

# Guidelines for Academic Review in the Arts and Sciences

Columbia University

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## Introduction

In 1979, the Presidential Commission on Academic Priorities in the Arts and Sciences recommended that "a continuing faculty body whose function is to attend to academic planning be instituted." In 1986, the Faculty Planning Committee was established to work with departments to develop strategic plans for the 1990s and to work with the Executive Vice President for Arts and Sciences (EVPAS) "to chart out a vision of innovative program areas as well as existing areas of instruction and research in which departments can acquire or maintain eminence." Over the next six years, 25 departments were evaluated and final reports were developed that discussed the findings of the external consultants and recommended steps for program enhancement. In April 1992, departmental chairs were asked to reflect on the usefulness of the process and to suggest improvements. They expressed strong support for continuing the academic review process, and administrators in the Arts and Sciences confirmed the value of the process in their decision making. In the spring of 1995, the chairs reaffirmed their desire that a systematic academic review process be implemented.

This document describes the structure and procedures for a continuing academic program review in the Arts and Sciences. It draws on the guidelines developed in the mid-1980s, incorporates enhancements suggested by that effort, and reflects revisions adopted since the 1995-1996 academic year.

The principal functions of an academic review are to assess program quality and effectiveness, to foster planning and improvement, and to provide guidance for administrative decisions. The process provides an opportunity for critical self-review on a periodic basis and for reevaluating long-range planning assumptions and goals. By providing a means for reaching collective judgment on the strengths and weaknesses of a program, its comparative advantages, and its future opportunities and challenges, the review process contributes to maintaining the excellence of distinguished programs and to formulating strategies for achieving eminence in programs that are not currently judged as distinguished.

Engaged faculty involvement is fundamental to the process. Faculty generate the self-study and develop the departmental plan. Furthermore, the Academic Review Committee - the body charged with oversight of the process - is comprised of faculty from the Arts and Sciences, and additional faculty serve on internal review committees (see below). This engaged faculty participation inaugurates the process, appropriately vests in the faculty the responsibility for assuring quality, enhances a sense of common cause among the faculty of the Arts and Sciences, and promotes interaction among the faculty.

## Academic Review Committee

The Academic Review Committee (ARC) is comprised of at least fifteen tenured faculty members. There are faculty representatives from the Humanities Division, from the Social Science Division, from the Natural Science Division, and from the School of the Arts. The Executive Vice President for Arts and Sciences, the Chief Administrative and Academic Affairs Officer, the Associate Vice President for Academic Planning, and the Deans of the Schools serve *ex officio*. The Divisional Dean of Social Science administers the Academic Review Committee on behalf of the Executive Vice President.

Faculty representatives are appointed by the EVPAS, following consultation with the deans, and the Policy and Planning Committee (PPC). Members are appointed for *non-renewable* three-year terms.. The intent is to assure that the Committee broadly represents the Arts and Sciences. While every department cannot be represented in any given year, over time, membership on the Committee will reflect the disciplinary diversity of the Arts and Sciences.

The chair of the Committee is selected by the Executive Vice President for Arts and Sciences. The Office of the EVPAS provides administrative support to ARC.

## Review Procedures

The review of academic programs<sup>1</sup> within Arts and Sciences follows the procedure outlined below.

### Self-Study and Preparation of a Self-Study Report

The academic program undertakes a comprehensive self-study which serves as the basis for self-assessment and for identifying future directions and opportunities for enhancement. The self-study process should be broadly participatory and involve all members of the program. It is intended to assist the program in achieving focus, establishing priorities, and identifying strategies for achieving its goals. The expectation is that the program will solicit viewpoints and opinions from all its members during at least two program meetings, and will also seek feedback on the resulting document before submission to the Office of the EVAPS.

The outcome of the self-study should be an organized report that comprehensively describes the current status of the program and offers a plan for the next five to ten years. It should express the views of all members of the program and include reference to areas where consensus is not achieved. *The text of the report should typically not exceed 20 pages.* Any appendix materials should relate directly to the substance of the report and/or to any special issues. Programs are provided with standard academic and financial data by the Office of the EVPAS and may call upon the Office of the EVPAS to assist in further data collection in the course of preparing the self-study report.

