Guidelines for

External Departmental Reviews

Washington University
Arts & Sciences

July 2013
Departmental Reviews are overseen by the Academic Planning Committee (APC) and the Dean of the Faculty of Arts & Sciences. The Dean identifies the departments to be reviewed in counsel with the department chair and the Academic Planning Committee. Typically departments are reviewed on a 10-12 year cycle, though reviews may be more or less frequent depending on circumstances. The purpose is fourfold:

1. to assess strengths, weaknesses and opportunities;
2. to engage the department in defining both short term and long term goals
3. to develop short term and long term plans for achieving those goals
4. to contribute to Arts & Sciences-wide decision making and development of priorities.

It is important that departmental reviews are structured as a serious assessment, and that the goals that are set are both obtainable as well as realistic for Washington University. The composition of the review team is therefore critical and must include individuals who can respond dispassionately, with expertise in the discipline and with a broad sense of the realities facing higher education and research institutions such as ours.

I. Department Self Study

Departments will prepare a self-study in the form of a written report to the APC, Dean, and the external review team. The self-study is usually organized and written during the two semesters prior to the scheduled review. Reviews will be scheduled either in the fall or spring semester.

This report should be an honest self-assessment by the department on its strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats. To the extent possible data on comparable departments at comparable universities should be included. The report should be no more than 30 pages, with appendices as appropriate.

In most cases an executive committee is formed within the department to assist the chair and to ensure department-wide input in the process.

The following topics should be covered:

Section 1: The Current Picture

1. Faculty Development
   A. A history of development over the past decade (include hiring, promotion, departures etc.)
   B. Current demographic breakdown of the department (rank, gender, race, and years since Ph.D.)
   C. Junior Faculty mentoring
   D. Letters from faculty members who voluntarily departed
   E. Any other information the chair deems relevant
2. Research and Scholarship
   A. An overview of the sub discipline clusters within the department
   B. Research Productivity – publication of articles, book chapters, edited books, monographs, etc.
   C. Grant activity
   D. Major awards, service, and other activities to the profession
   E. Citation analysis (science and social science departments)
   F. Rankings
   G. Chair’s view of discipline’s perception of department
   H. Any other information that the chair deems relevant

2. Teaching
   A. The undergraduate program including information on:
      1. majors, degrees awarded and course enrollments over a ten year timeline (note: these data can be obtained from the Dean’s office)
      2. participation in honors and capstones
      3. class sizes at introductory and advanced levels
      4. requirements for major
      5. post-graduation activities of majors to the extent known
   B. The graduate program including internal and comparative information on:
      1. applicant pool and quality of graduate students
      2. strengths and weaknesses in recruiting
      3. attrition, numbers completing degree, time to degree
      4. stipends, awards, grants and fellowships won by graduate students
      5. placement of graduates
   C. University College
      1. undergraduate classes
      2. graduate programs, if any
   D. Departmental policies regarding:
      1. teaching load (by faculty level; tenure track, instructors, adjuncts)
      2. actions taken when teaching evaluations are poor or enrollments decline
      3. the balance between service courses and courses required for the major, graduate level courses (how the curriculum is managed)
      4. faculty leave policies and management
      5. the criteria for assigning, evaluating, and mentoring TA’s
   E. Assessment of student learning: courses and majors.
   F. Activities related to enhancing teaching and pedagogy
   G. Any other information the chair deems relevant

3. Facilities
   A. An account of existing space usage and issues relevant to the department’s current work and future plans

5. Role in Arts & Sciences/ the University
   A. Involvement of faculty in interdisciplinary research and teaching programs
B. Involvement of faculty in committee work, service, leadership roles
C. Any other information the chair deems relevant

Section 2: Strengths
1. In rank order, list the top 5 to 10 strengths of the department and briefly discuss

Section 3: Weaknesses and threats
1. In rank order, list the department’s top 5 to 10 weaknesses/threats and briefly discuss

Section 4: Opportunities
1. In rank order, list the top 5 to 10 opportunities and briefly discuss

