Harvey Mudd College
Academic Program Review Guidelines
(Revised: Sept 2024)

In 2002, the Harvey Mudd College faculty adopted a policy for assessing how well its programs fulfill the College's mission. The policy has been revised as part of a normal review process to reflect best practices in academic program review. This update again revises that policy by describing the purposes, characteristics, and procedures for an academic program review. The guidelines are suggestive, not prescriptive, and are designed to assist programs as they plan for, undertake, and respond to the results of an academic program review.

The Purposes of Academic Program Review

Academic program reviews provide an opportunity for programs to reflect, self-assess, and plan; they generate in-depth useful communication between the program and College leadership, thus offering a vehicle to inform planning and decision-making; and they invite candid assessment by external experts that can generate new directions in professional engagement, teaching, and service.

Departments and academic centers are reviewed typically once every 10 years, or as needed, in a cycle determined by the Dean of the Faculty. Whenever possible, programs of study that are associated with a department or program (e.g., Mathematical and Computational Biology is associated with Math and Biology) are included in the review. The Department of Engineering engages in ABET accreditation, a process that replicates the process of self-study, review and continuous improvement associated with academic program review. As a result, their ABET accreditation self-study and review is submitted as their academic program review.

Academic program review consists of three phases: 1) a self-study by the program in consultation with relevant constituents; 2) an on-site visit by an external review team; and 3) a report from the external review team and response by the program being reviewed.

HMC's review process is designed to:

1. Understand the strengths and weaknesses of the program as well as the opportunities available and challenges and vulnerabilities faced by the program.
2. Engage external expertise to help us better understand how well the program is achieving its mission.
3. Assess how the teaching and professional activities of the program contribute to its mission, and where there may be opportunities for improvement (without necessarily adding additional faculty resources).

Getting Started with Program Review

Ideally, academic program reviews will be spread over three semesters, a period that should allow a program ample time for preparation, collecting and analyzing data, writing the self-study, hosting an external visit, and discussing how to apply what has been learned in the process. One person—either the department chair or a designated faculty member—should serve as the review coordinator. While program review is a shared endeavor among the faculty, the review coordinator is generally responsible for:
1. Convening and leading a program review committee or subcommittee.
2. Preparing the self-study.

3. Managing the external site visit.

The review coordinator works closely with members of the program review committee and the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness (OIRE) to gather necessary information and write the self-study.

The Self-Study

The self-study includes the program's description and assessment of itself, as well as a plan for its future. The self-study should highlight key issues with the potential to have a significant impact on the program within the next 3-5 years and/or describe relevant issues the program must contend with in order to improve. It should be informative to both internal and external readers. The study should be thorough, but concise. The self-study should address the broad areas described below. Typically, the self-study also includes a number of appendices with relevant data. Data can be useful in evaluating various dimensions of a program: the faculty; demographic diversity; professional activities; curricular outcomes; and budget. The Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness (OIRE) provides a standard set of data (e.g., majors, graduates, course enrollment, 5C and summer enrollment, average class size) to each department, and BAO provides financial information. OIRE can also assist with additional data needs.

The self-study requires several months to complete since it touches the entire program and includes data gathering, discussion, and reflection. Programs undergoing a review in the fall of the academic year should plan to complete their self-study during the preceding spring and summer. Similarly, programs undergoing a review in the spring semester should plan to engage in the self-study during the preceding fall. The self-study is typically due to the DOF four weeks prior to the review committee's on-site visit. In the year the self-study is completed, it may be submitted to the Assessment and Accreditation Committee (AAC) in lieu of an annual assessment report.

The self-study addresses any specific issue raised by the Dean of the Faculty and typically includes the following elements:

- A description of the fundamental questions that organize and motivate the current teaching, professional engagement, and service activities of the program.
- A critical analysis of the current state of the program, including teaching (with attention to the purpose and coherence of the curriculum), professional engagement, and service.
- An outline of the specific issues, if any, the program wishes the review committee to address, and any other expectations the program has of the review committee.
- A plan for the future, taking into account a sense of where the relevant field(s) is going.

Elements of a Self-Study

Not all the elements will be relevant to every program and/or department. The elements listed below are intended to help programs frame and organize their self-study:

Program Profile
- A statement of the program's mission and goals.
- Describe the major areas of professional engagement represented in the program. Call attention to any past conditions or events that are critical to understanding the program's present situation and future development.

<u>Strategic Direction</u>
- Describe how the relevant academic fields are projected to change nationally and internationally in the near future, and how the program plans to respond to these changes.
- Describe three to five opportunities or threats the program will face in the next three to five years and how the program hopes to address each one.

<u>Faculty</u>
Recruiting
- Have there been significant recent hires or losses in the last five years?
- Has the program been successful in recruiting and retaining faculty members? If not, what have been the major challenges and barriers to success? What are the retention patterns? Do retention patterns correlate with demographic characteristics?
- How does the program create a large, diverse pool of candidates? What efforts have been made to recruit a diverse faculty?
- How does the program mentor junior faculty? How is the program responsive to the potentially different mentoring needs of faculty members?
- What are the prospects for the future in terms of attracting desired faculty to the department?

Professional Engagement
- What are the professional engagement strengths of the program? How do they support the curriculum?
- Do faculty in the program include undergraduates in professional engagement activities? If so, how?
- Are there areas of professional engagement that need to be developed or phased out?
- Is support for professional engagement adequate?

