

Academic Program Review Guide

For Units Reporting in 2016



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Purpose and Scope of Academic Program Review

Academic Program Review is a multi-year process in which an academic unit conducts a self-study and writes an APR report that is then reviewed by the Provost, Dean, college administrators, and a team of peer reviewers. During the self-study process, the academic unit identifies the mission, goals, and student learning outcomes of its degree programs. The unit, with help from the Office of Institutional Assessment (OIA), uses a variety of data sources to measure whether goals and outcomes are being achieved. These results are used to create action plans for the ultimate purpose of improving student learning and student success. Once the self-study is completed, the unit writes an APR report, which is reviewed by a team of peer reviewers as well as the Provost, Dean, and the Office of Institutional Assessment.

The Office of Institutional Assessment requires most units to submit an Academic Program Review report every seven years. Time between reports should be spent making the recommended improvements or changes. Units are also encouraged to routinely discuss the educational goals, learning outcomes, and curriculum maps of their degree programs during the years between APR reporting.

Academic program review data are used in Mason's accreditation reporting to SACS (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools), and SCHEV (State Council of Higher Education for Virginia).

The Self-Study Process

Academic Program Review begins with a yearlong self-study process. There are several activities that comprise the self-study, and these activities require much time and thought. Therefore, careful planning is essential. The following sections outline each of the self-study activities and provide tips for how and when to conduct these activities. Generally speaking, all self-study activities require collaboration among several faculty members.

Self-Study: Unit Level Activities

Goal Setting and Linking to Previous Reports

Although in assessment we often talk about outcomes, goals play a crucial part in Academic Program Review. Goals are broader than outcomes, and an academic unit should have several goals that guide its operation. Goals can pertain to how a unit or program is run, but they can also be more theoretical, focusing on a particular method or framework that the unit will use. Goals often delineate the services, opportunities, or experiences that the unit or program would like to offer students.

The first step in the self-study is to reflect on previous goals and what has been achieved since the unit submitted its last APR report. If the unit has not participated in APR previously, other goal setting documents such as SCHEV program approvals, college curriculum committee proposals, and prior WEAVE/MATS assessment reports can be reviewed. The top table in the Goal Setting Worksheet offers a place to record how previously set goals have been met, and which goals still need attention. The Goal Setting Worksheet will also be used later in the self-study process to brainstorm new goals.

Suggested completion date: December 15, 2014 for Previously Set Goals table; September 15, 2014 for Current Goals table (see below for more information)

Soliciting Feedback from Faculty

In order to understand how current faculty perceive the unit, its students, and its leadership, a faculty survey should be administered. OIA can provide a template of questions that are normally asked in the APR Faculty Survey. Units should decide on additional questions to be included as well as who will be invited to take the survey. Units should decide whether the survey should go to all only tenure-line faculty, or whether term faculty and adjuncts should be included as well. The Faculty Survey is generally administered by OIA during the Spring semester.

Suggested completion date: Questions to OIA by February 15, 2015

Peer Comparison

Another important step in the self-study is a comparison of similar departments or programs at peer institutions. The peer comparison may be qualitative or quantitative. Comparisons might include the number and type of degree programs offered, number of degrees granted, admissions criteria and acceptance rates, number of faculty, or levels of graduate student funding. Faculty from the unit should identify peer institutions and programs; it is up to the unit to decide which institutions should be considered peers. Units do not have to use Mason's list of peer institutions. OIA can help with finding publicly available data from SCHEV and the U.S. Department of Education.

Suggested completion date: Identify peers by February 15, 2015; Contact peers and collect data by June 15, 2015

SWOT Analysis

A SWOT analysis identifies the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to the unit. Strengths and weaknesses are determined by internal factors, whereas opportunities and threats come from sources external to the unit. While strengths and opportunities are positive, weaknesses and threats are negative.

Ideally, many faculty members from the unit should participate in the SWOT analysis. The SWOT Analysis Worksheet can be used to record the main findings of the analysis. The SWOT analysis is best done at the unit level, however, individual degree programs can certainly be examined in the analysis.

