

Buffalo State - SUNY

GUIDELINES FOR PERIODIC EVALUATION OF ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

OBJECTIVES

Periodic formative evaluation, as a collaborative venture between academic departments and the Provost's office, serves three primary purposes:

- To elicit informed judgments about how well an academic department is performing given its collective resources
- To make prudent projections about emerging opportunities and the way a department can best take advantage of those opportunities
- To ensure that the department has an updated strategic plan and is in the process of implementing it.

In fulfilling these three functions, a formative evaluation assists academic departments in maintaining high academic quality and stimulates change that enhances the department's performance in the future. When done well, a formative evaluation is both an honest evaluation of current circumstances and a candid dialogue about future possibilities and mutual commitments. The discussion and thought invested in the process leads to actions designed to increase the value of the department's contributions to undergraduate, continuing education and in some cases graduate education, to the disciplines and professions through the generation of new knowledge and to society through application of knowledge and outreach.

The fundamental question for any academic department is how creatively and effectively is the department leveraging the resources it has (or could access) to achieve excellence in its contributions to the instructional, scholarly and outreach missions of the college. Finally, it is critical that these evaluations incorporate the changing intellectual and educational environment that constitutes higher education today into each department's plans for the future.

The College is accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. For the college as a whole to meet the requirements of re-accreditation, each department (unit) within the college must individually meet those requirements. Therefore, as outlined by Middle States, the requirements of the department include that:

- The department has developed and implemented an assessment plan and process that evaluates its overall effectiveness in:
 - achieving its mission and goals;
 - implementing planning, resource allocation, and institutional renewal processes;
 - using department and other institutional resources efficiently;
 - providing leadership and governance;
 - providing administrative structures and services;
 - demonstrating departmental integrity; and
 - assuring that department and institutional processes and resources support appropriate learning and other outcomes for its students and graduates;
- The department's educational offerings display academic content, rigor and coherence that are appropriate to its higher education mission;
- The department identifies student learning goals and objectives, including knowledge and skills, for its educational offerings; has a written published plan for assessing learning; records the assessment results and changes made as a result.
- The department's curricula are designed so that students acquire and demonstrate college-level proficiency in general education and essential skills, including oral and written communication, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and reasoning, technological competency and information literacy; assessment of student learning demonstrates that the department's students have knowledge, skills, and competencies consistent with department and institutional goals and that students at graduation have achieved appropriate higher education goals.

The college also adheres to the principles advocated by the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) and the National Research Council (NRC). Therefore, in addition to the above and as suggested by CGS and NRC, all departments with graduate programs should:

- Articulate a vision of excellence for its graduate program(s),
- Provide quality control for all aspects of its graduate education,
- Provide a clear statement of expectations of students and timely monitoring of student progress,
- Address retention and time-to-degree appropriately,
- Provide an inter-disciplinary perspective
- Emphasize the importance of adequately training future college teachers,
- Provide sufficient and timely evaluation of teaching assistants, and
- Develop ways for graduate education to contribute to and enhance undergraduate education and
- Promote diversity.

Self-Study

The self-study is intended to help faculty and administrators gain a clear understanding of the following:

- The department's purposes within the college/SUNY/New York State, including the student learning outcomes it is intended to promote
- The department's effectiveness in achieving these purposes and outcomes (faculty expectations for students and the department)
- The department's overall quality
- The faculty's vision for the program; that is, future objectives for the department and any changes necessary to achieve those objectives

The general questions below are meant to guide the process of accessing a department's current situation, its emerging opportunities and its plans for the future. A critically important component of the process is the self-study undertaken by the members of the department itself. Every department can benefit from a thorough and reflective look at itself as a prelude to developing plans for the future. The questions are intended to guide a unit in its self-study and planning efforts. They are also framed to focus the attention of the external reviewers. The narrative does not need to take the form of itemized question followed by a specific answer, but each question that applies to the department should be addressed somewhere in the self-study. Departments are encouraged to provide data and data-driven analyses by making use of reports routinely available from all college sources. These should include:

- Enrollment trends
- Major trends
- Personnel trends
- External funding from grants, contracts, foundations
- Publications
- Alumni/other giving

The purpose of the questions is to shape both the internal discussions within the department and the dialogue with the external reviewers and should also help frame the final report to the Provost.

The self-study should give special attention to how the department creates research and scholarship synergies through faculty hiring and meets teaching and service missions through deployment of a mixture of tenure/tenure-track faculty, lecturers, visitors and adjuncts. The unit should also address how personnel and technology are used to offer breadth required for an undergraduate major or professional degree and to make appropriate contributions to Intellectual Foundations and other curricular needs beyond those of the department.

In addition to addressing the guiding questions, the self-study should contain a brief history of the department and its programs, descriptions of all degree or certificate programs offered by the department and narrative or other information that will enable the external reviewers to make good use of their time on campus.

