

Self-Study and External Review Process

Overview

The external review process includes a self-study by the academic unit during one semester, followed by a visit from external reviewers in the following semester. Approximately six weeks after the visit, the reviewers submit their report to the Dean, who forwards the report to the Chair of the academic unit, to the Provost, and to EPC.

Purpose

This process is intended to provide the academic unit, as well as Academic Affairs and EPC, with an overview of the unit's articulation of its various educational objectives for students; an assessment of its effectiveness in meeting these objectives over the previous decade; and its vision for the future. The review also serves to present the range, balance, and strength of the curriculum offered by the unit with respect to the current state of the discipline. The review aims to address the academic unit as a whole and is not intended to provide an assessment of individuals. An external review is a serious commitment of institutional time and resources, and the goal is for this investment to provide long-term benefits to the academic unit and to Wesleyan.

Frequency of Reviews

A self-study and external review should occur approximately every ten years for each academic unit, though the timing for a given unit may be affected by a number of circumstances which could delay or accelerate the timing of a review process.

When a new department, program, center, or college is founded, an initial simplified review should take place five years after creation (possibly with a smaller review team of one or two external reviewers), and the first full external review should take place five years after that (10 years after creation).

Process to Determine Schedule of Upcoming Reviews

The Provosts and Deans review the schedule at least annually to determine which academic units should receive a review within the coming 3-5 years. The proposed schedule is then shared with EPC, as well as with the Chair of the units that are intended to be reviewed in the coming three academic years. The Provosts and Deans will take into account the advice of EPC and any feedback from the relevant Chairs, then will select 5-6 academic units (at least one in each division) to be reviewed each year, with the goal of all academic units receiving a review approximately every 10 years. Some reviews include a site visit in the fall semester and some in the spring semester; the Dean will work with the Chair to determine which will be best for each review.

Academic Unit Self-Study Head

Two semesters prior to a scheduled review, the Dean will remind the academic unit Chair of their upcoming review and will ask them to name someone to head the self-study process for their unit. This person will serve as the point of contact with the Dean, and all data requests will go through this person.

EPC Liaison

Before the end of the fall semester, the Provost will provide EPC with the list of academic units to be reviewed the following academic year. EPC will designate an EPC member to serve as a liaison for each review; preferably a faculty member from the same division as the unit being reviewed, but not from that unit.

For reviews with a fall site visit, the liaison would ideally be a current EPC member who will remain on EPC the following year; for reviews with a spring site visit, EPC may wait to designate the liaison when the following year's EPC members will be present (final spring meeting or first fall meeting).

Constituting the External Review Team

Two semesters prior to a scheduled review, the Dean will ask the academic unit to submit the names of approximately 6-8 possible external reviewers, along with a brief description of each individual's expertise, why they've been nominated, and contact information, with the understanding that some but not all will be selected. It is helpful to prioritize the names in various specialty areas, indicating alternates, and recognizing that it is typically easiest to recruit reviewers from nearby institutions. The list should include some from comparable liberal arts colleges who will understand our type of institution as well as some from research universities who can provide feedback on our research programs, and some who are or have been chair of their unit.

The Dean will then draw up a list of possible reviewers. This list will include some nominated by the academic unit and others that were not. Once the list of possible external reviewers is in place, the Dean will contact the individuals on this list, to constitute the committee. The Dean will also appoint a chair of the external review committee.

Once the external review team is set, the Dean will inform the Chair and the EPC liaison of the final composition of the committee as well as the final date of the site visit.

Scheduling the Site Visit

Two semesters prior to the scheduled review, the Dean and the Chair will work with Lisa Sacks in Academic Affairs to set aside possible dates for the site visit. These dates will be blocked on everyone's calendar until the final dates are confirmed with the external review team. Site visits usually take place over 2 days, typically a full day on Monday followed by a half day on Tuesday.

Self-Study

The Dean will ask the academic unit to engage in a reflective process during the semester prior to the scheduled site visit, to develop a self-study that will be sent to the external reviewers and shared with EPC, the Provost, and the President.

A retreat or sustained mediated self reflection to help with this reflective process is strongly encouraged; funds for this are available.

The self-study will likely be a fairly substantial document (usually in the range of 30-50 pages, plus appendices, depending on the complexities of the unit), so anything the unit can do to facilitate its legibility to readers (table of contents, index, summary statements) will be appreciated. The Chair should ensure sufficient time for the unit to engage in a thoughtful process that includes soliciting feedback from students and alumni as well as gathering relevant data from other offices on campus (Registrar, Institutional Research, Admissions, etc.). When requesting data from other offices, it is critical to submit requests as early as possible, allowing sufficient time (varying by the data collection and/or analyses required, the time of year, and other factors – please see the external review schedule for deadlines for data requests). It is also important to anticipate multiple rounds of edits, including time to incorporate final feedback from Academic Affairs.

The Dean will work closely with the academic unit to ensure that its report contains the information that an external review committee is likely to want. The self-study should address all of the topics below that are appropriate for the academic unit.

Template Outline for the Self-Study

Within each of the five main topics of Faculty, Curriculum, Learning Goals & Assessment, Students, and Administration, please provide:

- (1) A brief description,
- (2) A full analysis and appraisal, and
- (3) Plans for improvement and for maintaining excellence.

