Academic Program Review Handbook

Revised April 2024

About this Handbook

As vice provost for academic affairs (VPAA), I oversee the Academic Program Review process for the executive vice president and provost. The purpose of Academic Program Review is to provide critical and unbiased assessments of the scholarly and educational programs and activities of an academic unit[1]. These assessments are a valuable resource for the unit, and for the school and university, in their strategic planning.

This handbook provides information which will guide the review process. It was created in collaboration with the Academic Strategy Committee, a group of faculty members that advises the VPAA and the provost on the Academic Program Review process. We recognize and appreciate that those involved in an academic program review will dedicate a large amount of work to preparing for and carrying out a review. If questions arise during preparations for the review or other assistance is required, please feel free to reach out to me.

Thank you in advance for the time and effort you and your colleagues will devote to Academic Program Review. This process will help us ensure that we continue to fulfill our mission by providing exceptional student experiences while advancing, preserving, and disseminating knowledge more broadly.

Brie Gertler

Vice Provost for Academic Affairs

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[1] In this document, "unit" refers to any entity undergoing Academic Program Review. This can be a department, degree-granting program, center or institute, school, or other academic entity.

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I. Overview of Academic Program Review

What is Academic Program Review?

The purpose of Academic Program Review (APR) is to provide critical and unbiased assessments of the scholarly and educational programs and activities of an academic unit. These assessments are a valuable resource for the unit, and for the school and university, in their strategic planning. In this document, "unit" refers to any entity undergoing APR. A unit can be a department, degree-granting program, center or institute, school, or other academic entity.

Reviews are intended to focus on areas in which excellence can be achieved within the unit. Areas of focus include, but are not limited to:

- fostering excellence in research and scholarship;
- fostering excellence in teaching and student learning;
- assessing the structure of the programs and activities offered;
- assessing the unit's administrative structure; and
- assessing the leadership of the unit.

Successful program reviews should:

- incorporate expert assessment provided by reviewers with relevant expertise and experience;
- provide a concise, honest appraisal of the unit's strengths, challenges, and opportunities in order to judge plans to improve;
- be evaluative, not just descriptive. Plans for improvement require judgments about the unit's current programs and activities. Special attention will be paid to student learning outcomes and their assessment, the diversity of the associated students and faculty members, and whether the unit is positioned to evolve as appropriate with new developments in the associated discipline(s);
- be forward looking. While assessment of a program's past performance and progress on goals that emerged from previous reviews are important, priorities for continuous improvement are of greater concern; and
- consider ways of strengthening the unit beyond the simple allocation of additional resources. Although suggestions for targeted, strategic investment in a unit may be appropriate, simply recommending increased funding or additional faculty lines does not provide the kind of appraisal that is most useful, since nearly every academic unit would be strengthened by additional resources.

The APR Process

In October of each year, the vice provost for academic affairs (VPAA) – working in collaboration with the deans of the University's schools – selects the units to be reviewed during the following academic year and notifies the relevant contact (usually an academic associate dean) and the unit's leadership. For example, in October 2023 the VPAA sent notifications identifying the units to be reviewed in 2024-25. Once notified about their scheduled review, the unit works with their dean's office and the VPAA to determine review timing and the composition of the Review Committee. The unit then begins work on its self-study.

For additional details on timing and unit obligations, see Section II. Specifics regarding Review Committees are found in Section III. Details about the self-study are given in Section IV.

Once the visit has taken place, the Review Committee issues a final report to the VPAA. Between reviews, the VPAA may meet with the unit and its dean to evaluate the progress being made (see section VI for more information). These meetings will be documented and used for reference in the unit's next program review.

Role of the Academic Strategy Committee

The Academic Strategy Committee plays an active role in Academic Program Review. This committee is composed of faculty appointed by the provost – in consultation with the Faculty Senate – which advises on the overall Academic Program Review process. This committee is expected to include between six (6) and nine (9) faculty members. Current committee membership is available on the Office of the Provost's APR webpage.

