

**Guidelines for Conducting a Self-Study**

[Revised January 2014, minor revisions February 2017]

<http://academicplanning.gwu.edu/academic-program-reviews>]

The self-study is the vital initial element of the Academic Program Review (APR) process. It is intended to give departments and programs (“units” below) an opportunity to conduct a critical evaluation of their current status and activities. These guidelines have been developed in order to establish a consistent framework for providing necessary information across the University. This will facilitate planning not only at the unit level, but at the school and University-wide levels as well.

*The first two sections (I) **Analysis of Strengths and Areas for Improvement** and (II) **Five-Year Strategic Plan** are by far the most important.* They provide the analytic information that will inform external and internal review teams, deans, and the Office of the Provost regarding those issues the unit considers of greatest importance or concern and how it intends to address them. But (perhaps counter-intuitively) these first two sections are actually completed at the *end* of the self-study process as their content is based on information generated in sections III-VII that follow. Sections I and II also allow for an assessment of how well the unit contributes to the goals of *2021 Vision: The Strategic Plan for the Third Century of the George Washington University*.

GW has leased a data management software tool, TaskStream, to collect, manage, and store much of the information required in the self-study and for yearly program and general education assessments. Questions regarding these guidelines may be directed to the appropriate dean’s office or to the Associate Provost for Academic Planning and Assessment, Cheryl Beil, at 4-6712 or [cbeil@gwu.edu](mailto:cbeil@gwu.edu). Questions regarding TaskStream, including information on how to access your individual work areas, should be directed to Alex Feldman, at 4-0933, or [alexmf@gwu.edu](mailto:alexmf@gwu.edu). (More information about TaskStream can be found at: <http://academicplanning.gwu.edu/taskstream>.)

How units conduct their self-study is left largely to the discretion of deans and unit faculty. In preparing their final self-study report, however, all units should follow these guidelines, using the main headings provided below. Upon completion, the self-study report should be submitted, via TaskStream, to both your dean and to the Office of the Associate Provost for Academic Planning and Assessment.

**Self- Study Main Sections**

- I. Analysis of Strengths and Areas for Improvement
- II. Five-Year Strategic Plan
- III. Mission Statement
- IV. Faculty
- V. Curriculum and Assessment
- VI. Enrollment Trends
- VII. Scholarly/Creative Productivity
- VIII. Supporting Materials:
  - Facilities
  - University and school service
  - Other pertinent information

# Guidelines for Conducting an APR Self-Study

## I. ANALYSIS OF STRENGTHS AND AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

This section, one of the two most important in the unit's self-study, should include highlights of the evaluation of all goals for student learning, faculty scholarly/creative productivity, and service to the discipline, the University and the community as applicable. *Discuss specific strengths, immediate and future opportunities and challenges, and areas for potential improvement.* The evaluation should consider any trends in the data and factors that may account for those trends. Most important, it should be honest.

## II. FIVE-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

This other very important section should lay out the unit's plans for the next five years for developing its strengths, meeting challenges and opportunities, and addressing the areas identified for improvement. It should include a **prioritized** list of issues/problems to be addressed. These plans should correspond to the university's strategic initiatives whenever possible. (A copy of the strategic plan and related goals may be found at: <https://provost.gwu.edu/strategic-plan>. For **each** issue/problem identified for improvement, please provide the following:

- Specific goals and objectives;
- Actions to be taken in order to achieve the stated goals;
- A schedule for implementation of the actions; and
- Measures of effectiveness for each of the actions.

## III. MISSION STATEMENT

Provide the unit's mission statement. The self-study is a good time to reconsider (or develop, if necessary) mission statements.

*Questions to consider for a mission statement:*

- **Unit's purpose:** a statement of purpose and how departmental activities align with its mission.
- **Relationship to your school's mission:** a statement of the unit's contributions to the mission of your school(s). How does the unit contribute to school goals and advance its strategic plan?
- **Relationship to the University's strategic plan:** how does the program contribute to GW's Strategic Plan?
- **Doctoral Programs:** Provide a well-defined mission and focus.

