

Guidelines for Units Undergoing Academic Program Review

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 currency 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 SACS) 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 strategic plans of both the University and the College and (2) are productive and of high quality.

B. The Timeline of Academic Program Review

At GSU, units undergo APR every 7 years. The Office for Institutional Effectiveness sets the cycle each year with an eye toward amassing similar units together where possible.

Each review cycle takes two years. In **Year 1**, a unit plans and produces a Self-Study Report, the unit Chair and the relevant Dean each prepare a response, and all three documents go to the unit's External Review team. The unit hosts a site visit of the External Reviewers, who then prepare their report. **Year 2** is dedicated to internal review and action planning. All the documents produced in Year 1 are reviewed by the University Senate Academic Program Review Committee (APRC), which is tasked with producing a brief report, making substantive observations about the fit between the unit's goals, objectives, and proposed initiatives and the existing strategic plan of the university, as well as the viability, quality, and productivity of the unit's programs. Then the unit Chair, the relevant Dean's office, and the Provost collaborate on an action plan for the coming years.

Once the action plan is approved, the unit's Dean is tasked with supervising its implementation. The Dean issues an annual follow-up report indicating which of the action steps have been met, noting which still remain to be met, and annotating the action plan with any changes that are necessary due to changing accreditation mandates or emerging opportunities.

C. The APR Funding Domain

In today's funding environment, 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 department.

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 Strategic Plans will gain resources while other 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, in particular with the Associate Provost of Institutional Effectiveness, Peter Lyons, and the Director of Academic Program Review, Michael Galchinsky. OIE is tasked with facilitating and guiding the efforts of all parties involved in a unit's review. This includes:

- 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 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 Michael Galchinsky at mgalchinsky@gsu.edu.

E. The Four Stages of Academic Program Review

A unit's review cycle takes place in four stages: 1) the unit Self-Study Report; 2) Review and Deliberation; 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 Goals and Initiatives of the University Strategic Plan, Board of Regents and SACS 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 addressing each of 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 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 retains viable measures in these requisite areas.
- c. SACS 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. This section describes the strengths and weaknesses of the unit as pertains to meeting the BOR and SACS requirements as well as the goals of the University Strategic Plan, and considers the unit within the context of other programs at GSU. This section is, in turn, broken down into 5 parts, structured according to the goals set forth in the University Strategic Plan, as follows:

- 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 are current trends in its 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? What are the links? 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 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 your field?

2. "How Adequate Are Your Unit's Current Resources?"

This section measures the adequacy of the unit's current resources as pertains to the unit's ability to meet BOR and SACS requirements and the goals of the University Strategic Plan. This section 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 pertain to BOR and SACS compliance and meeting the goals of the University 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 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, there are a number of proposed parameters. Not all parameters will be relevant to every Unit: it is expected that Units will address only the criteria that apply to them. For the parameters (which will be rank-ordered for each unit by the relevant Dean in consultation with the unit chair, so that their relative importance is explicit) please consult the Self-Study Template.

The Self-Study Template provides the data source for each parameter, indicating whether the data is to be supplied by OIE or generated by the unit itself. Data supplied by OIE (including survey data) are available to each unit on its own APR Dashboard, which is a webpage containing all of the OIE data required for APR. The Director of Academic Program Review will aid the unit in resolving any conflicts in the data on an ongoing basis. The Unit will also be able to upload data to the Dashboard, and the external and internal reviews, Chair and Dean letters, appendices, and other supporting documents will be kept on linked webpages. This obviates the need for appendices to the Self-Study Report.

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 goes up for review, the unit will go up under the template linked to the most recent USP. If the change occurred less than three years before the unit will go up for review, the unit may opt to base its Self-Study Report on either the template linked to the previous USP, or the newer one.

B. Stage Two: Review and Deliberation

Review of the unit is multilayered. The Unit's Self-Study Report and all other APR materials is reviewed by the Unit Chair and center directors where relevant, the relevant Dean, the External Reviewers, and APRC, each of whom write a report evaluating the Unit and the soundness of the Self-Study Report's Goals and Objectives. After the external 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. This plan is reviewed by the Associate Provost for Institutional Effectiveness 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.

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 coordinating the visit, 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 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 growth as well as the University Strategic plan. The committee provides a university level context on the goals, objectives, and overall direction of units as they relate to the University Strategic Plan, as well as the viability, quality, and productivity of the unit's programs.

C. Stage Three: Action Plan

Once the deliberation process is completed, the Unit Chair then drafts an Action Plan stating the final agreed upon strategic initiatives and any corresponding resource allocation/redirection for each Goal and Objective, with a timeline for each allocation. As soon as the Dean and Provost approve the Action Plan, the relevant Dean begins the process of supervising the implementation of the plan.

D. Stage Four: Follow-up Reporting

Once the Provost issues final approval of the Unit's Action Plan, the relevant 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.