External Program Review Guidelines

Most institutions with a robust program review include an external review as part of the process. External reviewers conduct a scholarly impartial evaluation of the quality and effectiveness of an academic program in relation to appropriate disciplinary expectations and practices. The external review is also meant to offer an impartial set of recommendations concerning opportunities for improvement in the program's curriculum, pedagogy, assessment practices, and scholarship. For a full description of the broader program review process see appropriate section in the Faculty Manual.

Team Membership

Typically, an external review team may consist of one to two tenured faculty members in the discipline from other institutions. Wittenberg's program under review will provide a list of potential reviewers suited to evaluate the program to the Provost. The Provost will then select the reviewer(s) in consultation with program faculty to ensure that all program faculty have the opportunity to give feedback on the recommended evaluator(s). Some professional organizations maintain a list of potential program reviewers and/or can provide advice on external evaluations.

Given Wittenberg's five-year cycle for program review, external reviews will be required once every two cycles or once every ten years. After the program submits its program review 5th-year report in Year 5, program faculty will begin to plan for the external review. With reviewers identified and approved by the Provost, the program will submit the Program Review 5th-Year Report to the external reviewers prior to a visit. The external review visit will take place in the fall of Year 5. This timing allows the Program Review and Assessment Committee time to read the external review during the spring of Year 5 and include any pertinent information in its final evaluation of the program.

Required resources for external review include reviewer stipends, travel, and on-campus events. Funds for external review are budgeted by the Provost's Office. Bills, invoices, and receipts for food and lodging should be submitted to the Provost's Office.

Preparing for an External Review Visit

1. Six months (April) prior to the start of Year 5 submission of the Program Review 5th-Yr Report, program leadership submits a list of 3-5 potential reviewers to the Provost. Preferably reviewers will come from primarily undergraduate liberal arts institutions similar to Wittenberg when possible (e.g., NCAC institutions, ELCA institutions, GLCA institutions)
2. In April and May, the Provost consults with program faculty and selects the reviewer(s)
3. Program faculty draft a preliminary schedule for the visit in consultation with the Provost's office and shares the schedule with the Program Review and Assessment Committee
4. Provost's Office contracts the external reviewer(s)
5. Program faculty submits the Program Review 5th-Year Report by September 1st of Year 5.
6. External review visits could start as soon as one month after submission of the Program Review 5th-Year Report and as late as December 10th.
7. The Provost's Office sends the Program Review 5th-Year Report to the identified external reviewer(s); at minimum the external reviewer(s) should have 30 calendar days to review the Program Review 5th-Year Report before the scheduled visit
8. Program faculty meets with the Provost to set expectations for the program review process/visit.

Sample Schedule for an External Review Visit

1. At the beginning of the visit, an initial meeting with the department's chair and/or program director to discuss the Program Review 5th-Year Report and to review the visit schedule
2. Next a meeting with the Provost to review the Program Review 5th-Year Report and to set expectations for the program review process

The following may take place in any order that best suits the program area.

3. Individual meetings with program faculty, including tenured, tenure-track, and non-tenured (adjunct or visiting) faculty, and professors of practice
4. Meetings with faculty members of departments with whom there is regular interaction with the program being reviewed (e.g., shared majors, interdisciplinary programs, program advisory committees, etc.)
5. Meeting with students (e.g. majors and minors)
6. Meetings with the Program Review and Assessment Committee (or at minimum the committee chair) and other committees as deemed appropriate by the program and/or Provost
7. Facilities tour
8. Schedule could include a set aside time for external reviewer(s) to begin outlining the report
9. A concluding meeting with the Provost, Department Chair/Program Director, for a discussion of preliminary findings and recommendations

After the External Review Visit

1. The report from the external reviewer(s) is due within 30 calendar days of the visit, but not later than January 15th. It is submitted directly to the program leadership and Provost, and subsequently shared with all program faculty.
2. All receipts and invoices from the visit should be sent to the Provost's Office within 30 calendar days of the visit
3. Once the report is received, program faculty will have a chance to meet with the Program Review and Assessment Committee to discuss the feedback and respond to the report. This conversation should take place by February 15th.

External Review Report

One tangible deliverable from the external review is a formal report based on the program's Program Review 5th-Year Report, interviews from the site visit, facilities tour, and any other evidence requested and/or provided. The report should address the following elements and criteria:

I.   Overall Profile

An evaluation of the coherence and appropriateness of the program's current mission and its contribution to the mission of the institution; its specific contribution to other interdisciplinary programs or the general education program; and the program's progress on its goals including its response to its previous program review. (Program Review 5th-Year Report A, D, F)

II.   Faculty

An evaluation of the appropriateness of faculty training and credentials for achieving the mission of the program; its policies and practices for evaluating and improving the quality of faculty instruction; faculty diversity; the balance of teaching, scholarship, and service achieved by the program's faculty; the quality and quantity of faculty scholarship in light of its teaching and service obligations; faculty mentoring practices; and faculty morale. (Program Review 5th-Year Report C, E, G, M)

III.   Curriculum and Pedagogy

An evaluation of the appropriateness of the program's curriculum and pedagogy in relation to accepted disciplinary expectations and national trends; changes to the curriculum and pedagogy since the previous program review; the extent to which the department offers experiential learning to students; the use of students in research; availability of appropriate student internships and other co-curricular learning; and availability, quality, and breadth of practical learning activities such as colloquia, workshops, productions, ensembles, etc. (Program Review 5th-Year Report B, D)

IV.   Assessment of Program Student Learning Outcomes

An evaluation of the program's assessment practices for its programmatic learning outcomes; changes in assessment practices since the previous program review; level of faculty participation in assessment of student learning; the richness and suitability of the program's evidence of student learning on the program's learning outcomes; and the quality of the changes made as a result of the assessment of student learning. (Program Review 5th-Year Report H)

V.   Students Success

An overall evaluation of the quality of the education and preparation received by students; student demand for the program; appropriateness and success of advising procedures; completion rates of students; job placement of students after graduation; student enrollment in graduate school; the role of students in programmatic decision-making; and student morale. (Program Review 5th-Year Report G, M)

VI.   Resources

An evaluation of the adequacy of the budget available to the program; adequacy and appropriateness of the number of faculty in delivering program offerings; adequacy and appropriateness of educational infrastructure (e.g., classrooms, laboratories, technologies, study areas, libraries); any other interdisciplinary or extra-disciplinary agreements and endeavors affiliated with the department; and the adequacy of staff, student worker, and student researcher support for the program. (Program Review 5th-Year Report C, G, K, M)

VII.   Recommendations

An evaluation of the particular strengths and challenges of the program; ways the program faculty can address its challenges; ways the program faculty can improve its academic program; and ways the institution can better support the program and program faculty in fulfilling its academic mission. (Program Review 5th-Year Report I, J, K, L)