NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY
PROGRAM REVIEW
FOURTH CYCLE

EXTERNAL REVIEWER GUIDE

APRIL 2016
# NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY
# PROGRAM REVIEW
# FOURTH CYCLE
# EXTERNAL REVIEWER GUIDE

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I. Introduction
This guide is intended to provide details on the role of the external reviewers in Northwestern’s Program Review process. For a more complete description of the process, please see the *Program Review Procedures and Rationale* document.

In addition, the Office of Administration and Planning is always available to answer any questions and clarify specific details of the process.

II. External Reviewer Selection
The department chair/head of the unit is asked to work with the faculty/staff to recommend individuals to serve as potential outside experts. The units are asked to nominate 8-10 eminent leaders in their field who represent the best programs and are from highly reputable institutions. Units may also delineate reviewers by their areas of expertise and ask that the team be comprised of reviewers from each group to ensure coverage of sub-fields within the unit.

The list of potential external reviewers is then reviewed by senior administrators (e.g., President, Provost, Vice President for Research, Dean of The Graduate School, and the Dean of the School) to ensure that there is consensus on the appropriateness of these individuals to serve as reviewers. Final selection and scheduling of reviewers is the responsibility of the Office of Administration and Planning.

At least two outside experts are asked to visit the unit, with additional reviewers added as needed based on the size and breadth of the unit. The knowledge and objectivity brought to bear on the reviews by the external reviewers have been relied upon heavily by Northwestern, and their expertise and dedication are core strengths of the process.

III. Confidentiality
Continuous improvement has been the primary goal of Program Review at Northwestern since its inception in 1985. To this end, the process has always been evaluative, but each Program Review has also been conducted with an eye toward what changes can be made to enhance the unit as well as the school and University.

In order to obtain the most candid and accurate information possible, we ask that everyone involved in the process judiciously maintains confidentiality. This covers both individual perspectives that are shared with the external reviewers, as well as final findings and recommendations. **Therefore, all Program Review materials and anything that is discussed with you in the course of the review should be considered confidential and not discussed with anyone outside the scope of the review process.** Confidentiality is of particular importance during any group meeting and it should be emphasized by the external reviewers to the participants that they, too, should not share with anyone else, the remarks made during the meeting. This expectation of confidentiality exists not only while the review is being conducted, but also once the review has been completed.
External reviewer reports and resulting agreements are shared with members of the respective unit (excluding any confidential addenda as necessary), with the University’s senior leadership (including Deans and Line Vice Presidents), and with University Trustees in summary form. The Office of Administration and Planning does not share Program Review materials with others outside these groups without the unit’s express permission. However, units may choose to share their review materials (for example, many units find that sharing the report findings with the unit’s advisory board or potential strategic partners can be beneficial), but the Office of Administration and Planning recommends that this be done only with a sense of consensus in the unit.

Occasionally, external reviewers may have friends or colleagues who may be curious about what the review team is finding and may try to engage the review team in conversation. On rare occasions, we have even had newspaper reporters trying to find out information about particular units. However, the review should not be discussed with anyone outside the unit, the Program Review Council, the internal reviewers, members of central administration, or the Office of Administration and Planning.

IV. Overview of the Process
Northwestern as an institution has had a longstanding commitment to continuous improvement, and Program Review is an important mechanism towards that goal. The purpose of Program Review is to assess each unit’s quality and effectiveness, to stimulate planning and improvement, and to encourage strategic development in ways that further the unit’s priorities. These reviews are an important source of external input about the strengths and weaknesses of all units and serve as a constructive base for future improvement; they are intended to be a catalyst for the unit to chart and seek change. These reviews cumulatively provide input to University-wide priority setting and also serve as an important aid to the Deans and faculty for school-level planning. They are a pivotal means of communication and accountability, within the department, with the Dean, and with central administration and the trustees.

