

Program Review for Departments and Programs

Program review is a cyclical process to continuously ensure quality and enhance improvement of academic departments and programs in service to the College's mission.

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1. Definition and Guiding Principles of Program Review

Program review in Academic Affairs is largely defined by two processes: self-study and external review. Self-study requires departments and programs to engage in a reflective process of self-assessment. The self-study document should provide a thorough analysis of the department's strengths, weaknesses, challenges, and opportunities, and will articulate an academic vision for the department over the next decade. External review rests on evaluation by appropriate faculty or administrators outside the College and holistically examines the department or program. The external review will offer recommendations to the College on how the department or program can achieve its educational objectives, improve the student experience and student success, and contribute to the intellectual life of the College. In addition, program review is linked to institutional accreditation. Occidental College is accredited by the [WASC Senior College and University Commission](#) (WSCUC), and its [accreditation process, since 2013, expects three features of an institution's program review process](#): (i) outcomes-based assessment of student learning and development, (ii)

evidence-based claims and decision-making, and (iii) use of program review results to inform planning and budgeting.

2. Overview of the Periodic Process

Program reviews are conducted on a decennial cycle. The Dean of the College confirms the [schedule for external reviews](#) in consultation with Chairs and the Academic Planning Committee (APC) and the office of Assessment and Accreditation.

Department chairs or program directors work with the Dean of College's office to coordinate the timing of the visit within the scheduled academic year by the external review team. Departments and programs may also request from the Dean of the College an accelerated or interim program review (such as after a substantial curricular revision). The Dean of the College's office notifies the department chair or program director, usually in the fall semester before the academic year that the unit is slated for program review. Departments and programs will receive support and guidance for the self-study process from the office of the Dean of the College, the office of Accreditation and Institutional Assessment, and the office of Institutional Research, which will provide internal department, program, and/or institutional data and materials needed for the self-study. Specifically, in the fall semester before the academic year of the program review, the Faculty Director of Academic Assessment will reach out to the department chair or program director to discuss that unit's upcoming program review process. At that time, the chair or director is informed that standardized departmental data is provided by APC annually in August/September. If, however, a department or program wishes to consider unique or specific evidence in their self-study, such data requests must be made to the office of Institutional Research by early April before the academic year of the program review.

The chair or director will initiate the self-study process, which will involve T3 and Resident faculty, students, staff, and alumni from the department. The self-study document is shared with a team of invited, external reviewers assembled by the Dean of College's Office in consultation with the department or program. After their visit, the

external review team will submit a report to the College summarizing their observations and recommendations. The outcome of the process is an Action Plan for the department or program, developed in consultation with the department, the Academic Planning Committee, and the Deans' Office, following deliberation and discussion of the self-study and external review report.

Program review consist of seven primary steps:

(1) The department or program conducts a self-study and produces a report that is reviewed by the Dean of the College and the office of Assessment and Accreditation. The self-study is sent to the external review team 2-3 weeks prior to the campus visit. (Year # 1);

(2) During a two-day visit to the Occidental campus, meeting with many campus constituencies, the external review team conducts an independent and in-depth review of the department or program. (Year # 1);

(3) The external review team issues a report of its findings and recommendations, which is sent to the Dean of the College, who in turn distributes it to the office of Assessment and Accreditation and the department or program Chair. The report should be made available to all T3 and Resident faculty members in the department or program. An opportunity to correct errors-in-fact is afforded to the department or program and the Dean's Office. The department or program may also prepare an optional, written response to the external review for the Dean of the College. (Year # 1);

(4) The external team report (corrected for errors-in-fact, if needed) and the optional response by a department or program (if given) are sent to the APC for review. The APC then drafts a set of questions arising from these documents for the department's or program's consideration. The Chair of the department or program submits responses to these questions to APC and is provided an opportunity to meet with APC in person to discuss their response. Following this exchange, the APC advises the Dean of the

College by providing suggestions on how best to respond to the recommendations of the external review team. (Year #2);

(5) The Dean of the College prepares an Action Plan for the department or program based on the documents and APC deliberations. (Year # 2);

(6) The Dean of the College shares the self-study, the external review report, the department's response (if provided), the written exchange between APC and the department addressing APC's questions arising from the review documents, and the Action Plan with the Academic Affairs and Technology Committee of the Board of Trustees for their information and discussion. (Year # 2);

(7) Department or program annual assessment reports are submitted to the Dean of College and office of Assessment and Accreditation in years 2-5 and 7-10 of the cycle. However, five years after the external review team visit, the department or program formally assesses its progress towards achieving the recommendations arising out of the Action Plan through a mid-cycle progress report (MCPR). The department or program sends their MCPR to the office of Assessment and Accreditation. (Year #6);

The program review process concludes after step 7, and then the cycle renews. (after Year #10).