Research and Scholarship

1. What are the current research strengths within the department? Is the department's publication/performance/exhibition and funding record commensurate with these strengths? Is the department competing effectively for external support?
2. What are the best objective measures for national/international comparisons in this field? Where would/does this department rank? Describe any unique programs that have national prominence.
3. What are the new directions in the discipline/profession? Are there emerging areas that might be particularly promising in the future? What areas of inquiry might be on the decline?
4. What specific strengths should Buffalo State leverage to improve its competitiveness for funding? To improve its national and international visibility?
5. What, if any, leverage can the department get from greater cooperation with other departments within the college? Outside the college? Does the unit have need for particular expertise in other academic departments in order to leverage its own strengths?
6. How do the department's facilities contribute or inhibit current research and scholarly/artistic objectives?

Teaching and Learning

These questions should be addressed separately for undergraduates and graduate students. If the graduate program has distinct tracks or more than one degree offered, such as terminal master and doctoral tracks, these questions should be addressed separately for those.

1. What are the programs' special areas of emphasis? Are these appropriate in terms of current strengths and probable future trends in the discipline?
2. What role does the department take in "general education"? What role does it play in "service teaching" for other departments?
3. What is the quality of students within the program? Do students come from backgrounds sufficiently different that their interactions are enriched by varying experiences and perspectives?
4. What does the department expect of its students (i.e. undergraduate majors, masters students)? Why does it hold these expectations? How well are its students meeting those expectations?
5. Does the department specify clearly in writing reasonable learning objectives for students? How does it measure learning outcomes? What are the indicators of "value added"?
6. To what extent does the unit incorporate research on student learning in the design of its curriculum? Its courses? Its evaluation of students?
7. Describe how advising works. Are students properly monitored and mentored? Is their moral high? What is the attrition rate?
8. Is the time to degree appropriate, given national norms in the field? Do students receive job placement help? How have they fared after graduation?
9. How does the department evaluate quality of teaching by faculty, lecturers and adjuncts? What kind of preparation and training is provided for adjuncts? What are the criteria for appointment of adjuncts?

10. What is the appropriate role for the department in continuing education, non-degree instruction and distance learning?
11. How do the college's classrooms and learning spaces and the technology available therein, contribute to or inhibit the department's teaching and learning objectives?
12. How do the college's teaching laboratories/studios, if applicable, contribute to or inhibit the department's teaching and learning objectives?

Service and Outreach

1. What is the nature and quality of the department's contributions to College-wide endeavors (e.g. governance)? Is this appropriate? Why or why not?
2. To what extent is the department's professional expertise made available to the community, state and nation through formal programs (e.g. lectures, exhibits, concerts, service on boards/professional associations)? Are there areas where the department should make other direct contributions to the public?
3. To what extent are faculty involved in outside consulting work?
4. To what extent are faculty involved in service learning, volunteerism, internships? How does this relate to the department's teaching and research? What is the impact on the community?

Allocation of Resources

1. Does the department make the best possible use of resources it has (faculty, staff, students, space, S&E, OTPS, IFR)? In what ways could it streamline or increase efficiency?
2. What is the process that the unit uses to address fair allocation of workload? How are workload allocations reviewed by the department and how are decisions made to reallocate made? (e.g. release time)
3. Is the faculty's time divided effectively? What are the demands for research, teaching, advising, committee assignments and other service? Do rewards for accomplishments in each of these areas encourage faculty to make appropriate contributions?
4. Are the department's missions appropriate given its faculty size and other resources? How does the graduate program relate to the undergraduate program? Are the strengths of both appropriately balanced?
5. Would greater use of technology enhance the department's ability to achieve its objectives? Would a redirection of resources within the department possibly achieve better results?
6. Are there areas where other resources could be accessed or developed by the department? For example, could the department develop beneficial arrangements with other campuses or organizations? Engage in fund raising or entrepreneurial activities?
7. Describe the process the department uses for allocating space to individuals, including how these allocations are reviewed by the department and how decisions to reallocate space are made.

Other Management Issues

1. How does the department review staff and promote professional development?
2. How does the department mentor faculty?

3. How does the department develop leadership in terms of the department, the college and the discipline?
4. How does the department connect with alumni? How could it improve its alumni relations?
5. How does the department plan for and manage overall graduate enrollment?

Assessment processes for outcomes/faculty expectations

The materials in the self-study should reflect continuous and ongoing planning, information gathering, self-review and use of results. The idea is to reflect on these things:

- What are we trying to do?
 - How well are we doing it?
 - How do we know?
 - How do we use the information to improve?
 - Do the improvements work?
1. What assessment activities were planned? What activities are on-going? What activities were completed?
 2. What changes (if any) were implemented as a result of assessment? What changes (if any) were proposed but are not addressed yet?
 3. What curricular and/or degree changes have there been since your last review and why?

