it combine resources with other units to pursue cross- or multi-disciplinary goals?

3. “Where Does Your Unit Want to Go?”
This section describes the Goals and Objectives of the unit as they pertain to BOR and SACSCOC compliance and meeting the goals of the University Mission and Strategic Plan. Units should consider their goals within the larger context of other programs at GSU. Are there areas where, in the future, the unit can work toward cross- or multi-disciplinary synergies?

4. “What Do You Need to Do or Change to Get There?”
This section proposes a plan for implementing the Goals and Objectives. Specific strategic initiatives should be detailed and justified in the context of the University Mission and Strategic Plan. The implementation plan should describe budget-neutral initiatives the unit will undertake, and where necessary, include an itemized resource list, keeping in mind that any new resources for the unit will come from college-level reallocations (reallocations from other units) or proposed new revenue streams.

Under each of the four divisions of the Self-Study Report are a number of parameters. Not all parameters will be relevant to every Unit: it is expected that Units will address only the criteria that apply to them.

The Self-Study Template indicates the data source for each parameter, noting whether the data are to be supplied by OIE or generated by the unit itself. Data supplied by OIE are available to each unit on its own APR Dashboard, which is a web page containing all of the OIE data required for APR. OIE will also provide survey data. The Director of Academic Program Review will aid the unit in resolving any conflicts in the data. The external and internal reviews, Chair and Dean letters, appendices, and other supporting documents will be kept on linked web pages.

Whenever there is a new University Strategic Plan (USP), APRC and the Director of APR have joint responsibility for updating the Self-Study Template, subject to approval by the Senate’s Committee on Academic Programs. If the change in USP occurred more than three years before the unit is reviewed, the unit will adhere to the template linked to the most recent USP. If the change occurred less than three years before the unit is reviewed, the unit may opt to base its Self-Study Report on either the template linked to the previous USP or the newer one.

**Stage Two: Review and Analysis**

Review of the unit is multilayered. The Unit’s Self-Study Report and all other APR materials are reviewed by the Unit Chair and center directors where relevant, the relevant
Dean, the External Reviewers, and APRC, each of whom writes a report evaluating the Unit and the soundness of the Self-Study Report’s Goals and Objectives.

External Reviewers consist of two to three experts in the Unit’s discipline, chosen for their knowledge of the field and of the Unit, from outside Georgia State University. The Unit proposes a list of Reviewers to the College. The list should include 10 proposed reviewers from peer and aspirational units. The Dean, in consultation with the Provost, determines the make-up of the Review Team, using at least one reviewer suggested by the unit. The External Reviewers receive the Self-Study Report and access to related web-based data prior to making a campus visit. During the visit, the External Reviewers meet with members of the Unit’s APR committee, the Chair, faculty, staff, and students. The External Reviewers also meet with the relevant Dean, the APIE, and the Director of Academic Program Review, who will guide and assist them in their work and provide the necessary local data and institutional context.

The Senate’s Academic Program Review Committee (APRC) receives the unit’s Self-Study Report and the External Reviewer Report and issues its own brief report on the viability of recommendations made by the unit in its self-study and by the external reviewers. This report comments on the potential impact of action plan items within the context of the relevant college’s development as well as the University Mission and Strategic plan. The committee provides a university-level context on the goals, objectives, and overall direction of units as they relate to the University Mission and Strategic Plan, specifically, the viability, quality, and productivity of the unit’s programs.

**Stage Three: Action Plan**

After the external review team has visited and provided a report and APRC has issued its report, the Dean’s office meets with the department chair to negotiate an action plan. The Action Plan states the final agreed upon strategic initiatives and any corresponding resource allocation/redirection for each Goal and Objective, with a timeline for each allocation. The plan is reviewed by the Associate Provost for Institutional Effectiveness (APIE) and is then given to the Provost, who, in consultation with the Chair and relevant Dean, determines which of the Unit’s Goals and Objectives are approved, modified, or denied.

**Stage Four: Follow-up Reporting**

Once the Provost issues final approval of the Unit’s Action Plan, the Dean is responsible for monitoring progress towards implementing the plan. At the end of each Fiscal Year, the unit chair makes a report to the Dean, and the Dean issues an annual report that
speaks to APR results. To ensure a continuous feedback loop in the APR process, the Director of Academic Program Review in OIE holds a debriefing interview with the unit’s APR committee chair at the end of each cycle.