Suggested completion date: September 15, 2015

Setting Current Goals

Once the SWOT analysis, faculty survey, alumni surveys (discussed in a later section), and learning outcomes assessments have been completed, goals for the unit will need to be set. Fill in the Current Goals table in the Goal Setting Worksheet.

Suggested completion date: September 15, 2015

Self-Study: Degree Program Level Activities

The following sections pertain to activities of the self-study that should be conducted at the degree-program level. Units that offer more than one degree should do each activity for each degree program. As with the unit level activities, it is essential that multiple faculty members participate in order to include a broad representation of perspectives within each degree program.

Creating an Assessment Plan

The best way to start planning for assessment is to generate the goals of the program. In the sections above, unit level goal setting was discussed. Each degree program should also have goals to achieve. Just as with unit level goals, program level goals can be broad statements about how the program is run or the opportunities the program will present to students. The Goal Setting Worksheet can be used for program level goals, or you can simply generate a list of goals for each degree program.

Once a program's goals have been identified, the program level outcomes will need to be articulated. In assessment, we focus on measuring student learning, thus we are interested in understanding the knowledge, skills, or values that students acquire upon completing the degree program. Student learning outcomes are concerned with what students have learned or are able to do.

Each degree program should identify several student learning outcomes. Ideally, these outcomes should link to the larger goals of the program or the unit.

For Academic Program Review, at least three student learning outcomes must be assessed. Note that programs that have already identified their outcomes, conducted their assessments, and reported the information in MATS can use these

outcomes and assessment data for their APR reports. For degree programs that have not yet conducted assessments of three student learning outcomes, the Assessment Plan Template should be used to determine how each outcome will be measured and how and when the evidence will be collected.

Suggested completion date: December 15, 2014 for the Assessment Plan; All assessments should be completed by June 15, 2015

Making a Curriculum Map

A curriculum map visually represents when and where student learning outcomes are covered and assessed in the curriculum. In a curriculum map, each row represents one of the program's student learning outcomes, and each column represents a course or experience in the program, such as passing a comprehensive exam or defending a thesis. If a particular course or experience fulfills a learning outcome, a symbol, such as an X, is placed in the corresponding cell. Some people prefer to use abbreviations or symbols that designate the extent to which an outcome is covered (e.g., I = Introduced, R = Reinforced, A = Assessed).

Curriculum mapping should be done in collaboration with all the instructors who teach in the degree program. Ask instructional faculty to provide copies of syllabi, assignments, exams, papers, etc. to illustrate when and where student learning outcomes are covered in their classes.

The Curriculum Map Worksheet can be used to start the curriculum mapping process. The degree program's curriculum map should also be entered into Tk20.

Suggested completion date: February 15, 2014

Soliciting Feedback from Current Students and Alumni

In order to understand how alumni perceive the value of their educational experience in the degree program and the impact of their degree on their lives and careers, an alumni survey should be administered. OIA can provide a template of questions that are normally asked in the APR Alumni Survey. A separate Alumni Survey should be made for each degree program in the unit. Program faculty should decide on additional questions to be included in the survey.

Optionally, individual degree programs may wish to solicit more in-depth feedback from their current students or alumni. OIA can conduct focus groups with current students and/or alumni to collect detailed comments about the degree program.

The unit should take an active role in soliciting feedback from alumni. While the university does collect contact information from alumni who consent to being contacted, social media has allowed faculty and staff from academic units more

direct access to alumni. OIA will administer the Alumni Surveys, but units should be prepared to make social media announcements about the surveys.

Suggested completion date: Additional Alumni Survey questions to OIA by February 15, 2015; Send invitation messages to alumni by March 15, 2016; (Optional) Identify focus groups participants and questions of interest by March 15, 2015

Analyzing Institutional Data

The Office of Institutional Assessment (OIA) and the Office of Institutional Research and Reporting (IRR) collect several different kinds of data about degree programs. IRR tracks program enrollment and number of degrees awarded per year. Additionally, OIA regularly surveys Mason students and collects data about student experiences, career plans, and post-graduation activities. These institutional data should be used to investigate student success and program effectiveness.

