



ILLINOIS WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY

GUIDELINES AND OBJECTIVES FOR EXTERNAL REVIEWS FOR DEPARTMENTS, SCHOOLS, AND PROGRAMS

Thorpe Center for Curricular and Faculty Development

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Guidelines and Objectives¹

I. Purpose and Benefits of the External Review

External program reviews provide the opportunity for each academic unit (department, school, or program) to reflect on their work and explain how it relates to the goals of the academic unit and the university mission. Each academic unit will undergo an external review approximately every 10 years. The guidelines detailed below are designed to support academic units as they prepare to undertake an external review and to promote the faculty dialogue that is central to this process.

Each academic unit will have different emphases for its review process, but several general questions should frame each program review:

- How is the department's or program's mission related to IWU's [mission](#) and [vision](#)?
- Is the department following national trends and best-practices for the content and rigor of the major(s), minor(s), or certificate(s)? Are curricular demands accessible to both majors and non majors, as appropriate?
- Has the department/program identified student learning goals for the major and/or minor that are clear and measurable? How does the department/program assess progress on these goals?
- What are the short- and long-term priorities of the department or program? What are the needs and demands of the program in the context of existing resources?

These general questions can also help each department/school/program define the specific objectives of the self-study. This step is crucial. By establishing the goals of the review before embarking on the self-study, faculty can avoid collecting information that has little relevance for the department/school/program's mission. Program reviews can be a formidable and time consuming undertaking for all constituencies, including faculty, students, and support staff. Thus, it is important that the review process be structured so that it provides information that is germane to the mission of the academic unit and speaks to the ongoing work of the faculty.

At its conclusion, the review can help build consensus around the collective priorities of an academic unit and define how the work of each faculty member contributes to those goals. Besides encouraging intra-departmental dialogue, the external review process will also encourage communication between central academic administrators and schools/departments/programs. This ongoing dialogue will enhance the administration's ability to support the work of the academic unit as well as provide evidence of ongoing program review to the Higher Learning Commission (Criterion 3.F).

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II. Major Components of an External Review

The information gathered during the external review process should help programs fashion a narrative that effectively communicates their mission and focus to their IWU colleagues and to external constituencies. Much of this information can draw on existing assessment efforts. For instance, departments/schools/programs routinely collect information on their curricula, the scholarly achievements for faculty, and the accomplishments of alumni, but often employ different strategies for gathering that information. The Associate Vice President for Institutional Effectiveness routinely collects other information that can be useful, such as enrollment data and student surveys that are benchmarked against peer institutions.

Each external review will include three components:

1. A comprehensive self-study conducted by faculty members in the department, school, program, or academic unit
2. An external review conducted by two colleagues from other institutions, ideally comparable to IWU
3. A departmental/school/program response to the external reviewers' report, including an action plan

The self-study. (See Appendix I for detailed discussion of the elements of the self-study). The first task of the comprehensive self-study is to gather and organize the information already collected by the department/school and by other university offices. Many academic programs have a formal mission statement that can be reviewed in light of the faculty's work and the university's mission statement. If your unit does not already have a formal mission statement, you might consider crafting one as part of the review process. The self-study provides an opportunity to review the scholarly and artistic work of the faculty and explain how the department supports the work of each faculty member.

Departments and schools will review the academic unit's curriculum, referencing disciplinary "best practices" for majors and minors and how the program contributes to university-wide programs such as the Gateway Colloquia, Shared Curriculum, and summer programming. Note program efforts to develop the faculty's teaching pedagogy, such as any innovative pedagogy (online learning, digital humanities, etc.) or interdisciplinary curricula, as well as efforts to support scholarly/artistic endeavors. Also important is the academic unit's contribution to the intellectual and creative life of the university (bringing scholars, reading circles, participation in JWP, student symposia, workshops, etc). Where possible, departments, schools, or programs will want to marshal available information on the career paths of the program's graduates. As noted above, the Dean of Curricular and Faculty Development and the Associate Vice President for Institutional Effectiveness can provide information from existing data sources.

Visit of the external review team. (Appendix II provides more detail on the external review, including a sample schedule.) Each department, school, or program will consult with the Provost on the selection of external reviewers. Two faculty colleagues from other institutions will visit the campus for approximately two days, during which they will meet with faculty from the academic unit, students, and administrators. The external reviewers will have access to the self-study in advance of their visit, and while on campus may visit classes, labs, and/or rehearsals. The external reviewers will compile a written report that summarizes their campus visit and responds to the self-study.