While standard academic data about the undergraduate and graduate programs are provided by the Office of EVPAS, units under review may be asked to provide additional information that the programs have and that is not otherwise available from the Office of EVPAS.

Topics normally included in the self-study report are listed in Self-Study Appendix A. Additional information can be included if it is germane to particular circumstances or deepens understanding of the context of the program. In framing the report, the emphasis should be on identifying strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and challenges, and ways in which the program does or could relate to the broader institutional mission. The plan for the next five to ten years should discuss ways in which the program can be strengthened and should explain any proposed changes in direction, policy or operation. The review process should not be viewed as an unbridled opportunity to request additional resources. Rather, in instances where the self-study identifies imperative needs, opportunities for internal reallocation of current resources should be discussed.

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<sup>1</sup> For this purpose, the word program is used throughout to connote the various academic entities within Arts and Sciences, including departments, schools, institutes, centers, etc.

Self-study reports are considered confidential documents, but they are made available to faculty and administrators directly involved in the review process, as well as to the Provost and the President.

The self-study report is forwarded to the Office of the EVPAS.

### Discussion of Self-Study by the Academic Review Committee

The draft of the self-study report is distributed and discussed by the full ARC, except when a member of ARC is part of the unit under review, in which case that member should recuse themselves from the discussion. ARC should be prepared to discuss whether the self-study comprehensively describes the current status of the program, and may be used to assist the program in achieving focus, establishing priorities, and identifying strategies for achieving its goals and offers a viable plan for the next five to ten years. ARC should also discuss whether the self-study fully expresses the views of all members of the program, includes reference to areas where consensus is not achieved, and that any appendices relate directly to the substance of the report and/or to any special issues. ARC may request revisions of the self-study if it determines more information is needed to reach an assessment of the program and offer recommendations for programmatic enhancement and remediation of problems.

### Internal Review Subcommittees

The EVPAS designates the subcommittees responsible for the review of individual programs in consultation with the ARC and the Divisional Deans. Each Internal Review Subcommittee generally has three members and is chaired by a member of the ARC. Active members of a program under review may not serve on that program's Internal Review Subcommittee. Two of the committee members are usually selected from related disciplines throughout the institution.

The Internal Review Subcommittee is charged with gaining a deep understanding of the program under review. To satisfy this responsibility, members of the committee should meet with faculty and students in the program, faculty in closely related departments, centers and institutes, chairs or directors who interact with the program, the chair of the cognate Barnard department and/or program, and relevant deans and administrators. The committee chair schedules sessions with the assistance of the program. The committee is encouraged to meet with any other individuals or groups it deems relevant to the review and will also meet with the External Review Committee. It may request additional information from the program and from the office of the EVPAS.

### External Review Committees

An External Review Committee is invited to visit and provide input into the review process. The team generally includes two or three individuals selected on the basis of their expertise and status in the field. The committee visits the university to meet with

faculty, students, relevant deans and administrators, and the Internal Review Subcommittee. A sample schedule is provided in Appendix B.

The External Review Committee is selected by the EVPAS after consultation with the ARC, and the program under review. When making its recommendations for the External Review Committee, the program should provide the name, title, institutional affiliation, and two-to-three phrases about the area of expertise and status in the profession for each. The Office of the EVPAS coordinates the visit by providing travel and accommodation assistance to the External Review Committee and scheduling support to the program.

In advance of the visit, the External Review Committee is provided with the self-study report and CVs and/or bios of the program faculty, and information about the review procedures. The program head is provided with contact information of the team so that faculty in the program have the opportunity to offer individual written comment in advance of the visit if they wish to do so.

Ideally within fourteen days following their visit, the External Review Committee submits a written assessment(s) to the EVPAS who provides confidential copies of the analysis to the program being reviewed. The program is given seven days to correct errors of fact or to respond to issues raised by the external team. Any response should be forwarded to the Office of the EVPAS, which transmits it to the ARC.

