Academic Program Review Guide for Reviewers

2016

Office of Institutional Assessment
assessment.gmu.edu

GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY

PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF ACADEMIC PROGRAM REVIEW

Academic Program Review (APR) provides an opportunity for a program's faculty to make a systematic, comprehensive study of an academic program, and articulate the program's cumulative contributions to student learning. The faculty are able to use assessment findings to purposefully plan changes in curriculum, services, research, and pedagogy to reach intended outcomes or results. The primary purpose of this review is to analyze the current state of the program, and plan for improvements for student learning by engaging in critical review of the program, its elements, relevant institutional data, as well as the faculty and student experience. This systematic process can be used to determine or make recommendations for resource allocation or new resource requests.

APR is a multi-year process in which an academic unit conducts a self-study and writes a report that is then reviewed by the provost's office, 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 for 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 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 Associate Provosts for Undergraduate and Graduate Education, the dean, and the Office of Institutional Assessment.

The responsibility for program review belongs to the faculty under the direction of the chair/director or dean, depending on organizational structure. Units typically identify a team comprising program directors, the undergraduate chair, graduate chair, and key faculty members.

Most units are required to participate in APR every seven years. Time between reports should be spent making the recommended improvements or changes, and conducting ongoing learning assessment. Units are also encouraged to routinely discuss the educational goals, learning outcomes, and curriculum maps for their degree programs during the years between self-studies.

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

Program Level Assessment

Program level assessment focuses on what a program is doing, and how it is contributing to the learning, growth, and development of students as a group. A quality assessment plan reflects specific program goals, measureable student learning outcomes, and a well-articulated plan for timely implementation, strategic data collection, and analysis. Findings should then be used to inform, confirm, and support program level change and facilitate continuous program improvement.

Assessment helps programs:

- Discover through empirical evidence what students are learning
- Identify gaps in student learning areas
- Inform pedagogy by aligning best practices with learners' needs

- Make informed decisions about curriculum
- Demonstrate overall program effectiveness and showcase student learning

Which programs participate in Academic Program Review?

All undergraduate and graduate degree programs that are not covered by an external accreditation organization must participate in APR. This includes interdisciplinary programs. Certificate programs that meet certain criteria are also required to participate in APR.

How does APR support institutional accreditation?

George Mason University is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). SACSCOC requires the assessment of institutional effectiveness as:

> 3.3 Institutional Effectiveness[1]
> 3.3.1 The institution identifies expected outcomes, assesses the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of the results in each of the following areas: (Institutional Effectiveness)
> 3.3.1.1 educational programs, to include student learning outcomes
> 3.3.1.2 administrative support services
> 3.3.1.3 academic and student support services
> 3.3.1.4 research within its mission, if appropriate
> 3.3.1.5 community/public service within its mission, if appropriate

SACSCOC expects that the institution engages in "ongoing, integrated, and institution-wide research-based planning and evaluation processes that (1) incorporate a systematic review of institutional mission, goals, and outcomes; (2) result in continuing improvement in institutional quality; and (3) demonstrate the institution is effectively accomplishing its mission" (Principle 2.5).

Academic program review supports the assessment of institutional effectiveness through a comprehensive, systematic self-study and peer review process that keeps decisions about the curriculum in the hands of the faculty, while helping the program understand itself and make improvements in the context of the institution.

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[1] Principle 3.3.1, The Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement, 2012, Fifth Edition, Second Printing, http://www.sacscoc.org/principles.asp

Overview of the APR Process

The APR process comprises the following elements:

1. Preparing for the self-study
    a. Review/develop goals and student learning outcomes
    b. Prepare faculty and alumni surveys and/or focus groups
    c. Identify areas of focus for the self-study
2. Conducting the self-study
    a. Collect and analyze data
    b. Assess student work
3. Writing the APR report
4. Meeting with department, college, and provost leadership
5. Implementing action plans, responding to recommendations, and participating in ongoing assessment

The active APR process takes about 18 months, beginning with a fall orientation and ending with a review in the spring semester of the subsequent year. A timeline follows on the next page.

THE REVIEW PROCESS

Academic Program Review reports are reviewed by tenured Mason faculty who serve 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 reports from departments with multiple degree programs.

