I. Purposes of Academic Program Review

Periodic program review is mandated by both the Board of Regents (BOR) of the University System of Georgia (USG) and implicitly the Southern Association of Colleges and School Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). The BOR Policy Manual requires USG institutions to “conduct comprehensive academic program reviews.” Specifically, “each USG institution shall develop procedures to evaluate the effectiveness of its academic programs to address the quality, viability, and productivity of efforts in teaching and learning, scholarship, and service as appropriate to the institution’s mission.” Likewise, the SACSCOC Principles of Accreditation require that each member institution “engages in ongoing, comprehensive, and integrated research-based planning and evaluation processes that (a) focus on institutional quality and effectiveness and (b) incorporate a systematic review of institutional goals and outcomes consistent with its mission.”

Independently of these external mandates, Georgia State University (GSU) has found it beneficial to conduct regular, comprehensive reviews of its academic units.¹ This process provides a systematic opportunity for units to reflect upon, evaluate, and continue to improve their academic programs. Units are able to demonstrate the degree to which their teaching, research, service, and other activities are productive, viable, and of high quality while supporting the college and university missions and strategic plans. APR also enables units to develop impactful and feasible plans for making improvements in their programs over the following five to six years. In addition, APR contributes to better informed decision-making by the Provost, Deans, unit heads, and other stakeholders about whether and how to maintain, enhance, reduce, modify, deactivate, or terminate programs and about resource allocation more generally.

II. 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 college or unit. In addition, units are encouraged to seek external resources as well as those provided by university-wide programs, such as CETLOE and Next Generation.

¹ The term “unit” refers to departments as well as schools, institutes, and colleges that perform departmental functions.
III. **Overview of the APR Process**

A variety of entities and individuals participate in the APR process. The key actors are:

- The unit under review and its head
- The unit’s ad hoc APR committee and its chair
- The dean and dean’s office of the unit under review
- The provost and the provost’s leadership team
- External and internal reviewers
- The University Senate’s Committee on Academic Programs (CAP)
- The Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE)

The roles of the various participants are detailed in the sections below.

APR operates on a seven-year cycle. Each academic unit is reviewed one time each cycle, according to a schedule set by OIE. The APR process consists of five main steps:

- Data collection (Year 1)
- Preparation of the unit’s self-study report (Year 1)
- Review (Year 2)
- Preparation and approval of the unit’s action plan (Year 2)
- Implementation and reporting (subsequent years)

Each of these steps is described in greater detail below.

OIE holds an orientation for unit heads and other key participants at the beginning of the process in the spring of Year 1. The orientations are organized by college so that deans can provide additional guidance to their units.

IV. **Data Collection**

Data collection is a major part of the APR process. OIE provides much of the data that units require to prepare their self-study reports. These consist of four primary sources:

- detailed surveys of faculty, current undergraduate and graduate students, and alumni of undergraduate and graduate programs;
- the APR dashboard, which gathers in one place many relevant iPort\(^2\) screens;
- snapshots of charts and diagrams in Academic Analytics;
- the most recent Faculty Data Report; and
- student learning outcomes assessment documentation, including reports and reviews.

\(^2\) iPORT is a web-based application that provides access to data stored in the University Data Warehouse.
In addition, units are welcome to make ad hoc requests for data available in the university’s Data Warehouse. Units may also submit supplementary questions for inclusion in the surveys.

Other data must be collected by the unit. This data may be available in the unit’s own records or the unit may have to identify and query external data sources, especially for comparative data for peer and aspirational units at other institutions.

V. Unit Self-Study Report

Preparation of the unit’s self-study report is the most substantial step of the APR process. The self-study report is where a unit has an opportunity to “tell its story” and propose a path forward. The report consists of two main sections: 1) the Status Report, which described where the unit is now, covering undergraduate and graduate education, faculty research, scholarship, and creative activity, and other relevant contributions to the GSU strategic plan as well as the resources available to the unit, and 2) the Strategic Plan, which lays out where the unit wants to go and how it proposes to get there.