The Academic Strategy Committee is specifically charged with the following:

- advising the provost, via the VPAA, on how the Academic Program Review process is working and, when relevant, how it could be improved;
- reviewing the self-study of units under review and providing guidance on questions that should be addressed by the Review Committee; and
- participating in the kick-off and exit meetings of each Review Committee visit (see Section V for more information).

II. APR Preparation Timeline

The schedule below is meant to facilitate planning by giving schools and units a general sense of the external review process as well as any hard deadlines that apply. Schools often need to designate earlier deadlines in order to review materials at the dean's level prior to submission. Units must work closely with school leadership on all planning and preparation activities.

By October 1	The VPAA or their designee notifies all units that are to be reviewed in the following academic year. The units' leadership (usually the dean's office) will also be notified.
By October 31	The unit's designated academic contact completes and submits the on-line Program Review Planning form. **Please review the sample form in Appendix A.**
	The unit's designated academic contact submits a list of potential external reviewers that has been approved by the unit's dean or their designee.
	If not attached initially, the primary contact for the program review will be sent a request to update the form referenced above to add this attachment.
By December 10	The VPAA notifies all designated contacts (i) whether to plan for a fall or spring term review, and (ii) who will be invited to serve on the Review Committee.
At least two months before review	Self-Study provided to the VPAA.
At least one month before review	Review Visit Schedule, approved by the unit's dean, is submitted to the VPAA.

III. The Review Committee

Role of the Committee

An APR Review Committee provides a critical and unbiased analysis of how a unit is performing in terms of its various programs and activities. Accordingly, the members of a review committee must be external to the University. The Review Committee is provided with the unit's self-study several weeks before its visit; shortly after the visit, the Review Committee submits its final report with their assessment of the unit.

Committee Selection

The Review Committee will normally consist of three members. Each unit must work with its dean to formulate a list of potential reviewers. This list is submitted to the VPAA, who selects and invites reviewers from the list. It is expected that the unit will nominate potential reviewers who have expertise that aligns with its activities and who represent a suitably diverse range of academic, professional, and pedagogical specialties and perspectives.

Units should provide the following:

- A plan for ensuring that the reviewers represent a range of expertise appropriate for the unit and the discipline. This is usually accomplished by providing categories such as areas of specialty. (For example: Mathematics includes the categories of analysis, algebra, and geometry/topology.) Please explain the rationale for the plan: e.g., do the categories represent the breadth of the discipline, or are they chosen to reflect current or emerging strengths of the department?

- A list that includes at least ten (10) potential reviewers, grouped by category and ranked (by preference) within each category. This will provide guidance about whom to invite initially and, in the case of declined invitations, whom to invite next.

- For each potential reviewer: an email address, title, institution, and area(s) of expertise. Where possible, please include a link to the reviewer's departmental page or other professional site containing information about their expertise and accomplishments.

- A brief description of the process by which these reviewers were selected.

- A brief explanation of how this set of reviewers represents a suitably diverse range of academic, professional, and pedagogical specialties and perspectives.

- A brief statement about any prior interactions each potential reviewer has had with the unit or people in the unit. Interactions could include a collaboration with a current faculty member on a scholarly project, having received a degree from UVA, having mentored or been mentored by a current faculty member, or having served on a past program Review Committee.

If applicable, list any special considerations that the VPAA should be mindful of when determining the composition of the committee. *The VPAA will select the members of the Review Committee and issue invitations.*

Compensation & Accommodations

The Provost's Office provides funding to the units undergoing external review to assist in the activities during the Review Committee visit (such as the kick-off and exit meals). It also provides compensation and accommodations for the visiting reviewers. These include:

- an honorarium of $2,000 upon completion of the committee's report;
- booking and covering the cost of travel to and from Charlottesville, in addition to lodging and travel to and from hotel; and
- reimbursement for standard travel costs (if not using the University provided option) and customary food and travel expenses upon submission of original receipts.

IV. The Self-Study

The self-study is the focal point of the Academic Program Review process. The overall goal for the self-study is for the unit to assess its programs and activities, identify opportunities for improvement, and articulate a vision for the future that will take advantage of those opportunities. The self-study – along with the review visit – will form the basis for establishing clear priorities for the unit over the following eight to ten years.

