SUNY POTSDAM
SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES
GUIDELINES FOR REVIEW OF ACADEMIC DEPARTMENTS AND PROGRAMS
Revised 09/14/2015

An Arts-and-sciences-specific Version of the college-wide Program Review Guidelines, those being in turn based on the SUNY-wide Program Review Requirements and Guidelines
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I Overview

SUNY Potsdam has developed a system of peer review for academic departments and programs to encourage academic excellence and to provide a high quality education to the students for whom we are responsible. This system reflects and is consistent with SUNY academic policy (Memorandum to Presidents 77-3). This academic program review is a process of regular, systematic review and evaluation of all academic programs not already subject to review by an established accrediting agency. It is designed to assess and enhance department or program quality, and to assist the college in planning, in setting institutional priorities, and in allocating resources.

Each department or program will be reviewed at seven-year intervals although, under certain circumstances, this interval may be either longer or shorter. The dean of Arts and Sciences will initiate reviews and will develop a rolling schedule for reviews, and will notify the relevant department or program no later than the semester prior to the start of the review. The program self-study should be completed by the end of the semester prior to the planned visit of the review team. Circumstances may occasionally require a less comprehensive review than that required by these guidelines; in such a case, the Academic Council shall determine appropriate review procedures.

The review is composed of three parts: (1) preparation of a self-study by the department or program; (2) site visit by a panel of reviewers and submission of their report; (3) the institutional response to the visit and review.

It is important to focus the review of the academic unit or program on critical questions affecting its current academic stature and future prospects. To this end, the provost and the dean will consult with the faculty of the department or program and will examine the most recent external report and/or the most recent reaccreditation report in order to determine whether there are special issues that should be addressed by the review. The Chair or Director of the department or program will be invited to propose additional topics. And the dean will communicate the resulting program review priorities both to the department or program faculty and to the review team upon their arrival on campus.

A more detailed description of the review process follows.
II Self-Study

The self-study has the dual purpose of involving the faculty in a critical scrutiny of all aspects of the department – undergraduate and graduate (if relevant) programs, scholarship, service, student learning environment, recruiting and retention of students, continuing faculty development – and of informing the reviewers about the department.

To ensure broad departmental involvement, the Chair or Director will inform the department or program of the review and solicit input from the faculty on questions and issues to be addressed in the self-study. The Chair or Director will be responsible for a summary of the self-study that will serve as the statement of the state of the department. A one-course reassignment (or equivalent stipend) may be made available to the primary author of the self-study.

Members of the department will be given at least one week to read the completed document and to sign the signature page although it is expected that the self-study will represent a diversity of views, anyone wishing to provide minority views on materials or conclusions may add them as a signed statement at the end of the appendices.

Copies of the self-study draft will be provided to the provost and the dean for review. The provost or dean may require revision before releasing the self-study to the reviewers. The self-study will comprise two parts: a narrative and an appendix or collection of appendices of relevant data.

The narrative should provide an overview of the current state of the department or program, any institutional history that is needed to properly grasp that state, and a list of current and prospective opportunities and challenges. It should not be more than twenty-five pages in length, excluding attachments. The questions in Appendix A are offered as a guide for this section.

The factual data to be included as appendices should include the following (some of which can procured from the Office of Institutional Effectiveness):

1. Faculty curriculum vitae that include each faculty member’s rank and tenure status, educational and employment background, professional affiliations and activities, awards and honors, publications, presentations or performances, and descriptions of current scholarly projects;

2. A summary of faculty activity for the past five years, with a brief appraisal of the most significant projects;

3. A list of other professional and support staff;

4. A summary of personnel changes over the course of the previous five years;

5. The undergraduate, and graduate if appropriate, course descriptions from the current college catalog, with note taken of which courses serve majors, non-majors, majors offered by other departments or programs, the General Education Program, the Learning Communities Program,
teacher preparation programs, interdisciplinary programs, Honors Program, and other college-wide programs;

6. A list of undergraduate, and graduate if appropriate, course offerings over the course of the prior five years, including any additions or deletions of course offerings (with the rationales for those additions and deletions, if available);

7. The undergraduate, and the graduate if appropriate, course enrollments, the numbers of majors and minors, and the number of degrees awarded, for each of past five years;

8. The undergraduate, and graduate if appropriate, faculty/student workload (including both headcount and FTE) over the course of the prior five years;

9. Summaries of student course evaluation data for the past five years, if available;

10. Available data concerning the undergraduate, and graduate if appropriate, student profile and quality; to wit:
    The academic profile of majors and minors:
    - Average SAT scores, HS average, and HS percentile rank of majors;
    - Transfer GPA of students transferring into the program;
    - Average cumulative GPA and major GPA of majors;
    - Number of full-time and part-time student majors; and
    - Retention rates for majors.