As part of APR, the Office of Institutional Assessment will produce reports of institutional data for each degree program and upload them to the APR Blackboard Organization. Programs should use the Data Synthesis Worksheet to analyze the institutional data to determine the program's effectiveness and to identify areas for improvement.

Suggested completion date: September 15, 2015

Writing the APR Report

Once all the self-study activities have been completed, the Academic Program Review report must be written. Two report templates are available: one is for departments/schools and the other is for interdisciplinary programs. The templates list all the required sections of the report, and under each section heading there is a short instructional paragraph that describes what should be included in that section. These instructions, written in italics, should be deleted once the final report has been written.

Writing the report will take a substantial amount of time, and the self-study activities completed during the first year of Academic Program Review will be incorporated into the report in various ways. Plan on spending from October 2015 to December 2015 writing and compiling the report.

Because units across campus vary drastically in size and scope, there are no page limits or length expectations. Units that run multiple degree programs will have longer reports than interdisciplinary programs that offer a single degree and do not have tenure-line faculty.

Tips for Report Writing

- **Plan ahead.** Do not wait until the last minute to write the report. Readers can easily spot a report that was written in a hurry.
- **Divide the workload.** Several faculty members should be responsible for the report writing. Consider using Google Docs or other file sharing methods so that collaboration is seamless.
- **Be concise.** Many readers will be reading several APR reports over the span of a few weeks. Rambling text and vague claims will make it harder for readers to focus on main points.
- **Take advantage of this opportunity.** The report is the place to highlight the unit's achievements, and it is the time to thoughtfully discuss how the unit and its degree programs can be improved.

The Review Process

Academic Program Review reports are peer reviewed by tenured Mason faculty who sit on the Academic Program Review Committee. Each APR report is read and evaluated by a review team consisting of at least two APR Committee members. As many as six APR Committee members may be asked to review some reports from departments that have multiple degree programs.

Review teams have access to not only the final report, but also to the worksheets, institutional data, survey results, and other self-study materials. Review teams evaluate their assigned APR report using rubrics provided by OIA. They then write a response document that addresses the unit's program goals, action plans, outcomes assessments, and alignment with the university's mission and strategic plan. The response document also identifies issues that may require further attention. Each review team meets with the Provost and OIA staff to discuss their assigned APR report. After review teams have submitted their response document and met with the Provost, the review response document is sent to the unit. Finally, each unit meets with the Provost, Vice Provost, Associate Provosts of Graduate and Undergraduate Studies, Dean, and OIA staff to address any outstanding issues and to create follow-up plans as needed.

The Office of Institutional Assessment also produces an APR Guide for Reviewers. This guide outlines the review process in more detail and provides the rubrics to be used in the review. For more information about the review process, please see the APR Guide for Reviewers.

