Program Review
Identification of Key Issues
Guidance for Administrative Units

One of the unit’s first steps for program review is to identify a list of key issues that it believes to be critical to the unit both now and over the coming years. These are issues which must be addressed in order to improve the quality of the unit and remain best-in-class. Units may use a variety of mechanisms for generating the list of issues, including but not limited to:

- Analysis of unit data
- Constituent feedback (Staff, Students, Faculty, “Customers” as appropriate)
- Review of previous cycle reports and implementation agreements
- Working knowledge of issues that have been discussed in recent planning sessions

Once a working list of issues has been established, it should be shared with the members of the unit for feedback and prioritization. The goal is that it would represent the perspectives of the entire unit. In areas where there are diverse perspectives, notes should be added as to the nature of the disagreement.

The final list should be 1 – 3 pages and contain 5 – 10 issues. The submission date for the final list will be given by the Office of Administration and Planning in accordance with the Program Review schedule. Once the list of issues has been provided to OAP, it will be distributed to the Vice President(s) to which the unit reports and the central administration (e.g., President, Provost, Senior Vice President for Business and Finance, etc. as appropriate). These individuals will provide feedback and may add additional issues to this list. The unit may be asked to modify the list based on feedback from this group.

It is important to bear in mind that the list of issues generated by the unit should correspond with the unit’s strategic plan or should be issues which will shape future strategic plans. It is assumed that most units have a strategic plan in place, in which case program review provides an opportunity to review and update the plan. In cases where units do not have a strategic plan, program review may serve as an appropriate time to develop one.

The issues may take the form of known challenges that the unit currently faces or critical questions that it needs to think about and on which it would like feedback.

Below is a list of questions related to areas from which key issues may arise. While consideration should be given to new issues that have arisen since the previous review, it may be equally important to review recurring issues that the unit still faces. The main criterion should be how critical the issue is to the unit’s strategic direction rather than how long an issue has existed.

The questions presented below are only examples of the areas which units may explore; fundamental to philosophy of Program Review is that the unit itself is best-positioned to determine what challenges it confronts.
A. Strategic Position

- What are the unit’s strengths and weaknesses? Have these changed in recent years? How do these correspond to the unit’s stated goals?

- How does the unit compare to equivalent units in peer institutions? What are the comparative measures used to assess performance?

- What are the key relationships with other units within the University? Outside the University?

B. Services

- Does the unit have defined performance goals or targets? How does the unit measure its progress on these goals? What specific performance metrics does the unit use to assess its performance on a regular basis?

- What improvements have been made in the delivery of services from the unit to its constituencies?

- Has the unit implemented any innovative or state-of-the-art approaches to improve its effectiveness and/or efficiency?

- How does the unit assess its constituents’ needs on an ongoing basis? How flexible is the unit in responding to those needs? How does the unit assess current satisfaction from their constituents?

- Are any new services being planned by the unit based upon constituents’ current or anticipated needs? How will these affect operations?

- Is there overlap or duplication of services with other units of the University? How could this be reduced (where appropriate)?

C. Staff

- What efforts have been made to make the unit more diverse with regard to ethnicity and gender? At what levels in the organization has such hiring occurred? What has been the pattern of retention?

- How have changes in service delivery affected the skills required by staff? How are staff being trained, retrained, and developed to meet these needs?
D. Organizational Structure

- How does the unit organize its operations and functions? How has this changed over time?
- Have any significant staffing or organizational changes taken place recently? How have they affected the unit?
- Have there been any changes in leadership? How have these changes affected the unit's operations, morale, and/or priorities?

E. Unit Support

- How has technology been integrated into the service and administrative functions of the unit? How successful have these efforts been?
- How well does the unit’s current space meet its needs? What reallocation or renovation could be done to accomplish the unit’s goals?