### Discussion of Program by Academic Review Committee

After meeting with the program and the External Review Committee, the Internal Review Subcommittee prepares a draft report (typically between 5 and 10 pages) that incorporates the findings from the External Review Report, which is then distributed to ARC members and serves as the basis for a discussion of the program by the full ARC, except when a member of ARC is part of the unit under review, in which case that member should recuse themselves from the discussion. The Internal Review Subcommittee meets with the ARC when the program discussion is held. The Internal Review Subcommittee should be prepared to discuss the quality and effectiveness of the program, its contributions to the mission and objectives of the Arts and Sciences and the institution more broadly, strategies for enhancing the program within realistic resource constraints, and the potential impact of incremental support for the program. The discussion is also informed by the self-study report, the interviews that were held, the report(s) of the external assessment team, and any findings from special studies and inquiries.

### Committee Findings and Recommendations

Once the ARC has concluded its discussion, the results are summarized in a final report that reflects the thinking of the ARC. The report provides an assessment of the program and offers recommendations for programmatic enhancement and remediation of problems. Recommendations for addressing identified issues are summarized at the end of the report and should be specific and realistic with respect to both the availability of

resources and the capability of the program for implementation. The report is forwarded to the EVPAS who provides a confidential copy to the head of the program. The program has seven days to correct factual errors in the report. Any response should be forwarded to the EVPAS who will provide it to the ARC. The ARC reviews the response and determines whether further deliberations are merited.

Once it has been determined that no further changes are warranted, a copy of the final report is transmitted to the program director to share with the program faculty. Since it is confidential, no additional copies of the report should be made or distributed. A copy of the final report is also made available to the relevant deans, the Provost and the President.

The Final ARC Report is then archived and is referenced when examining the direction a department or institute is taking and may be used to provide guidance for administrative decisions and to formulate strategies to maintain the excellence of distinguished programs and for achieving eminence in programs that are not currently judged as distinguished.

### Meeting to Discuss Findings and Adopt Plan

The EVPAS and the relevant divisional dean or school dean(s) meet with the department chair or program director to discuss the results of the review and the recommendations of the ARC. Recommendations are prioritized by need and feasibility. It is expected that the department chair or program director will have discussed the report with the faculty prior to the meeting. The outcome of that meeting will be a formal agreement on accepted recommendations.

### Implementation Plan

Within six months after the completion of the review, the program will submit to the EVPAS a plan detailing the manner in which it intends to respond to the recommendations. The plan should include a timetable indicating when specific actions will be taken.

### Monitoring Progress

At regular intervals following submission of the implementation plan, the program is expected to provide the EVPAS with brief updates on progress in implementing the plan. These updates may be transmitted by the EVPAS to the ARC for its information and review at the discretion of the EVPAS.

## Sequence and Timetable

Approximately 5-7 programs are reviewed each year, such that all academic programs in the Arts and Sciences are reviewed approximately every ten years. To the extent possible, related programs will be reviewed in the same year to facilitate broader planning. The final schedule for any given year will be determined by the EVPAS in consultation with the ARC and following consultation with program heads. It will reflect unanticipated developments that justify altering the schedule (e.g., leadership changes, significant personnel turnover, major curricular revisions, etc.).

Academic reviews generally follow the steps outlined below, which (except for the action plan and follow-up) are intended to be completed within the course of an academic year:

1. The EVPAS notifies the program to be reviewed.
2. Programs submit recommendations for members of the External Review Committee. Then, the EVPAS selects members of the External Review Committee after consultation with the relevant Divisional Dean.
3. The EVPAS, in consultation with the ARC chair and the Divisional Dean, designates the Internal Review Subcommittee.
4. Programs submit self-study reports at the beginning of the fall term. ARC meets to review the self-study and offer suggestions for improvement to it, as necessary.
5. The Internal Review Committee visits the program
6. The External Review Committee visits the program.
7. The External Review Committee submits a report approximately 2 weeks following their visit.
8. The head of the program reviews the External Review Committee Report for factual errors before it is sent to the Internal Review Subcommittee.
9. The Internal Review Subcommittee prepares a draft report approximately 2 weeks after receiving the External Review Report.
10. The ARC meets with the Internal Review Subcommittee to discuss its findings, and the subcommittee revises the draft report as needed. If needed, the Chair of ARC will meet separately with the Internal Review Subcommittee Chair and the relevant Divisional Dean to clarify the points of revision.
11. Once revisions to the draft report are complete, the program is provided an advance copy of the final report to review for factual errors.