Program Review is overseen by the Program Review Council (PRC), an appointed steering committee comprising senior faculty and administrators. Program Review Council members serve three-year terms and the Chair of the Council is appointed every two years from among the members of this group. At least two-thirds of the members of the Program Review Council are faculty.

The process is organized and supported by the Office of Administration and Planning through the Vice President of Administration and Planning, as well as the Associate Vice President for Program Review, who serves as the Council’s Vice Chair.

The review process begins with a self-assessment phase, where the unit identifies key issues and writes the self-study, which is a deeper dive on the key issues initially identified. Data collection includes the administration and analysis of a faculty/staff survey (and customer surveys for administrative units as appropriate) and development of a data profile measuring key performance indicators for the unit.
These materials are reviewed by distinguished experts from outside the University and an internal review team of faculty/staff of the University, who then conduct a review visit with unit to get detailed insight from members of this unit and related units. A report is written by the external reviewers within two weeks of the visit, and the internal reviewers may add an addendum if necessary (though this is rare). The report is fact-checked by the unit head and then presented to the Program Review Council by the internal reviewers. It is also presented to central administration and the unit to develop an actionable implementation agreement. Results of the review are shared with members of the unit, the University’s senior and line administration, and the Board of Trustees, but are otherwise kept confidential.

Annual follow-up with the unit occurs to ensure recommendations that were agreed upon have been enacted or are in the process of implementation.

V. Role of the External and Internal Reviewers
One of the primary strengths of the Program Review process is the tradition of inviting eminently qualified external reviewers to review the units. The role of the external reviewer is viewed as that of a “field expert” with a wealth of knowledge about the issues particular to the discipline or administrative field. The external reviewers are asked to provide insight and feedback on issues and trends particular to the discipline/field, with a specific focus on how the unit at Northwestern can strategically improve their standing in the field. The external reviewers are also responsible for writing the final report and recommendations, which is explained in further detail in Section VI of this document.

Because of their expertise in the specific discipline or field, members of the unit often rely on the external reviewers to understand the key issues of the unit in the context of the field. Thus, the external reviewers should take the lead with regard to which issues to discuss during the meetings. However, they are also highly encouraged to consider issues raised by the internal reviewers, who may have a deeper understanding of organizational and administrative issues at the University.

In contrast, one of the roles of the internal reviewers (who cannot be members of the unit under review) is to serve as a resource to the external reviewers and provide a lens on the unique context of the Northwestern environment. The internal reviewers are strongly encouraged to discuss the materials and any questions and thoughts they may have about the discipline with the external reviewers prior to and during the campus visit.

VI. The Review Process
The following is an overview of the process that will detail the role of the external reviewers. In addition, the Office of Administration and Planning and the internal reviewers are available to consult with external reviewers on any issue that might arise during the course of the review and to provide assistance or additional information whenever possible.
A. Prior to the Campus Visit

1. Background Materials
   In preparation for the campus visit, the external and internal reviewers are provided with the following materials approximately one month prior to the review visit:
   - External Reviewer’s Guide/Internal Reviewer’s Guide
   - Program Review Procedures and Rationale
   - Materials for the current review:
     - Key Issues List
     - Self-Study
     - Faculty/Staff and Customer Surveys (if applicable)
     - Data Profile
     - Relevant Appendices (e.g. CVs/Resumes)
     - Prior Review Materials (when available)
   - Schedule of Meetings for the Visit

   The key issues list gives the external and internal reviewers a preview of what the unit will address in its self-study report, and which the unit believes are critical for framing its future strategy. The self-study provides both a broader and deeper story about the unit’s current strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities. Faculty/staff surveys provide the venue for each unit member to share their perspective; this is particularly useful in larger units, where all unit members may not be able to meet individually with the review team. For administrative units, the customer feedback survey allows constituents to provide feedback on the unit’s services or resources. The data profile is compiled by the Office of Administration and Planning or by a resource in the school, in the case of schools that maintain separate databases. The data profile provides metrics on the unit’s key performance indicators as a trend over the past ten years, if data is available.

