



**Office of Institutional Research & Effectiveness**

3100 Alan & Sally Merten Hall, 4400 University Drive, MS 3D2, Fairfax, Virginia 22030

Phone: 703-993-8834; Fax: 703-993-3988; Web: <https://assessment.gmu.edu>

# Academic Program Review Guide for Reviewers

2019

## **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 Research and Assessment (ORIA), 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 strengthening programs and improving student learning and success. Once the self-study is completed, the unit writes self-study 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 OIRA.

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 program and student learning outcomes assessments. 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.

### **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, measurable 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 expects that accredited institutions demonstrate institutional effectiveness by engaging in: “ongoing, comprehensive, and integrated research-based planning and evaluation processes that (a) focus on institutional quality and effectiveness and (b) incorporate a systematic review of institutional goals and outcomes consistent with its mission.” (Principle 7.1 Institutional Effectiveness). Furthermore, SACSCOC requires that “the institution identifies expected outcomes, assesses the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provides evidence of seeking improvement based on analysis of the results” in multiple areas including student learning outcomes for each of its educational programs (Principle 8.2a Student Achievement).

APR supports these principles by asking units to regularly evaluate program quality and effectiveness, report on improvements made since the last review, and address long-term goals and the extent to which outcomes are being achieved. Though required for continued accreditation with SACSCOC, the primary purpose of APR is to provide program faculty the opportunity to collectively review, assess and strengthen the degree programs in their unit and improve student success.

## 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 APR Peer Review Committee. Each self-study is read and evaluated by a review team consisting of at least two Committee members. As many as six Committee members may be asked to review reports from departments with multiple degree programs.

Peer review teams evaluate their assigned self-study reports using rubrics provided by OIRA (see pages 7-10). The team then prepares an analysis report that addresses the unit's program goals, action plans, outcomes assessments, and alignment with the university's mission and strategic plan. The analysis report also identifies issues that may require further attention. After the review teams have submitted their analysis reports and met with the associate provosts for undergraduate and graduate education, the peer review team analysis report is sent to the unit. Finally, each unit meets with the associate provosts, College Dean, and OIRA staff to address any outstanding issues and to create follow-up plans as needed.

## 2019 UNITS AND DEGREE PROGRAMS UNDER REVIEW

The following table outlines the academic units and degree programs that are being reviewed in 2019. The reports will identify degree programs that 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.

Communication	BA Communication MA Communication PhD Communication
Computational and Data Sciences	BS Computational and Data Sciences MS Computational Science PhD Computational Sciences and Informatics PhD Computational Social Sciences
Health Administration and Policy	MS Health and Medical Policy PhD Health Services Research
Nutrition and Food Studies	MS Nutrition
Philosophy	BA Philosophy MA Philosophy
Physics and Astronomy	BS Astronomy BS Physics MS Applied Engineering Physics PhD Physics
Rehabilitation Science	BS Rehabilitation Science PhD Rehabilitation Science
Religious Studies	BA Religious Studies

### CONDUCTING THE REVIEW

Review teams work together to evaluate the self-study report, posted in the 2019 Academic Program Review Organizations site on Blackboard. Reviewers should familiarize themselves with the 2019 APR Guide and report template, both of which can also be found in this Blackboard Organization. Review teams have access to public data sources (at <https://ira.gmu.edu/academic-program-review/resources/>) and survey results (in Blackboard).

Peer review teams should prepare a written analysis using the rubrics at the end of this guide and the 2019 APR Peer Review Team Analysis Template (in Blackboard). The team analysis report should strive to be concise and should focus on program quality and only secondarily on the quality of the self-study report. In other words, the review should be more than simply a review of the report itself. The review team should attempt to:

- affirm the strengths and weaknesses of the program,
- validate the evidence addressing student learning outcomes,
- critically evaluate program capabilities and resource needs, and
- evaluate the overall quality of the educational experience for program students.

Lastly, the review team should provide constructive guidance and 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 the missing elements in the team analysis report so that the unit can provide any missing information prior to their meeting with the dean and provost staff.