While the format is determined by the unit and its dean, the self-study must provide, at a minimum:

1. An executive summary: a vision for the unit which outlines its strategic priorities, to include

    o the process used to arrive at those priorities;

    o the rationale for those priorities (do they reinforce a current strength, address a weakness, etc.);

    o where appropriate, a description of how those priorities align with the University's priorities.

2. A discussion of the current status of the unit, including data[2] about faculty, students, and programs.

3. An overview of how the unit currently assesses the performance and impact of its programs and activities.

4. The unit's vision for the next eight to ten years and a plan for achieving this vision.

Where there are divergences of opinion, e.g., as to the department's scholarly strengths or visions for the future, these should be represented in the self-study for the benefit of the external reviewers. The self-study often includes appendices which contain data and other descriptive materials. Schools may impose additional requirements at the discretion of the dean. Please see Appendix C for a suggested self-study format.

The self-study should also be responsive to the list of questions asked during all program reviews (see Appendix B). If appropriate, the self-study should also refer to the most recent review of the unit and progress made on previous recommendations.

In preparing the self-study, department leaders should seek input from all relevant stakeholders including tenure-track and general faculty, postdoctoral scholars, staff, graduate students and, where appropriate, undergraduate students. The mode of input may vary according to the stakeholders involved. For example, faculty might discuss key points of the self-study in an all-faculty meeting; graduate students may rely on a representative to share their views with the faculty, or these views could be shared through a survey. Students, staff, and faculty should be allowed to provide input confidentially if desired and feasible.

The self-study is to be provided to the VPAA at least two months prior to the visit by the Review Committee. The self-study will be reviewed by the Academic Strategy Committee, which may suggest additional questions beyond those in Appendix B.

V. The Review Committee Visit

Typical Schedule

In addition to the self-study, the visit is another important means by which the Review Committee gathers the information that will shape their assessment of the unit. Typically:

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[2] Units will receive baseline data from various university systems over the last five years, including information related to: Unit Size and Demographics; Research and Scholarship; Degrees and Other Academic Credentials; Course Offerings and Enrollments; and Survey Results from students and faculty.

- Reviewers arrive in Charlottesville the day/night before the review.

- The review commences with a kick-off meeting attended by the Review Committee, representatives from the provost's office and the unit's dean's office (for department reviews), and a member of the Academic Strategy Committee. *This generally occurs as a breakfast the day of the review. Departmental representatives do not attend this meeting.*

- The Review Committee meets with members of the unit (see below for best practices). *On occasion, and only with the support of the dean, larger departments may request reviews of one and a half to two days in order to accommodate the robust array of meetings suggested below.*

- The review visit ends with an exit meeting attended by the Review Committee, representatives from the provost's office and the unit's dean's office (for department reviews), and a member of the Academic Strategy Committee. *This meeting generally occurs over breakfast or lunch. Departmental representatives do not attend this meeting.*

- The Review Committee then meets on their own to discuss the review and plan for the writing of their report. *Departmental representatives do not attend this meeting.*

A schedule template is provided in Appendix D: Sample Visit Schedule.

The details for the schedule are to be determined by the unit in consultation with the dean; the final schedule must be approved by the VPAA at least one month before the review.

Suggested Meetings

Reflection on previous successful review visits suggests that a review visit should include the following types of meetings in addition to the kick-off and exit meetings (though some of these may not be appropriate for all units):

- A welcome dinner hosted by the unit for the Review Committee.

- Meetings with all faculty members in the unit, regardless of rank and tenure status, either individually or in groups (e.g., all academic general faculty). It is recommended that assistant professors speak with the reviewers in one or more groups that do not include associate or full professors.

- Meetings with faculty in other departments or units who interact with the unit being reviewed.

- A meeting with all departmental staff.

- A meeting with undergraduate students involved in the unit's academic programs, who are representative of the students in those programs.

- A meeting with graduate students involved in the unit's academic programs, who are representative of the students in those programs.

Best Practices

Reflection on previous successful review visits suggests that the following are best practices for review visits (though some of these may not be appropriate for all units):

- When possible, task a staff member with keeping meetings to their allotted time (i.e., by knocking on the door or otherwise signaling when a meeting should be ending).