    The composition of student majors and minors with respect to age, gender and ethnicity.

    If available a list of the positions and places of employment of department or program students who receives degrees in the past five years, and a list of earlier graduates who have gained positions of significance within or without the academic discipline of the program.

11. A list of major professional activities sponsored by the department in the last five years, e.g. specials colloquia, conferences, seminars, workshops.
III Site Visit: Review Team

The charge of the evaluation team is to evaluate the overall state of the department or program, its success in fulfilling its mission, and its future needs. The review team is encouraged to make suggestions for improvement.

As part of the site visit, the team will assess the accuracy of the self-study, interview faculty and students to understand their respective perspectives on the department and to assess morale, examine the facilities, review student work, discuss with administrators the unit’s role in fulfilling the overall mission of the institution, and ascertain both the institution’s commitment to the department or programs and the current state of its financial, physical, and human resources. In this work the review team will start with the findings and questions that are provided by the self-study. The reviewers may also request information from the college prior to the visit.

Selection and Composition of the Review Team

The review team shall consist of two to three experienced – preferably tenured – college or university level faculty members, one of whom (the internal reviewer) teaches at SUNY Potsdam but is not a member of the department or program under review and two to three of whom (the external reviewers) teach at another institution within in the discipline of the department or program under review.

The department or program under review begins the process of team selection by submitting to the dean a list of potential reviewers and a brief description of the qualifications of those individuals. The department or program then works with the dean’s Office to finalize a review team proposal. The provost either approves that team or asks for changes.

One of the external reviewers chairs the team and coordinates the writing of the site visit report.

When choosing review team members the department or program being reviewed should consider the following:

1. To ensure fairness and impartiality in observation, persons with close professional relationships to members of the department – including current research collaborations, current and prior co-author relationships – will normally be excluded from consideration as external reviewers. And all those considered as possible reviewers will be vetted both by the dean and the department or program, in the effort to avoid any conflicts of interest.

2. If more than one major is housed within a single department or program then – should resources allow – the effort should be made to choose an external member of the evaluation team to represent the different majors.

3. External reviewers who work at fellow SUNY institution should be considered because they offer the benefit of proximity and will be familiar with challenges typically faced at public institutions.
Site Visit Arrangements

The dates and arrangements for the site visit will be handled by the office of the dean in consultation with all concerned, and the schedule for the visit itself will be determined by the dean and the host department working together. The following schedule elements are either required or suggested, as indicated:

1. Recommended: three days of review activities, with the first day consisting of a dinner attended by the review team and the members – or as many as can be assembled – so that those involved can begin exchanging ideas and information. The second day would then be a full day of activities for the team and the department/program faculty, and the third day would consist of one or two closure meetings in the morning.

2. Required: the review team begin the full day of the site visit by receiving their charge in a meeting with the provost, the dean, and /or other campus staff as determined by the provost, dean, and Chair.

3. Strongly recommended: the schedule include a meeting attended only by the review team and students studying in the department or program under review.

4. Required: the schedule provide time for the members of the review team to meet with many, and if possible all, members of the faculty of the department of program under review. Also the schedule should give the team ample time to consult with the chair of the department or program.

5. To be considered:
   -- A meeting of the team with all tenured faculty members present excluding the chair.
   -- A meeting of the team with untenured faculty members, including adjuncts.
   -- Times set aside so individual faculty members can if they wish schedule a meeting with the review team, without other faculty present.

6. Recommended: the team be provided with a space – e.g. someone’s office not otherwise occupied at the time – that they can use to confer with each and to put their personal effects during the day.

