

**ACADEMIC AND ADMINISTRATIVE
PROGRAM REVIEW**

**EXTERNAL REVIEWERS' GUIDE
Third Cycle
2000 – 2009**

(February 2008)

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I. INTRODUCTION

This guide is intended to supplement the information provided in *Academic and Administrative Program Review – Procedures and Rationale* and contains information specifically targeted for external reviewers. The purpose is to facilitate an efficient familiarization with program review at Northwestern University. It is suggested that the *Procedures and Rationale* also be reviewed and consulted for further details and clarification. The Office of Administration and Planning is always available to answer any questions and clarify anything about the process.

II. HOW WERE YOU SELECTED?

During the late Spring/early Summer prior to the review year, the members of the unit are asked to recommend individuals to serve as potential outside experts. The units are asked to nominate the eminent leaders in their field who represent the best programs and are from highly reputable institutions. Units may request that one or more of the reviewers from a previous cycle be employed again; this request will be considered in light of the appropriateness and availability of the same reviewer(s). Units may also delineate reviewers by their areas of expertise and ask that the team be comprised on a reviewer from each group to ensure coverage of sub-fields within the unit.

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

As in the previous two cycles, at least two outside experts are asked to visit the unit, with the visit generally occurring in the winter or spring. The knowledge and objectivity brought to bear on the reviews by the external reviewers have been relied upon heavily by the Program Review Council subcommittees. The expertise and dedication of the external reviewers continues as a core strength of the program review process.

III. 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. Also, at these institutions, the results of program review are often not confidential.

In the course of conducting each review, the goal is to obtain the most candid and accurate information possible. Also, the aim of program review is not to publicly embarrass a unit if problems are discovered but rather, to find a way to correct them. To achieve these goals, judiciously maintaining confidentiality—both regarding individual perspectives that are shared with you, as well

as findings and recommendations—is an integral aspect of the program review process. **Therefore, anything you hear or that is discussed with you 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.

Of course, program review reports and resulting agreements are shared with members of the respective unit (minus any confidential addenda as necessary), with the University's senior leadership (including deans and line vice presidents), and with University Trustees. 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 with a sense of consensus in the unit.

Occasionally, you 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 newspaper reporters trying to find out information about particular units. However, you should not discuss the review with anyone outside the unit, the Program Review Council, the internal subcommittee members, members of central administration, or the Office of Administration and Planning.

IV. OVERVIEW OF THE PROCESS

Northwestern University has a very rigorous process to review the qualitative functioning of all academic and administrative units of the University. 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 improvements. Reviews are also a key catalyst for the unit itself to chart and seek change. These reviews cumulatively provide input to University-wide priority setting. They also serve as an important aid to the deans and faculty for school level planning. They are a pivotal means of communication—within the department, with the dean and with the central administration and trustees. Finally, program review is a major mechanism for accountability within Northwestern.

Program review is overseen by the Program Review Council (PRC), an appointed steering committee comprised of senior faculty and administrators. PRC members serve three-year terms and the Chair of the Council is appointed annually from among the experienced members of this group. The size of the PRC mirrors the number of reviews scheduled each year so that each PRC member chairs an internal subcommittee guiding a review. At least two-thirds of the members of the PRC are faculty. The PRC appoints subcommittees (generally consisting of three persons) to assist it in conducting the reviews. Members of these subcommittees cannot be members of the unit under review.

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

The review process includes a self-study and strategic plan by the unit being reviewed, a two-day in-depth visit by distinguished experts from outside the University and a comprehensive review by an internal subcommittee of faculty (and, on occasion, staff) of the University. Reports are written by the external reviewers and a final report is composed by the internal subcommittee, incorporating its own findings with those of the external reviewers. The final report is in each case presented to the Program Review Council for discussion, then presented to central administration and the unit for action. A year after the reviews, follow-up occurs to ensure recommendations that were agreed upon have been enacted or are in the process of implementation. Results of the program reviews are shared with pertinent members of the unit, the University's senior and line administration, and the Board of Trustees, but are otherwise kept confidential.

V. EVOLUTION OF PROGRAM REVIEW

Program review at Northwestern University was initiated in the Fall 1985 when the central administration, at the behest of the General Faculty Committee, initiated a systematic review and evaluation of all academic and administrative units of the University. Since 1985, more than 125 academic and administrative units have been reviewed, 388 faculty and administrators—some serving more than once—have participated in the process as members of the Program Review Council and subcommittees, while more than 420 highly regarded experts have visited campus from other universities and outside organizations to serve as external reviewers.