3. Self-study

The department or program's self-study represents an assessment of its current status and articulates a vision for the future. The self-study serves to present the breadth, balance, and depth of the curriculum and associated programming with respect to the current state and practices of the discipline. It should discuss both the details of its curricular structure and offerings while assessing their strengths and limitations using assessments through multiple measures. The self-study will present an

evidence-based assessment of student learning and articulate its aspirations for academic equity and student success. The document is strengthened with perspectives from students and alumni as well as all faculty and staff related to the department or program. The self-study can pose or address the kinds of questions, issues, and challenges that the department or program wants to communicate to the external reviewers, the Dean of the College, and the APC. In sum, the department or program will conduct a self-study that will provide the external reviewers with (1) extensive information about the faculty, curriculum, co-curricular programming, facilities, students, and alumni, and (2) a holistic understanding of the vision for the department's or program's future. The self-study should involve the participation of all T3 and Resident faculty members of the department or program including those who are on leave. In addition, in compliance with WSCUC standards, the self-study must include an analysis of student learning and development.

Planning and Self Study (PSS) is the digital platform used for assessment, program review, strategic planning and accreditation; it is described in the Appendix D. Chairs may generate their department's self study in any program (MS Word, Google Docs, ...), but must ultimately be copied/uploaded into the PSS platform.

Topics covered in the self-study (see Appendices for guidance on the structure of the self study and the external review team's report) will normally include:

(a) The College: a brief introduction to the College, a description of its mission and a concise statement of the priorities of the current Strategic Plan within the context of the department/program;

(b) The department or program description with context: the number of faculty and support personnel, the general description of departmental and interdisciplinary programs that the department supports, office and laboratory space, departmental grants, gifts, prizes, or collections and publications about the department, if any. An explanation of how the department's curriculum allows the department to achieve these

goals; this should be in narrative form but also may be accompanied by a visual representation (e.g., a "curriculum map");

(c) Faculty & Staff: faculty ranks and classifications, years in service, areas of specialization, research interests, publication records, grant support, courses taught (both departmental and college-wide), consulting activities, etc. A *curriculum vitae* should be provided for each faculty member as well as a brief statement of future scholarly or curricular plans. A description of staff and how these positions support student success and the goals of the program;

(d) Curriculum and Pedagogy: degree requirements, programs for departmental and interdepartmental majors, Core Program, and writing requirements, honors programs, course descriptions (syllabi), enrollment figures for the past 5 years (enrollment data—raw data and compiled comparison tables—are available with support from the offices of Assessment and Accreditation and Institutional Research), future course revisions, and curricular plans;

(e) Description of the role and value of the discipline or interdisciplinary field for a liberal arts college education;

(f) Academic Equity and Student Success: The department or program's student learning goals and outcomes, and how these are aligned with college-wide learning goals. Departments or programs should also include a discussion of their equity and justice efforts and outcomes.

(g) Information about how faculty research and professional activity inform the curriculum, department, and student development;

(h) Identification of the current and aspirant: faculty, staff, curriculum, space and facilities plans and other needs for the next ten years in order to meet the department's goals; The department's or program's resources and needs, including material holdings (library resources), equipment and other facilities, and any support staff (or needs for

support staff); future plans or aspirations for the curriculum, student learning outcomes, and assessment; (i) Evidence: (i) outcomes-based assessment of student learning and development, (ii) evidence-based claims and decision-making, and (iii) use of program review results to inform planning and budgeting;

(j) Questions and opportunities: To assist the department or program in planning for the future, it should take the opportunity of the program review to seek the advice of the external review team regarding any questions, issues or concerns it may have; and,

(k) Appendix: An appendix that contains all recent annual assessment reports by the department or program is included to show continual improvement in the student learning or success outcomes of the department or program.

