NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY
PROGRAM REVIEW
FOURTH CYCLE

EXTERNAL REVIEWER GUIDE
2017-18
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I. Purpose of Program Review
Northwestern as an institution has had a longstanding commitment to continuous improvement, and Program Review is an important mechanism towards that goal. Initially launched in 1985, Northwestern is currently in the fourth cycle of the review process. 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.

The reviews are a pivotal means of communication and accountability, within the unit, with the Dean/line Vice President, and with central administration involved in Program Review (President, Provost, Executive Vice President, Vice President of Administration and Planning, Vice President for Research, Vice President and General Counsel, and Dean of The Graduate School) and the Board of Trustees.

This guide provides details on the role of the external reviewers in Northwestern’s Program Review process. For a description of the review process, please see the Program Review Procedures and Rationale document.
II. External Reviewer Selection
For each review, at least two outside experts are invited to review 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.

The department chair/head of the unit under review works with the unit’s faculty/staff to recommend individuals to serve as potential outside experts. Each unit is asked to nominate 8-10 leaders in their field who represent the best programs and are from highly reputable institutions or industry as appropriate. Units may also delineate reviewers by their areas of expertise and ask that the team be comprised of reviewers from specific subfields to ensure coverage of all areas within the unit. The Program Review Office may request additional nominations given feedback from central administration and line administration or due to scheduling constraints.

The list of potential external reviewers is then reviewed by central administration (President, Provost, Executive Vice President, Vice President of Administration and Planning, Vice President for Research, Vice President and General Counsel, and Dean of The Graduate School) and the Dean/line Vice President 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 Program Review Office.
III. Role of the External and Internal Reviewers

Each visit is conducted by the review team, which consists of two or more external reviewers and two internal reviewers. The external and internal reviewers are responsible for being familiar with the review materials, and will conduct all meetings together throughout the review visit.

A. External Reviewers

One of the primary strengths of the Program Review process is its history of inviting expert 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 the External Reviewer Report section.

Because of their expertise in the specific discipline or field, the external reviewers are relied on by members of the unit 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. They are also highly encouraged to consider issues raised by the internal reviewers, who may have a deeper understanding of organizational and administrative structure of Northwestern.

B. Internal Reviewers

As a complement, the role 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 participate in the interviews to provide context on the Northwestern environment and advisory support to the external reviewers.

The internal reviewers are nominated by the Dean/line Vice President or central administration, and are approved by the unit head. The internal reviewers cannot be members of the unit or have courtesy/joint appointments with the unit under review.
IV. Program Review Process
The following is an overview of the Program Review process that details the role of the external reviewers. In addition, the Program Review Office and the internal reviewers are available to consult with external reviewers on any issue that might arise before or during the course of the review and to provide assistance or additional information whenever possible.

A. Prior to the Campus Visit
   1. Background Materials
      Approximately one month in advance of the campus visit, the external and internal reviewers are provided with the following materials. The review team is expected to be familiar with the materials for the current review prior to the site visit:
      - Materials for the current review:
        - Key Issues
        - Self-Study
        - Faculty/Staff and Customer Survey Results (if applicable)
        - Data Profile
        - Appendices (e.g., CVs/Resumes)
        - Prior Review Materials (when available)
        - Review Visit Schedule and Contact Information
      - Program Review Guidelines
        - Procedures and Rationale
        - External Reviewer Guide
        - Internal Reviewer Guide
      The Key Issues give the external and internal reviewers an overview of critical challenges that will be addressed in the Self-Study, 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 survey results provide a venue for each unit member to share their perspective; this opportunity is particularly useful in larger units, where all members may not be able to meet individually with the review team. For administrative units, the customer feedback survey results allow a wide range of constituents to provide feedback on the unit’s services and resources.
      The Data Profile is compiled by the Office of Administration and Planning for academic departments or by a resource in the school or unit, when units maintain separate databases. The Data Profile provides metrics on the unit’s key performance indicators, ideally as a trend over the past ten years.
      The Program Review Office coordinates the hard copy and electronic delivery of all background materials, which are prepared with the assistance of the unit.

   2. Travel Arrangements
      The Program Review Office will make hotel and meal reservations and is available to provide assistance in ground transportation arrangements, if requested. Generally the external reviewers make their own flight arrangements (and are later reimbursed), as each
The external reviewers’ visit is generally two days in length, consisting of an evening dinner followed by a day and half of meetings. If there are particular scheduling needs for the reviewers or for the unit that do not fit the typical schedule, these should be addressed at the time that visit dates are confirmed.

The following table summarizes the individuals with whom the reviewers typically meet during the course of the campus visit:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPICAL REVIEW PARTICIPANTS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unit members</td>
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<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Administrative</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

1. **Meetings with the Unit Leadership**
   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. In addition, the review team meets 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.
2. **Meetings with Unit Members**
The review team meets 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.

3. **Meetings with Other Stakeholders and Collaborators**
For academic units, and as appropriate, the review team also meets with groups 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.