7. Required: that the site visit end with an exit interview with the provost, the appropriate dean, and other college representatives selected by the provost.

8. Required: Toward the end of the second day and prior to the exit interview, the evaluation team will be given several hours to prepare an initial draft or outline of their report. This is often accomplished by scheduling a review team-only dinner and leaving the rest of the evening to them. The team can then use the draft of their report as the basis for the team’s initial evaluation to be given at the exit interview.

9. Required: a final written report submitted by the team. This is normally expected within four weeks of the team’s visit.
IV Site Visit Report

The site visit report is a crucial element of the college’s evaluation of the department/program and must be objective, complex, accurate, and specific. The review team should use the self-study, the Guide for Reviewers (appendix B), and the charge given to them in person at the initial meeting on campus to craft a report that evaluates the unit’s effectiveness in defining and fulfilling its mission; evaluates its strengths and challenges; and assesses, in detail, the state of all its important components and functions. The chair of the review team assumes responsibility for the preparation of the full written report.

V Follow-up Procedures

Upon receiving the site visit report, the dean will forward copies to the provost and the department chair or program coordinator. As appropriate, findings from the report will then be incorporated into the planning either within the academic department or program (e.g. course and curriculum improvements) or within the School and the college (e.g. administrative support and campus-wide planning). To this end, the dean and the department chair/program coordinator will meet soon after the receipt of the report to discuss issues and priorities and communication will continue back and forth between the dean’s Office and the department or program.

Action Plan

The final result of this process of consultation will be the creation of a joint action plan, which is a description of planned actions in pursuit of improvement and an appropriate time frame and commitment of resources.

Appendix A – The Content of the Self-Study

Overview

The self-study should answer the following questions: What are the department or program’s major strengths, weaknesses, and concerns? What challenges does it face in the immediate future and over the next five to ten years? How do the activities of the department contribute to the overall goals of the institution?

Faculty

- What changes are anticipated in the faculty for the next several years: What new positions or replacement positions have been authorized; what reductions, if any, are foreseen? How do these changes affect the department’s direction and its ability to fulfill its mission?

- How does the faculty’s range of interests compare with the breadth covered in typical peer departments? If disciplinary groupings of faculty in the department are identifiable, what working relationships exist among them and what procedures ensure
communication? Are there major research/scholarly foci within the department or program?

- How effective is the faculty’s teaching? What procedures are there for evaluating the quality of instruction? What consideration is given to the quality of teaching in the granting of tenure, promotions, or discretionary salary increases?

- How well does the department distribute responsibility for teaching, scholarship, service, advising and other activities that contribute to the health of the college across faculty?

- What role, if any, do faculty other than the chair or program director have in determining departmental objectives or policy? How do they participate in departmental governance, including deciding intra-departmental budget allocations and assignment of new or replacement faculty lines?

- What is the state of faculty morale? What factors have promoted it and what have tended to lower it; what efforts are being made to foster the former and reduce the latter?

- What efforts are made to support and sustain new faculty as they advance toward continuing appointment?
• What effort is the department making to address gender imbalance (if present) and increase the ethnic diversity (if lacking) of its faculty?

Undergraduate Program

• How do the activities of the department contribute to the formation of the “Potsdam College Graduate”?

• What is the focus of the undergraduate program and its majors and minors?

• What innovations has the department or program initiated to enhance undergraduate education? How well has the department or program kept up with external changes in the discipline (e.g. new areas of research, technology).

• What efforts has the department made to contribute to an integrated undergraduate curriculum across departments? What effort has been made (when appropriate) to encourage interdisciplinarity?

• How do the offerings of the department contribute to the college’s General Education program? Does the department participate in the Learning Communities Program?

• What opportunities exist for undergraduates to engage in research and/or scholarly activities? What proportion of undergraduate majors are involved in research, creative, or scholarly activity?

• How do the activities of the department contribute toward a more integrated undergraduate student experience at the college? Describe any collaborations with student/residence life.

• What are the department’s procedures for academic advising of undergraduates? How many faculty are directly involved in undergraduate advising? Do college personnel who are not faculty members engage in undergraduate advising? If so, who, and what is the rationale for that practice?

• How effective is academic advising in the department? Describe evidence of its effectiveness.