4. External Review: The Team's Role and Visit

The role of the external review team is essential in the program review process. The team will provide the College with an independent, broader understanding of the department or program that will

- ensure that the academic program being reviewed is current in its disciplinary or interdisciplinary focus and positioned within the larger academic community
- promote understanding of similar, aspirant programs at other institutions
- address issues that may come to light during the self-study or site visit
- inform a department or program Action Plan in response to the external review report

After the site visit (typically within 4-6 weeks of the visit), the external review team members are asked to submit a report to the Dean of the College's Office. The report summarizes their visit and recommendations for the department or program.

Selection of the external reviewers Approximately one year in advance of the anticipated site visit, the department or program will submit to the Dean of the College a

list of 8-10 names of experts who can represent a diverse team, as well as a range of diverse scholarship within the field, and any relevant sub-disciplinary specialities. With the future of the department or program in mind, the submitted list will include a brief description of each individual's expertise and contact information. It is helpful to prioritize the nominated experts into teams, indicating alternates and recognizing that it is typically easiest to recruit reviewers from nearby colleges or universities. Final selections are determined by the Dean of the College, in consultation with the Chair. The Dean of the College may frame specific charges to the external review team, often with input from the APC. The Dean of the College's Office will pay all transportation, lodging, and meal expenses of the reviewers, as well as provide an honorarium for each reviewer.

The Visit Planning for the external review is a valuable component of the program review process. Ideally, faculty, staff, and students participate in setting goals and developing strategies in an inclusive, transparent manner. Sound planning practices include retreats and other in-depth discussions among all faculty and staff about program direction, priorities, and needs. The external review team visits campus, tours departmental facilities, interviews department or program faculty and students, and meets with the Dean of the College, the associate deans, one of whom serves as the APC Chair, and the office of Assessment and Accreditation. See Appendix B for guidance on the practical aspects of organizing the site visit. Following the site visit, the external review team submits a report (see suggested guidance in Appendix D) to the Dean of the College. It is important to note that the review team should meet all T3 and Resident faculty in the department or program in private conferences so that all faculty are comfortable providing candid feedback to the review team.

5. Ensure Quality and Continuous Improvement

Once the external review report is received by the Dean of the College, it will be forwarded to the office of Assessment and Accreditation and the department or program Chair. The Chair will in turn share the report with T3 and Resident faculty members in

the department or program. An opportunity to correct errors-in-fact in the report is afforded the Dean of the College and the department or program.

Optional letter from the department/program responding to the external review

report After reading the external review report, the department or program may opt to craft a brief written response to the review team's findings and recommendations, after any errors-in-fact are corrected. The letter should be signed by all the T3 and Resident faculty members in the department or program, acknowledging that they have read both the external team's report and the department or program's letter of response. Any faculty member who does not concur with the contents of the letter must be invited to attach a letter of dissent.

Iterative discourse between the Academic Planning Committee and the

department or program The self-study, the external review report (except for those sections or appendices that deal with personnel matters or are of a confidential nature), and the optional department/program letter will be submitted to the APC by the Dean's Office. To inform the Action Plan and contribute to long-term academic planning, the APC will generate a set of questions that are shared with the department or program through the Chair. The Chair is advised to consult with the members of the department or program when preparing responses to the APC. After submission of its responses to APC queries, a meeting with the Chair and members of APC will follow to discuss the responses in an iterative dialogue to advance the goals of the department or program. Following this meeting and subsequent APC deliberations, the Dean of the College will document the outcome of the process in the form of an Action Plan shared with the department or program and kept on file in the Dean's Office and the Office of Assessment and Accreditation.

The Action Plan The Dean of the College prepares an Action Plan that presents recommendations for future implementation by the department or program. The Action Plan is based on (1) the set of program review documents (self-study, external review report, any optional response by the department or program, APC questions, and the

department/program reply), (2) the iterative dialogue between APC and the department or program, and (3) APC deliberations. The APC will have the opportunity to read and make suggestions to the Dean's summary of the APC deliberations, as needed, to ensure the plan reflects APC deliberations before the letter is shared with the Chair. The Chair should disseminate the Action Plan to all T3 and Resident faculty members of the department or program. As program review cycles are completed, the Dean of the College submits to the Academic Affairs and Technology Committee of the Board of Trustees all documents generated by the program review process for their information and discussion. In addition, the Dean of the College updates this committee with the status of program review within Academic Affairs on a regular basis.