The reviews are conducted in seven-year cycles. The first cycle took place from 1985-1991 and the second from 1992-1999. After the completion of each cycle, a hiatus year is taken during which the process itself is reviewed and, at its request, the Board of Trustees. We are currently engaged in the third cycle, which is an extended cycle and will take place from 2000-2009. A list of the units under review this year is attached as Appendix A.

In the first cycle, each unit prepared a comprehensive self-study that described its history and identified strengths, weaknesses and opportunities in the context of the University's mission. The process included a review by an internal subcommittee, as well as by a team of visiting external experts. Based on these reviews and the resulting external reviewers' report, each subcommittee developed a report on behalf of the Program Review Council that, along with the external reviewers' report, was presented to the senior administration, the line administration, and the unit. Recommendations and plans for implementation were discussed with and agreed to by the deans or vice presidents and department chairs or directors. Two years following the review, a follow-up report from the unit was requested to document the unit's progress in implementing the recommendations.

Procedures for the second cycle were modified to allow these reviews to build directly on the results of the first. Units were asked to develop a list of key issues emanating from their previous review and from significant changes in the department or emerging in the field since the review. An analysis of these issues then became the primary focus of the second cycle unit report. Other aspects of the process, such as the internal subcommittee review, the visit by external experts, and the follow-up administrative meetings, remained in place for the second cycle. Units were not necessarily reviewed in the same order as in the first cycle; a number of factors, such as the extent of problems identified in the first review of the unit, significant changes within the unit, schedule of accreditation

visits, and the desirability of reviewing like units in the same year, influenced the scheduling process. Near the end of the second cycle, the follow-up process was changed from a two-year to a one-year timeframe to better gauge the unit's efforts in implementing the recommendations and to provide assistance where needed.

Since the majority of the units to be reviewed during the third cycle were reviewed in the first and/or second cycles, the purpose of the third cycle is to assure that the unit has established and is working toward clear strategic improvements and addressing specific issues that grew out of the prior reviews or have arisen since each unit's last review. In this way, the third cycle continues the spirit of the previous two cycles. Based on the evaluation of the program review process following the second cycle, nineteen specific recommendations for further refinements to the process were made for the third cycle. These focused on the areas of follow-up, communication, unit strategic planning, benchmarks and data, and general process improvement. Four of the recommendations were specific to either academic or administrative units. These recommendations were accepted by the University's senior administration and have been incorporated into the revised third cycle procedures. The third cycle of reviews began with the 2000-01 academic year, and will conclude in 2008-09.

VI. ROLE OF THE EXTERNAL REVIEWER

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 particular discipline at issue. The external reviewers are asked to provide insight and feedback on issues and trends particular to the discipline. In contrast, one of the roles of the internal subcommittee (who cannot be members of the unit under review) is to filter the external reviewers' expertise through the lens of the peculiarities and uniqueness of the Northwestern environment.

The internal subcommittee is asked to view the external reviewers (and their report) as one input to their report, along with the numerous interviews, the self study report, and other data. The internal subcommittee is urged to use the external reviewers to answer questions and address issues which it is not qualified to answer (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?) The internal subcommittee is strongly encouraged to discuss these questions and issues with the external reviewers at the beginning of their campus visit.

Because of their expertise in the specific discipline, members of the unit may view the external reviewers with more credibility than the internal subcommittee and may raise different issues with the external reviewers than with the internal subcommittee. Thus, the external reviewers should view the list of issues/questions provided by the internal subcommittee as a guide—members of the unit may raise different, and equally or more important, issues during their meetings.

VII. THE REVIEW PROCESS

The internal subcommittee and the Office of Administration and Planning (OAP) 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 wherever possible and needed. The following is an overview of the process that will hopefully give you a better sense as to your role in it. More detail

on each component of the process can be found in the *Procedures and Rationale* manual, or at: <http://www.adminplan.northwestern.edu/progrev/index.htm>

A. Prior to the Campus Visit

1. Background Materials

In preparation for the campus visit, the external reviewers are provided with the following materials:

- *Academic and Administrative Program Review - Procedures and Rationale* Manual
- Material from the unit's previous review: internal subcommittee and external reviewer reports, implementation agreement, and follow-up report
- Issues Statement for the current review
- Unit's current self study report

The first three items are provided to the external reviewers upon their acceptance of the invitation to serve. The material from the unit's previous review is provided to give the external reviewers a context and history of the unit. The Issues Statement from the current review gives the external reviewers a preview of the key issues that the unit will address in its self-study report, which will be distributed to the external reviewers during the winter, as the unit utilizes the summer and fall quarter to prepare the document.

