University of Rhode Island Academic Program Review Committee (APRC)

Academic Program Review Self-Study Guidelines

General Introduction

The formal self-study is subject to external review, most commonly through evaluation by a reviewer(s) from the same discipline at peer universities. Using data generated from the annual Central Data Report provided by URI’s Institutional Research Office and Department-Driven Data Collection, the self-study provides a narrative that identifies strengths and weaknesses in the academic program and includes a self-reflection on research/scholarly activities, teaching/curriculum development activities, and public engagement activities. The report should also discuss how the program's activities support the mission and strategic planning goals of the college and university and outline a plan for the future.

The self-study is both a retrospective and a prospective activity. The self-study summarizes the current state-of-affairs, analyzes trends since the last program review, compares the academic program’s activities with benchmark data of similar academic programs, and outlines an assessment process for evaluating the efficacy and value of these programs and activities. This retrospective analysis allows departments/units to explain how their past activities support their program’s strategic plan and the University’s mission and Academic Plan. With the aid of data provided through the Central Data Reports and department data collection over the last six years, programs are able to document progress on their performance goals and benchmarks. The self-study also presents a plan for the future that includes ways to ensure improvement in the quality of academic programs and its services to the college, university, and community. This prospective analysis allows academic programs to articulate response strategies to the opportunities and challenges of their field, and to establish forward-looking goals and benchmarks to be pursued during the next planning cycle.

The audience for the self-study includes the Provost, the external reviewer(s), and the faculty, staff, and administrators within the college.

Level of organizational evaluation and the review cycle

The URI Academic Program Review is at the department or free-standing academic program degree level and at the college level for those colleges without departments or with departments having fully integrated academic degrees. For clarity in this document, the terms “department” or “unit” are used instead of “academic program”. The self-study review cycle is intended to be every six years, with approximately 1/6 of academic units reviewed each year. Typically, all or most departments within a college are reviewed simultaneously. For departments with specialized accreditation, self-study reviews should be well coordinated to avoid duplication of effort and these departments may be reviewed independently of others within their academic unit.
General procedure and timeline*

1. Notification of the review                              Feb-March
2. Program review orientation by APRC attended by Dept Chairs  March
3. Formation of the Self-Study Committee (formed by Chair)  April-June
4. Determine process and schedule for External Review       Oct
5. Preparation and submission of self-study to Dean        January
6. Site visit and review by External Reviewer(s)           Feb/March
7. Receipt of the External Reviewer(s)’ report by Dean and Chair  April
8. Department creation of written proposed Action Plan     April/May
9. Submission of written proposed Action Plan to Dean for approval  May/June
11. Chair, Dean and Provost meet to Discuss Findings & Proposed Action Plan Aug/Sept
12. Action Plan finalized; Follow-up and on-going evaluation continuous

*Departments with accredited programs should provide their proposed Action Plan within 6 months following the receipt of the external reviewer preliminary report.

Producing the Self-Study

Suggested Outline for Self-Study Reports

I. Executive Summary
II. Brief history of Department (includes mission statement)
III. Brief summary of prior program review and actions
IV. Brief description and summary of current state of degree programs (graduate, professional and undergraduate as appropriate)
V. Brief description and summary of current research programs
VI. Brief description and summary of current service and public engagement programs
VII. Institutional Effectiveness
VIII. Future plans
IX. Appendices (faculty vitae, learning assessment curriculum maps and reports, Annual Central Data Reports, Data Collection Summaries, Department strategic plan, etc)

NOTE: Units that have a mix of accredited and non-accredited programs are only required in their Self-Study to address the areas not covered within their accreditation report. The Provost receives both the accreditation report and the self-study. The proposed Action Plan covers all programs/activities within the unit.

Guidelines for Completion of Self-Study Report

1) The self-study report should be an honest evaluation, providing feasible mechanisms for advancing quality.
2) The self-study report should be comprehensive but succinct, focusing on key issues, with each section being descriptive and evaluative. The report should be well-organized and as brief as possible (typically no longer than 20 pages), using appendices effectively.

3) The self-study report shall reflect the views of the faculty for the department/unit under review.

4) Two main criteria should structure the academic program review and the self-study: 1) Quality/Effectiveness and 2) Efficiency.

Program quality/effectiveness addresses how well the Department does what it sets out to do. For example, how do the goals and objectives of the Department in terms of teaching, research, and public engagement compare to other benchmark programs, and how well are these achieved? Does it effectively serve the mission and strategic goals of the University? Is the Department innovative and of high quality?

Program efficiency addresses the costs effectiveness of offerings of the Department. For example, what are the costs associated with its teaching, research, and public engagement activities? How effective is the Department in generating resources through attracting students, teaching and generating external funding in comparison to the level of institutional investment? Is it productive? Does it use its resources efficiently?

**Components of Self-Study**

**Executive Summary**

**The Academic Unit**
Include history, mission statement of the Department and provide a summary of characteristics including degree programs administered, FTEs etc.