Review teams evaluate their assigned APR report using rubrics provided by OIA. They then prepare 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. After review teams have submitted their response document and met with the associate provosts for undergraduate and graduate education, the review response document is sent to the unit. Finally, each unit meets with the associate provosts, College Dean, and OIA staff to address any outstanding issues and to create follow-up plans as needed.

2016 UNITS AND DEGREE PROGRAMS UNDER REVIEW

The following table outlines the academic units and degree programs that are being reviewed in 2016. The reports will identify degree programs are relatively new, have low enrollments, and/or few or no degrees awarded. This means that these programs may not have the institutional data and stakeholder feedback that one might expect to see from large, well-established degree programs.

Advanced Biomedical Sciences	Graduate Certificate
Systems Biology	MS, PhD Bioinformatics & Computational Biology MS Bioinformatics Management
Mathematics	BA, BS, MS, PhD Mathematics
Modern & Classical Languages	BA, MA Foreign Languages
Cultural Studies	PhD Cultural Studies
Applied Information Technology	MS Applied Information Technology
Volgenau Interdisciplinary	PhD Information Technology

CONDUCTING THE REVIEW

Review teams work together to evaluate the self-study report (also known as the APR report), posted in the Blackboard site (APR 2016). Reviewers should familiarize themselves with the 2016 APR Guide and report template, both of which can also be found on the APR Blackboard Organization.

Review teams have access to public data sources (at https://assessment.gmu.edu/academic-program-review/resources/) and survey results (in Blackboard).

Review teams should prepare their written review document using the 2016 APR Template for Review Response. Normally, review documents are 2-3 pages long. The review should focus on the unit and degree programs, and not solely on the quality of the unit's report. In other words, the review should be more than simply a review of the report itself. The review team should specify their recommendations at the end of the document. These recommendations may be based on the action plans outlined in the self-study report, but the review team can also bring up concerns that were not addressed in the self-study report. If major elements of the self-study are missing from the report, the review team should note those in their review document, and the unit will be asked to provide any missing information at their meeting with the Dean and provosts.

Academic Program Review Spring 2016 Timeline

February 1, 2016	APR Reports due from units
February 2, 2016	APR Reports uploaded to Blackboard
March 2, 2016	Review Response due
Mid/Late March	Review team meets with Associate Provosts

ACADEMIC PROGRAM REVIEW RUBRICS

The Office of Institutional Assessment has created guiding questions and rubrics to stimulate productive discussions about the unit and its degree programs. Rubric scores do not need to be included in the review document, but it is expected that the review team will discuss its findings and recommendations in terms of the rubric categories.

Academic Program Review Rubrics

Guiding Question: **How grounded, realistic and viable and are the unit-level goals and action plans?**

	Excellent	Good	Needs Attention
Grounded	• The goals and actions are clearly linked to issues and concerns raised in the Unit Overview section of the report • All major unit-level concerns raised in the report are addressed as unit-level goals and actions • Stated goals are meaningful and important	• The goals and actions are mostly linked to issues and concerns raised in the Unit Overview section of the report • Most major unit-level concerns raised in the report are addressed as unit-level goals and actions • Stated goals are somewhat superficial	• The goals and actions are not related to issues and concerns raised in the Unit Overview section of the report • Major unit-level concerns raised in the report are not addressed as unit-level goals and actions • Stated goals are superficial
Realistic	• The goals and actions are within the unit's control • Stated goals are realistic and achievable	• The goals and actions are mostly within the unit's control • Stated goals are more or less realistic and achievable	• The goals and actions are not within the unit's control • Stated goals are not realistic and achievable
Viable	• A concrete timeline is specified • Goals and actions can be accomplished in the given timeframe	• A timeline is specified, perhaps with some missing details • Goals and actions can more or less be accomplished in the given timeframe	• A timeline is not specified, or it is not sufficiently detailed • Goals and actions would not be able to be accomplished in the given timeframe

Guiding Question: **For each undergraduate program reviewed, how well does the program seem to function?**
(if applicable)