   The unit head is given the names and contact information of the external reviewers in advance of their visit. In addition, the internal reviewers are also advised of the selection of the external reviewers and may contact them in advance of the campus visit to highlight key issues and questions.

2. Travel Arrangements
   The Office of Administration and Planning will make hotel and dinner reservations and is available to provide assistance in ground transportation arrangements. Generally the external reviewers make their own flight arrangements (and are later reimbursed), as each reviewer is most familiar with his/her own schedule and airline preferences. The Office of Administration and Planning can also book flights by request.
Approximately one month prior to the campus visit, review materials and a draft itinerary for the visit, along with hotel and ground transportation reservation numbers, and other pertinent information, will be provided to the review team. The external reviewers are requested to provide the Office of Administration and Planning with their travel information, which will ensure that the meeting schedule is coordinated with flight times and that return transportation to the airport can be arranged.

**B. The Campus Visit**

The external reviewers’ visit is usually about two days in length. If there are particular scheduling needs for the reviewers or for the unit that do not fit the typical schedule, this should be addressed at the time that visit dates are confirmed. The external and internal reviewers will meet jointly with the unit’s faculty and/or professional staff, a cross-section of undergraduate and graduate students, line administration involved (Dean or unit manager, appropriate Vice President(s), Provost, and President), and any others appropriate to the review. The following table summarizes the individuals with whom the reviewers typically meet:

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<tr>
<th>ACADEMIC UNITS</th>
<th>ADMINISTRATIVE UNITS</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chair</strong></td>
<td><strong>Department Head</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Available Tenure-Line Faculty</td>
<td>Key Professional Staff (&lt;br&gt;(Those reporting directly to the unit head))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(This may include separate meetings to highlight the roles that some of these individuals play within the unit – e.g., Director of Undergraduate Studies, Director of Graduate Studies, etc.)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dean of School</strong></td>
<td><strong>Line Vice President</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Constituents <em>(as applicable)</em></td>
<td>Primary Constituents <em>(as appropriate)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Undergraduate students</td>
<td>• Clients (faculty, students, and/or staff)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Graduate students</td>
<td>• Other staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Post-docs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Residents and fellows</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chairs/Faculty in Related Areas</strong></td>
<td>Unit Heads/Staff in Related Areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Affiliated with the unit</td>
<td>• Affiliated with the unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Have potential for productive interdisciplinary collaboration</td>
<td>• Utilize the services provided by the unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Senior Administrators</strong></td>
<td><strong>Senior Administrators</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Others relevant to the unit (e.g. joint program heads, center directors)</td>
<td>• Others relevant to the unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Dean of the Graduate School, Vice President for Research <em>(if applicable)</em></td>
<td>• Executive Vice President, Provost, President</td>
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1. **Meetings with the Internal Reviewers**
   The external and internal reviewers will participate in all meetings during the review. The schedule allows for the reviewers to have dinner privately on the evening after the first full day of meetings, as well as meet privately at the end of the visit to coordinate their thoughts, discuss the division of labor among the external reviewers in drafting a joint report and begin preparing a draft or outline of the report (which of course may be revised over the following two weeks). This draft or the outline may be used in the debriefing sessions with the unit head and members of central administration.

2. **Meetings with the Unit Head**
   As mentioned, the review team generally begins their campus visit with dinner hosted by the unit head. This is the unit head’s opportunity to identify any issues or areas of emphasis, as well as for the review team to ask any questions that may have arisen from reading the background materials or self-study report. In addition, every effort is made to permit the review team to meet with the unit head at the conclusion of the campus visit to answer any additional questions that arose during the visit or clarify any matters of interest to the reviewers.

