

## ACADEMIC PROGRAM REVIEW

### OVERVIEW, WORKFLOW, AND TIMELINE

The Academic Program Review is a mission-centered and evidence-based learning process in which departments and/or teaching units gather information and engage in self-examination to enhance academic excellence. Rather than approaching the self-study with the goal of meeting accountability requirements, the best self-studies will model a culture of honest reflection in the service of continuous improvement. All units on campus have tremendous strengths and areas where they can do better. Academic program reviews are meant to focus on *improving*, rather than proving, excellence. The process aims to help each academic program identify opportunities for greater excellence and impact as assessed against the program's own mission and goals.

At American University, each academic and/or teaching unit (hereafter: program) participates in the review process at intervals of no more than eight years. See "[Academic Program Review Schedule 10-Year Cycle](#)" document on the Dean of Faculty's website.

In some cases, an accreditation review also can serve as the periodic review of a program. In those instances, the accreditation review committee functions as the external review committee. (See "[Overlap with Accreditation](#)" in Section 1 below for important details.)

The Dean of Faculty and Provost administer the academic program review process in consultation with the appropriate deans, chairs, and directors. The process has three components as described below: self-study, external review, and follow up. See table on pages 5-6 below for the program review workflow and timeline.

#### 1. The Self-Study

This initial phase of the review includes assembly and analysis of relevant data in collaboration with the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (OIRA). This part of the review is designed to elicit broad input from the unit's faculty, staff, and students. The self-study is meant to be a collaborative and representative process that the entire department is involved in assisting with, with the chair's leadership and guidance. The self-study assesses how the unit is doing in the fulfillment of its academic mission and objectives, how it operates organizationally, how it promotes an inclusive and supportive environment for all members, and how the work of the unit intersects with that of other units or departments. The self-study also offers an opportunity to benchmark academic performance to peer programs, discuss the unit's strategic vision for the next five to seven years, and identify opportunities and future directions.

An effective assessment of the program should take no more than 25 pages exclusive of appendices, to describe, but please use your discretion with respect to length while minimizing redundancies. In addition, the document should follow the program review self-study outline

found in the document “Academic Program Review Self-Study Guidelines” on the Dean of Faculty’s website. Workflow and timeline for the self-study are presented in the table at the end of this document.

Ramp up: A “ramp-up period” occurs roughly 2 months immediately prior to the start of the self-study. If the self-study starts in the fall, the ramp up occurs in the summer, and if the self-study starts in the spring, the ramp up occurs in the fall. The ramp up period is intended to help the program plan for the work of the self-study and will vary by program.

During the initial ramp-up meeting, the Dean of Faculty, Associate Dean of Faculty and Inclusive Excellence, and Assistant Provost for Institutional Research and Assessment will meet with the relevant unit administrator(s) (program director, chair, etc.) and their Dean to discuss the program review process, including timeline and data available from the provost’s office, and answer questions.

Self-Study: Over 6-7 months of work (not including ramp up), the program will produce a complete draft of their self-study, addressing all questions in the guidelines document (unless otherwise instructed), and with complete data and evidence compiled. Academic Unit Deans will determine the nature and timing of their involvement: some may wish to be consulted regularly throughout the self-study process while others may prefer to review and comment on the draft document only once before it is submitted to the Dean of Faculty. Each program’s self-study project management plan should include time for consultation with, and review by, the unit Dean prior to the deadline for submission to the Dean of Faculty.

The self-study draft should be submitted to the Dean of Faculty along with suggestions of other universities’ programs from which external reviewers might be recruited on the date indicated in the table below. The Dean of Faculty will review the self-study draft and provide feedback. The program will have up to 4 weeks to use this feedback to revise the self-study report.

The Dean of Faculty also will begin composing the external review team during this period. As the self-study is being finalized, the chair and/or program director should work with a designated administrative support person in the school to plan the visit.

Total time spent on the self-study is approximately 8–9 months.

Overlap with Program Accreditation: While American University is accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, several academic programs and schools maintain specialized accreditation. If such a program has been accredited or re-accredited within the 10 years preceding their scheduled AU program review, the Dean of Faculty, at their discretion, may agree to accept the self-study and external visitors’ report associated with the accrediting body’s program review as satisfying AU’s requirement. If a program director believes this is applicable to them, they should consult with their dean’s office and request consideration by the Dean of Faculty prior to the ramp up meeting.

Note: As a standard practice, all programs with specialized accreditations should submit a copy of their reaccreditation self-study to the Dean of Faculty at the same time it is submitted to the accreditor. The final report from the reaccreditation review team should also be submitted to the Dean of Faculty when the program receives it.

