

Academic Program Reviews

Academic program reviews (APRs) are comprehensive reviews of an academic program that occur every seven to ten years. An academic program is defined as a credit-bearing credential, including certificates and degrees. The focus of the APR is the academic program, but for purposes of organization, the APR process works through the department or unit that delivers each academic program, and all academic programs delivered by a given department or unit will be reviewed at the same time. The APR involves both a self-study conducted by the faculty and staff of the department delivering the program, and an on-site review conducted by expert, external evaluators. The end result is a memo from the Provost to the Dean of the College or School in which the program is housed detailing the success and strengths of the program and outlining a discrete number of opportunities for improvement.

Both the self-study and the external review are supported by university-provided data about enrollments, time to graduation, employment outcomes for students, program learning outcomes, assessments of student learning, faculty productivity, and other measures relevant to the teaching and research activity of an academic program. A central component of the review process is the on-site review, during which external evaluators meet and speak with all faculty and staff in the academic program, as well as students in the program, and any other key stakeholders. The purpose of the APR is to present, to academic program, the Provost and the Dean, a clear picture of the mission, goals, and outcomes for a given academic program, as well as the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that exist for that program.

For departments, the APR process offers an opportunity to reflect on the academic composition, goals, successes, and challenges of the program while evaluating the goals and the future direction of that program. It also provides an opportunity for getting expert advice on opportunities for improvements and finding efficiencies. The APR process also offers the opportunity to convey to senior Academic Leadership at SMU both the successes of a program and the challenges it faces. While resources are not allocated directly as the result of an APR, findings from the APR could be used as supporting evidence for resources through the SMU budget request process.

For the university, the APR is an opportunity for a detailed look at each academic program, its contributions to the overall university mission and strategic goals, its strengths, its challenges, and the opportunities to help the program continue to advance. It also offers an opportunity to review the student learning

outcomes and assessments of student learning in the program.

APR Roles and Responsibilities

The APR Process involves a number of people from across the institution, as well as external evaluators from other institutions. Here, we detail the roles and responsibilities of all parties involved.

- 1. Associate Provost for Institutional Planning and Effectiveness:** The Associate Provost coordinates the APR process. She works with the Chair or Director of the programs under review to inform them about the process, to identify and invite external evaluators, to gather the data for the self-study, and to set the date of the on-site visit. The Associate Provost serves as the liaison to the Provost during the process, sharing both the self-study and the external evaluator report with the Provost. The Associate Provost also works with the APR Committee to oversee the APR process.
- 2. Coordinator of Institutional Planning and Assessment:** The Coordinator from the Office of Institutional Planning and Effectiveness, works with external evaluators to make travel arrangements, arranges meals (with the exception of lunch during the on-site review) and accommodations for external reviewers, and processes all paperwork related to the work of the external evaluators. The Coordinator also serves as a resource to the Program or Department in scheduling the on-site review.
- 3. The Chair of the Department or Director of the Academic Program:** The Chair or Director works with the faculty in the academic program to identify potential external evaluators and to identify a date for the on-site review. The Department Chair or Director also works with the faculty in the program to author the self-study, using the template provided by IPE. The Chair or Director, in coordination with the departmental administrative assistant, also establishes the schedule for the on-site review. The Department Chair also hosts the external evaluators for lunch during the on-site review.
- 4. The external evaluators:** Each APR has two to three external evaluators. The external evaluators read the self-study and supporting data, participate in an on-site review that involves interviews with departmental faculty, staff, students, and other stakeholders. Based on the self-study, data, and interviews, the external evaluators author an external evaluator report, using

the template provided by IPE.

5. **The internal evaluators:** Each APR has one to two internal evaluators. The internal evaluators read the self-study and supporting data, participate in an on-site review that involves interviews with departmental faculty, staff, students, and other stakeholders. The internal evaluators do not participate in the writing of the external evaluator report, although they serve as a resource to the external evaluators and can, in that capacity, proof-read and offer edits to the external evaluator report.
6. **The APR Committee:** The APR Committee oversees the APR process, reviews evaluator reports and the Provost's memos, serves as internal evaluators for APRs, and reviews and assesses the effectiveness of the APR process and recommends improvements.
7. **The Office of Institutional Planning and Effectiveness:** The IPE Offices covers travel expenses and honorarium for one external reviewer. The travel expenses and honorarium for additional reviewers are covered by either the department or program under review or the Dean of the School in which that program resides. The IPE Office also covers the cost of the welcome dinner for evaluators, and the cost of the meeting rooms at the Hotel Lumen. The department under review covers the cost of lunch for the Chair and reviewers on the day of the on-site review.

APR Timelines and Process

1. The IPE Office will maintain and publish a four-year schedule of Academic Program reviews. This schedule will be shared with Associate Deans and posted on the IPE website.
2. Academic Departments or Programs will be notified by their Associate Dean or the IPE Office the at the beginning of the semester prior to their APR that they are scheduled for Academic Program Review. At this time, IPE will schedule a meeting with the Chair or Director to review the APR Process.
3. Department Chairs or Program Directors will provide to IPE, subsequent to this meeting, a list of potential dates for the on-site review and a list of potential expert external evaluators.
4. IPE will invite external and internal evaluators and finalize the date for the on-site review no later than the end of the semester preceding the on-site review.
5. IPE will work with the Office of University Decision Support to gather the

- institutional data necessary for the APR and to provide it to the Department or program by the end of the semester preceding the schedule review.
6. Department Chairs, or Program Directors, in concert with program faculty, will write and submit the self-study to the IPE Office no later than 30 days prior to the scheduled on-site review.
 7. Internal and external reviewers will meet with the IPE office to review the APR process one to two months before the schedule on-site review. The institutional data and self-study will be made available to reviewers after this meeting.
 8. On-site reviews take place over 3 days, with arrival on the afternoon of the first day, interviews on the second and the morning of the third day, and work sessions for writing the report on the evening of the second and morning of the third day.
 9. External reviewers should complete at least a draft of the external review before leaving campus.
 10. The external evaluator report should be submitted to the Associate Provost for Institutional Planning and Effectiveness no later than one week after the on-site review.
 11. The external evaluator report, once received, will be sent to the academic program or department and the Associate Dean for review and error correction.
 12. Departments or programs should submit any factual corrections of the external evaluator report to the Associate Provost within one week of receiving the evaluator report.
 13. Once the department or program has reviewed the external evaluator report, the report and the self-study are sent to the Provost and Associate Provosts for review. The self-study and evaluator report will also be shared with the APR Committee.
 14. The Provost will, based on the findings of the self-study, draft a summary memo to the Dean of the College or School where the academic program or department is housed. This memo will contain recommendations and requests for action, based on the recommendations of the external evaluators.
 15. The Provost will also request a follow-up report on any action items in the memo. This follow-up report is due to the Provost one year from the memo.