- When possible, vary the location of the meetings so the committee is not stuck in the same room all day.

- In scheduling the meetings, balance time with the number of individuals present. In general, meetings with more people should run longer than meetings with fewer people.

- When possible, provide breaks when the committee members will be alone.

- Provide the review team with time and a space to meet to draft their final report.

VI. Final Report & Next Steps

Documentation Requirements

Review Committee Report: The Review Committee should submit their report to the VPAA within four weeks of their visit. While there is no set format for the report created by the Review Committee (other than a suggested length of 10-15 pages single spaced), both the Provost Questions and the self-study can potentially serve as reference points when a committee structures and drafts its final report.

Factual Corrections: The Review Committee report will be shared with the unit head, who will review it for factual accuracy. If any inaccuracies are found, the unit head should document these in writing and send them to the VPAA to be appended to the committee report within two weeks of receiving the draft report.

Dean-VPAA Discussion: After the unit head has had the opportunity to flag any inaccuracies, the VPAA will convene a meeting with the relevant dean and/or their designee to discuss next steps. The VPAA will produce a brief (1-2 page) summary of the discussion to be appended to the report. Depending on the outcome of this discussion and the details of the report, additional meetings and/or specific actions may be required. Note: the dean has the option to share the report with the unit and solicit feedback in *advance* of the Dean-VPAA discussion.

Unit's Response to the Final Report

Once the steps above have been taken, the VPAA will provide the unit with the report (with any notice of inaccuracies appended) and the summary of the Dean-VPAA discussion. The unit should use these documents, in combination with its self-study, to guide their plans for the next eight to ten years, in alignment with the school's and the university's missions and current strategic plans.

At the vice provost's discretion, in consultation with the dean, a formal written response to these documents may be required. In compiling this response, the unit may use planning documents already in place. While the format for the response will be left to the unit and dean, information that is usually expected includes:

- short-term (2-3 years) and long-term (4-8 years) goals that the unit plans or hopes to pursue. These goals should include those that can be done using existing resources and those that require additional resources.

- a list of the expected tasks and/or actions for meeting these short- and long-term goals, including expected dates of completion and identifying personnel responsible for completing the task.

- specific milestones and measurable outcomes that can be used to demonstrate satisfactory progress towards these goals.

This response must be submitted to both the dean and the VPAA.

Reporting on Progress between Reviews

It is expected that the results of the review will be used to guide decisions about the strategic direction of the unit the school's strategic planning. This may include revisions to the unit's academic programs, modifying the unit's administrative structure, reassessing hiring plans, and/or changes in how revenues are allocated within or to the unit. As a means of reporting on progress being made, the VPAA may hold meetings with the unit and its dean in years 3 and 6 after the review, as needed and appropriate.

After these meetings, the VPAA will create a short summary of the meetings. This summary will be shared with both the unit head and the dean.

Appendix A: Program Review Planning Form Fields

Completing the Program Review Planning form is a required part of the process. This is an on-line form that feeds a spreadsheet that the Provost's Office uses for planning and documentation of the process. Those completing the form should review the information below to ensure they have everything needed before filling it out online at this link.

FIELD	DESCRIPTION
Program/Unit	The name of the program to be reviewed
SECTION I. CONTACT INFORMATION	
This portion of the form must be completed by September 30 of the calendar year that precedes the year of the planned review.	
Department Chair	The full name of the department chair, as well as preferred email address and phone number if other than as listed in the UVA directory.
Administrative contact	Departments may designate an administrative contact. This person usually provides direct operational and administrative support to the process. Please provide the individual's full name, as well as preferred email address and phone number if other than as listed in the UVA directory.
Academic contact (if not the department chair)	Departments may designate an academic contact. This is usually a faculty member who will serve as the primary contact in lieu of the chair or as a secondary point of contact. Please provide the individual's full name, as well as preferred email address and phone number if other than as listed in the UVA directory.
SECTION II. SCHEDULING	
This portion of the form must be completed by September 30 of the calendar year that precedes the year of the planned review. Please note that scheduling site visits can be difficult and although Provost Office's staff will do their best to accommodate requests from the department and school, we cannot make guarantees. Scheduling preferences must be reviewed and approved by the dean or their designee prior to submission. Please take into account religious and other holidays.	
Preferred Term	If there is a preference for Fall or for Spring during the academic year in which the review will take place, please state that preference here.
Blackout dates	If there is a particular week or set of dates that would be completely untenable, the please use this field to identify these dates and explain why they are untenable.
Multi-day visit	Please review Section V. The Review Committee Visit. Most site visits last one day with a welcome dinner the previous night. Larger departments may need two days to ensure adequate time for the site visitors to complete their work.

