

Guidelines for Academic Program Review at USC

August 14, 2006

I. Introduction

Academic program review consists of on-going, high quality peer reviews of all the University's academic units and programs offering graduate degrees. The purpose of program review is to foster academic excellence at all levels, to determine how to raise quality to a higher level, and to provide guidance for administrative decisions in support of continual future improvement.

UCAR reviews will be focused on programs, departments and schools offering graduate degree programs. Each review will include all graduate degree and certificate programs offered by the unit being reviewed. As Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs, the Provost is responsible for choosing the programs to be reviewed. The schedule of reviews and the specific configuration of units to be reviewed will be set by the Provost in consultation with the appropriate deans. Reviews may focus on individual departments, clusters of departments, schools, or interdisciplinary groups that cut across departmental or school lines. University reviews will occur on a ten-year cycle; it is expected that units will undergo other reviews, either by accrediting organizations or through internal processes, more frequently. As developed, a schedule of future reviews will be posted on the UCAR website, but is subject to change. Funding for program reviews will be provided centrally by the Office of the Provost.

Program review is not an unrestrained opportunity to request additional resources. Every unit to be reviewed will prepare a self-study containing a comprehensive plan for improvement over the next five years. The process is intended to assist an academic unit in understanding its current status so that it can establish clear priorities for achieving excellence or becoming eminent in its field. A critique of each unit's plans for achieving excellence and recommendations for constructive change will be provided by faculty peers from the best programs in the field at other leading universities and by faculty from other units at USC.

Program reviews at USC have the following characteristics:

1. Reviews provide a concise, honest appraisal of an academic unit's strengths and weaknesses.
2. Reviews are forward looking. While assessment of a program's current status is important, priorities for continual future improvement are of greatest concern.
3. Reviews are evaluative, not just descriptive. Plans for improvement require academic judgments about the quality of the faculty, academic program(s), students, curricula, resources and future directions.
4. Reviews incorporate expert assessment provided by reviewers from other institutions of high quality.

Academic program reviews are independent of any other type of review. However, units that are separately accredited may request that the UCAR review occur at a time most convenient to the accreditation cycle.

II. Unit Self-Studies and Responsibilities

Broad faculty participation in all phases of the review is strongly encouraged. Program review begins with a process leading to the drafting of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the unit to be reviewed, the appropriate dean(s) and the Provost. The MOU will include the charge to be given to the Review Committee, which must be consistent with these guidelines but may also include questions specifically relevant to the unit. The MOU also outlines the general composition of the Review Committee, including its size, the range of disciplines and/or sub-disciplines to be represented, and the collaborating units that might be included in the site visit. Although the MOU should be arrived at through a dialogue between the parties concerned, the Provost or the Provost's designee will make the final decision on the questions that will guide the review. It is not necessary for the MOU to include issues tailored to the unit under review, and the review itself may raise additional issues during the process of assessing a unit's strengths and weaknesses.

The academic unit's comprehensive self-study will serve as the basis for self-assessment and for identifying future directions and opportunities. The self-study will follow the format established in these guidelines and will also address any additional questions raised in the MOU. The text of the self-study should not exceed 20 pages. Data and descriptive material should be placed in appendices.

The self-study must include a strategic plan for the next five years. The self-study process is intended to assist the faculty of the unit under review in establishing priorities and identifying strategies for achieving the goal of academic excellence or eminence in the field, including strategies for bringing about marked improvement in significant rankings. Deans and heads of units under review should identify institutions against which they plan to benchmark the quality of their units and outline the sequence of steps the unit will follow to attain its desired increase in reputation.

III. The University Committee on Academic Review (UCAR)

The University Committee on Academic Review (UCAR) oversees the process of academic program review. UCAR is a permanent, standing university committee appointed by the President. Recommendations for membership will be solicited from a variety of sources, including academic deans and the Executive Board of the Academic Senate. Each year, the President will appoint one member of the committee to serve as chair of UCAR. UCAR consists of two groups: the UCAR Executive Committee and members of the UCAR Panel.