3. **Meetings with Faculty/Key Staff**
   Efforts are made to permit the review team to meet with as many tenure-line faculty members as possible, for academic units, or with as many professional staff as possible, for administrative units. Depending on the size and structure of the unit, these meetings may be conducted with small groups or individually. As time permits and if appropriate, the review team may also meet with teaching track faculty or lecturers. These meetings are intended to allow the members of the unit to vet issues on their minds, as well as for the reviewers to explore the critical issues or questions identified from the initial assessment of the unit’s materials. Although every attempt is made to schedule the campus visit when all key individuals of the unit will be available, if key individuals are unavailable, the review team may be requested to participate in a conference call with them. Alternatively, the internal reviewers may conduct meetings with those individuals prior to the visit.

4. **Meetings with Other Stakeholders**
   For academic units, and as appropriate, the review team will also meet with a group of undergraduate students, graduate students, post-docs, residents, and fellows. For administrative units, the review team generally meets with a cross-section of the unit’s constituents. As time and the size of the unit permits, meetings with heads of related schools, units, programs, or centers may also be scheduled.

5. **Meeting with the Dean or Line Vice President**
   The review team will also meet with the Dean or Line Vice President. The purpose of this meeting is to become familiar with the overall strategy of the larger organization in which the unit is situated. The priorities of the unit should
be coordinated with the priorities and strategies of the larger entity within which it functions.

6. Meeting with Central Administration
   Toward the end of the second day of the visit, the review team will meet with the President, Provost, Vice President of Administration and Planning, Associate Vice President of Program Review, and any other member of central administration appropriate for the unit (i.e., Dean of the Graduate School, Executive Vice President, Vice President for Research, etc.). The purpose of this meeting is for the reviewers to clarify any issues and for the reviewers to provide members of central administration with a preview of the major findings from the review.

C. Drafting the Report
   Following the campus visit, external reviewers are asked to provide a set of written recommendations for the unit to improve and achieve its strategic goals. This section is intended to provide guidance to the external review team in preparing their report.

1. Submission
   The report should be submitted electronically (preferably in Word format) directly to the Office of Administration and Planning within two weeks of the conclusion of the campus visit. The report is the responsibility of the external review team, though the internal reviewers are available for consultation following the review visit. Some teams have found it helpful to designate one individual at the time of the campus visit as the lead responsible for finalizing and submitting the report, though the writing is usually shared.

2. Body of the Report
   Although there is not a prescribed format, the report should include the following:
   a. Cover page identifying the unit and the external reviewers, and the date of the report
   b. Executive summary of the report
   c. Discussion of the findings and recommendations for change
   d. Summary list of the recommendations at the end of the report

   The main body of the report can be organized in whatever manner is most suitable for the unit and its issues. Some reports discuss issues and conclusions/recommendations in the body, while others only discuss issues and save recommendations for the end. While either style is appropriate, we suggest all recommendations be summarized at the end, even if they are given in the body of the report.

3. Recommendations
   Recommendations should be action-oriented and desired results should be measurable, specifying what is to be done and by whom, as well as the timeframe for accomplishing it. It is reasonable to make recommendations to University administrators or other people outside the department. Keep in mind that the
recommendations are used to develop the implementation agreements and follow-up reports and should be drafted in a manner to reflect that. If there is discussion, then the actual recommendation should be highlighted in boldface or italics. The following are sample recommendations:

a. **Refresh the undergraduate and graduate curricula to account for recent transformations in the field and develop sustainable new courses by Spring Quarter 2015.** Perform a curriculum audit to determine where concepts of modern thought leadership can be added to existing as well as new courses.
   i. Examples of topics include...
   ii. Curriculum updates should consider whether major requirements should be updated

b. **The department chair should work with the department faculty to improve collaborative efforts (both within the department and interdepartmentally).** Collaboration could be improved between basic and clinical researchers as well as between full-time and contributed service faculty. Research and scholarly productivity should be rewarded. The current model of two separate departmental sections with little interaction between them should be corrected. The responsibility for this falls to both “camps” – clinicians and scientists. This responsibility also extends to the Evanston campus.