Worksheets and Templates

Goal Setting Worksheet

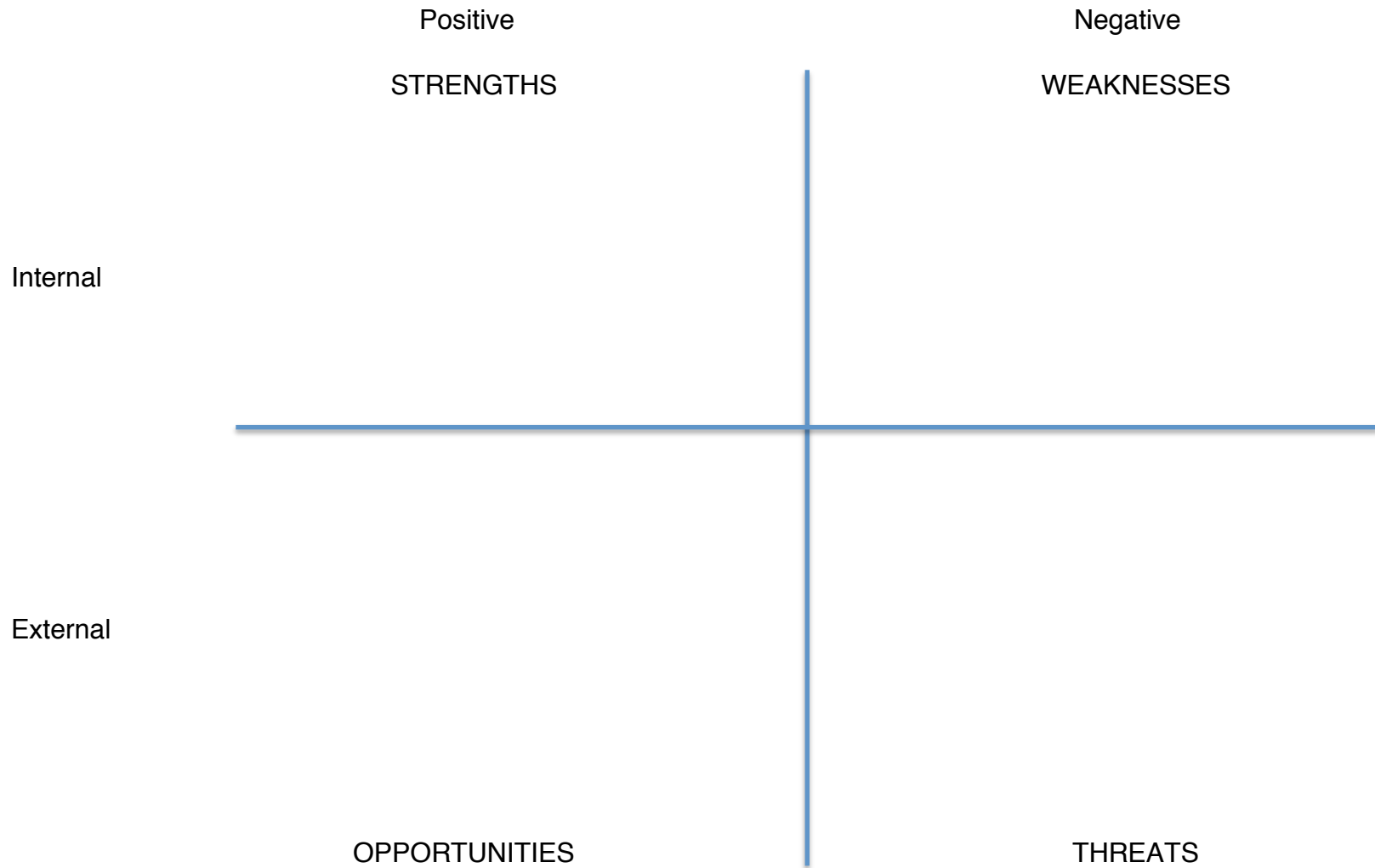
Previously Set Goals

Goal Name and Description	Source Document (previous APR report, SCHEV proposal, internal document)	Plan for Achievement (activities, timeline)	Has this goal been achieved? If yes, record date completed	Should this goal be kept as a current goal?

Current Goals

Goal Name and Description	Evidence or Origin of Goal (Assessment results, faculty or student feedback, etc.)	Pertaining to the entire unit or a single degree program? (Specify degree program)	Plan for Achievement (activities, timeline)

SWOT Analysis Worksheet



Assessment Plan Template

	Statement of the Outcome	Link to Program Goal	Measurement Plan				How will findings be used?
			What evidence will be collected? (e.g., capstone project, paper, thesis defense)	When will evidence be collected?	Who will conduct the assessment?	Who will create the rubric, scoring sheet or other instrument?	
Student Learning Outcome 1							
Student Learning Outcome 2							
Student Learning Outcome 3							
Program Outcome 1							

Curriculum Map Worksheet

	Courses and Milestones (exams, defenses, etc. that do not have a corresponding course number)														
SLO 1															
SLO 2															
SLO 3															
SLO 4															
SLO 5															

Data Synthesis Worksheet

Enrollment and Degrees Awarded: 5 Year Trend Reports

What is the demand for the program?

Who are the majors in terms of demographic data?

Are current enrollment levels okay, too low, too high?

Career Plans Survey; Graduating Senior Survey/Graduate Student Exit Survey; NSSE (undergraduate only)

How well does the program prepare students for post-graduation activities?

What are some suggestions for improving educational/curricular activities?

Quality of advising- what could be better communicated? Could advising be better structured?