The UCAR Executive Committee, consisting of roughly 12-15 members including faculty and ex officio members, will provide oversight for each review by:

1. Serving as a resource for the Chair of UCAR, who leads the Executive Committee and may consult members of the Executive Committee for recommendations on individuals to serve on the Review Committee established for each review.

2. Reviewing and assessing the report of the Review Committee, which will be presented to the UCAR executive committee by the internal RC member(s). Any critiques arising from this review process should be incorporated in the memorandum that accompanies the transmittal of the report to the Provost.
3. Advising the Provost on any modifications to the review process that may prove necessary.

The UCAR Panel will serve as a pool of potential Review Committee members. In addition to the nominations described above, the Executive Committee may nominate members for the UCAR Panel. Given the time-consuming nature of the review process, UCAR Panel members should ordinarily serve on a Review Committee only once in any two year period.

IV. Review Committees (RCs)

For each program to be reviewed, a Review Committee (RC) will be appointed by the Provost upon the recommendation of UCAR. Each RC is charged with conducting a comprehensive review of a specific academic unit and preparing a report for transmission to the Provost through UCAR.

1. Review Committees will include a combination of internal and external faculty. Each RC will consist of one or more senior members of the USC faculty and two or more external consultants who are prominent faculty members at other universities. The number of internal faculty and external reviewers should be influenced, in part, by the breadth of the unit's scholarly focus, including its interdisciplinary breadth and methodological diversity, and the background and training of the reviewers. For example, when the unit under review employs various core methods or requires diverse core experiences, it might be appropriate to expand the number of internal faculty and/or to choose additional external reviewers to fully cover the unit's interests and activities. External reviewers will typically be from the discipline(s) represented by the unit being reviewed, but may occasionally be from a related academic discipline.
2. The internal member(s) of the Review Committee is recommended by the UCAR Executive Committee from the UCAR Panel.
 - a. No member of a program under review may serve on the program's RC. This includes faculty with joint appointments in the unit under review. Faculty with courtesy appointments in the unit should also typically be excluded from service on such review committees.
 - b. No member of the University faculty who is currently teaching or working on a collaborative project with a member of the faculty from the academic department or unit under review may serve on the program's RC.
3. The internal member(s) of the Review committee, in consultation with the UCAR chair, will recommend external reviewers to the Provost.
 - a. The head of the unit to be reviewed and the appropriate dean(s) will be asked for input, including a description of the types of visitors to be included, such as which subdisciplinary areas need to be encompassed.
 - b. The head of the unit to be reviewed and the appropriate dean(s) will review in advance the list of RC members to be invited to serve on the committee and may strike from the list any reviewers whose relationship with the unit or its faculty

would hinder the review process. Valid reasons for such exclusions would include conflicts of interest such as those described below, acrimonious scholarly rivalry, etc. The unit or dean(s) should not approach potential Review Committee members in advance.

- c. The Provost or the Provost's designee will invite external peers to participate in each review.
4. One of the external reviewers will chair the site visit and lead the preparation of the RC report.

Efforts will be made to assure that external reviewers have sufficient independence from USC faculty and that visitors represent a balance of faculty in administrative and non-administrative positions. Individuals with the following potential conflicts of interest will be excluded from serving as the program's external reviewers:

1. An individual from another university who now has or in the past five years has had a close collaborative relationship with a faculty member of the department or unit under review.
2. An individual who held a faculty appointment in the department under review during the past ten years.
3. An individual associated with an organization or corporation that may benefit financially from a research project that includes a faculty member from the department or unit under review.
4. An individual associated with a corporation that currently sponsors research projects involving a faculty member from the department or unit under review.
5. An individual associated with an organization or corporation in which a faculty member from the unit under review is currently a member of the board, a consultant, or has similar conflicts of commitment.

The internal member(s) of the Review Committee and the Chair of UCAR will receive an advance draft copy of the self-study, documents related to the previous UCAR review (e.g., the reports of the Internal Review Committee and External Review Committee as well as the unit's response to the External Review Committee's report), and the MOU. After reviewing the draft-self study the internal RC member(s) and the Chair of UCAR will comment on the draft in writing. The unit will revise the self-study in response to these comments, and this final version (plus previous reports and the MOU) will be sent to the entire RC, including the external reviewers, in advance of the site visit. These materials will also be made available to the Provost, the appropriate dean and the chair of UCAR.