## **2. The External Review**

In consultation with the program and academic and/or teaching units, the Dean of Faculty and Provost select members of a committee that will be charged with the external review. The external review team normally consists of a minimum of two scholars or professionals of significant stature in the field who, in most cases, have had previous relevant academic administrative experience. They are charged with providing an objective and authoritative assessment of the academic and/or teaching unit. The external committee review includes assessment of the following components:

- Organization and governance of the academic and/or teaching unit
- All academic programs housed in the unit including curricula, admissions, progress to degree, and post-graduate placements
- Quality of the faculty
- Appropriate mentoring of junior faculty
- Adequacy of facilities and staffing
- The unit's role within the university
- Positioning within the academic field or discipline
- Issues relating to diversity, equity, and inclusion in all areas: curriculum, undergraduate and graduate students (if relevant), and faculty

The external reviewers examine the academic and/or teaching unit's strategic goals and objectives, and provide an assessment of future directions, while making appropriate recommendations. Following a campus visit (in-person or remote) that minimally includes meetings with a broad representation of the unit's constituents, the external review committee sends a final report to the Provost. In turn, the Dean of Faculty and Provost distribute this report to the Dean and, if applicable, to the chair and/or director(s).

The Dean of Faculty will set the dates for the external team visit, commonly a Sunday-Tuesday but this may vary if the visit is conducted virtually. There should be one point of contact for communication with the team. The visiting team members should be given access to the self-study, all evidence and supporting materials, and the schedule of the visit no later than 3 weeks before the visit. The external team may request modifications to the schedule or additional materials to be sent. The external visit includes approximately 1.5 days of meetings with faculty, students, program committee members, the program director (or equivalent), the Dean, and the Dean of Faculty.

Within one week of the visit to campus, the reviewers will produce their final report. The final report should be submitted directly to the Dean of Faculty's office. The Dean of Faculty will share the external report with the relevant dean and department chair or program director.

The department chair or program director should then draft a brief memo outlining what was learned during the program, briefly explaining the process for collecting information, and responding to points made by the external reviewer team to the relevant Dean for their review. This memo should also contain goals for the department and outline what support the department is seeking from the school or university. After review by the relevant dean, that memo should be sent to the Dean of Faculty.

### **3. Follow Up: Learning and Next Steps**

Once the Provost receives and reviews the external report and departmental wrap up memo, follow-up meetings are scheduled with the Dean, Dean of Faculty, and, if relevant, with the chair or director(s), preferably within one to two months of the external visit. The self-study and external review reports are discussed thoroughly with specific attention to strategic recommendations that will move the unit to higher levels of distinction. Recommendations will be followed through regular meetings with the Dean. The Dean or chair will make the report available to the unit's faculty.

Two years after the completion of the program review, the Dean, Dean of Faculty, and chair and/or program director (or equivalent) will revisit the strategic recommendations and discuss progress toward their implementation. The purpose of this follow-up is to examine not only what the program has accomplished in the two years post-review, but also how the school/college and university have supported the program in its efforts.

### Program Review Workflow and Timeline – Fall Start

| Month                 | Fall Start  |
|-----------------------|---|
| June to August        | Ramp up: DoF meets with Dean and Program Director and/or Chair (or equivalent) to discuss the self-study, including timeline, and answer questions. The program uses the summer months to plan for production of self-study.  |
| September to February | <p><b>Program performs self-study, including consultation with, and review by, the academic unit Dean.</b></p> <p><b>Complete draft self-study with supplemental data is due to DoF by 3/1.</b></p> <p>List of other university programs from which to recruit external reviewers is due to DoF at the same time.</p> |
| March                 | DoF reviews draft and provides feedback to program for corrections, edits, or additions no later than 3/15.   |
| April                 | <p><b>Final draft of self-study due to DoF and Dean no later than 4/15.</b></p> <p>DoF reviews for completeness. DoF sends the self-study materials to external team no later than 3 weeks before visit.</p>  |
| May to June           | <p><b>External team visits</b></p> <p>External review team delivers their report to DoF within 1 week of visit.</p> <p>Program has 2 weeks to correct any issues of fact in the external team's report.</p>   |
| September to October  | <p><b>Learning &amp; next steps</b></p> <p>DoF and Dean meet with program to review findings and articulate next steps for the program within a month or two of external visit. Timing determined by the DoF.</p>   |

### Program Review Workflow and Timeline – Spring Start

| Month                | Spring Start  |
|----------------------|---|
| October to December  | <b>Ramp up:</b> DoF meets with Dean and Program Director and/or Chair (or equivalent) to discuss the self-study, including timeline, and answer questions. The program uses the fall months to plan for production of self-study.   |
| January to July      | <p><b>Program performs self-study, including consultation with, and review by, the academic unit Dean.</b></p> <p><b>Complete draft self-study with supplemental data is due to DoF by 8/1.</b></p> <p>List of other university programs from which to recruit external reviewers is due to DoF at the same time.</p> |
| August to September  | DoF reviews draft and provides feedback to the program for corrections, edits, or additions no later than 9/1.  |
| October              | <p><b>Final draft of self-study due to DoF and Dean no later than 10/1.</b></p> <p>DoF reviews for completeness. DoF sends the self-study materials to external team no later than 3 weeks before visit.</p>  |
| November to December | <p><b>External team visits</b></p> <p>External review team delivers their report to DoF within 1 week of visit.</p> <p>Program has 2 weeks to correct any issues of fact in the external team's report.</p>   |
| January              | <p><b>Learning &amp; next steps</b></p> <p>DoF and Dean meet with program to review findings and articulate next steps for the program within a month or two of external visit. Timing determined by the DoF.</p>   |

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