The unit head is given the names and addresses of the external reviewers in advance of their visit so that members of the department can have the opportunity to provide individual comment directly if so desired. In addition, the members of the internal subcommittee 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 reservations and is available to provide assistance in ground transportation arrangements. Generally the external reviewers make their own flight arrangements (a reimbursable expense, of course), as each reviewer is most familiar with his/her own schedule and airline and airport preferences. The Office of Administration and Planning can assist in this regard as necessary.

Approximately one month prior to the campus visit, a draft itinerary for the visit, along with hotel and ground transportation reservation numbers, and other pertinent information, will be provided to the external reviewers. The external reviewers are strongly encouraged to provide the Office of Administration and Planning with their flight information, which will ensure that the meeting schedule is coordinated with flight times and that return transportation to the airport can be arranged. At the conclusion of the campus visit, the Office of Administration and Planning staff will also confirm flight times and gate information for each reviewer.

B. The Campus Visit

The external reviewers' visit is generally scheduled during the Winter or Spring of the review year and is usually about two days in length but can be extended for particular needs. The external reviewers meet with the unit's faculty and/or professional staff, a cross section of undergraduate and graduate students, the members of the internal subcommittee, line administration involved (dean or unit manager, appropriate vice president(s), Provost, and President), and others appropriate to the review. The following table summarizes the individuals with whom the reviewers will meet:

ACADEMIC UNITS	ADMINISTRATIVE UNITS
Chair	Department Head
All tenure-line faculty (<i>individual meetings; you should also be attentive to the roles that some of these individuals play within the unit, e.g., Director of Undergraduate Studies, Director of Graduate Studies, etc.</i>)	Key professional staff (<i>individual meetings</i>)
Dean	Line vice president
Cross-section of (<i>can meet in small groups</i>): – graduate students – undergraduate students – post-docs (if applicable) – residents (if applicable)	Primary constituents (<i>can meet in small groups</i>): – professional staff – faculty – students – outside contacts, vendors, etc.
Chairs/faculty in related areas who are affiliated with the unit (or could interact more with the unit)	Heads/individuals in related areas who are affiliated with the unit, or who utilize the services provided by the unit
Senior administrators: – Dean of the Graduate School – Others relevant to the unit (i.e., joint program heads, center directors)	Senior administrators: – Senior Administrator to whom the unit reports – Associate Vice President for Budget Planning, Analysis and Allocation – Others relevant to the unit

1. Meetings with the Internal Subcommittee

The external reviewers generally have two opportunities to meet with members of the internal subcommittee. The internal subcommittee is strongly urged to complete the major part of their work prior to the visit by the external reviewers.

- Breakfast on the first day—At this meeting, the subcommittee has the opportunity to share their perspectives on what it sees as the issues. The members of the subcommittee may also discuss the questions they have and may highlight areas on which they would especially like the external reviewers' input.
- Wrap-up session (usually after lunch) on the last day of the external reviewers' visit—this meeting is also very important. At this meeting, the external reviewers debrief the subcommittee, and share their initial assessment of what they view to be the major issues

and the directions that they will be emphasizing in their final report. It is also a key time for the subcommittee to ask any follow-up questions to the external reviewers.

2. Meetings with the Unit

- Individual meetings with members of the unit - Every effort is made to permit all tenured and tenure-track faculty to meet individually with the external reviewers and, in the case of administrative units, to meet individually with all professional staff. As time permits and the unit size and structure will allow, the external reviewers may also meet with lecturers, teaching assistants, post-doctoral fellows. These individual meetings are intended to allow the members of the unit to vet issues on their minds, as well as for the external reviewers to explore the critical issues or questions identified by the subcommittee. 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 external reviewers may be requested to participate in a conference call with them
- Meetings with the unit head - The external reviewers generally begin 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 external reviewers 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 external reviewers 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 Related Constituents

For academic units, the external reviewers will also meet with a group of graduate students and a group of undergraduate students. For administrative units, the external reviewers generally meet with a cross-section of clients or customers. 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 the Dean or Line Administrator

The external reviewers will also meet with the Dean or Line Administrator. The purpose of this meeting is to become familiar with the overall strategy of the larger organization in which the unit is situated, as no unit operates in a vacuum. The priorities of the unit should be coordinated with the priorities and strategies of the larger entity within which it functions.

5. Meeting with central administration

Toward the end of the second day of the visit, the external reviewers will meet with the President, Provost, Vice President for Administration and Planning, Director of Program Review, and any other member of central administration appropriate for the unit (i.e., Dean of the Graduate School, Vice President for Business and Finance, 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.