### **Academic Program Review Spring 2017 Timeline**

February 1, 2019	APR Reports due from units
March 1, 2019	Peer Review Team Analysis Report due

### **ACADEMIC PROGRAM REVIEW RUBRICS**

The Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness 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?**

	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Needs Attention</b>
Grounded	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The goals and actions are clearly linked to issues and concerns raised in the Unit Overview section of the report</li> <li>• All major unit-level concerns raised in the report are addressed as unit-level goals and actions</li> <li>• Stated goals are meaningful and important</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The goals and actions are mostly linked to issues and concerns raised in the Unit Overview section of the report</li> <li>• Most major unit-level concerns raised in the report are addressed as unit-level goals and actions</li> <li>• Stated goals are somewhat superficial</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The goals and actions are not related to issues and concerns raised in the Unit Overview section of the report</li> <li>• Major unit-level concerns raised in the report are not addressed as unit-level goals and actions</li> <li>• Stated goals are superficial</li> </ul>
Realistic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The goals and actions are within the unit's control</li> <li>• Stated goals are realistic and achievable</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The goals and actions are mostly within the unit's control</li> <li>• Stated goals are more or less realistic and achievable</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The goals and actions are not within the unit's control</li> <li>• Stated goals are not realistic and achievable</li> </ul>
Viable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A concrete timeline is specified</li> <li>• Goals and actions can be accomplished in the given timeframe</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A timeline is specified, though some details are missing</li> <li>• Goals and actions can more or less be accomplished in the given timeframe</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A timeline is not specified, or it is not sufficiently detailed</li> <li>• Goals and actions could probably not be accomplished in the given timeframe</li> </ul>

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

	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Needs Attention</b>
Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Motivations for the structure of the curriculum are clear</li> <li>• Decisions to change the curriculum are usually based on evidence and stakeholder feedback</li> <li>• The curriculum is evaluated often and the program seems to monitor it closely</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Motivations for the structure of the curriculum are somewhat clear</li> <li>• Decisions to change the curriculum are sometimes based on evidence and stakeholder feedback</li> <li>• The curriculum is evaluated fairly often and the program seems to monitor it closely</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Motivations for the structure of the curriculum are unclear</li> <li>• Decisions to change the curriculum do not seem to be based on evidence or stakeholder feedback</li> <li>• The program seems to go years without evaluating or monitoring the curriculum for changes that should be made</li> </ul>
Student Success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multiple data sources indicate student success</li> <li>• There is ample evidence that suggests that students show success both during their time in the program and post-graduation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some data sources suggest student success</li> <li>• Evidence suggests that students show some success both during their time in the program and post-graduation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are very few indicators of student success</li> <li>• There is little evidence to suggest that students are successful both during their time in the program and post-graduation</li> </ul>
Relationship between assessment data and action plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Action plans are directly linked to assessment data, stakeholder feedback and student success metrics</li> <li>• All major issues and concerns about the program are addressed in the self-study</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Action plans are somewhat related to assessment data, stakeholder feedback and student success metrics</li> <li>• Most major issues and concerns about the program are addressed in the self-study</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Action plans are not at all linked to assessment data, stakeholder feedback and student success metrics</li> <li>• Major issues and concerns about the program are not addressed in the self-study</li> </ul>

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

	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Needs Attention</b>
Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Motivations for the structure of the curriculum are clear</li> <li>• Decisions to change the curriculum are usually based on evidence and stakeholder feedback</li> <li>• The curriculum is evaluated often and the program seems to monitor it closely</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Motivations for the structure of the curriculum are somewhat clear</li> <li>• Decisions to change the curriculum are sometimes based on evidence and stakeholder feedback</li> <li>• The curriculum is evaluated fairly often and the program seems to monitor it closely</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Motivations for the structure of the curriculum are unclear</li> <li>• Decisions to change the curriculum do not seem to be based on evidence or stakeholder feedback</li> <li>• The program seems to go years without evaluating or monitoring the curriculum for changes that should be made</li> </ul>
Student Success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multiple data sources indicate student success</li> <li>• There is ample evidence that suggests that students show success both during their time in the program and post-graduation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some data sources suggest student success</li> <li>• Evidence suggests that students show some success both during their time in the program and post-graduation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are very few indicators of student success</li> <li>• There is little evidence to suggest that students are successful both during their time in the program and post-graduation</li> </ul>
Relationship between assessment data and action plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Action plans are directly linked to assessment data, stakeholder feedback and student success metrics</li> <li>• All major issues and concerns about the program are addressed in the self-study</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Action plans are somewhat related to assessment data, stakeholder feedback and student success metrics</li> <li>• Most major issues and concerns about the program are addressed in the self-study</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Action plans are not at all linked to assessment data, stakeholder feedback and student success metrics</li> <li>• Major issues and concerns about the program are not addressed in the self-study</li> </ul>

Guiding Question: **Does each program have an assessment plan that demonstrates what students will be able to do/know and is the unit using the findings to improve student learning?**