SECTION III. ATTACHMENTS

Before submitting any of these documents, please review the instructions in this handbook carefully. The dean of the school, or their designee, must review and approve each of these documents prior to submission.

Potential Reviewers	The list of potential reviewers is due **by October 31 of the calendar year that precedes the year of the planned review**. Please review <u>Section III. The Review Committee</u> when compiling this list and make sure that all required elements are included.
Self-Study	Units are urged to begin their self-study as soon as possible. The self-study is **due to the provost's office two months prior to the review visit**. This timeline allows the self-study to be reviewed by the Academic Strategy Committee, and for the department to revise as appropriate, before it is sent to the reviewers.
Proposed site visit schedule	Units are urged to begin planning for the site visit, identifying necessary meetings and personnel, as soon as possible. The proposed site visit schedule is **due to the provost's office one month prior to the review visit**. Units will be sent a reminder to submit this documentation and update this form. Departments may be asked to revise the schedule after VPAA review.

Appendix B: Provost Questions for Program Reviews

The following is a baseline set of questions that the Provost's Office uses for program reviews. The self-study should address these questions, though this list does not exhaust the questions that may need to be addressed by a self-study or during the overall APR process.

While there is no set format for the report created by the Review Committee (other than a suggested length of 10-15 pages single spaced), both the Provost Questions and the self-study can potentially serve as reference points when a Review Committee structures and drafts its final report.

1. What does the unit see as its research and scholarly strengths? How do these strengths align with trends in the scholarly areas for this unit? What could be done to build on these strengths?

2. The academic unit under review may have a mix of tenured, tenure-track, and general (non-tenure track) faculty. Are the faculty appropriately involved in the operation of the unit and in determining its strategic direction? Is the administrative workload equitably distributed? Do faculty have appropriate opportunities to provide service to the department, including leadership? Please consider rank and diversity as it pertains to these issues.

3. UVA's strategic plan envisions that universities will be judged, in part, by how well students are prepared "to secure their first jobs", "to lead meaningful, satisfying lives", and "to lead in a diverse and globally connected world." Please comment as appropriate on how the combined programmatic offerings of the school or department help it achieve this aspect of our mission.

4. How well does the unit balance its scholarly and teaching activities? Are the expectations for scholarship aligned with the expectations for teaching (number and size of courses, advising load) and administrative responsibilities?

5. The University of Virginia values diversity, equity, and inclusion, and has adopted the Inclusive Excellence framework to advance those goals. Please address the unit's current and planned efforts in these areas in terms of its faculty (across ranks), scholarly and research activities, graduate and undergraduate students, staff, curriculum, and other areas. Are these efforts well-suited to advancing Inclusive Excellence?

6. Schools and departments play a critical role in providing mentoring and career development opportunities to faculty. How successful is the unit in such efforts and what could/should it do to improve in this regard?

7. In its research and teaching activities, is the unit taking advantage of opportunities to connect with other units across the University? Please consider how these efforts compare to the unit's national and/or international peers.

8. What is the unit's national and (if appropriate) international stature? What could be done to improve that stature?

Appendix C: Sample Self-Study Format

Self-studies are limited to 20 pages, excluding appendices. Some suggestions in this sample format may not be applicable to all units.