The Mid-Cycle Progress Report (MCPR) from the department or program During the fifth year after the external review (year # 6 where the year of the external review campus visit counts as year # 1), the department or program prepares a concise mid-cycle progress report (MCPR) on its implementation of the Action Plan. The MCPR should be organized so that each recommendation of the Action Plan is stated separately and followed by a description of the actions the department/program has taken to address each one. The report should describe any steps taken (or planned) to assess improvements in outcomes related to these changes. All the T3 and Resident faculty members of the department/program should sign this report indicating that they have been consulted in its preparation. Except for extraordinary reasons, this report should not bring up issues or needs beyond those already addressed in the external review. The MCPR is sent to the office of Assessment and Accreditation. This mid-cycle progress assessment occurs *in lieu* of an annual assessment report in that year (Year #6).

Appendices

Appendix A. Guide to Organizing the Self Study

I. The Department or Program Overview

Provide a brief description of the department or program and its mission and goals/vision. Consider including: significant historical and/or recent developments, size and scope, course load (both majors and non-majors), student characteristics (enrollment counts, number of current majors, gender and ethnicity, grade-point averages, *etc.*), faculty and staff characteristics (e.g., degrees, years of professional experience, publications, unique skills, involvement in campus initiatives, *etc.*), and evidence for the needs of the department (in support of general education, as a vital component for a liberal arts education, to fill an external need, *etc.*). In addition, discuss any known issues or areas in which the external reviewers should focus their attention. Also, in this section, please provide a separate document detailing your response to your previous program review.

Examples of Evidence: Copy of department response to previous external review; enrollment/majors data from the department's Data Set provided by the office of Institutional Research; copy of previous external review and self study

II. Goal Achievement

Provide evidence for the achievement of program learning goals, such as: direct learning assessments, demonstrations of student work that shows evidence of achievement, alignments of learning outcomes and course content, survey data that demonstrates student understanding of the program's mission and their perception of whether goals are achieved, *etc.* If findings show that goals are not being met, discuss preliminary recommendations for the most critical areas to address.

Examples of Evidence: Assessment Plans and Reports; Examples of Rubrics; Assessment Data; Survey Data

III. Curriculum Review and Its Relevance

Provide an assessment of the current curriculum, considering its relevance with practice in the profession or field of study, whether its course content is up to date, the appropriateness of the units offered for the amount of work required, its relationship with peer programs at other institutions, *etc.* Specific attention might also be paid here to how the senior comprehensive or major field test requirement helps students to

integrate information, concepts, and skills in order to demonstrate the depth and breadth of their knowledge of the field.

Examples of Evidence: Examples of student work; senior comp projects; peer institution data (as relevant)

IV. Student Experience

Provide evidence for how the department is meeting student needs for academic and inclusive excellence and also possibly including: participation in community-based learning, undergraduate research, participation in co-curricular activities, case studies of student success, impact of the program (based on student placement in graduate programs, employment in professional positions, post-test results, etc.), honors and fellowships received by students, and so on. Assessment of the student experience should also include student satisfaction with access to faculty, mentoring and academic advising, and departmental community as well as course content, assignments, teaching methods and effectiveness, etc. Evidence for meeting student needs should include a program-oriented alumni survey based on the needs of the department. The program and/or departmental alumni survey should ask alumni to respond to questions about: achievement of program learning outcomes; achievement of institutional learning outcomes; satisfaction with course offerings and student-faculty engagement; satisfaction with program-related student services, equipment, and spaces; and demographic information such as graduation year, race/ethnicity, gender, current profession, graduate degree(s) pursued, etc. Supporting data can also be collected from course evaluations, as well as published surveys. The Office of Institutional Research can assist, but it is recommended that you seek support well in advance of the due date for your self-study, especially if a new alumni survey will need to be developed and implemented.

Examples of Evidence: Examples of community-engaged learning, Senior/Alumni Surveys, Job Placement; Grad School Placement; Data on alumni; Course Evaluations (as relevant); Institutional Surveys; Evident of academic equity and inclusion

V. Resource Planning

Provide an assessment of current resources required to support the achievement of the department's goals. Potential resources might include library holdings and information resources, physical facilities, support staff, network infrastructure, hardware and software, media equipment, supply budgets, office space, etc. Project future needs for the program over the next 5-8 years considering possible changes within the field, changes within the student population, potential recruiting issues, impact of technology,

etc. If germane, you may include a copy of your departmental budget documents and relevant grant related information.