V. Site Visit

The head of the unit under review is responsible for preparing an itinerary for the two-day visit in consultation with the internal member(s) of the Review Committee, the Chair of UCAR, and the Provost's Office, and in a manner consistent with these Guidelines. The entire Review Committee and the Chair of UCAR should receive a draft of the itinerary in advance of the site visit in order to provide input on the schedule.

The final day of the site visit will include several hours set aside for the RC to draft its report. This draft may be revised after the visit as desired by the RC, but the report must be submitted in final form within four weeks. Review Committee reports should normally be fewer than ten pages in length.

The final RC report will be provided to the faculty and head of the unit reviewed as well as the appropriate dean(s). The head of the unit will write and submit a response to the draft RC report within two weeks, which is also provided to the appropriate dean(s). Both documents will be transmitted to UCAR Executive Committee for consideration, typically at a meeting also attended by the internal RC member(s). After discussion by the UCAR Executive Committee, the final report will be transmitted to the Provost. The unit's response will be appended to the final report, and the both RC report and response by the unit will be made available to faculty from the unit. If the Executive Committee, the Chair of UCAR, and the internal member of the RC wish, they may include a cover memo contextualizing the RC report and the unit's response.

VI. Post-Review Planning Process

The success of academic program reviews depends on timely follow-through by the dean and the Provost's Office, with primary emphasis on how the academic unit can be improved through the use and reallocation of its existing resources.

The following sequence of events will begin after receipt of a report from UCAR:

1. The Provost will distribute the Review Committee's final report to the appropriate dean(s) immediately upon its completion by UCAR.
2. The Provost or the Provost's designee will convene a meeting as soon as possible, but within one month. This will typically include the following individuals, and may include others that are deemed appropriate:
 - a. The Provost or Provost's designee
 - b. The appropriate Dean(s)
 - c. The department chair or program head, as applicable
 - d. Members of the Provost's leadership team selected by the Provost
 - e. Members of the Dean's leadership team selected by the Dean.
3. The MOU, the unit's self-study, the Review Committee's report and the unit's response, will serve as the basis for this meeting.
4. Based on these discussions the Dean and Provost or the Provost's designee will forge a consensus on necessary next steps needed to address opportunities and concerns raised in the course of the review.
5. The five-year plan contained in the self-study should be revised as necessary and a finalized strategic plan should be produced within two months of the post-review meeting. The appropriate dean(s) and the unit under review should participate in the formulation of the five-year plan. This plan, when complete, should be made available to the faculty of the unit and to the UCAR Executive Committee.

Appendix I Self-Study Outline

I. Executive Summary of Comprehensive Plan for Improvement

II. Overview

1. Introduction to contemporary issues in the academic discipline or field
2. Current academic/intellectual profile (what distinguishes it from other programs in the field)
3. Recommendations of the previous UCAR review, and progress since that assessment
4. A statement of how the unit is responsive to the University's strategic plan, focused on "meeting societal needs," "expanding global presence," and "promoting learner-centered education."

III. Assessment of Quality

1. Current academic stature, including national rankings and metrics of excellence, with particular attention to doctoral programs
2. Quality and diversity of students and placement of graduates
3. Stature and diversity of faculty, including recent achievements, research strengths, sponsored research support, patents, performances, and service
4. Quality of teaching, evaluation of educational programs, and evidence of student learning.
5. Contributions to interdisciplinary research and teaching in conjunction with other units at USC and/or elsewhere
6. Comparative strengths, distinctiveness, and weaknesses

IV. Comprehensive Plan for the Future

1. **Prepare an integrated plan for improvement over the upcoming five-year period to increase the program's stature and to achieve eminence**
2. List core objectives and priorities clearly and the sequence of actions to be taken for each.
3. Consider where the academic discipline is likely to be headed in the next five years. Indicate how the department will position itself in the changing context.
4. Consider what opportunities exist to extend existing strengths. Briefly discuss major obstacles.
5. Explain what internal improvements are possible *through reallocation of existing resources*.
6. Explain improvements that can only be addressed through additional resources.