1. **Executive Summary: Vision and Strategic Goals**

    a. Vision statement (less than one page) and a brief description of how this vision was arrived at

    b. A list and description of the goals of the unit and strategies for achieving the goals

    c. Relationship to the University's strategic plan (https://strategicplan.virginia.edu/)

2. **Current Status of the Unit[3]**

    a. Current academic stature, including national rankings and metrics of excellence

    b. Distinguishing characteristics of the unit compared with others in the field

    c. Description of a unit's activities and programs, including those which are new or planned (e.g. new degrees, certificates, high-impact educational experiences, etc.)

    d. Enrollment (for schools and departments) and participant (for research center and other units) trends over time (last 3-5 years suggested)

    e. Performance and diversity of faculty/staff of the unit, including recent achievements, research strengths, sponsored research support, patents, artistic performances, and public service

    f. Performance and diversity of students in schools/departments (e.g., graduate student placements) or participants in activities of other units

3. **Unit's Current Assessment Activities**

    a. Description of how the unit currently assesses the quality and impact of its activities and how it is making progress towards its goals

    b. Description of how the unit has used its assessment activities to evaluate and/or modify the curriculum, enhance program management, and/or make other improvements within the unit

    c. For schools and departments, include the following in the appendix: a five-year schedule for the assessment of undergraduate and graduate student learning outcomes for the school/department

4. **Plan for the Future**

    a. Assessment of the direction of the field(s) in which the unit operates for the next eight to ten years. Indicate how the unit will position itself in the changing context of higher education

5. **Integrated plan for improvement over the upcoming eight- to ten-year period (Action Plan)**

    a. an overarching strategic vision and agenda for the unit

    b. short-term (2-3 years) and long-term (4-8 years) goals for the unit

    c. a timeline for meeting these short- and long-term goals;

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[3] When writing this section, units are strongly encouraged to work with The Office of Institutional Research and Analytics (IRA), as they can provide appropriate institutional data as well as comparative data to peer institutions. The Office for Equal Opportunity and Civil Rights can also provide information on faculty demographics overall and in comparison to estimated labor market availability.

d. what would happen if those goals were not met; and

e. specific milestones and measurable outcomes which can be used to demonstrate satisfactory progress towards these goals.

6. Appendices

a. Data and descriptive material

Appendix D: Sample Visit Schedule

See Section V: The Review Committee Visit for guidance about the visit schedule. This template may be adjusted as appropriate.

Day 1

Time	Event	Location	Contact
XX:XX PM	Reviewers Arrive Check into hotel	CHO	[car service details]
XX:XX PM	Walk to dinner	[hotel]	Whoever meets them at the hotel and escorts them to dinner
6:30 PM	Reviewer Dinner with XXXX *Note: this dinner should include no more than 1-2 members of the dept, e.g., the chair and perhaps one more. It is an opportunity for the reviewers to meet each other and to ask factual questions.*	[restaurant]	

Day 2

Time	Event	Location	Contact
8:45	Meet reviewers at hotel Walk to breakfast meeting		
9:00-10:15	Breakfast with Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, Dean's office representative, Academic Strategy Committee member		
10:30-11:00	Meeting with Faculty/Staff/Students		
11:00-11:30	Meeting with Faculty/Staff/Students		
Brief break			
11:40 -12:10	Meeting with Faculty/Staff/Students		
12:10-12:40	Meeting with Faculty/Staff/Students		
Brief break			
12:45-1:30	Lunch with Students		
1:30-2:00 PM	Meeting with Faculty/Staff/Students		
Brief break			
2:10-2:40 PM	Meeting with Faculty/Staff/Students		
2:40-3:10 PM	Meeting with Faculty/Staff/Students		
Brief break			
3:20-3:50 PM	Meeting with Faculty/Staff/Students		
3:50-4:20 PM	Meeting with Faculty/Staff/Students		
Brief break			
4:30-5:30 PM	Reviewer Meeting. *Reviewers meet alone to begin planning their report.*		
5:30 PM	Return to hotel. Reviewer Break		
7:30 PM	Reviewer Dinner. *Reviewers only. Make a reservation and provide transportation.*		

Day 3

Time	Event	Location	Contact
8:45	Reviewers check out of hotel Walk to breakfast meeting		
9:00-10:15	Breakfast with Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, Dean's office representative, Academic Strategy Committee member		
10:30-12:00	Reviewer Planning Meeting (If needed and time allows)		
XX:XX PM	Reviewers Depart		[car service details]