4. **Meeting with Line Administration**
The review team meets with the Dean/line Vice President to which the unit reports. The purpose of this meeting is to become familiar with the overall strategy of the larger organization in which the unit is situated, and to ensure the priorities of the unit are coordinated with the priorities and strategies of the larger entity within which it functions. This meeting also serves as an opportunity for the review to present their preliminary findings that will be in the final report.

5. **Meeting with Central Administration**
At the end of the visit, the review team meets with the President, Provost, Vice President of Administration and Planning, Associate Vice President of Program Review, and other members of central administration appropriate for the unit (i.e., Dean of The Graduate School, Executive Vice President, Vice President for Research, Vice President and General Counsel, 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. **External Reviewer Report**
With ten days of the conclusion on the campus visit, the 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 Program Review Office 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. Though the writing is usually shared, 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.

2. **Body of the Report**
   Although there is not a prescribed format, the report should include the following:
   i. Executive summary of the report
   ii. Discussion of the findings and recommendations for change
   iii. 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, all recommendations should 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 leadership or other people outside the unit. 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. **Given upcoming retirements, the Department needs to develop a strategic plan to hire around its core strengths.** Strategic planning efforts should consider:
      i. Relationship of Department to actual and potential collaborators within the University
      ii. Identifying and accounting for significant ways in which the field may evolve

   b. **The Department chair should work with the department faculty to improve collaborative efforts between faculty of all ranks.** Collaboration could be improved between basic and clinical researchers as well as between full-time and contributed service faculty. 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.

   c. **Foster connections with other units throughout the University.** The Department would benefit from increased interactions with cognate Departments within the School, as well as from connections between scholars exploring similar research pursuits. In addition to serving the Department’s research portfolio, increased connections throughout the University could also help to engage a larger community of 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. **Increase efforts to mentor junior faculty.** The Department should develop a plan to engage and support junior faculty earlier in their careers. The mentorship plan should include more feedback and interactions with regard to research between junior and senior faculty.

4. **Confidential Addendum**
   While the majority of reports do not include one, external reviewers have the option to add a confidential addendum. This addition 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 Program Review Office can advise on the best way to incorporate such an addendum.
V. After the Review Visit

A. Implementation and Follow-Up

Once the report is received, it is made available to the unit head for fact-checking. The unit head may not change any opinions or recommendations but may have factual statements corrected with a footnote 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.

The internal reviewers then present a summary of highlights to the Program Review Council, who discusses each review and ensures that the Implementation Agreements are actionable.

Then, the unit head, Dean/line Vice President, and central administration discuss the Implementation Agreement and respond to the recommendations, outlining specific action plans. The Implementation Agreement serves as the basis for the one year follow-up.

Approximately a year after the Implementation Agreement is finalized, the Program Review Office solicits a follow-up report from the unit, which is shared with central administration and the Board of Trustees.

B. Honorarium and Reimbursement

An honorarium is provided to each external reviewer for their participation in the process. The Program Review Office will send two forms – “Vendor Code Request Form for Individuals” and “Contracted Services Form for Residents” – that need to be completed before the honorarium can be processed. Once the external reviewers submit their report, their honorarium will be promptly provided.

The Office of Administration and Planning covers all expenses for the visit. 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 to process reimbursements.

C. Evaluation of Review Visit

The Program Review process itself strives for continuous improvement. An online evaluation is sent to each member of the review team after the final 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 Program Review Office greatly appreciates candor in this feedback so that it may continue to refine its processes. These evaluation forms are kept confidential. Composite results and trends in the evaluations may be used during the review cycle planning process and to improve the process for future reviews.
VI. Confidentiality

In the course of conducting the Program Review process, external reviewers are privy to sensitive information in the form of data, survey results, reports, and discussions. The intention of Program Review is not to publicly embarrass a unit if problems are discovered but rather to resolve issues and build a mindset of continuous improvement. Thus, judiciously maintaining confidentiality—both regarding individual perspectives that are shared with the review team, as well as findings and recommendations—is an integral aspect and expectation of the Program Review process. Therefore, anything the review team and the Program Review Council hear or discuss throughout the course of the review (prior, during, and after) should be considered confidential and not shared with others outside the scope of the review process. Confidentiality is of particular importance during group meetings, and it should be re-emphasized to the participants that they should not share remarks or information with anyone else.

External reviewer reports are made available to members of the unit (excluding any confidential addenda as necessary), the Dean/line Vice President, central administration, and the Board of Trustees. The Program Review Office 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 Program Review Office recommends that this sharing be done only with a sense of consensus in the unit.

Occasionally, reviewers may have friends or colleagues who are curious about the review team’s findings and may try to engage the review team in conversation. On rare occasions, newspaper reporters have tried to contact internal reviewers trying to get information about particular units. Thus, as stated above, reviewers should not discuss the review with others outside the unit, the review team, the Program Review Council, or the Program Review Office.

This expectation of confidentiality exists not only while the review is being conducted, but also once the review has been completed.