## IV. FACULTY

### A. Faculty Profile

- List all full-time faculty by rank and tenure status, including those on contract.
- List all full-time faculty hires in the past five years.
- Describe your experience in retaining existing faculty and recruiting new faculty.
- What anticipated faculty changes and hoped-for new hires are projected over the next five years?

- Describe the unit's goal for achieving faculty gender, racial, and ethnic diversity.
- Discuss your unit's reliance on part-time and/or contract (as opposed to tenured or tenure-track) faculty.

### **B. Faculty Productivity**

When relevant, attach data from unit annual reports to provide the following data (some of this will be in available from unit annual reports, TaskStream or Literati).

- List publications and creative works for past three years (see also VII).
- List external funding sought and received for past three years.
- List professional activities for past three years.
- Provide a five-year faculty workload report, formatted as one spreadsheet per semester, showing all unit faculty teaching for each semester. This should include courses and enrollments.

## **V. CURRICULAR DEVELOPMENT AND ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING**

In this section, review all undergraduate majors, master's degree programs, and doctoral degree programs for which your unit is responsible.

### **A. List of Programs**

*First, list ALL programs currently offered by the unit* (e.g., undergraduate majors and minors, double majors, secondary fields of study, combined bachelor's/master's programs or other dual or joint programs, master's, doctoral, and other degree programs, certificate programs). For undergraduate offerings, include any special academic programs supported by the unit (e.g., academic/residential programs, summer institutes, study abroad). For doctoral programs, include and define concentrations, and list faculty associated with each.

### **B. Curriculum Development and Relevance**

*Questions to consider:*

- As your discipline, the external environment, and unit resources have changed during the past five years, how has the unit responded to new challenges and new opportunities?
- Does the curriculum reflect best practices in your discipline and adequately prepare students to succeed at the next career or educational step?
- During the past five years, what significant curriculum changes have been planned and implemented to stay abreast of the discipline?
- What changes are planned or underway to support the university's strategic initiatives?
- What changes have occurred in degree requirements, courses offered, internships, or other elements that define the learning expectations and experiences of students in each program?
- What career path expectations does the doctoral program have for its graduates upon earning their degrees?
- How have you used measures such as student surveys, alumni placement, alumni satisfaction, alumni gifts, employer ratings, intern supervisor ratings, and student research and conference presentations to review and inform the curriculum?

(Three years of survey data from the undergraduate and graduate student graduation surveys can be found in TaskStream in Appendix D.)

### **C. Assessment of Student Learning**

Assessment of student learning is an essential tool for advancing GW's commitment to achieve academic excellence in teaching and to provide outstanding learning experiences for its students. How well students have mastered the knowledge, analytic skills, and tools set forth in each degree program's learning outcomes serves as the key measure of how successfully the degree program contributes to these overall University goals. Moreover, a large component of GW's reaccreditation by Middle States is based on our implementation of a "comprehensive, organized, and sustained process for the assessment of student learning outcomes, including evidence that assessment results are used for improvement<sup>1</sup>."

#### **Assess student learning**

Units should use their past five years of annual assessments of student learning as the foundation for this section.

- Provide a list of each degree program's major learning goals or outcomes. Note any changes in learning outcomes that have been made over the past five years.
- Summarize and review how well students have achieved the learning goals, outcomes, objectives and/or competencies defined by each degree program on its own or in accordance with its professional accreditation group and any changes made in response to each year's findings. (The number of learning outcomes may range from as few as three to as many as 12-15 depending on accrediting agency requirements.)
- Reflect on the past five years' annual reviews of student learning and the changes made in the curriculum and teaching to evaluate how well your program is achieving its mission and providing quality academic programs and opportunities for its students. Cite the three most important changes made in each degree program in response to the annual assessments.
- What is your overall evaluation of the improvements of the past five years in each degree program?
- What is currently the most important aspect of each program where the students could be doing better, and how is the faculty planning to improve student learning?