c. **Develop a mentoring strategy for early career professionals. We recommend the department put together a mentoring plan, especially for the growing cohort of junior faculty.** We also recommend the department develop and implement plans for mentoring researchers and graduate students. For example, more senior students could be assigned to serve as a resource for junior students.

d. **Consider a pause in the PhD program until current structural issues are addressed.** The program has grown too large for the current faculty size, in part because students are taking too long to finish. This is related to a lack of clear communication about requirements and enforcement of deadlines.
   i. Develop, document, and clearly communicate the skills that students are expected to master and the milestones that will serve those purposes. Enforce deadlines.
   ii. Improve mentoring and foster development of current PhDs, for example by identifying opportunities for them to attend and/or present at national meetings.

e. **The administration should continue to allow the department to define its own hiring needs and priorities.** However, the department should look broadly throughout the university to exploit the assets of the
institution in order to strengthen the fields it is weak in. It should continue to strive for increasing the diversity of its faculty.

f. **The department should continue to embrace relationships with other departments, areas and external groups in order to develop its strategic areas of focus and better leverage existing resources.** The use of courtesy and voting appointments, cross-disciplinary programming and hiring should be encouraged.

4. **Appendices**
   While it is not necessary to reiterate data supplied in the unit self-study report, any new data or supplementary materials obtained during the review (e.g., additional data provided by the department) should be included as appendices.

5. **Confidential Addendum**
   While the majority of reports do not require one, reviewers also have the option to add a confidential addendum. This is appropriate for any sensitive recommendations, particularly those relating to specific individuals. The addendum should identify who should see it (e.g., the Department Chair, Dean, and/or Central Administration). The Office for Administration and Planning can advise if there are any questions on the best way to incorporate such an addendum.

**VII. After the Review**

A. **Implementation and Follow-Up**
   Once the report is received, it is made available to the unit head for fact-checking. The unit may not change any opinion or recommendation but may have factual statements corrected if there are any errors. The unit is given a chance to provide a separate written response if they have serious concerns with the recommendations in the report.

   After presentation to the Program Review Council, the recommendations contained in that report form the basis of the implementation agreement where a specific action plan is set out. The implementation agreement is developed through meetings with the Dean or line administrator and the unit head and assigns oversight for each action either to the unit or the Dean/line administrator as appropriate. These meetings also offer the unit the opportunity to respond to any matters raised in the course of the review process.

   Approximately a year after the implementation agreement is finalized, the Office of Administration and Planning solicits a progress report from the unit, which is shared with senior administration and the Board of Trustees.

B. **Honorarium and Reimbursement**
   An honorarium is provided to each external reviewer for their participation in the process. A “Vendor Code Request Form for Individuals” and “Contracted Services
Form for Residents” will need to be completed before the honorarium can be processed – the Office of Administration and Planning collects the information necessary from the reviewers to complete these forms and sends them back for signature. Once the external reviewers submit their report, their honorarium will be disbursed.

The Office of Administration and Planning covers all expenses for the visit (please note that we are only able to reimburse economy class airfare). Please save all receipts to submit after the review. External reviewers also need to submit a “Visitor’s Travel Expense Form” and the associated receipts for expenses related to the visit. The Office of Administration and Planning will process reimbursements as quickly as possible.

C. Evaluation of Review Visit

The Program Review process also strives for continuous improvement. An online evaluation will be sent to each member of the review team after the report is submitted. This evaluation is intended to assess the quality of the process (i.e., if the structure of the process was sufficient in providing meaningful insight for assessment) as well as satisfaction with the logistics (i.e., timely receipt of materials and other information, satisfactory accommodations). The Office of Administration and Planning greatly appreciates candor in this feedback so that it may continue to refine its processes. These evaluation forms are kept confidential, disclosed only to members of central administration and members of the Program Review Council on occasion. Composite results and trends in the evaluations may be used during the inter-cycle planning process.