Summary (one page with bulleted items)

- Major strengths
- Major weaknesses
- Key challenges
- Key opportunities

Strategic Plan

One page using bulleted format that outlines a strategic plan for the next five years.

Format

The self-study must have an appendix with a list of the core faculty and a current vitae for each tenured/tenure-tracking faculty member who has a full or joint appointment in the department. Core faculty should be people who are regularly and substantially contributing to the department now and through the review period. Each vitae should be limited to four pages.

The department's self-study should be forwarded to the Dean at least one month prior to the external reviewers scheduled visit.

External Review

Fresh perspectives improve formative evaluations. For that reason, external reviewers will be invited to familiarize themselves with the department and to take part in the deliberations about the department's assessment and planning. Reviewers will be expected to provide candid assessment of the program's current strengths and weaknesses and their best judgment on where the department should invest its intellectual and other resources to become even better in the future.

- Generally, potential external reviewers should be discussed by the program/department being evaluated, the Dean and the campus Chief Academic Officer or designee but the Chief Academic Officer (Provost) should make the final selection.
- "At least two external reviewers should be selected who have no significant academic, professional or other relationship to full-time faculty in the program/department, who have no previous significant or formal affiliation with the institution, and who come from academic or professional institutions belonging to a peer or aspirational peer group (i.e. the same Carnegie class and having a similar program size, scope and statistical or perceived reputational ranking."¹
- External review shall conclude when the external reviewers submit a report, based on a campus visit, to the Chief Academic Officer.

To help the Provost identify appropriate reviewers, the department provides a list of faculty from 3-4 programs or departments at other institutions (disciplinary associations are often a good source) which model different forms of excellence to which the department aspires. The academic departments listed might be thought of as benchmarks, programs whose achievement or innovations Buffalo State could stretch to match with roughly the same number of faculty and the same financial resources.

Procedures

Preparation for Reviewers

In preparation for the self-study and external review the following information should be obtained by the department and used in the self-study: information about undergraduate majors, course enrollments and degrees granted; benchmark comparisons where available and appropriate; a description of the infrastructure supporting the department including facilities, staff, equipment, library holdings and computing resources.

Arrangements for Reviewers

The usual visitation time will be 1-2 working days. Typically reviewers arrive mid-day and leave the following late afternoon. The department in consultation with the Dean's office should develop an itinerary for the reviewers. The goal of a campus visit is to foster conversations and observations that enable the reviewers to do well the job we ask of them. Time will be provided for the reviewers to work together in private in order to complete at least a rough draft of the report prior to departure from Buffalo. If requested, laptop computers will be provided during the campus visit to assist the reviewers in drafting their report. The reviewers will be asked to share their preliminary observations with the Provost and the Provost's invitees in an exit interview.

Travel, meals and housing for the reviewers along with a small honorarium should be arranged through the Dean's office.

The Reviewers' Report

After reviewing all pertinent information, the reviewers will prepare a final report addressing how the department's contributions to the various aspects of the college's mission (teaching and learning, research and scholarship and service/outreach) can be as strong as possible in the future. Obviously, if the college invested more resources in a program the college would reap additional benefits. What the college asks of consultants is a much more crucial task; they are asked to provide advice about the quality of what the department does, how current resources are used and how they might be used better to achieve the department's aspirations.

The reviewers should agree during the visit on a plan for preparing a single, consolidated report. Use of bulleting for items is acceptable. The following headings are suggested:

- Teaching and Learning
 - Undergraduate Major
 - General Education for Undergraduates/service teaching
 - Graduate programs
- Research and Scholarship
 - Faculty
 - Relationship to Graduate Programs
- Service and Outreach
- Allocation of Resources by Unit
- Other Management Issues
- Assessment processes for learning outcomes/faculty expectations
- Strategic Plan
- Recommendations by Reviewers for when new resources are available
- Conclusions

Disposition of the Report

The reviewers should forward their report to the Provost no later than three weeks after the visit is completed. Copies will be forwarded to the department and to the department's Dean who each will have three weeks to respond in writing to the document, sending their response to their Dean who will forward the assembled packet to the Provost. The Provost's Office will prepare the Academic Affairs response and send it, along with copies of the consultants' report, unit's response and Dean's response to the President. Copies of this packet may also be sent to the graduate Dean if appropriate and to the

Associate Vice President for Curriculum and Assessment office for official recording. The Provost will meet with the department/dean to discuss the recommendations from the review.

Typical schedule for reviewers' visit

Organization meeting (agenda, logistics, college overview) – Provost, dean

Overview with chair

Undergraduate program overview—with faculty

Graduate program overview—with faculty

Research overview—with faculty

Meeting with undergraduates – selected by department

Meeting with graduate students – selected by department

Meeting with Dean

Tour of facilities

Reviewers team meeting – private meeting

Debriefing with administrators and department chair and others as selected

1 Memorandum to Presidents, Vol. 10, No. 2 "Policy and Guidance: Assessment", July 15, 2010.

DRAFT