NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY
PROGRAM REVIEW
FOURTH CYCLE

PROGRAM REVIEW COUNCIL &
SUBCOMMITTEE GUIDE
# NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY
## PROGRAM REVIEW
### FOURTH CYCLE
## PRC & SUBCOMMITTEE GUIDE

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I. **Introduction**
This guide has been developed to build upon the knowledge and experience of previous Program Review Council (PRC) and subcommittee members. As such, while it is designed to provide guidance, it also acts as a living document that will be updated regularly based upon new insight and feedback. All Program Review participants should contact the Office of Administration and Planning (OAP) any time they have questions or need additional information and support.

II. **PRC and Subcommittee Appointments**
In the fall of each year, nominations of individuals to serve on the Program Review Council are solicited from the University’s leadership (senior administration, line vice presidents and deans). Each member of the Council serves as the chair of a review subcommittee, and the number of units undergoing review determines the number of individuals needed to serve on the Council in a given year. The Program Review Council discusses these nominations and may provide additional recommendations. Before a subcommittee is determined, the list of potential candidates being considered is shared with the unit head for review to make sure there are no conflicts of interest. Once the list of potential candidates is approved and review dates have been identified, OAP then extends invitations to individuals to serve on the subcommittees. Program Review Council members serve for a term of three years, and subcommittee members for one year.

The selection of Program Review Council and subcommittee members is one of the most significant aspects of the program review process, since Council members’ credentials and professional stature lend an important measure of credibility to the overall process. Council and subcommittee members are therefore carefully selected and only individuals who are highly regarded and who have achieved tenure or reached more senior levels of administration are considered.

Every two years at the conclusion of the Council’s activities in the late spring/early summer, an experienced member of the Council is selected to serve as chair for the following two years. The terms of the PRC members are staggered so that approximately one third of the Council is replaced each year. This ensures a sense of continuity while also bringing fresh perspectives to the Council each year.

III. **Subcommittee Chair Responsibilities**
The subcommittee chair is a member of the Program Review Council, typically for a three year appointment. This means the subcommittee chair will chair three consecutive reviews, and participate in the review visits for each unit (typically in spring). As a member of the Program Review Council, the chair also attends the fall and spring PRC meetings, where the reviews of other units are discussed (see Section VII for a description of the meetings). At the spring PRC meeting when the subcommittee chair’s unit under review is discussed, the chair is responsible for presenting the external reviewers report and recommendations. The subcommittee member for the review will join the PRC meeting for this portion, and serve as co-presenter. Following the presentation, the subcommittee chair is
responsible for making sure the input from the PRC is incorporated into the recommendation language for the unit’s final implementation agreement.

IV. Subcommittee Member Responsibilities

The subcommittee member has a one year appointment and participates in the review visit for a single unit (typically in spring). The subcommittee member also attends the PRC meeting when the unit is discussed. During this meeting, the subcommittee will present the external reviewer’s report and recommendations to the PRC.

V. Confidentiality

“Improvement” has been the primary focus and goal of program review since its inception. 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, the school, and ultimately, the University. This mindset and approach differs from that used at many other institutions, where program review may serve as a tool for downsizing, for investigating or eliminating problematic units, or for other similar purposes.

At Northwestern, program review reports and resulting agreements are shared with members of the respective unit, with the University’s senior leadership (including deans and line vice presidents), and with University Trustees. OAP 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 we recommend that this should be done with a sense of consensus in the unit.

In the course of conducting each review, the goal is to obtain the most candid and accurate information possible. 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. To achieve these goals, judiciously maintaining confidentiality—both regarding individual perspectives that are shared with the review team, as well as findings and recommendations—is an integral aspect of the program review process. Therefore, anything the review team hears or that is discussed in the course of the review should be considered confidential and not discussed with others outside the scope of the review process. Confidentiality is of particular importance during any group meetings and it should be emphasized 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.

To enable members of the PRC and subcommittees to fully execute the reviews, the review team will receive access to a variety of data, survey results and other information. Because much of this is highly sensitive, the review team should
regard all information received through program review activities as confidential and should not discuss it with anyone outside the review process.

Occasionally, reviewers may have friends or colleagues who may be curious about what you are finding and may try to engage you in conversation. On rare occasions, we have even had reporters contact members of subcommittees trying to get information about particular units. However, reviewers should not discuss the review with others outside the unit, their subcommittee, the PRC, or the Office of Administration and Planning.

VI. The Review Process: Guidelines for Subcommittees

The Office of Administration and Planning is available to consult with the subcommittee team on any and all issues that might arise during the course of the review, and to provide assistance or additional information wherever possible. The following is a summary of the major tasks for PRC and subcommittee members in chronological order. For a detailed overview on the overall review process, please refer to the Program Review Procedures and Rationale document.

A. Prior to the Review Visit

1. Review the materials from the unit’s prior review (unit self-study report, PRC and external reviewer reports, implementation agreement, follow-up reports, etc.).
   These materials will be sent to you soon after you are appointed. Reviewing these previous review materials will give the subcommittee a good sense of the background of the unit.