- 12.** Once the factual corrections have been submitted and approved by ARC, the Final ARC Report is prepared and distributed to the program, the relevant Divisional Dean, and the EVPAS.
- 13.** The EVPAS convenes meetings with the program head and the relevant Divisional Dean to discuss the results and recommendations of the reviews in order to formulate a plan.
- 14.** The program submits an Action Plan (2-3 pages) detailing the manner in which it intends to respond to the recommendations including a timetable indicating when specific actions will be taken as discussed in the previous meeting with the EVPAS and the Divisional Dean
- 15.** The EVPAS has further discussions with the program at intervals of 2 years following the ARC review to monitor progress by the program in achieving the goals set forth in the plan. The program should send an update detailing the progress made on achieving the report recommendations at least a week prior to each such meeting.

## Revisions to the Process

The ARC will periodically evaluate the experience of the previous review cycle and consider appropriate revisions of the guidelines. These guidelines are generally available to the Arts and Sciences faculty, and will be communicated to programs scheduled for review.

# Appendix A: Guidelines for the Self-Study Report and Review Process for Academic Units

## 1. Self-Study Preparation

Detail how the self-study was prepared including how it was shared with the entire program and who contributed to the preparation of the report and in what capacity.

## 2. Overview and Mission

Provide a brief history of the program and its mission; discuss its organization; and outline its major academic responsibilities.

## 3. Assessment of Quality

Reflect on the state of the discipline(s) represented by the faculty, and examine the unit's engagement with the broad intellectual environment of the discipline: what are the current debates in the field; where is the field likely to be five or ten years from now; and what might need to occur in the local context in order to ensure that Columbia maintains and/or improves its standing in the field in light of the challenges presented.

Make comparisons with peer departments, in terms of disciplinary identity, FTEs, size of graduate and undergraduate program, and other relevant criteria. Are there any areas of overlap or duplication of services with other campus units?

Provide information about the ranking of the department in national surveys, and the department's interpretation of its ranking. Provide any comparative data from surveys, rankings, etc., that indicate success relative to that of peer institutions.

The self-study should include an accurate and comprehensive description identifying both strengths and weaknesses. It should discuss internal improvements possible through reallocation of existing resources and improvements that can only be addressed through additional resources.

## 4. Description of Academic Programs

Summarize instructional activities of the program, including their relationship to instructional activities of other programs. Include a description of any interdisciplinary instructional efforts and of any unique educational ventures.

### a. Undergraduate Education (See Appendix C)

Provide information on degree requirements, curricular innovations, student quality, service to non-majors, and, when available, the placement of majors.

b. Graduate Education (See Appendix D)

Provide information on degree requirements, curricular innovations, student quality, and the placement of M.A. and Ph.D. students.

c. Research and Sponsored Programs

Describe the nature of the research enterprise. Include a brief description of any special affiliated entities devoted to research and development.

Statistical information about sponsored research is made available by the Office of the EVPAS, though programs may be asked to provide additional information that the programs have that is not otherwise available to the Office of the EVPAS.

**5. Resources**

Statistical information about faculty (e.g., rank, tenure status, demographic statistics), and administrative support services (e.g., administrative personnel) are made available by the Office of the EVPAS.

Describe the types and levels of personnel associated with the program and their roles relative to the overall mission and activities of the program. Provide a statement addressing the demographics of the area faculty in regards to gender and race/ethnicity and include information on future plans, including searches and hires.

Provide information on space and other special equipment and facilities that are available to the program.

Describe linkages within Columbia University, Barnard, Teachers College, and with any external entities that support the program, including development and alumni relations efforts where applicable. Financial arrangements with donors should be clearly described.