Department/school/program response and discussion with administrative colleagues. Each academic unit will draft an action plan in response to the external review which identifies both short-term and long-term plans for the department / school / program. The academic unit may also outline any significant disagreements with the external reviewer's report. This response and action plan are to be sent to the Provost, the Dean of Curricular and Faculty Development, and the President no later than one month after receiving the external reviewer's report. The chair, director, or Dean (plus the external review coordinator, if that is a different individual) will meet with the President, the Provost, and the Dean to discuss the external review, the department/school/program's response, and the action plan, so that they may agree upon action items for the academic unit's faculty to accomplish with support of the Provost's Office. As the academic unit works on their action plan, they are encouraged to include the Provost or the Dean in pertinent department meetings or other conversations about their progress. The Provost and Dean will schedule a progress assessment meeting in the third year after the external review.

Some considerations for action planning:

- What are the best next steps for the academic unit? Are these steps reasonable and achievable given the University's processes and resources? What assistance from the Provost's Office does the academic unit need to take these steps?
- If the external reviewers suggested areas for improvement, what evidence did they cite to show that the program is not as good as it could be? What milestones will the program use to demonstrate improvement in these areas?
- If the external reviewers recommend significant investments, such as increasing faculty, what are the criteria for determining that the investment is warranted? What evidence can the academic unit use to demonstrate that they have met those criteria?

III. General Schedule and Tasks for External Review

First Year: Self-Study

- ☐ Identify a faculty member to be the external review coordinator (usually, but not necessarily the chair, director, or Dean)
- ☐ Using the guidelines found in Appendix I, compile the information of the self-study, including supporting documents.

- ☐ 6-12 months before the review, compile a suggested list of external reviewers. See Appendix II for details.
- ☐ Before setting a date for the external review, coordinate with the Provost's Office and the Thorpe Center.

Second Year: Finalize Self-Study, Host the External Review, Action Plan

- ☐ The external review coordinator works with their administrative specialist to organize the details of the external review visit. See Appendix II for details.
- ☐ 8 weeks before the external review, share the Self-Study draft with the Dean for feedback.
- ☐ 6 weeks before the external review, share the finalized Self-Study with the external reviewers, Dean, Provost, and President.
- ☐ Host the external review. The external reviewers will be asked to submit their report 3-4 weeks after their visit.
- ☐ After receipt of the reviewers' report, the unit will prepare their response and action plan and submit copies to the President, the Provost, and the Dean of Curricular and Faculty Development. (See Section II, above for more details.)
 - ☐ The chair, director, or Dean (plus the external review coordinator, as needed) will meet with these administrative colleagues to discuss the review and action plan.
 - ☐ The Dean collects electronic copies of the finalized self-study, report, response, and action plan for accreditation purposes.

Subsequent Years

- ☐ Arrange meetings with the administration as needed to implement the action items developed after the external review.
- ☐ The Provost and Dean will schedule a progress assessment meeting in the third year after the external review

Appendix I: Elements of the Self-Study

The self-study of each department/school should be guided by the mission and focus of the program's work. The primary purpose of the self-study is to provide information that will support planning for the department/school's future. Faculty members of each program will highlight aspects of their work and gather the information needed to assess current practice and identify areas for development.

The outline in this appendix suggests some guidelines for the self-study. *The information presented below is offered as a recommendation, not as a set of requirements.* Each department/school should include materials that will be useful for the review, including materials that are not suggested below.

I. Background on Department/school's mission and identity

- A. Relevant departmental history
- B. Relationship with the broader mission/strategic plan of the university

1. The Mission and Vision Statement can be found here:
<https://www.iwu.edu/about/mission.html>
<https://www.iwu.edu/about/vision.html>
2. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness page references data sources that might be useful, such as the IPEDS Benchmark Report, Fact Book, Common Data Set, survey results, etc.:
<https://www.iwu.edu/institutional-effectiveness/>
- C. What disciplinary or other national trends in your field have a bearing on the department/school's work?
 1. Comparisons with similar programs
 2. Expectations for graduate and professional schools
 3. Changes in the opportunities for students entering the private and / or public sector
- II. Description of Department/School's Resources**
 - A. Describe the physical resources that support the department/school's mission: office, lab, and studio space, specialized equipment necessary for teaching and research, library holdings, etc.
 - B. How does the non-salary budget support the work of the department/school? Where appropriate, explain how external funding has supported teaching and scholarly activity of the faculty.
- III. Overview of the instructional program**
 - A. What are the teaching goals of the department? Are there defined learning outcomes? How does the department measure the students' progress toward these goals or outcomes?
 - B. What is the structure of and rationale for the major/minor?
 - C. How does the department contribute to campus-wide curricula such as summer sessions, Shared Curriculum, and interdisciplinary programs?
 - D. How does the curriculum facilitate learning opportunities outside the classroom, such as student-faculty research projects, off-campus study, and service learning?
 - E. What is the academic unit's contribution to the intellectual and creative life of the university (bringing scholars, reading circles, participation in JWP, student symposia, workshops, etc.)?
 - F. Does the department/school focus on development of faculty pedagogy, whether traditionally or by encouraging innovations in online learning, digital humanities, interdisciplinary curricula, etc.?
 - G. How does the department/school incorporate principles of Universal Design for Learning into the course creation or revision process?
- IV. Professional Activities, Leadership, and Service**
 - A. Self-studies might reference the principal areas of leadership and service by faculty in the department/school/program. Doing so not only recognizes the collective investment of the program to broader institutional, community, or national efforts, but also facilitates planning for future commitments.