2. Review the background materials for the unit’s upcoming review: key issues, self-study report, faculty survey results and data profile.
   Approximately one month before the review visit, the internal subcommittee and the external reviewers will receive a packet of review materials. If the review team feels critical data is missing, (e.g., it is lacking data on PhD placement, hiring statistics, rankings, etc.), the review team is entitled to ask OAP for help in obtaining it. In reviewing the material, do not assume that all important issues are going to be those raised in the unit self-study report. They may be, but the unit may also be overlooking key issues. The subcommittee’s most valuable role is as an unbiased outsider who can provide an objective perspective on the state of the unit.

3. Review the draft review visit schedule prepared by the unit and OAP and provide suggestions on others that should be included, if available.
   While recognizing that the staffing of each unit is somewhat unique, there are general guidelines regarding whom the reviewers will meet. The following table summarizes the individuals the subcommittee should plan to meet with during the course of the review.
### ACADEMIC UNITS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chair</th>
<th>ADMINISTRATIVE UNITS</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>All Available Tenure-Line Faculty</strong>&lt;br&gt;(while also being attentive to the roles that some of these individuals play within the unit – e.g., Director of Undergraduate Studies, Director of Graduate Studies, etc.)</td>
<td><strong>Department Head</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Key Professional Staff</strong></td>
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### ADMINISTRATIVE UNITS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dean</th>
<th>Line Vice President</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Constituents (as applicable)</strong>&lt;br&gt;- undergraduate students&lt;br&gt;- graduate students&lt;br&gt;- post-docs&lt;br&gt;- residents and fellows</td>
<td><strong>Primary Constituents (as appropriate)</strong>&lt;br&gt;- clients (faculty, students, and / or staff)&lt;br&gt;- other staff</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<tr>
<th>Chairs/Faculty in Related Areas</th>
<th>Heads/Staff in Related Areas</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- affiliated with the unit&lt;br&gt;- have potential for productive interdisciplinary collaboration</td>
<td>- affiliated with the unit&lt;br&gt;- utilize the services provided by the unit</td>
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<tr>
<th>Senior Administrators</th>
<th>Senior Administrators</th>
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<tr>
<td>- others relevant to the unit (e.g. joint program heads, center directors)&lt;br&gt;- Dean of the Graduate School, VP for Research (if applicable), Provost, President</td>
<td>- others relevant to the unit&lt;br&gt;- Senior Administrator to whom the unit reports, Provost, President</td>
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4. **Prepare a preliminary list of questions to ask or issues to raise with the external reviewers and various constituents of the unit.**

Having a set of questions that the review team has reviewed and agreed to will provide cohesiveness to the review, particularly if the interviews are split among the members of the review team during the visit. The review team may want to develop different sets of questions for the chair, the members of the unit, the dean/line vice president, and senior administrators. Typically, there will be time for the review team to discuss questions at breakfast before the first full day of interviews. Keep in mind that while external reviewers are more knowledgeable than you about the discipline of the unit, they do not have the intimate local perspective you do nor are they unbiased. External reviewers tend to act as advocates for their disciplines and if left to their own devices will generally recommend expansion of the unit. (Northwestern has many small academic units, so it is natural for reviewers from larger institutions to reach this conclusion.) While this is fine, it may not fit with University strategy or reality. To make maximum use of highly qualified external reviewers, you need to pose to
them the questions where we seek their expertise (e.g., How does a unit rank in a particular research field? Are the areas into which the unit is expanding on the cutting edge of the discipline?).

B. During the Review Visit

1. **Conduct unit interviews with external review team. Orient the external reviewers to Northwestern’s culture.**
   The subcommittee’s role is advisory and support to the external reviewers during the visit. In general, the external reviewers should lead the interviews. The subcommittee, however, should feel free to ask questions at any point.

2. **Provide key insights to the external reviewers to assist with the writing of the report.**
   The internal subcommittee will have time to meet privately with the external reviewers at both the start of the visit (typically breakfast on the first full day), during dinner at the end of the first full day of meetings, as well as time at the conclusion of the visit. Please use these opportunities to provide insights on Northwestern’s culture, structure and strategy to help inform the external reviewers in developing useful recommendations. Remind the external reviewers that they can add a confidential addendum to their report if needed. The subcommittee should also be available to the external reviewers via email for any additional follow up questions after the review during the completion of the report.

   For additional detail on the review visit format, please see the External Reviewers Guide, Section B.

C. After the Review Visit

1. **Review the report submitted by the external reviewers.**
   As soon as the report is received, the subcommittee should review the report and determine whether an addendum is necessary. In general, reports will not require an addendum. However, in some cases it may be appropriate and the subcommittee should consult with OAP before adding one. For example, it may be appropriate to add an addendum if there is a differing perspective of the subcommittee on the recommendations, if additional information is made available after the review visit, or to provide context on the scope or practicality of the external reviewer’s recommendations. Should there be particularly sensitive topic or item related to a specific individual, the reviewers have the option to add a confidential addendum that limits who may see it (e.g. only the department chair, only the dean and central administration).