Yearly assessment reports for each degree program should be included in Appendix A.

### **D. Map the curriculum**

Individual courses and curricula should be developed within the context of the unit's goals and should reflect a coherent plan of study. Curriculum mapping provides an efficient means to display the relationship between student learning and the curriculum. Its value is that it enables the faculty to display visually where central information, concepts, or skills are introduced, developed, and mastered. A curriculum map must be developed for each major and degree program. If the unit has not already produced curriculum map(s), it is strongly encouraged that there is broad unit involvement in the development of the map, especially from those faculty teaching key courses in the program. That way, faculty member can better understand how their course(s) contribute to the overall learning outcomes for the program. (Use the curriculum mapping feature in TaskStream, Section V.D., or online to map the curriculum for each program. For examples of completed curriculum maps, see: <http://assessment.gwu.edu/curriculum-mapping>.)

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<sup>1</sup> From GW's 2008 Statement of Accreditation by Middle States Commission on Higher Education.

## **E. Instructor Development**

As faculty are the heart of any institution (serving as teachers, mentors, and scholars, shaping the curriculum, and creating a climate for learning), the self-study needs to explore how they contribute to the learning process.

### **Full- and Part-time Faculty**

*Questions to consider:*

- Given the variety of people responsible for student instruction and learning, how has the unit worked with regular active status (and possible limited service) faculty to encourage high quality teaching?
- How do each of these different groups gain knowledge and understanding of the programmatic and course learning outcomes pertinent to their work?
- How are data from student surveys and course evaluations used to help teaching staff improve their effectiveness in supporting student learning? What processes are in place, either formally or informally, to address substandard teaching from active status and limited service faculty?
- How do course evaluations, departmental syllabus review, class observation, or other techniques enable the program to monitor consistency, not uniformity, across sections?
- (For doctoral programs) Are faculty resources adequate for carrying out the doctoral program at a level of high quality?

Include a copy of the department's course evaluation form in appendix B.

## **F. GTAs (if applicable)**

*Questions to consider:*

- How does your unit prepare GTAs to be effective instructors? Describe the criteria used to determine a GTA's readiness to perform specific instructional activities. Describe the training and supervision/feedback provided for GTAs, including any workshops or tutorials provided specifically for GTAs.
- Describe the methods (e.g., separate course evaluations, observation by faculty) used by your unit to evaluate the performance of your GTAs and to give them feedback.
- Describe the methods used to assess the reliability of grading (particularly more subjective grading such as grading of essay questions or papers) done by GTAs. Include examples of unit rubrics used for grading essay questions or papers.

## **G. Placement of Undergraduate and Master's Students**

Using data from the undergraduate and graduate student graduation surveys (available from TaskStream in section V.A., or online <https://careerservices.gwu.edu/undergraduate-employment-education-outcomes>), describe the types and levels of positions obtained by your graduates.

*Questions to consider:*

- How well is the curriculum preparing students for employment?
- Describe the employment market for students who have completed their master's degree.

## **H. Placement of Doctoral Students (if relevant)**

- Is there a viable employment market for new Ph.D.s in the discipline?

What has been the placement of graduates in the program, including the mix between academic institutions, government, industry, and independent employment? Include placement data for graduates over the past five years.

- For those pursuing an academic path, provide samples of the institutions, academic titles, and types of positions graduates attain.

## **VI. ENROLLMENT TRENDS**

### **A. Enrollment**

The following data will be provided and can be found in TaskStream, Section VI:

- Five year undergraduate and graduate course enrollments
- Five year trend of number of majors and minors as of fall census

Other information that will be needed may be found in the chair's annual report or in DataMart:

- Five year certificate program enrollments
- Graduate programs five-year admissions information and time to degree

### **B. Trends**

Describe, separately, any increases or decreases that are apparent in your five-year enrollment figures for undergraduate and graduate programs. Note factors (e.g., addition or deletion of courses, faculty sabbatical leaves or retirements, changing demand for the program) that may account for variations in the enrollments.