The self-study report is the necessary starting point for review of the unit. Preparation of the self-study also provides an opportunity for unit faculty to familiarize themselves with all that the unit is doing and to hold meaningful, in-depth conversations about the unit’s mission, activities, and future directions.

The self-study report is prepared by an ad hoc APR committee appointed by the unit and chaired by a senior faculty member. The APR committee should be broadly representative of the unit faculty, taking into consideration faculty types and ranks, faculty roles, and areas of research and teaching, as appropriate. Typically, the unit head does not sit on the committee, although the head should be apprised of at least the broad outlines of the report as it is developed in order to provide feedback.

The report is structured according to a template provided by OIE. The template includes a number of required elements to ensure that units address a common set of topics, but it is designed to provide as much flexibility as possible in order to reflect the important differences that characterize the purposes, structures, resources, and activities of units. The template indicates the data source for each parameter, noting whether the data are to be supplied by OIE, generated by the unit itself, or provided from some other source.

A first draft of the report should be sent to OIE by September 15 for review and feedback. A draft should also be submitted to the relevant dean’s office for review at that time. A final draft, which must be approved by the full faculty of the unit, is due to OIE and the dean’s office by the Friday before Thanksgiving Break.

The submission of the self-study is followed by the preparation of letters by the unit head and the respective dean. These letters may highlight elements of the report of particular interest, provide additional context, such as the unit’s contribution to the college, the suitability and
feasibility of the unit’s goals, and the availability of resources to achieve them, and raise
questions for the reviewers to address. The unit head’s letter is due to OIE and the dean’s
office on the last day of Fall semester classes. The dean’s letter is due to OIE by January 15.

Centers, similar to academic units, are required to undergo periodic review. A center
embedded within an academic unit is reviewed when that unit is reviewed and must submit a
supplementary report, using the appropriate APR template. Any center reports are due on the
same schedule as the self-study report.

Finally, units should list any formal agreements they have made establishing cooperative
academic arrangements with other institutions through which students may earn course credit
and the date of the last review of each agreement. If an agreement has not been reviewed in
the past five years, it should be reviewed in relation to the university’s mission and strategic
plan, and the Associate Provost for Institutional Effectiveness should be notified.

VI. Review

The review process consists primarily of an in-depth review by a team of external and internal
site visitors. The site visit takes place over a two-day period, typically between late January and
early April of Year 2. The report of the review team is due 10 business days after the site visit.

The review team typically consists of two external reviewers from outside GSU and two internal
reviewers from within GSU. The external reviewers, chosen for their knowledge of the field,
provide a disciplinary perspective on the unit under review. They should, whenever possible, 1) hold
the rank of professor, 2) come from peer or aspirational units in the discipline, and 3) have
significant administrative experience, such as unit head, program or center director, or dean or
associate dean.

The unit proposes a list of potential external reviewers to the dean’s office by June 1 of Year 1
of the APR process. The list should include at least 10 prospective reviewers from peer and
aspirational units and may be subdivided to reflect different specializations within the unit.
Because it may not be possible to have an external reviewer for each major area of the unit,
units should be strategic in their nominations, seeking to cover areas of particular importance.
The dean’s office reviews, and possibly revises, the unit’s list and then provides a ranked list to
OIE, which issues invitations to prospective reviewers and arranges their travel.

The internal reviewers provide institutional context. Ideally, they will be senior faculty
members with significant leadership, administrative, and/or service experience. One internal
reviewer is selected by the Committee on Academic Programs of the University Senate and is
intended to bring a university-wide perspective to the process. Where possible, this reviewer
should not come from the same college as the unit under review.