	Excellent	Good	Needs Attention
Curriculum	• Motivations for the structure of the curriculum are clear • Decisions to change the curriculum are usually based on evidence and stakeholder feedback • The curriculum is evaluated often and the program seems to monitor it closely	• Motivations for the structure of the curriculum are somewhat clear • Decisions to change the curriculum are sometimes based on evidence and stakeholder feedback • The curriculum is evaluated fairly often and the program seems to monitor it closely	• Motivations for the structure of the curriculum are unclear • Decisions to change the curriculum do not seem to be based on evidence or stakeholder feedback • The program seems to go years without evaluating or monitoring the curriculum for changes that should be made
Student Success	• Multiple data sources indicate student success • There is ample evidence that suggests that students show success both during their time in the program and post-graduation	• Some data sources suggest student success • Evidence suggests that students show some success both during their time in the program and post-graduation	• There are very few indicators of student success • There is little evidence to suggest that students are successful both during their time in the program and post-graduation
Relationship between assessment data and action plans	• Action plans are directly linked to assessment data, stakeholder feedback and student success metrics • All major issues and concerns about the program are addressed in the self-study	• Action plans are somewhat related to assessment data, stakeholder feedback and student success metrics • Most major issues and concerns about the program are addressed in the self-study	• Action plans are not at all linked to assessment data, stakeholder feedback and student success metrics • Major issues and concerns about the program are not addressed in the self-study

Guiding Question: **For each graduate program reviewed, how well does the program seem to function?**
(if applicable)

	Excellent	Good	Needs Attention
Curriculum	• Motivations for the structure of the curriculum are clear • Decisions to change the curriculum are usually based on evidence and stakeholder feedback • The curriculum is evaluated often and the program seems to monitor it closely	• Motivations for the structure of the curriculum are somewhat clear • Decisions to change the curriculum are sometimes based on evidence and stakeholder feedback • The curriculum is evaluated fairly often and the program seems to monitor it closely	• Motivations for the structure of the curriculum are unclear • Decisions to change the curriculum do not seem to be based on evidence or stakeholder feedback • The program seems to go years without evaluating or monitoring the curriculum for changes that should be made
Student Success	• Multiple data sources indicate student success • There is ample evidence that suggests that students show success both during their time in the program and post-graduation	• Some data sources suggest student success • Evidence suggests that students show some success both during their time in the program and post-graduation	• There are very few indicators of student success • There is little evidence to suggest that students are successful both during their time in the program and post-graduation
Relationship between assessment data and action plans	• Action plans are directly linked to assessment data, stakeholder feedback and student success metrics • All major issues and concerns about the program are addressed in the self-study	• Action plans are somewhat related to assessment data, stakeholder feedback and student success metrics • Most major issues and concerns about the program are addressed in the self-study	• Action plans are not at all linked to assessment data, stakeholder feedback and student success metrics • Major issues and concerns about the program are not addressed in the self-study

Guiding Question: **For each standalone certificate program reviewed, how well does the program seem to function?**
(if applicable)

	Excellent	Good	Needs Attention
Motivation	• Motivations for offering the certificate are clear	• Motivations for offering the certificate are somewhat clear	• Motivations for offering the certificate are unclear
Student Success	• Multiple data sources indicate student success	• Some data sources suggest student success	• There are very few indicators of student success
Relationship between assessment data and action plans	• Action plans are directly linked to assessment data, stakeholder feedback and student success metrics • All major issues and concerns about the program are addressed in the self-study	• Action plans are somewhat related to assessment data, stakeholder feedback and student success metrics • Most major issues and concerns about the program are addressed in the self-study	• Action plans are not at all linked to assessment data, stakeholder feedback and student success metrics • Major issues and concerns about the program are not addressed in the self-study

Guiding Question: **Overall, how thoughtful and thorough was the APR self-study?**

	Excellent	Good	Below Standard
Thoughtful	• The discussion of the unit and its degree programs was meaningful, honest and reflective • The assessment of student learning outcomes yielded meaningful and informative results • Stated goals are meaningful and important	• The discussion of the unit and its degree programs was somewhat meaningful, honest and reflective • The assessment of student learning outcomes was fairly meaningful, and informative • Stated goals are somewhat superficial	• The discussion of the unit and its degree programs was not very meaningful, honest or reflective • The assessment of student learning outcomes was superficial and not informative • Stated goals are superficial and lack importance
Thorough	• The unit studied a wide variety of data sources and considered feedback from multiple stakeholders • It was evident that a majority of the unit's faculty participated in the self-study and/or report writing	• The unit studied a variety of data sources and considered feedback from multiple stakeholders • A few faculty members seemed to participate in the self-study and report writing	• The unit did not consider a wide range of data sources or feedback from multiple stakeholders • It was evident that only one or two people took responsibility for the self-study and report writing