Supplemental Materials for Reviewers

While not part of the self-study, the following should be included in the material that is sent to

each reviewer prior to the team visit.

- A copy of the IWU catalog
- Curriculum vitae of all members of the unit
- Syllabi for courses typically offered in unit
- Number of majors and minors for the past five years
- Recent enrollment data for courses typically offered

Appendix II: The External Review

Choosing External Reviewers

Departments, programs, and schools will coordinate the visit of a two-person external review team. 6-12 months prior to the on-campus visit of the external review team, faculty in the program under review will develop a list of 3-5 suggested external reviewers. Typically the reviewers will be selected from tenured faculty at institutions that are similar to IWU. The list should include the reviewers' contact information, CV, a short paragraph that explains the strengths of each candidate, and a statement that identifies any relationships between prospective reviewers and faculty in the department/program/school.

The external review coordinator will forward the list to the Dean of Curricular and Faculty Development who will then meet with the Provost to determine which reviewers to invite. Once identified, external review coordinators then make the invitation to campus and work with these colleagues on travel arrangements with the assistance of their administrative specialist. The coordinator should consult with the Provost's Office, department, and other campus constituencies to determine the best dates for the review. Once the coordinator has established reviewers' availability and the date for the review, the Dean will send the external reviewers a formal letter with the details of the review.

The honorarium for external reviewers is typically \$1000 each, but this is subject to change and to the approval of the Provost. When possible, the reviewers' travel and accommodation arrangements should be made in advance by the academic units' administrative specialist. Honoraria and reimbursements are paid through the Thorpe Center budget either directly or by transfer to departmental accounts.

Finalizing the Self-Study

The department/school/program will share a draft of the self-study with the Dean two months before the visit of the external review team. The final self-study and materials related to the self-study will be submitted six weeks prior to the visit of the external review team. Electronic versions of these materials should be housed in a Google Drive folder, and a link forwarded to each external reviewer and to the Provost, Dean, and President. The Dean will also keep final copies of the key documents for accreditation purposes.

Planning the Visit

One month before the external reviewers' visit to campus the coordinator should develop, in

consultation with the Dean of Curricular and Faculty Development, an itinerary. The external reviewers will arrive on the first day in time for a dinner with two members of the department/school/program. The reviewers should have the opportunity to meet with the Provost early in the morning of the second day of the visit and to meet with the President, Provost, and Dean at the end of the visit. In addition, reviewers usually appreciate some time to meet by themselves near the end of the on-site visit. Otherwise, the schedule will vary from program to program, including some or all of the following constituencies:

- All full-time faculty in the department/school/program, both tenured and untenured;
- Members of departments, schools, or programs with which the program under review has regular interaction;
- Student advisory groups or other student groups in the department/school/program;
- Where possible or appropriate, the external reviewers might visit individual classes, labs, or rehearsals.

We will request the external review report be submitted within four weeks of the campus visit. By doing so, departments and schools will have ample time to prepare a written response to the external reviewers' report.

Scheduling the External Review

This worksheet provides advice and resources for scheduling the external review visit.

Essential Information

- What are the dates of the review? _____
- What are the names and contact information for the two reviewers?
 - Reviewer 1 (name, email, phone)
 - Reviewer 2 (name, email, phone)
- Who is the IWU contact person for the review? (name, email, extension)

Task Check-List for Administrative Assistants

- ☐ Self-study shared with external reviewers, Dean, Provost, and President
- ☐ Travel arrangements complete
- ☐ Lodging arranged
- ☐ Dietary restrictions noted
- ☐ All meetings and meals confirmed for the agenda
- ☐ Transportation to/from airports and to/from lodging arranged
- ☐ Receipts from travel and W-9 for honoraria collected from the reviewers (W-9s should not be stored on computers or printed and stored in files. They should not be emailed. They should be given to the Business Office as a hard copy or should be uploaded here: <https://secure.iwu.edu/rcv/accountspayable-send>)
- ☐ All receipts with appropriate business office forms submitted to the Thorpe Center (Ames 301)

Resources and FAQs

Payment: The Thorpe Center (thorpe@iwu.edu) budget reserves \$5000 for each external review. \$2000 of this is for the honoraria for the two reviewers. The rest is for travel expenses, lodging, and meals. Note that national/regional accreditation reviews for professional schools and other special programs come out of the general operating budget overseen by Julie Anderson instead of the Thorpe budget.