Examples of Evidence: Department Budget Reports and Grants

VI. Supporting Documentation

Include as appendices the current curriculum-vitae for all program faculty, syllabi for essential courses, and the program's data portfolio. Other supporting evidence and documentation can be provided as needed.

Examples of Evidence: Syllabi for all courses, program data profile (from the office of Institutional Research), curriculum vitae of all faculty in department; any other pertinent program information. Already stored in PSS are annual assessment reports, curriculum maps, and department or program overview and outcomes.

Appendix B. A guide to the scheduling the site visit

The Faculty Director for Academic Assessment (FDAA) leads the effort to launch the program review process and schedule the two-day site visit in partnership with the Dean's Office, the Chair, and the external review team members.

Early fall semester before the academic year of the program review and site visit

- FDAA emails chairs to notify/remind them that their dept/program will undergo program review according to the approved, posted decennial cycle.

November/December before the academic year of the program review and site visit

- FDAA meets with the Chair to review the entire process and communicate the expectations of and support provided to the Chair to develop the self study and prepare for the site visit
- FDAA gives Chair a sample two-day site visit schedule
- Chair will
 - convene dept/program faculty colleagues (T3 and resident) to begin to discuss the process and what the department hopes to gain from the site visit and the external review team report
 - Consider any special data needs/alumni surveys
 - Develop list of potential external review team scholars

March/April/May before the academic year of the program review and site visit

- Chair should provide 6-10 names and contact information of possible reviewers to the Dean of the College

- Chair should make a request to the Office of Institutional Research for any special data requests (beyond the department/program profile provided to chairs by APC for T3 proposals)

April/May or summer before the academic year of the program review and site visit

FDAA should obtain the final list of 3 external review team members invited by the Dean of the College. The team will be shared with the Chair (and in turn with departmental colleagues). FDAA will spearhead the scheduling of the two-day site visit in partnership with the Dean's Office, the Chair, and the external review team members.

Appendix C. A guide to the digital platform Planning & Self Study (PSS)

Planning and Self Study (PSS) is a web-based digital platform that Oxy uses to monitor, support, and archive its assessment, program review, accreditation, and strategic planning activities. Please look [here](#) for an introduction to the platform by product's vendor Watermark (Additional Watermark digital products are also utilized by the College).

Here are instructions to Login to PSS:

To log in to PSS:

1. Go to login.watermarkinsights.com. You should see a screen like the one attached.
 1. a. If you already have a password, go ahead and log in.
 1. b. If you forgot your password OR if you are new to the system, click on Forgot Password.
 - 1.b. i. You will receive a password reset link from Watermark. [Might end up in SPAM, so if you don't see it within 10 minutes, check there.]
 - 1.c. Click on the link in the email, set up your password, and login.
2. Once you have logged in, select Planning & Self Study from the menu.



Welcome to your Watermark Product Suite

Sign In

Email

Password

Sign In

[Forgot Password](#)

Appendix D. A Guide for Organizing the External Review Team Report

The following outline for the external review team report is provided to the external review team in advance of the site visit.

1. Executive summary of the report (with cover page identifying the department and the external reviewers, and the date of the report)
2. Brief description of the site visit
3. Discussion of the findings from the self study and the site visit.

The main body of the report can be organized in whatever manner is most suitable for the unit and its self study focus. Some reports discuss issues and conclusions/recommendations in the body, while others only discuss issues and save recommendations for the end. While either style is appropriate, we suggest all recommendations be summarized at the end, even if they are given in the body of the report. The report should generally comment on the following topics:

- Department Mission and goals
- Faculty
- Students: including academic equity and student success
- Curriculum and pedagogy
- Achievement of goals or student learning outcomes: evidence, progress, and aspirations
- Resources: support personnel, budget, space, library, facilities, *etc.*

4. Specific recommendations based on the findings

To inform the department/program Action Plan as a forward-looking document that serves to enhance academic quality and excellence, it is helpful if the recommendations are action-oriented with suggested, measurable results or outcomes.

5. Concluding remarks

6. Confidential addendum to the Dean of the College - OPTIONAL

While the majority of reports do not require one, reviewers also have the option to add a confidential addendum. Any observations related to a specific individual should be placed in the confidential addendum.

7. Appendices - This part of the self study is optional.