The second internal reviewer is selected from another unit in the college of the unit under
review or a related discipline in another college and is intended to bring a college and/or meta-
disciplinary perspective to the process. The unit submits a rank-ordered list of five prospective reviewers to the dean’s office by June 1. The list should provide a rationale for each nominee and describe any potential conflicts of interest. The dean’s office may reorder or modify the list, and OIE will invite the nominees in the order in which they are listed.

The site visit is conducted over two full days, beginning with a dinner hosted by the relevant dean on a Sunday evening. Monday morning begins with an orientation by OIE and a university overview by the provost and the provost’s leadership team. The visit concludes with an exit interview with the provost, the provost’s leadership team, the dean, and the unit head, at which the review team will provide an overview of its primary findings. The unit determines the remainder of the review team’s schedule, but it should not host dinners or receptions for the reviewers and should otherwise limit informal interactions between the review team and unit personnel.

The review team selects one external member to serve as its chair, whose duty is to ensure the review team report is completed on time. The report is organized according to a template provided by OIE.

After submission of the review team report, the internal member presents the report and its major findings to CAP or a designated subcommittee. At that meeting, the unit head has an opportunity, but is not required, to respond to issues raised in the review team report. The unit head may also prepare a written response that addresses recommendations, criticisms, and other observations offered by the reviewers in greater detail than may be possible in the action plan.

VII. Action Plan and Implementation Reports

Following the receipt of the review team report, the unit may commence preparation of the action plan, using the template provided by OIE. The plan should summarize the principal findings of the review process and then specify the precise action steps to be taken by the unit over the next five to six years (prior to the initiation of the next APR). For each action step, the plan should include a rationale (where this is not readily apparent), a description of the resources needed, if any, and where they will come from, and a timeline for implementation. The plan should be no more than 3 pages in length.

In addition, units are required to include an appendix containing a summary for each degree program offered by the unit regarding the program’s productivity, viability, and quality. This summary is used by OIE to prepare a Comprehensive Program Review (CPR) report for each program for submission to the University System of Georgia.

Typically, the unit head works closely with the dean’s office in the development of the action plan, especially with regard to those action steps that require the infusion of additional resources from the college. At the discretion of the unit head, units may find it useful to
involve other faculty in the process of developing the action plan or present a draft of the action plan to the full faculty for discussion and feedback.

The unit head and dean should submit a draft action plan to OIE for review by July 1 of Year 2. This deadline is intended to ensure that implementation can begin during that fiscal year and that particular action items can be considered in the budgetary process for the following fiscal year. OIE then forwards the action plan to the Provost, who either approves the plan as submitted, requests revisions, or calls a meeting with the dean and unit head to discuss the plan. Once the plan is approved by the Provost, the unit may begin implementation.

At the end of the fiscal year in which implementation begins, the Dean, in consultation with the unit head, prepares an implementation report, using the template provided by OIE. The report describes the status of each action item and is due to OIE on July 1. The Dean submits additional reports after the third and fifth fiscal years of implementation.

VIII. **Documentation**

OIE will maintain all the documents generated during the course of the APR process (self-study and center reports, unit heads’ and deans’ letters, reviewer reports, action plans, and implementation reports) on a password protected website.

IX. **Important Dates**

**Year 1:**
- Notification of units (November of preceding year)
- Supplemental survey questions due (January)
- Orientation (February)
- Lists of external and internal reviewers (June 1)
- Self-study first draft (September 15)
- Self-study final draft (Friday before Thanksgiving break)
- Unit head’s letter (last day of Fall classes)
- Dean’s letter (January 15)

**Year 2:**
- Site visits (January-April)
- Review team reports (February-April)
- Presentations to CAP (March-May)
- Draft action plan (July 1)
X. **Key Documents and Resources**

Self-study report template  
Center report templates  
Guidelines for selection of reviewers  
Instructions for reviewers  
Mock site visit schedule  
Review report template  
Action plan template  
Implementation report template

APR website: https://oie.gsu.edu/our-services/apr/  
APR Academic Dashboard: academicdashboards.gsu.edu (campus ID and PW required)