2. **Present the report to the PRC for discussion during the spring PRC meetings.** The subcommittee’s presentation to the PRC consists of a 5 to 10
minute presentation of the highlights of the report with the remainder of the time used for discussion between the subcommittee and PRC members.

a. Preparing for the Discussion
   i. Assume the PRC members have read the report, so there is no need to reiterate the report in the meeting. A brief overview of the general state of the unit and major issues is all that is needed. The PRC is also provided with the same set of materials that you received prior to the review visit.
   ii. Generally, the chair provides the report overview and the other subcommittee member(s) provide additional detail and help answer questions.

b. During the Discussion
   i. You should allow time for general questions. Before you go into the specifics of your recommendations, the PRC members may have general questions about the unit or your review.
   ii. The PRC will go through each of the recommendations carefully to make sure that they are clear and consistent with the needs of the unit. The external reviewer’s report will not be modified, but the recommendation language used in the implementation agreement can reflect any changes recommended by the PRC. All changes to be made reflected in the implementation agreement should be discussed and agreed upon by the PRC in this meeting.

c. Following the Discussion
   Review the draft implementation agreement to make sure it captures the PRC’s suggestions for the recommendations. The wording of the implementation agreement is important as it is used as the map for implementation and follow up action between central administration, the dean or line vice president, and the unit head.

d. Timing and Confidentiality
   i. PRC meetings are generally scheduled during May – July (generally within a month of the review visit). Each presentation is scheduled for one and a half hours (usually two presentations are scheduled for each PRC meeting).
   ii. PRC members who are members of the unit under discussion do not attend that meeting, nor do they receive copies of the reports.
   iii. Again, confidentiality throughout the process is extremely important. Because these discussions are very candid, nothing said in these meetings is to be discussed outside of the meetings.

VII. Program Review Council
The Program Review Council (PRC) is an appointed group of senior faculty and administrators who also serve as chairs of the review subcommittees and oversee the program review process. The Chair of PRC is appointed for a two-year term
from among the senior members of this group, while the Vice President for Administration and Planning serves as the Vice Chair on an ongoing basis. The PRC also includes Advisory Members that have prior program review experience but are not currently chairing a review. For the beginning of the fourth cycle, the PRC Chair has a three year term in order to provide continuity to the process.

A. PRC Meetings
The Program Review Council meets at least once during the fall quarter and regularly during spring quarter. (Depending on the timing of review visits, additional fall meetings may be required to discuss unit reports.)

The purpose of these meetings is to:
1. Discuss the unit reports and determine if any changes are needed to the recommendations
2. Review follow-up progress reports of units reviewed in previous years
3. Review any finalized implementation agreements from the reviews just completed
4. Review the nominations from University leadership to serve on program review for the coming year and provide additional names if needed

B. Meeting Format
The primary purpose of the PRC meetings is to discuss the unit reports. The meetings are generally scheduled for three hours, and two reports are discussed at each meeting. The number of meetings is based on the number of units under review and the timing of the review visit. OAP will distribute the reports at least one week prior to the scheduled meeting. PRC members are strongly encouraged to read the reports prior to coming to the meeting. The subcommittee is advised to assume the PRC members have read the report and to highlight the primary issues in 5-10 minutes.

The PRC members are encouraged prepare at least one major issue/question regarding the report to raise during the meeting. The discussion period is intended to take the majority of the meeting. Any changes agreed to by the PRC will be reflected in the implementation agreement language.

As in previous review cycles, some related units have been scheduled for reviews in the same year (i.e., basic life sciences, business and finance units, humanities, etc.). During the spring meetings, it may become apparent that certain issues arise repeatedly across different but related units. The PRC may wish to formally identify these “cross-cutting” issues and prepare a list of these issues with recommendations that can be presented to central administration by the Chair of the PRC.

Following the discussion of the reports, OAP will keep the PRC updated on the status of implementation agreement discussions between the unit head, dean or line vice president, and central administration.
APPENDIX

CHRONOLOGY OF KEY TASKS FOR SUBCOMMITTEES

Prior to the Review Visit
- Review the background materials from the unit’s prior review: key issues, self-study report, internal and external reports, implementation agreement, and follow-up report.
- Review the background materials for the unit’s upcoming review: key issues statement, self-study report, faculty survey results and data profile.
- Review the draft review visit schedule and provide suggestions on others that should be included, if available.
- Prepare a preliminary list of questions to ask or issues to raise with the external reviewers and various constituents of the unit.

During the Review Visit
- Conduct unit interviews with external review team. Orient the external reviewers to Northwestern’s culture.
- Provide key insights to the external reviewers to assist with the writing of the report.

After the Review Visit
- Review the report submitted by the external reviewers.
- Present the report to the PRC for discussion during the Spring Meetings. The presentation to the PRC consists of a 5 to 10 minute presentation of the highlights of the report with the remainder of the time used for discussion between the subcommittee and PRC members.
- Make recommendations to the implementation agreement per the PRC’s suggestions. While the PRC will not revise the report, recommended changes can be accounted for in the language of the implementation agreement, which is used as the map for implementation and follow up action between central administration, the dean or line vice president, and the unit head.