<b>Learning Outcomes</b>	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Acceptable</b>	<b>Needs Attention</b>
Focus on student achievement	Describes in detail what graduating students will know and be able to do.	Describes in general what students will know and be able to do.	Focus is not on what students will know or be able to do, rather describes a process or what the program does.
Achievable/ Measurable	All use precise action verbs (e.g. recognize, distinguish, apply, critique, etc.) and are clearly linked to student work (learning).	Use of precise action verbs inconsistent; some are measurable but others could be made clearer.	Most outcomes are not realistic or it is not clear how the outcomes can be measured.
Achievement Targets			
	Identifies one or more meaningful achievement targets - based on previous results or existing standards; that are specific, measurable and aligned with outcomes.	A specific and measurable target is identified for each outcome/measure. Target may not (appear to) be based on previous results or existing standards.	Targets have not been identified for every measure or are aligned with process rather than results. Language may be vague or subjective.
Measures			
Direct measures	All outcomes assessed using multiple measures, of which at least 1 is a direct measure.	Utilizes a single direct assessment measure per outcome.	Not all outcomes assessed use direct measures or outcomes assessed using only indirect measures (e.g. course grades).
Assessment Instruments	Assessment instruments (e.g. exams, rubrics, surveys, etc.) reflect good research methodology/current best practices with explicit criteria.	Instruments are adequate for the task but could use improvement.	Instrument does not appear adequate or appropriate.
Findings			
Derived from evidence	Provides solid evidence that achievement targets were met, partially met or not met.	Provides some evidence that targets were met; evidence is not always convincing	Questionable whether targets were met, partially met or not met.
Interpretation	In-depth analysis and insightful use of the findings is evident.	Adequate analysis and understanding of the findings.	Superficial or inadequate analysis and or understanding of the findings.
Improvement/Action Plan	Plan(s) describe how to optimally use results to strengthen student learning/curriculum/ assessment process.	Plan(s) is/are often but not always linked to findings; may not always recognize needs/opportunities/next steps.	No plan(s) for improvement is included or plan(s) is/are not clearly/entirely linked to findings.

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

	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Needs Attention</b>
Motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Motivations for offering the certificate are clear</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Motivations for offering the certificate are somewhat clear</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Motivations for offering the certificate are unclear</li> </ul>
Student Success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Multiple data sources indicate student success</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some data sources suggest student success</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There are very few indicators of student success</li> </ul>
Relationship between assessment data and action plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Action plans are directly linked to assessment data, stakeholder feedback and student success metrics</li> <li>All major issues and concerns about the program are addressed in the self-study</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Action plans are somewhat related to assessment data, stakeholder feedback and student success metrics</li> <li>Most major issues and concerns about the program are addressed in the self-study</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Action plans are not at all linked to assessment data, stakeholder feedback and student success metrics</li> <li>Major issues and concerns about the program are not addressed in the self-study</li> </ul>

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

	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Needs Attention</b>
Thoughtful	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The discussion of the unit and its degree programs was meaningful, honest and reflective</li> <li>The assessment of student learning outcomes was <i>rigorous</i> and yielded informative and useful results across <i>all</i> programs</li> <li>Goals are forward-thinking, relevant and important; strong focus on improvement</li> <li>Action plans are well-developed; clearly support stated goals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The discussion of the unit and its degree programs was somewhat meaningful, honest and reflective</li> <li>The assessment of student learning outcomes was <i>often rigorous</i> and yielded useful and informative result across <i>most</i> programs</li> <li>Goal focus on maintaining current status with little attention to meaningful improvement</li> <li>Action plans are not always thoroughly developed; alignment to goals not always clear</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The discussion of the unit and its degree programs was not very meaningful, honest or reflective</li> <li>The assessment of student learning outcomes was <i>often superficial</i> and yielded useful or informative results across <i>few or no</i> programs</li> <li>Stated goals are superficial and lack importance</li> <li>Action plans are missing or vague; plans, if present, do not always appear related to goals</li> </ul>
Thorough	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The unit studied a wide variety of data sources and considered feedback from multiple stakeholders</li> <li>It was evident that a majority of the unit's faculty participated in the self-study and/or report writing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The unit studied a variety of data sources and considered feedback from multiple stakeholders</li> <li>A few faculty members seemed to have participated in the self-study and report writing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The unit did not consider a wide range of data sources or feedback from multiple stakeholders</li> <li>It was evident that only one or two people took responsibility for the self-study and report writing</li> </ul>