6. Private Meetings Between Reviewers

Generally, the schedule allows for the reviewers to have dinner privately on the evening after the first full day of meetings, as well as a private meeting of the reviewers toward the end of the visit to coordinate their thoughts, discuss the division of labor in drafting a joint report (or begin preparing the report if desired), and prepare for the debriefing sessions with the unit head and members of central administration.

C. Drafting the Report

The external reviewers are asked to provide a written assessment of the strengths, weaknesses, personnel, leadership, governance, opportunities for the unit, and the reviewers' perspectives on the issues outlined in the unit's self study and those highlighted by the internal subcommittee. This written assessment can either be individual or joint and it is asked that the report(s) be submitted in electronic format directly to the Office of Administration and Planning within ten to fourteen days after the conclusion of the campus visit.

Joint reports (minus any confidential addenda as necessary) ultimately are distributed to members of the unit, the internal subcommittee, members of the Program Review Council, the President, the Provost, and, in the case of academic units, the Vice President for Research, and the Dean of the Graduate School (for units with graduate programs), along with the PRC report. If the reviewers choose to draft individual reports, a composite report is constructed by the Office of Administration and Planning that contains the full text of each of the external reviewer's reports, excluding any comments about individuals or personnel matters, which may take the form of a confidential addendum as necessary. This provides the reviewers with a measure of confidentiality. In addition, if individual reports are submitted, they are distributed only to the internal subcommittee, while the composite report is submitted to the members of the Program Review Council, members of central administration, the dean/line vice president, and the unit. Any confidential addenda, of course, are distributed to individuals as appropriate.

When drafting the report, please keep in mind that program review has traditionally been considered a "zero sum" activity; that is, it is not an exercise whereby units can ask for more resources or staff, but rather, new initiatives are expected to come through reorganization or reallocation.

VIII. AFTER THE REVIEW

A. Implementation and Follow-Up

The review process is not complete simply because the external reviewers have submitted their report(s). The *Procedures and Rationale* manual details more fully the process of the subcommittee and Program Review Council in finalizing the report and recommendations. Once the internal subcommittee's report is finalized, it is made available to the unit for review, along with the external reviewers' joint report or composite report. The recommendations contained in that report form the basis of the implementation agreement, where a responsible agent and action plan are set out. The implementation agreement is developed through meetings with the Dean or line administrator and the unit head. These meetings also offer the unit the opportunity to respond to any matters raised in the

external or internal reports. The finalized implementation agreement will be distributed to the external reviewers. One year after that implementation agreement is finalized, the Office of Administration and Planning solicits a progress report from the unit. This progress report will also be shared with the external reviewers.

B. Honorarium and Reimbursement

An honorarium of \$2500 is provided to each reviewer in addition to covering all expenses. Once the external reviewers submit their report(s), their honorarium will be disbursed. A “Vendor Code Request Form for Individuals” and “Contracted Services Form for Residents” will need to be completed to before the honorarium can be processed. External reviewers are also reimbursed for expenses associated with the review and must submit a “Visitor’s Travel Expense Form” and the associated receipts. These forms are provided with the initial package of materials,. Additional forms are attached as Appendix B and are also available through the Office of Administration and Planning. It is helpful for these forms to be submitted as early as possible to expedite payments.

C. Evaluation Forms

The program review process is also continuously striving for improvement. Evaluation forms are provided to the external reviewers along with their honorarium and/or reimbursement check. These evaluations are intended to assess the quality of the process (sufficient and adequate breadth and depth of meetings to provide meaningful insight for assessment) as well as satisfaction with the logistics (timely receipt of materials and other information, satisfactory accommodations, etc.). The Office of Administration and Planning greatly appreciates candor in this feedback so that it may continue to refine the one of the preeminent program assessment programs in the country. These evaluation forms are generally 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.

Appendix A

Program Review Schedule – Third Cycle YEAR 8 (2007-2008)

1. Art Theory and Practice (97-98)
2. Finance (97-98)
3. Marketing (97-98)
4. Dermatology (95-96)
5. Physical Therapy and Human Movement Sciences (96-97 *f/k/a Programs in Physical Therapy*)
6. Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (98-99)
7. Office of the Vice President and General Counsel (97-98)
8. Office of the Vice President for University Development and Alumni Relations (98-99)
9. Office of the Vice President for University Relations (98-99)

Student Affairs Group II:

10. a) University Housing and Food Service (95-96)
b) University Residential Life (95-96)
c) Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life (95-96)
d) Norris University Center (95-96)
e) Residential Colleges (95-96) (*Provost's Office*)

Appendix B

Vendor Code Request Form for Individuals

Contracted Services Form for Residents

Visitor's Travel and Expense Form