Please keep your self-study and plan for the future to 20 pages or less. Appendices can be separately bound, if they exceed 20 pages.

Appendix II Guidelines for Appendices

To the extent possible the appendices included in the self-study should use data already collected on a regular basis by the unit under review, the school(s), and the Graduate School. It may also be possible to use NIH, NSF, or other tables where applicable.

The following types of data are recommended and should accompany a self-study, if they are available. The Provost's Office will endeavor to gather key data asterisked below from the University's Data Portfolio and provide it to you prior to the deadline for completing a self-study. If the data do not reach the unit in a timely manner, please call Associate Provost Jerry Walker at 821-1256.

A. Appendix for Overview

1. Organizational chart
2. List tenure-track faculty by rank, tenure status, gender, ethnicity, and major areas of expertise
3. List adjunct/clinical faculty (including part-time faculty) by rank, gender, ethnicity, and areas of expertise
4. New faculty hired during last ten years (including those who may have left)
5. Faculty who have left during the last ten years

B. Appendix for Quality Indicators

1. Surveys, national rankings and metrics of excellence
2. Graduate student quality data (summarized by school or department)***
 - a. Numbers of applicants, admits, and newly enrolled students
 - b. Admit rate and yield (conversion rate)
 - c. Quality data, such as undergraduate GPA and standardized test scores (e.g. GREs, GMATs, LSATs, MCATs, etc.)
 - d. Diversity of new and/or enrolled students, including gender and ethnicity
 - e. Trend data showing change over time on these measures
3. Faculty external funding (federal and foundation)
 - a. Total awards, past five years (indicating principal investigator, amount, dates, using NIH format for Other Support or similar)
 - b. Major awards, e.g., federally-funded "center" grants, grants over \$1 million, high prestige grants
4. Faculty quality indicators, including major prizes and awards, membership in national Academies, "young investigator" awards

C. Appendix for Comprehensive Plan

1. Implementation sequence of top priorities
2. Faculty hiring plans, including intended responses to forthcoming retirements
3. Budget reallocation (e.g., funds freed by retirements, reduction or closure of lower priority programs, etc.)
4. New funds needed to accomplish some priorities

D. Appendix for Academic Programs

1. Enrollment in the school or department, by entry year, for the past 5 years
 - a. Enrollment by degree program also is helpful
2. Degrees and Retention
 - a. Degrees awarded, by graduating year, for the past 5 years
 - b. Time to degree for each graduate student, by degree program
 - c. Retention and graduation rates for graduate students by program (student tables can follow NSF or NIH training grant format or similar)
4. Faculty
 - a. Faculty-graduate student ratios by department and by program
 - b. Faculty responsibilities with respect to teaching, advisement and mentoring of graduate students
 - c. Any relevant student evaluations of faculty teaching
5. Assessment of Student Learning and Educational Effectiveness (accomplishment of learners at an appropriate level of performance for the degrees awarded)
 - a. Ph.D. placements for last ten years, including placement rates into tenure-track faculty positions
 - b. Methods used to evaluate student dissertations and master's theses
 - c. Passage rates on professional entry examinations, if applicable
 - d. Other relevant learning assessments (e.g., qualifying examinations, research projects)
 - e. Graduate student scholarship: publications, grants, national awards, attendance at professional meetings

E. Appendix on Resources

1. Department or program endowment
2. Graduate student fellowships and endowments (last 5 years)
3. Facilities and space
4. Computers, libraries and information access
5. Other learning resources

F. Appendix on Governance

1. List associate chairs, divisional directors, and chairs of major committees

2. List student associations, honor societies, and their student officers
3. Staff support

G. Faculty CV's

Appendix III Guidelines for Review Committees

The internal member(s) of the Review Committee (RC), in consultation with the chair of UCAR, will decide how best to gather the information needed to provide advice to the Provost. It is useful for the internal member(s) of the review committee to have a meeting with the unit's leadership and/or executive committees early in the self-study and planning process to consult about the process and to discuss the state of the unit prior to visits by external reviewers.