**6. Governance and Leadership**

Briefly describe the administrative organization and decision making structures. An ARC review is an opportunity to review the unit's existing by-laws or principles of governance in effect, a copy of which should be included as an Appendix.

**7. Plans for the Future**

Describe plans for the next five- to ten- year period. What are the program's specific objectives and priorities? How will current strengths be built upon and weaknesses addressed? How do future plans relate to future directions in the field or fields covered by the program? How well positioned is the program to play a significant

role in those areas? What, if any, are the barriers to these aspirations? Be as introspective and candid as possible.

## Appendix B: External Review Committee Visits

### **Who should meet with external assessment team?**

Program head; individual faculty, representative group of undergraduate students; representative group of graduate students; representatives from other programs with linkages to the program; chair of relevant Barnard department/program; deans, where applicable; Executive Vice President for Arts and Sciences; Internal Review Subcommittee.

### **How should the meetings be structured?**

Ideally, junior and senior faculty meet individually with entire group of external reviewers (in larger programs, reviewers may divide up or faculty may be grouped); specific times are arranged; students meet with reviewers without program representatives present; students are grouped by level.

### **How is scheduling handled?**

Program develops a tentative schedule of meetings that includes broad representation of those who should meet with External Review Committee; sessions scheduled by program, with the final session scheduled by Office of Executive Vice President for Arts and Sciences; sessions generally scheduled in program facilities; tentative schedule provided to Office of Executive Vice President for Arts and Sciences at least two weeks before visit; final schedule distributed to all relevant parties by Office of Executive Vice President for Arts and Sciences.

### **Who handles travel and hotel arrangements?**

The External Review Committee members make their own travel arrangements and submit receipts for reimbursement to the Office of the Executive Vice President for Arts and Sciences (via program administrator); the Office of the Executive Vice President for Arts and Sciences makes hotel reservations for External Review Committee members.

## Sample Schedule for External Assessment Team

### Initial Session

1hr. Meeting with the EVAPS and the relevant Divisional Dean

### Team Session

1 hr. External Committee Closed Session

### Consulting Session

1 hr. Meeting with members of Internal Review Subcommittee [*arranged by EVPAS*]

### Other Program Sessions

Meeting with Provost  
[*arranged by EVPAS*]

Meetings with individuals and small groups  
[*arranged by program*]

Meetings with students  
[*arranged by program*]

Meetings with Deans (i.e. GSAS, Columbia College)  
[*arranged by EVPAS*]

Use of breakfast, lunch and dinner as meeting times  
[*arranged by program*]

### Team Session

1hr. External Review Committee Closed Session

### Final Session

1 hr. Meeting with Executive Vice President for Arts and Sciences and the relevant Divisional Dean  
[*arranged by EVPAS*]

External Review Committee members depart

## Appendix C: Questions about the Undergraduate Curriculum

In thinking about the undergraduate section of the Department's self-study, please give some considered thought about how the undergraduate curriculum is planned, what is its purpose, how it is structured and coheres, and how it is taught, and advised.

Provide information on degree requirements, curricular innovations, student quality, service to non-majors, and placement of majors

To the extent possible, discuss quantitative information on the contributions of the program to undergraduate instruction and advising. Programs are expected to meet with the relevant Committee(s) on Instruction during the self-study process to obtain their assessment of the program's functioning.

Include information on areas in which faculty are involved in aspects of extra-curricular undergraduate student life.

The College provides the following helpful self-study questions:

1. What process does the Department use to shape and staff its undergraduate curriculum?
2. To what extent are senior/tenured faculty involved in the planning and teaching of the undergraduate curriculum? To what extent are they involved in the advising of majors?
3. What does the Department think is (are) the purpose(s) of its undergraduate major and how does it inform students?
4. Attached you will find the most recent version of the learning goals and assessment plans for your program. Please use this information, data from the department profile, and any additional data on student assessment results (e.g., average course grades, pass rates on comprehensive exams, quality of capstone projects, placement rates, course evaluations, or student satisfaction data) to address the following questions.
  - a. Please describe 2-4 methods that you use to gauge student learning in this program. The methods described may be a combination of direct methods (e.g., scores on exams, quality of capstone projects, writing samples, oral presentations) and indirect methods (e.g., course evaluations, enrollment patterns, student exit surveys, graduate school admission rates).
  - b. What do the methods reveal about student learning? Note that your evaluation at this step may reveal positive or negative findings regarding student learning.