• By what procedures are freshman-level courses designed and faculty assigned to teach them?

• How satisfied is the department with the quality of its current undergraduate students? How has the quality of undergraduate student preparation affected the content and method of undergraduate instruction?
• What are the special needs of transfer students in the department? How has the department met those needs?

• Does the department utilize graduate assistants or student interns? If so, what are their specific responsibilities; and how are they trained, supervised and compensated?

• Describe any special student recruiting efforts the department is involved in and describe the results of these efforts.

**Graduate Program (if there is one)**

• What is the focus of the graduate program? How is the graduate curriculum designed? To what extent does it overlap with the undergraduate curriculum? To what extent do undergraduates participate in graduate courses?

• What is the quality of graduate students attracted to this program? What recruitment efforts are in place? What type of student body is served by the graduate program?

• What plans are there for graduate program development or change in the immediate future, and what are the reasons for the change?

• What are the procedures for academic advising, for supervision and evaluation of student progress through degree completion, and for assisting graduate in job placement? Does the department monitor and assess graduate student outcomes?

**Assessment**

• What is the department or program trying to accomplish with each of the majors if offers? What student learning outcomes are expected? Are those outcomes made explicit?

• How does the department or program measure and assess the degree to which the learning outcomes are achieved?
  • Direct assessments include, but are not limited to, standardized tests, capstone experiences, performance assessments, portfolios, job placements, performance in admission and licensing tests, and placement in graduate school programs.
  • Indirect assessments include, but are not limited to, surveys, exit interviews, and focus groups.
• Describe how the department or program uses assessment data to make programmatic, curricular, and pedagogical enhancements to its program(s).

**Scholarship/Research**

• What provisions are made in the department or program to support faculty to engage in scholarship/research? Are all of Boyer’s four forms of scholarship (discovery, application, integration, and teaching) valued and supported?

• What level of support external to the department or program exists to assist faculty in their scholarship/research? Does the department have plans to try to increase this level of support? If so, what are they?

**Service**

• Describe how the department contributes in service to the college, faculty governance, and the wider community.

**College Libraries**

• Information Literacy
  - Are students introduced to the creation, communication, and dissemination of knowledge in the discipline? Do students have opportunity to practice identification, retrieval, and evaluation of information resources in all formats using print and electronic tools? Do students practice ethical use of information?

• Resources
  - Does the department or program collaborate effectively with the library faculty in selecting resources in support of the curriculum?
  - Do faculty and students have adequate access to resources that support the curriculum and faculty research?
  - Are students encouraged/required to use information resources?

• Services
  - Are students encouraged to use key library services that enhance access (e.g. reference materials and interlibrary loans)?
Continuing Education and Other Activities (where applicable)

- Describe the unit’s continuing education efforts; summer session offerings, Winterim offerings, off-campus courses, evening and part-time programs, and lectures, symposia, or workshops available to the college community.

- Describe collaborations with other departments and programs of the college.

- Describe advancement-oriented activities (i.e. fundraising and alumni development initiatives) in which the department or program is engaged.

Resources and Facilities

How satisfactory are the following provisions for the department or program’s needs and how might (if needed) might they be made more satisfactory?

(a) General and disciplinary library holdings and acquisitions
(b) Research and laboratory facilities and equipment
(c) Computer facilities and services
(d) Technical and secretarial services for faculty and students
(e) Office, classroom, and study space
(f) Any special resources or support facilities
(g) Funds for other than personnel services (OTPS)
Appendix B – Guide for Reviewers

Overall

What are the major strengths of the unit? What are the major concerns? What challenges does it face in the immediate future and over the next five to ten years? How do the activities of the department contribute to the overall goals of the institution?

How do the department’s or program’s teaching and research foci compare with other similar units at comparable institutions? Does the department or program have a distinctive identity?

Faculty

• What is the overall quality of the faculty? What is the quality of its teaching effectiveness and scholarship? What is the extent and quality of other current professional activities? Which faculty members are outstanding in their specific scholarly areas? In what areas is the department program weak? Are significant areas of specialization inadequately represented relative to any instructional needs? Are there areas of available faculty expertise that might be more fully exploited? Do the faculty’s teaching and administrative responsibilities leave sufficient time for scholarship?