Section 5: Goals/Strategic Planning
An assessment of significant changes over the last decade and what needs to be done over the next five to ten years in the following areas. The self study will specify:

1. Goals and strategies with regard to faculty development
2. Goals and strategies with regard to teaching (at graduate and undergraduate levels)
3. Goals and strategies with regard to scholarship and place in the discipline
4. Priorities and their rationale with regard to faculty recruitment
5. Goals and strategies with regard to diversity and the hiring and retention of underrepresented minorities
6. Goals and strategies with regard to role in Arts & Sciences/University
7. Metrics that can be used annually to track progress towards goals
8. Strategic questions or issues for which the department seeks advice from the external reviewers

Section 6: Questions from the Department for the Reviewers
1. List specific areas where the department would appreciate advice from the review team
2. List specific questions on which you would like the reviewers to focus

Appendices
1. Curriculum Vitae of all faculty members – to be made available to reviewers electronically.
2. Any other data the chair deems relevant
II. External Reviewers

Reviews are typically planned at least one academic year prior to the arrival of the review committee. A longer planning horizon is often required to identify and schedule the review team members. Reviews are planned jointly by the Dean’s office, selected members of the Academic Planning Committee and the department chair.

Selection of External Reviewers
1. Each department should provide the Dean with 2-3 names within each category listed in preferred order, as well as justifications for its choices.
   
   A. Researchers at the cutting edge of the discipline at comparable universities
   B. Former or current journal editor, NSF/NEH or private foundation program head, or department chair at a comparable institution
   C. Former or current high-level administrator at a comparable university
2. The Dean will appoint a Washington University faculty member, not from the department being reviewed and preferably a member of the APC, who will serve as a member of the review team.
3. The Dean may add to the department’s list in consultation with the department.
4. The department chair, with prior approval from the dean, will make first contact and check willingness to serve and availability.
5. The final committee will consist of 3 to 5 external members with one member serving as chair.

Preparation for Visit
1. A subcommittee of the Academic Planning Committee (APC) will review a draft of the department’s self study and make suggestions on areas to address. The Department will revise the report before release to the reviewers.

2. The Dean will send a formal letter of invitation to the committee confirming the details and including the department’s self study, a reference to the department’s web site, a note about access to faculty CVs (to be available online), any documents that the Dean’s office or the APC produces, a tentative schedule for the three day campus visit, and a list of expectations and questions to be addressed in a brief, final report. The report should also include recommendations. Reports should be submitted 2 weeks after the site visit.

3. The chair of the external review committee may request additional material and suggest changes to the schedule.
**The Visit**

1. The committee should plan to be on campus for two and a half days.

2. The visit should begin with a meeting with the Dean and a subset of the APC, making clear the goals of the visit. This usually takes place in a dinner session the night before the review begins. This meeting should emphasize that committee members are not here to serve as agents of the department but to provide a review that will set priorities for enhancing the department in a manner consistent with available resources. (Reviews that simply state the department needs more faculty and more resources are not useful.)

3. The external committee should make every effort to interview each member of the department, along with representative samples of undergraduate and graduate students. Meetings with faculty members can be in groups, but also may be individually if requested by either the committee or faculty.

4. The committee should be given time for confidential discussions during the visit.

5. After a full day and a half (more if necessary), the Dean and a subset of the APC will hold an exit interview with the committee at which time the review team will present its initial findings.

6. The Dean will then meet alone with the external review committee for the opportunity to discuss any confidential matters at the review’s conclusion.

7. A written report will be prepared by the committee and sent to the Dean within three weeks of the visit.

**Conclusion**

1. The Report will be shared with the APC.

2. After receiving input from the APC, the Dean will meet with the department chair to discuss the reviewer’s final report.

3. In consultation with the department members, the department chair will send the Dean a written response to the Final Report emphasizing the short term goals (changes to be made over the next year) and long term goals (changes to be made over the next five to ten years).

4. The Response will be shared with the APC.

5. The Dean and the APC will evaluate the response and interact with the department as needed.

6. The department will provide an update report assessing progress since the review once every two years until its next scheduled review.