**Prior Program Review and Actions**
Include major elements of the most recent Department reviews as well as actions taken.

**Academic Degree Programs**

Describe all degree programs provided by the Department (graduate, professional, and undergraduate as applicable) with regards to rigor, breadth and contemporary nature and include how quality is ensured through evaluation of all educators within the department. Describe the department’s process for each of its programs’ learning outcomes assessment, and include:

1) The engagement of faculty in assessment activity, and specifically, the strategy for planning, executing, and reflecting upon the biennial assessment process and results
2) The date of the most recent program learning outcomes assessment report and the date of the next planned report
3) Curriculum map, assessment reports and feedback in the appendix

Describe how your program has used the results of program learning outcomes assessment for program and student learning improvement; include examples of changes to curriculum or other innovations that resulted from the assessment process and identify how your degree program(s) and expected outcomes of student learning provide value to the College and University and relate to overall strategic goals and the Academic Strategic Plan.
Summarize the current state of the degree programs including metrics, analysis of trends and comparison with benchmark programs. Describe the overall teaching effectiveness of faculty as quantitatively assessed in aggregate. Include the accomplishments of students in the degree program (e.g., academic records, academic and research awards, scholarly, research and creative efforts, graduation with honors, post-graduation career paths and achievements).

**Research/ Scholarship Programs**
Summarize the current state of the research and scholarship programs within the Department including metrics, analysis of trends and comparison with benchmark programs. Consider the quantitative/qualitative accomplishments of faculty in research, scholarship and creative efforts and external grant funding (where appropriate) for the program as a whole. Identify how these provide value, support College and University strategic goals and the Academic Plan as well as contribute to the local/regional community. Describe the Department’s evaluation process for assessing how well these research and scholarship programs achieve their goals. Identify what the Department has done to strengthen its research, scholarship and creative efforts.

**Service and Public Engagement**
Summarize the current state of the service and public engagement programs including overall goals, metrics of the professional, institutional and public service accomplishments of the Department’s faculty, analysis of trends and comparison with benchmark programs. Identify how these public engagement and service activities relate to College and University strategic goals and the Academic Plan as well as contribute to the local and regional community. Describe in aggregate, academic faculty service contributions at the College, University and professional level. Describe the Department’s evaluation process for assessing how well these outreach and service activities are achieving their goals. Identify what the Department has done to strengthen its public engagement and service efforts.

**Institutional Effectiveness**
Describe the operations of the Department, specifying examples of how it operates in cost- effective ways and how resources are used to achieve the mission and goals of the department. Identify significant changes in faculty, support staff, library resources, and other expense budgets.

**Future plans**
In light of the findings of the self-study, summarize future strategic plans given existing resources as well as programmatic initiatives the Department would like to pursue that would require additional resources.

**Appendices**
- Program(s)’ curriculum map, including current learning outcomes Learning outcomes assessment report and feedback
- Summary of Annual Central Data Report with trends; Benchmark Evaluations
- Summary of Department’s Data Collections with trends
- Report of the External Reviewer(s) with response of the Department
Obtaining an External Perspective

The importance of an External Review
The formal Department self-study will be subject to external review, most commonly through evaluation by a visiting reviewer(s) from the same discipline at peer universities. The purpose of the external review is to provide an unbiased perspective that is not available from within the program or university. An external reviewer can assess whether the research, scholarship, creative, and artistic activity and public engagement benchmarks of the Department are consistent with norms and expectations for the field, and whether the Department has, or has the potential for, regional, national or international prominence in its field or subfield. Similarly, the external reviewer(s) can assess whether the Department's plans for the future are realistic given the direction of the field, the Department 's current activities, and market conditions for faculty and graduates, can advise on whether the learning outcomes set by the Department are reasonable and current for the field, and can determine whether the assessment method itself is appropriate. See the separate APRC document: “Academic Program Review: Obtaining an External Perspective”

Note: In most cases, Departments undergoing accreditation site visits will be able to use these in substitution of the external review for the self-study.

Producing an Action Plan

The Action Plan
After the faculty of a Department review and discuss the external review of the self-study, the Department chair collaborates with the faculty to develop a draft Action Plan that is submitted to the Dean. The Dean meets with the Department chair (and the self-study chair, if a different person) and they develop a mutually agreeable written proposed Action Plan that is submitted to the Provost along with the Self-Study and the External Reviewer Report. The Department chair, the Dean, the Provost and representatives from the Provost’s office meet to discuss the Action Plan for the Department. The written Action Plan is finalized following this discussion.

The Action Plan outlines the strategic plan of the Department for the next six years including biennial benchmarks used to assess progress. The plan addresses major issues raised in the self-study and by the external reviewer(s), and relates these to the strategic plan of the Department. The plan also includes specific goals, their rationale, and estimates of resources required. The approved Action Plan represents an agreement between the Department, the college Dean, and the Provost for actions to be taken over time, benchmarks used to assess progress, and a plan for allocation of resources.

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