• Is the department or program anticipating its future needs? How effective has it been in recruiting promising junior faculty to replace retiring senior faculty? Are its character and function likely to be affected by retirements in the next few years, and if so, how? Is there a healthy balance between tenured and non-tenured faculty? Is the gender and ethnic diversity and distribution of the faculty adequate?

• How effective is the instruction? How do students rate the teaching in the department?

• How successful is the faculty in generating funding for research, facilities, and equipment? How do the levels of funding available compare with those at comparable departments or programs in the same discipline? Describe the mix of funding sources, e.g. federal agencies, and corporate, private, and on-campus sources.

• What are the credentials of the members of the adjunct or part-time faculty? Is the department’s use of that faculty appropriate?

• What is the current state of faculty morale? Is there consensus within the department or program about its goals and policies? Is departmental leadership effective? Are burdens, responsibilities, rewards, and privileges equitably distributed? Are junior faculty members’ interests respected? Are compensation levels, teaching loads, and working conditions commensurate with the quality of each faculty member? Does the department have difficulty retaining faculty, and/or is that a potential problem?
• Are junior faculty members mentored adequately on the development of their careers? Is their academic progress reviewed periodically?

• How is the teaching of faculty members (including adjunct and part time members) assessed, and what sort of mentoring and support is provided (if any)?

**Undergraduate Program**

• How does the character and quality of the undergraduate major and minor programs compare with those at comparable institutions? What, if anything, is distinctive about them? How well do they prepare students for serious graduate study? For teaching in the schools? For other occupations related to the field? Does the department adequately monitor and assess student outcomes?

• To what extent are undergraduate course offerings utilized by non-majors?

• How large is the department’s instructional responsibility in the form of service courses to the college. How effective are they?

• How do undergraduates, particularly majors, feel about the department and its courses? How accessible are faculty outside the classroom? How adequate is undergraduate advising? Are there opportunities for undergraduates to become involved in research, creative, or scholarly activity?

• Is there evidence that the department engages in systematic assessment of student learning outcomes? Does the department use an appropriate mix of direct and indirect assessment procedures? Is there evidence that the department has used program assessment review to make programmatic, curricular, and pedagogical enhancements in the program?

**Graduate Program (if relevant)**

• How does the character and quality of the graduate program, including its curriculum and degree requirements, compare with those at comparable institutions? What, if anything, is distinctive about it? How well does it prepare students for research, for teaching, and for non-academic careers?
• How does the quality of graduate students compare with those at other institutions? How rigorous are admissions standards? How effective are recruiting methods? How might they be improved?

• How effective is the advising system? How helpful are faculty in directing student research? What, if anything, is done to foster a scholarly community of faculty and graduate students within the department? What is the state of graduate student morale?

• What are the procedures for aiding the placement of graduates in appropriate academic or professional positions?

**Resources and Facilities**

• How adequate are the classrooms, laboratories, faculty offices, technical support, computer and audio-visual facilities, and their maintenance? Are conditions in these areas improving or deteriorating?

• Are the library holdings and facilities and other research resources in this field adequate to the needs of faculty and students? Are conditions in these areas improving or deteriorating?

• Is the secretarial, clerical, and technical support staff adequate to the needs of the programs and faculty? Is the allocation of funds for expenses other than salaries adequate?

• Are interdepartmental research facilities utilized by the faculty? Identify whether there are specific areas where increased investment in such facilities might be particularly effective in increasing research or scholarly activity.

• How does the college’s level of support for research and scholarship compare to the support provided to peer departments at other universities?

**General Conclusions**

• How well does the department distribute its interest, energies, and resources among undergraduate and graduate (if relevant) education, advising, individual research, collaborative research, and college service and governance? Are its efforts skewed disproportionately in one direction? Is the department making the best possible use of its resources?

• How does the department or program fare in comparison with its counterparts in comparable institutions? What is unique about the department or program?

• Are there important steps that should be taken to maintain and/or to improve the unit’s quality?
### Appendix C – A Partial List of Information Utilized and Likely Sources

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<td>SPD – Average SAT Scores, HS average, Average Class Rank Percentile</td>
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<td>SPD – Retention/Persistence rates by major</td>
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