

Program Review Guidelines

Calvin College

Introduction

Academic assessment is primarily about being reflective people – ones who regularly reflect on our beliefs, goals, and values; the consistency of our work with those beliefs and values and our progress toward those goals; and the changes necessary to improve our work. We are called to this as individual Reformed Christians but also as departments and as a college.

Periodic program review is a common practice in higher education. Some programs require review as a part of professional accreditation or certification; such reviews are conducted regularly and follow externally established guidelines. For other programs, Calvin initiates the review. In both cases, however, program review is a means of structuring a reflective process that aim to ensure faithfulness to the college's mission, recognize excellence, help establish budgets, and identify problems and opportunities requiring departmental or administrative action.

Overview

The Program Review Process involves five parts.

- I. Departmental Strategic Planning,
- II. Annual State of the Departmental Reports,
- III. Evaluation by External Consultants,
- IV. Departmental Response to the Consultant's Report,
- V. Administrative Response

All academic majors will have an external review at least every ten years on a cyclical basis. If a department does not have a strategic plan in place, one should be completed no later than the summer prior to the external reviewers' visit, preferably earlier. The department chair, in consultation with other members of the department their academic dean and the director of assessment, will select two external consultants (EC) from the same discipline as the major being reviewed. The ECs will conduct an on-site visit (typically lasting two days) and will submit a written report on their findings.

The departmental chair will manage the production of a self-study. The core elements of the self-study will be the department’s most recent strategic plan and state of department reports (at least from the prior five years). The self study will also include an executive summary, which will articulate the questions that the department (in consultation with their academic dean and the director of assessment) believes are most critical for consultants to address. The self-study will also include a brief explanation of any significant changes that have occurred in the department since the department’s most recent strategic plan was approved. A college catalog, the most recent college strategic plan, the self study, and other supporting materials should be sent to the ECs no less than 60 days prior to their campus visit. Departments accredited by external agencies may substitute their own site visit process.

The department is responsible for planning the events of the visit and hosting the evaluators. The Office of Assessment will provide a suggested agenda of activities, interviews, group meetings, etc. Travel arrangements should be made by the ECs through Calvin’s travel agent. Accommodations will typically be at the Prince Conference Center.

The ECs will submit a report ,following a suggested outline (details below) and including recommendations. The department will write a brief response to the ECs’ report and recommendations. An academic dean and the director of assessment will review the self-study, the ECs’ report, and the written departmental response and prepare a written administrative response (in consultation with the Educational Policies Committee, the Professional Status Committee, and the provost).

When the process is complete, a final report will be sent to the department, the Provost, the College President, and the Education Committee of the Board of Trustees and will be filed for reference during the next review cycle and for inclusion in future HLC institutional evaluations. Findings from the review process will inform curriculum planning, program development, budgeting, and strategic planning for the department and the college.

Time Line

By September 1	Complete departmental strategic plan (if not already in place)
By September 1	Select external consultants. Set date of site visit
90 days prior to visit	Self-study and supporting materials submitted to director of assessment and academic dean.
60 days prior to visit	Self-study sent to ECs
January – April	EC site visit
30 days after visit	EC report due
30 days after EC report received	Departmental response sent to director of assessment and academic dean

30 days after all materials received by director of assessment and academic dean	Administrative response presented to the provost and departmental chair
60 days after all materials received and reviewed	Self-study and all subsequent reports submitted to Education Committee of the Board of Trustees, department, provost, and president

External Consultants

I. Selection of Evaluators

For some departments, outside accrediting agencies will assign their own evaluators. For the rest, nominees for the external consultants will be gathered by the Department Chair in consultation with the members of the department, other faculty members, and the assigned academic dean. The chair will then bring the nominees to the department for discussion and to make final recommendations, which should be approved by the academic dean. Typically we will expect a two-person team of evaluators, who will be paid a stipend and expenses for participation.

Evaluators should be

- recognized for their expertise in the discipline
- knowledgeable and experienced with undergraduate liberal arts institutions
- knowledgeable about and comfortable with Calvin's mission (at least one team member should have some personal experience with Christian higher education)
- not personally associated with the faculty at Calvin College in a way that might affect their assessment
- skilled in evaluation and critical analysis.

2. ECs should arrange travel through Calvin's travel agent. Calvin will arrange for accommodations. Additional expenses will be reimbursed upon receipt. The stipend will be sent following the receipt of the EC report.

3. The EC report should address the following questions (modifications of these questions and additional questions will be developed by each department as it undergoes review). The EC report should also address these questions in context of larger college goals, e.g., Reformed Christian liberal arts education, the Expanded Statement of Mission, FEN, and the current college strategic plan.

Strategic planning

Is the department's strategic plan thorough without being overly restrictive? Is it appropriate and realistic given the current state of the discipline? Has it addressed the key issues the department faces? Is the department acting on the key issues?

Personnel

Is faculty training appropriate for the programs being offered? Are there gaps in expertise? Are criteria for reappointment and promotion clear, and does the department respond to reappointment reviews with appropriate developmental support for faculty?

Curriculum

Is the curriculum appropriate given the current state of the discipline? Does it offer enough breadth and depth? Has it undergone recent expansion, and if so, was that expansion necessary? Does this department offer core courses or other courses that serve programs outside of the department? If so, are these appropriate?

Student Learning

Does the department have a clearly articulated set of desired student learning outcomes? Are they appropriate? Is the department adequately assessing how well students are achieving these outcomes? Is it using assessment results to improve its programs?

Scholarship

Is the department producing sound scholarship? Is its productivity reasonable given Calvin's teaching loads? Is the scholarship appropriate to the department's mission and role in the college? Are the department's criteria for judging the kinds, quality, and amount of scholarship that it expects of its members appropriate and clear?

Budget and Facilities

Is there enough space? Are classrooms and offices adequate? Is equipment adequate and up-to-date? Are other resources sufficient? Is the budget sufficient? Are there any gaps in it?

Integration of Faith and Learning

Has the department worked out effective ways to integrate faith and learning in its teaching, scholarship, and service and to share and develop such strategies among departmental members?

Other

Are there ways the department can be strengthened that have not been addressed above?