Lodging: Ideally, reserve the Funk House (contact Julie Anderson, janders3@iwu.edu x3780) for the external reviewers from the night before the review starts to the afternoon the review ends. We only pay for the cleaning fee (\$150 in 2023) for use of the house. It has two bedrooms with separate bathrooms, as well as kitchen and living areas. If the reviewers prefer a hotel or the Funk house is unavailable, contact one of the hotels that offers IWU a special rate. Conference Services maintains a list of these hotels in the Departmental Resources share drive. If you have questions, please contact Conference Services – conferences@iwu.edu

Travel expenses: Inquire of the reviewers whether they will be driving or flying to Bloomington.

- If driving, IWU will reimburse their mileage (following IRS guidelines). See the [Business Office policies](#) for specifics.
- If flying, please arrange for their flight using a departmental credit card and request a transfer of funds from Thorpe. Do not add flight insurance. Please fly in and out of the Bloomington, IL airport as much as possible. As a last resort, IWU will reimburse the reviewer for the cost of their economy airline ticket (within reason, given the overall budget of \$3000 for all of the visit events).
- Cars should not be rented for external reviewers, unless approved by the Thorpe Office.

Advice for Arranging the Schedule

1. Logistics:
 - a. Make sure all IWU administrators, faculty, and staff who meet with the external reviewers have access to the self-study.
 - b. Provide a space for reviewers to leave their stuff, take breaks with the door closed, and provide drinks and snacks.
 - i. Ask beforehand what drinks and snacks they prefer. It's a hospitable thing to do for people who are basically talking for two days straight to a whole bunch of people so departments can improve.
 - c. Provide a folder with wireless instructions and other easy to provide facts.
 - d. Provide titles for IWU community members along with their names.
 - e. Ask about dietary restrictions or mobility requirements (this could impact where meetings are held).
2. Building the schedule:
 - a. Contact Brenda Milcik (bmilcik@iwu.edu, x3101) to schedule the Provost first, then fill in the faculty and students.

- b. Before finalizing the schedule, check with the reviewers to see if they have any scheduling requests, such as an early/late arrival or departure.
- c. If there are many faculty members in a department/program, you can create group meetings. Provide an option for departments to meet together in addition to individual meetings with faculty, if this is not problematic in your area. If there are few department/program faculty, you can create more work time.
- d. Provide open time in case faculty or staff want to share information privately.
- e. Make sure there are coffee/bathroom breaks built in every 2-3 hours.
- f. If you're going out to breakfast, go somewhere with reservations. Seating is difficult to guarantee at local coffee shops and travel time to actual "breakfast restaurants" (if reviewers are not staying in a hotel with a restaurant) decreases time doing review work and complicates travel to/from campus. Plus, coffee shops might be loud, preventing a generative conversation.

Sample Schedule

First Day

2:00 – 6:00 PM – arrive in Bloomington/Normal
Unit representative escorts to lodgings
Dinner with 2-3 members of academic unit

Second Day

8:00- 9:00 – breakfast at hotel/restaurant/campus coffee shop with appropriate staff
9:00-9:45 – meet with the Provost
9:45-10:45 – campus and facilities tour
10:45-11:00 – break
11:00-12:00 – 20-30 minute meetings with individual faculty members
12:00-1:00 – lunch in the Cartwright Room or Thorpe Conference Room with representative University faculty
1:00-2:30 – 20-30 minute meetings with individual faculty members
2:30-3:00 – coffee/tea break
3:00-4:00 – meet with chair
4:00-5:00 – meet with students
5:00-6:30 – break (reviewers may wish to work on preliminary report)
6:30 – dinner with members of academic unit

Third Day

Eat breakfast and check out of lodgings by 10:00AM
10:00-11:00 – time for reviewers to finalize preliminary report
11:30-12:45 – report to faculty from academic unit, including the chair/director
(Either provide lunch or build in a lunch period for the reviewers)
1:00-2:00 – present preliminary report to the President, the Provost, and Dean of Curricular and Faculty Development, without the chair/director (or external review coordinator)
2:00-5:00 – depart Bloomington-Normal