The internal member(s) of the RC will comment on the unit's self-study and strategic plans, and recommend revisions to the self-study prior to sending it to rest of the review committee. Additional information or greater clarity may be requested by the RC.

The site visit itinerary is addressed in appendix IV, but the internal member(s) of the Review Committee should take note that a clear offer should be made during the site visit for faculty or students to have meetings with external reviewers that are not attended by internal reviewers or other USC-affiliated individuals.

One of the external reviewers will chair the site visit, which should be two days in length, and lead the preparation of the RC report. The internal RC member(s) should avoid unduly shaping the report but may draft portions either during or after the site visit. The external RC members should sign the version of the report that is forwarded to the UCAR executive committee.

The review committee should avoid using individual faculty names in the report; e.g., naming the junior faculty who may be concerned about the tenure process.

As peers with collegial ties to some of the faculty in the unit under review, the University recognizes that internal committee members in particular may feel constrained against being frank and outspoken in a written report. External reviewers may also feel some inclination to "advocate" for their disciplines. The Provost will not benefit from the RC's advice, or be able to act effectively, unless all reviewers are entirely honest in their assessment of the department or school.

The written report is most helpful if it is as direct and frank as possible. If there is additional advice that the Provost should have, but is too sensitive to write in the report, please explain this information in the private portion of the exit interview and write a confidential cover letter for the report that will *not* be shared with the department. *The Provost will protect the confidentiality of this correspondence.*

At the exit interview, members of the Review Committee are asked to provide an executive summary of their recommendations orally to Provost's representatives. The chair of the unit and appropriate dean(s) will be invited to hear the executive summary of recommendations and to ask questions for the first 45-60 minutes of the exit interview; then they will be excused to permit the review committee to complete its report in private.

The gist of the Review Committee's conclusions and recommendations will usually be substantially completed during the time set aside for this purpose on the final day of the site visit. Final reports signed by the external reviewers should be submitted within four (4) weeks of the last day of the site visit.

The committee's report will be submitted to the head of the unit being reviewed and appropriate dean. The unit head will respond to the report in writing within two (2) weeks. UCAR will meet, at the next available opportunity, to discuss the review. The chair of UCAR will, in turn, submit the site visit report and departmental response to the Provost on behalf of the committee with a cover letter including any key points that arose in the discussion of the review.

In their reports to the Provost, RCs should thoroughly and candidly evaluate:

1. The mission and intellectual profile of the program, with particular regard to doctoral programs.
2. The reputation of the program among peers in the discipline, including national rankings, and the extent to which the program is regarded as a leader in the field.
3. The likelihood that the program can become pre-eminent in the field. RCs should recommend the priorities and strategies that are needed to achieve the University's goal of academic excellence and eminence.
4. The stature and diversity of the faculty
5. The extent to which the unit under review contributes (or could contribute in the future) to interdisciplinary research and teaching, and whether there are interdisciplinary ties that currently are underdeveloped.
6. Improvements that are possible without the need for massive infusions of University resources.
7. Improvements that are possible only with additional resources.
8. Whether there are entrenched or irreconcilable issues within the unit that constrain its effectiveness, and whether there might be more effective ways of working together.
9. Specific additional issues included in the MOU

Additional areas in which RCs might offer advice include:

1. The curriculum through which a program's mission and goals are pursued, with particular attention to graduate programs.
2. The quality and diversity of the students, the program's capacity to satisfy and retain students, and learning outcomes.
3. Faculty research productivity and teaching performance.
4. Learning support, such as the availability of libraries, computing facilities and other educational resources.
5. Physical facilities.
6. Program size and resources relative to success in its mission.

To assure maximum clarity, recommendations should be kept short and direct; reports to the Provost should be less than 10 pages.