- c. Based on your findings in (b) above, indicate whether the findings were expected or unexpected, and provide potential reasons that may explain what you have observed.
  - d. Finally, please describe any actions or changes that you have made or plan to make to the program going forward, whether in response to your assessment findings or for other reasons.
5. Is there an opportunity to link major requirements to the Core Curriculum?
  6. How does the Department organize the academic advising of its undergraduate majors?
  7. How are graduate teaching assistants assigned to classes? How are they trained, supervised, and mentored?
  8. Is study abroad integrated into the Department's curriculum?

## Appendix D: Questions about the Graduate Curriculum

Discuss information on degree requirements; five-year trends in enrollments and degrees conferred; nature and size of the applicant pool, admit rates and yield; time-to-degree and attrition; profiles of student support; and placement of graduates. Include information on graduate programs served by non-Arts and Sciences programs.

The Graduate School provides the following helpful self-study questions from the Executive Committee of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (ECGSAS):

### **Information provided to PhD program by GSAS via the Office of the EVPAS**

- five-year trends in enrollments and degrees conferred
- nature and size of the applicant pool
- admit rates and yield
- time-to-degree and attrition

### **Information requested by ECGSAS**

1. Program: Describe (1-2 pages) the program's history, organization, development, subfields within the discipline, and relationship to instructional activities of other programs. Attach the following information:
  - Graduate degree requirements: Provide information on degree requirements by year, i.e. beginning with year 1, which courses, requirements and exams are taken?
  - Profiles of PhD student support by year for past 5 years
  - Placement of graduates

Program Goals and Student Assessment: Attached you will find the most recent version of the learning goals and assessment plans for your program. Please use this information, data from the department profile, and any additional data on student assessment results (e.g., average course grades, pass rates on comprehensive exams, quality of capstone projects, placement rates, course evaluations, or student satisfaction data) to address the following questions.

- a. Please describe 2-4 assessment methods that you use to gauge student learning in this program. The methods described may be a combination of direct methods (e.g., results of qualifying exams, theses, writing samples, oral presentations) and indirect methods (e.g., course evaluations, enrollment patterns, student exit surveys, academic appointments).
- b. For each method considered, characterize the findings so far (i.e., what do the methods reveal about student learning?). Note that your evaluation at this step may reveal positive or negative findings regarding student learning.

- c. Based on your findings in (2) above, indicate whether the findings were expected or unexpected, and provide hypotheses or potential reasons that may explain what you have observed.
- d. Finally, please describe any actions or changes that you have made or plan to make to the program going forward, whether in response to your assessment findings or for other reasons.

## 2. Program Reputation

- Comparative evaluation – Provide a brief description of the results of surveys, national ranks, etc., that compare your program to others (top-ranked and competitive peers).
- Immediate competition – Identify schools you believe most closely represent “the competition” for students applying to your program.
  - Compare the size of your department (graduate faculty and entering students) with theirs.
  - How well do we compete with these schools for students?
  - What do those programs offer that we do not?
  - What are the amounts of their stipends and for what number of years are they guaranteed?
  - How do Columbia’s PhD degree requirements compare with others?

3. How do students receive training in critical skills and knowledge for entering and succeeding in the discipline and profession, such as training for independent teaching (including course design and student evaluation), oral communication/presentation skills, writing a proposal for funding, preparing articles for publication, working in collaborative groups, project management, responsible conduct of research, preparation for the academic and non-academic job markets, including interview and job talk skills?
4. What are the current strengths and weaknesses of your program?
5. What is the process for annual student evaluations, both before and after coursework is completed?
6. What is your five-year plan for the Ph.D. program?