



Academic Program Review Guidelines for External Consultants

Program reviews are conducted under a mandate from the Arizona Board of Regents with the most important purposes being to assure the quality of educational programs to identify opportunities for future development. As an external consultant, you have an important role in this review process. Your objective input will help the unit and university evaluate its programs and develop strategic plans for program development.

The following information provides background on Northern Arizona University's program review process, specific functions and responsibilities of external consultants, and suggestions for maximizing the effectiveness and outcome of the site visit and final report.

General Review Procedures

Academic programs at Northern Arizona University (NAU) are reviewed on a seven-year schedule. Normally, program reviews include evaluation of undergraduate and graduate degree programs, other educational programming, and research activities housed within the academic unit. The reviews are coordinated and conducted under the auspices of the Provost's Office by the Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies.

Programs scheduled for review prepare a comprehensive self-study report that includes:

- a brief history of the unit and programs
- a report of actions in response to the findings and recommendations resulting from the previous review of the program
- a description and assessment of the academic unit/program(s); contributions to university-wide programs; human, fiscal and physical resources; student enrollment; and research, professional, creative, and public service activity of the unit
- assessment of student learning and other data about student accomplishments or placement
- program goals and strategic plan
- vita for each faculty member and other relevant documentation

The self-study report is reviewed by the supervising Dean and Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies prior to its distribution to the Provost, external consultants and the university faculty consultant.

A member of the university faculty is assigned to serve as an internal consultant along with the external consultants for each program review. Normally two external consultants, selected by the Provost's Office from a list developed by the academic unit and approved by the Dean, are invited to the NAU campus to participate in a two-day site visit. The external consultants and the faculty consultant constitute the review team.

Prior to the site visit, the external consultants are provided with:

- a copy of the self-study, departmental brochures and any other information the academic unit believes will aid the consultants in understanding the unit's environment.
- URLs to the online University Catalogs and Northern Arizona University Strategic Plan
- these guidelines
- a draft itinerary for the site visit
- a list of questions, if any, for the consultants to address

During the two-day site visit, consultants meet with faculty, students, unit administrators, the Dean, Provost, Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies, and Vice Provost for Research and Graduate Studies. The consultants also tour the University and examine facilities and services. The site visit begins and ends with interviews with the Provost, the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies, the Vice Provost for Research and Graduate Studies (if relevant), and the Dean. At the exit interview, the unit Chair or Director will also be present.

Four to six weeks after the site visit, the consultants submit to the Provost a joint report that summarizes their evaluations and recommendations (see below). The external consultants are responsible for the preparation of the report. The internal faculty consultant should have input to the evaluation of the program; this may be obtained at the conclusion of the site visit or through communication subsequent to the site visit. The report is distributed to the academic unit, the supervising dean, the Provost and Vice Provosts for review and comments. The evaluation and recommendations are used in future planning by both the academic unit and other affected campus units.

Guidelines for Preparing the Report(s)

There are no specific format requirements for your report. The length and content will vary depending on the nature and scope of the program being reviewed and on your personal preferences. We encourage you to comment on any program aspects you believe important to program quality and future development. We suggest you begin the report with your overall view of the program and conclude with a summary and specific recommendations. The visit and the report should address issues such as:

- the quality and suitability of degree program curricula
- qualifications of faculty
- effectiveness of the instructional programs as evidenced by student learning outcomes
- research, professional and/or other creative activity of the faculty
- opportunities for development, and weaknesses/deficiencies in the program
- quality of the support from the library and other support external to the unit
- appropriateness of short and long-term goals
- prospects for program to achieve its stated objectives

In the course of the report we request that you give attention to the following:

- Both the undergraduate and graduate programs offered by the unit.
- Based on your knowledge of the discipline, is the curriculum current and does it provide an adequate educational experience for graduates of the program?
- Are the qualifications of the faculty fitting with the programs offered?
- Has the unit implemented an adequate process for assessing the learning outcomes of its students?
- What major limiting factors do you find impacting the unit's future development or increased effectiveness?
- Is the quality and level of research, other scholarly and creative activities appropriate for the program?
- If national accreditation of the program exists and the NAU unit is not accredited, do you recommend that the unit seek accreditation, and if so, what is needed to bring the program into conformity with those accrediting standards?
- If the unit is considering or has applied for a new degree program: (1) Is there potential for this to be a high-quality program? (2) Are qualified faculty in place? (3) Are there adequate resources and opportunities available to provide a quality program to quality students? (4) Are the library, laboratories, and other facilities adequate to support the proposed degree program? (5) In what ways could the unit reorganize to support the new program?

Basic Principles for External Consultants

The best means of assisting the academic unit is to make recommendations that are useful within the confines of the current budget. Thus, if a major initiative is needed, corresponding reductions should be suggested. If the current level of support is inadequate to support the current program, indicate what could be eliminated from the program to correct the imbalance as well as what additional resources would be needed to adequately support the current program. Recommendations that will increase a unit's effectiveness are especially helpful.

If you have any questions or concerns about the report, feel free to contact the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies, Karen Pugliesi (928-523-1580) or email at Karen.Pugliesi@nau.edu. We recognize the importance of your participation in the review process and sincerely appreciate your efforts to make the program review process a productive and valuable exercise.