Appendix IV Guidelines for Review Committee Itineraries

1. The head of the unit to be reviewed should inform their faculty at least three months before a visit that the faculty are expected to be available to meet with the visiting committee. The faculty should avoid travel out of town or making any conflicting commitments on those two days until the final agenda has been prepared and they know the hour and day on which they are scheduled to meet.
2. The head of the unit under review is responsible for preparing a suggested itinerary for the two-day visit in consultation with the internal member(s) of the Review Committee, the Chair of UCAR, and the Provost's Office, six to eight weeks prior to the visit, and in a manner consistent with these Guidelines. A week before the site visit, the Provost's Office will forward the itinerary to the entire Review Committee and the Chair of UCAR so they can provide input on the final schedule. Where possible, meetings should be held in the unit's facilities.
3. Review Committees should dine together on the evening before the review, if possible, with the chair of UCAR and a representative from the Provost's office.
4. The first meeting on Day One should be with the dean or department chair. Executive committees or other formal leadership groups should be scheduled early on Day One.
5. Faculty meetings should be organized around disciplinary fields reflecting the unit's own internal organization. A separate meeting with untenured, tenure-track faculty is essential, and a separate meeting with adjunct faculty should be considered.
6. Graduate students should meet with the Review Committee during the late afternoon of Day One. Separate meetings for different student cohorts, such as Masters and Doctoral students, are strongly encouraged.
7. It would be very constructive to have the department suggest faculty and chairs from other schools and departments who collaborate with the department's faculty on research and teaching and other units where there are or could be interdisciplinary or cross-disciplinary linkages. Suggestions will also be made in the MOU, and suggestions will be sought from the RC and the Chair of UCAR. They could be scheduled for the morning of Day Two.
8. Meetings with staff are rarely scheduled and would need to be justified before the review committee should consent to scheduling them on the agenda.
9. Facilities tours should be kept sufficiently brief so as not to displace time for meetings with faculty and students.
10. The Review Committee should be provided with maximum private time to discuss their observations and draft their reports with recommendations. It is best to let them dine alone at dinner on Day One and at lunch on Day Two. A block of three hours from noon until 3:00 p.m. on Day Two has proven necessary to allow site visitors to write their reports. The goal is to complete the written reports while the external members of the committee are on campus. **The host unit must provide computers and access to a printer for the review committee.**
11. The exit interview on Day Two will be conducted by the review committee and will include the head of the unit under review, the appropriate dean(s), the Provost or Provost's designee, the chair of UCAR, and others invited by the dean(s) and Provost. The unit head and dean will be invited to participate for the first 45-60 minutes of the 90 minute exit interview. The

review committee will hold an executive session with the Provost or Provost's designee and other representatives of the Provost's Office and chair of UCAR during the final 30-45 minutes.

Appendix V Program Review Cycle

The responsibility for scheduling program reviews rests with the Provost and, typically, will follow these guidelines as closely as possible:

Month 1: The Provost notifies the unit selected for review of the timing of that review and the review process.

Month 2: A memorandum of understanding is prepared. In the MOU, the unit may suggest categories of reviewers, e.g., disciplines for the internal RC member(s), or subfields that should be encompassed by the external reviewers.

The Provost's Office provides the unit with any data gathered centrally, for use in preparing the self-study

Month 3: The chair of UCAR and the Provost or Provost's designee invite a member of the UCAR Panel to serve as of the internal member the RC. The unit under review should be afforded the opportunity to strike names from the UCAR Panel before the decision is made. Once in place, the internal RC member works in consultation with the chair of UCAR and the Provost's designee to select and invite external members to serve on the Review Committee. The unit may wish to suggest exemplars of the subfields for external reviewers, as may the appropriate dean. The site visit should be scheduled with at least two months notice.

Month 3-5: The unit under review drafts its self-study and prepares an itinerary for the site visit.

Month 6: The unit submits its draft self-study to the internal member(s) of the RC and the Chair of UCAR for comments, and revises accordingly.

Month 7-9: The site visit should occur sometime during this period, allowing sufficient time for drafting and revising the self-study and scheduling the site visit with sufficient advance notice to the faculty.

The Review Committee's report should be submitted to the unit within four weeks of the end of the site visit, and the unit should submit a written response to that report within two weeks of its receipt.

Month 10-11: UCAR should meet to discuss the Review Committee report and the unit's response as soon as practicable. Ideally, this meeting should occur within one month of receiving the report. The report should be finalized and submitted to the Provost shortly thereafter.

Month 12: The post-review meeting should occur within a month after the final report is submitted to the Provost.