- Is the unit comfortable with what the data say about enrollments?
- What plans are underway to address enrollment growth or decline?
- What is the average time-to-degree for doctoral students?
- What is the retention rate for masters and doctoral students over the past five years?
- Describe any changes in the overall quality of master's or doctoral students? To what do you attribute these changes?
- If there are declines in the quality of master's or doctoral students, what has the unit done or what plans are underway to address this issue?

## **VII. SCHOLARLY AND/OR CREATIVE PRODUCTIVITY**

As the university serves as a center for intellectual inquiry, including both research, and creative endeavors, describe how your unit is advancing knowledge in your discipline and contributing to improving local/national/global conditions.

### **A. Scholarly and/or Creative Activities**

*Questions to consider:*

- Discuss the overall range and development of the faculty's primary scholarly and/or creative activities (refer to IV-B). Is the unit becoming more focused or diverse in its interests?
- Describe any collaborations among faculty within the unit, with other GW departments or schools, and with individuals or groups outside GW.
- Does the unit have any existing affiliations with organizations outside GW such as research/creative entities or governmental agencies?
- Are there additional agencies, or entities with which the unit might develop collaborative partnerships?

## **B. Research Foci and Strengths**

*Questions to consider:*

- What are the unit's primary research strengths? How do they support the unit's mission and the university's strategic plan? How do they correspond to current trends in the field or discipline?
- What cross-disciplinary research is either underway or being considered?
- Is any applied, translational, and policy research underway or being considered?

## **C. Research and Graduate Education**

*Questions to consider:*

- How is faculty research integrated into the graduate curriculum?
- Which faculty direct graduate student research, and in what disciplinary areas? (Provide a copy of any unit guidelines for faculty directing graduate student research.)
- Cite examples of outstanding graduate student research (especially publications)—and why they are important.
- List doctoral dissertations and their faculty advisors for the past five years in Appendix C (if applicable).

## **D. Research and Undergraduate Education**

*Questions to consider:*

- How has faculty research been integrated into your *undergraduate* curriculum?
- Which faculty are directing undergraduate student research and in what subject areas? Cite examples of outstanding undergraduate research.
- Have your undergraduates been involved in school, university-wide, or external initiatives to support undergraduate research (e.g., Gamow, Luther Rice, NSF's REU program). Again, if so, in what subject areas?

## **E. National (Ph.D.) Rankings (if applicable)**

*Questions to consider:*

- Cite any external evidence that describes or ranks the quality of the unit's doctoral program(s) with respect to national standards of excellence in your discipline. Evidence that is as objective as possible, and not totally subjective, should be noted (e.g., NRC data, other rankings, citation index data).
- Describe aspects of the unit's Ph.D. program that may not be available at competing institutions. What makes your program stand out?

## **VIII. SUPPORTING DATA AND ANALYSIS**

### **A. Staff**

Provide the number and levels (e.g., executive aide, senior secretary) of all clerical staff assigned to the unit.

### **B. Facilities**

- *Space:* Assess unit facilities in relation to programmatic goals, considering the amount, types, and overall adequacy of space.
- *Equipment:* Describe specialized equipment used by the unit for instructional and/or research purposes.

**C. University and School Service**

Provide a summary listing of full-time faculty service to (1) the University (e.g., Faculty Senate, IRB) and (2) to your school (e.g., freshman advising, teaching initiatives, committees) over the past three years.

**D. Other Pertinent Information**

Include any additional information that you feel may prove useful in conducting the academic program review.

**APPENDICES**

**Appendix A:** Copies of annual academic assessment reports for each of the unit's degree program for the past five years

**Appendix B:** Copy of the unit's course evaluation form(s)

**Appendix C:** (if applicable) List of doctoral dissertations and their faculty advisors for the past five years

**Appendix D:** Undergraduate and graduate student graduation survey data