Teaching
- Describe the typical teaching load of the faculty teaching in the program.
- How are teaching assignments made, and how are they distributed among the different levels of faculty?
- What percentage of Core courses and required courses are taught by tenured and/or permanent faculty?
- How does the program promote an inclusive learning environment for all students?

Advising & Mentoring Undergraduates
- What is the distribution of advising and mentoring responsibilities to faculty, and what methods are used to evaluate their effectiveness?
- How do the faculty serve as role models in mentoring and professional engagement opportunities for students to encourage them to continue in the discipline?
- What is the program's advising and mentoring structure and philosophy?
- How is the employment environment changing and how does the program prepare students for this?

Collaborations & Partnerships
- Do faculty actively seek partnerships with faculty in related programs? In Claremont? At other institutions? How does this contribute to the intellectual life of the program? Are there new strategic partnerships that should be pursued?
- Describe any collaborative centers or programs that play a significant role in the program's function.
- Describe current efforts made to foster and promote intellectually rewarding collaborations among faculty.

Students

Goals & Mission
- How does the program's curriculum contribute to fulfilling the mission of the College?
- How does the program's structure of requirements ensure that students acquire a deep and rigorous understanding of the methods and substance within the discipline?
- What evidence do you have that students are achieving the student learning outcomes you have for the program?
- Describe the program's goals for inclusive teaching, and how you monitor and assess your progress.

Quality
- How do you balance the need to provide Core courses and courses for non-majors with the need to provide courses for majors?
- What opportunities are available to students to integrate and demonstrate their learning (e.g., undergraduate research, tutoring/grutoring, clinic, thesis)?
- How many students pursue professional engagement opportunities and/or independent studies?
- Describe the support mechanisms you have in place to facilitate and promote the academic success and retention of students who may be struggling.

Limitations
- Describe any limitations students may experience in your current program.

Governance and Administration
- Describe the leadership and oversight structure for the program.
- Describe the role of the chair, director, and any standing committees that may exist within the program.
- Describe the role of the staff in the program.
- Is the current staff and/or leadership structure effective or are changes needed?
- How is the work of the program distributed among the faculty and staff?
- How effective is the administrative structure of the program?

Because academic program review is situated at the program level, programs with joint majors must address them within their program review, or clearly delineate why it is not appropriate to address joint majors. It may be advisable in the case of joint majors to involve faculty and/or staff from other departments in a program review.

The External Review Team and Visit

The program creates an annotated list of 6-8 potential external reviewers including names, title(s), contact information (institution, email address), any non-arms-length professional relationship a reviewer may have to a member of the program, and a short paragraph describing why they are being invited to review. The external review team should consist of those whose expertise matches the work of the program being reviewed, whose accomplishments and perspective are respected, and who have sufficient distance from the program to enable them to give a frank and unbiased assessment. Generally, close associates of HMC faculty members are not eligible to serve as external reviewers. That list is shared with the Dean of the Faculty, who may supplement the list at their discretion, sharing any additional reviewer names with the program. The final makeup of the external review team is determined by the Dean of the Faculty

The Dean of the Faculty formally invites potential reviewers. While a program is free to suggest external reviewers as it sees fit, it may be beneficial to include one person from a comparable liberal arts college and one person from a research university that offers PhDs in relevant disciplines. This helps to ensure that the department receives feedback on the unique position of HMC as a liberal arts college as well as on how well HMC is preparing students for further study.

The department will indicate dates it would prefer the external reviewers to visit campus. The Dean of the Faculty's office will determine availability and once reviewers have confirmed, arrange travel and housing for reviewers.

The On-Campus Visit

The program is responsible for arranging the on-campus schedule for the visit. Sample on-campus visit schedules can be found here.

External reviewers typically spend two full days on campus. The external review team meets with the Dean of the Faculty at the beginning of the first day of their visit and again for an exit interview in the afternoon on the second day. After this exit interview, the reviewers should have no further contact with program members. The program sets the schedule for the visit in partnership with the Dean of the Faculty, ensuring that external reviewers meet with all continuing program faculty and, as relevant, support staff as well as individuals in joint or related majors or programs, including those at other Claremont Colleges. This allows reviewers to gain the fullest picture of the program. Many programs find it valuable to have reviewers meet with students, visit one or more classes, and review any significant resources (e.g., laboratories, workspaces). It may be advisable to provide reviewers with time to read or review student work such as thesis or clinic work, or class projects. Many departments find it useful to have a purely social reception or dinner for the reviewers and program members one evening during the visit.

Final Report

The review team has one month after the end of the on-campus visit to submit the final report. This report is sent by the review chair to the Dean of the Faculty. The Dean of the Faculty will share the report with the department chair or program director for review for errors of fact. If there are no errors of fact, the report can then be distributed to the program. If there are errors of fact, the Dean of the Faculty's office corresponds with the review team chair and requests that they be addressed within two weeks.

Response to the External Review Report

Upon receipt of the external review team's written report, the program prepares a written response to their findings and recommendations and shares that with the Dean of the Faculty.

The length of the program's response depends on their level of agreement with the report. When the program agrees with the report and intends to implement its recommendations, a short acknowledgement to the Dean of the Faculty is sufficient. On the other hand, should the program disagree with some of the findings or recommendations in the report, a fuller response is required.

Should further communication and/or clarification between the program and the external reviewers be necessary, the Dean of the Faculty will facilitate this process and retain any resulting documentation.

After the program review, the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness (OIRE) maintains the program review archive. Self-studies are available for reviewing by coordinating with OIRE. External-review-team reports and program responses are generally treated as confidential and available at the discretion of the Dean of the Faculty.