Below, please find a template outline with sample questions to help guide the development of the self study. This outline and these questions are *not intended as formulae*, but as suggestions to stimulate thinking and engagement in the reflection and assessment processes; please ask and answer the questions that seem most productive for your unit.

- Introduction
 - Overview and history of the academic unit
 - Describe the role of the unit and area of study within the college
 - Describe the unit's contributions to university-wide objectives
- Faculty
 - Structure and composition of the faculty
 - Core faculty profiles (likely an appendix)
 - Affiliated faculty
 - Research directions
 - Provide a summary of faculty research activity
 - In what ways does the unit support faculty research productivity?
 - Scholarship assessment
 - Teaching assessment
 - To what extent do faculty find their teaching satisfying?
 - How can the unit help faculty members continue to improve their pedagogy or develop new areas of teaching expertise?
 - Recruiting, retention, and mentoring
 - How are junior faculty members mentored with respect to their teaching, scholarship, and collegiality?
 - Are information and expectations communicated effectively?
 - Are there sufficient opportunities for faculty to interact with one another and share experiences (through both formal meetings and informal interactions)?
 - Is there potential for better interdepartmental and intercollegiate cooperation and complementarity?
- Curriculum
 - Overview
 - Describe the shape, goals, and efficacy of the major and minor curriculum.
 - Course offerings (appendix with full enrollment data)
 - How is the curriculum staffed? How stable is the staffing? Have there been changes over the years? To what do you attribute these changes?
 - How many courses/faculty contribute from within the unit? Outside of the unit? How do you assess this balance?
 - Are there particular elements of the curriculum that require unique consideration (such as labs, studios, and performance spaces)?
 - Enrollments
 - Contributions to the University curriculum
 - Interdisciplinarity
 - Recent curricular changes
 - Honors theses and other capstone projects
 - Study abroad
 - Major advising
 - Graduate programs (including BA/MA program, MA and PhD)
- Learning Goals and Assessment
 - Goals and structure of the major
 - What are the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum offered?
 - What are the learning objectives for the major?
 - Are students learning what you want them to learn, and how do you know?

- Assessment activities
- Undergraduate alumni accomplishments and placements
- Goals and structure of graduate program
- Graduate program student time to completion
- Graduate student placement
- Students
 - Demographic information - majors and non-majors
 - What students (and how many) are served by major's courses? By general education courses? Does this match your goals for which students (and how many) you aspire to serve?
 - How many majors/minors are there? Has that changed over years? Why?
 - Are there particular trends in how students proceed through the curriculum? Are there demographic trends in terms of ease of progression and persistence of students through the major?
 - Are there striking ethnic, racial, and/or gender disparities among majors and non-majors in the program? What can be done to address any disparities?
 - If you need to limit enrollments in courses, what criteria do you use?
 - What do your majors/minors go on to do?
 - Cohort building
 - Describe co-curricular elements of the program (social and community building activities, programming designed to serve Wesleyan as a whole, or other communities)
 - Student engagement in/opportunities for co-curricular research/work
 - What opportunities do you offer students to conduct research with faculty or to engage in intellectual work outside of the curriculum?
- Administration
 - Governance
 - Are there clear processes for faculty governance?
 - Discuss internal dynamics in the unit
 - How does the unit prepare faculty members to assume leadership roles in the unit or the University more broadly?
 - Has there been effective leadership and mentoring in the unit—if so, what are its main features; if less so, how might it be improved?
 - Facilities and resources (include photos of the spaces if helpful)
 - How are the unit's goals supported or hampered by its physical facilities?
 - Budget and staffing (include information about endowments, if applicable, and how they are used to support departmental goals)
 - Are the budget and infrastructure/facilities appropriate and adequate?
 - What are the administrative or technical staff needs within the department/program and how well are they being met?
 - Information about the effectiveness of the unit's website
- Conclusion
 - Future directions and future needs
 - Are there specific questions you would like external reviewers to consider with regard to the goals of the unit?
 - Overall, what could be improved? Can you articulate a strategy for those improvements? If you work to strengthen one area, how will your priorities in other areas shift?

The self-study should pinpoint the questions and issues that the academic unit wants to communicate to the external reviewers and to EPC. Samples of recent self-studies from other departments are available from the Dean.

The final approved self-study must be sent to the external reviewers and to the EPC liaison no later than 6-8 weeks in advance of the site visit.

Charge for the External Review Team

The Dean will draft the charge for the external review committee. The Dean will solicit the input of the EPC liaison and the Chair of the academic unit before obtaining final approval for the charge from the Provost. The final charge will be shared with the Chair of the academic unit.

Documents for the External Reviewers

The Dean will send a copy of the final approved self-study, along with the charge, and any other relevant external review materials (department CVs, course syllabi, enrollment reports, as well as materials on Wesleyan University and Middletown) to the external reviewers, and will send a copy to the EPC liaison at least 6 weeks prior to the site visit.

Site Visit

The site visit takes place over 1-2 days. This usually involves a full first day that begins with a breakfast meeting and ends with a dinner meeting. The external review committee will meet with members of Academic Affairs when the committee members first arrive on campus and in an exit interview. In between those opening and closing meetings, the committee will meet with all academic unit members (individual or small group meetings), those in related programs, academic unit majors and non-majors, and anyone else deemed relevant for the particular review. Visits may also include a tour of relevant equipment and facilities.

If reviewers must travel to Middletown, they would arrive the evening prior to the first day. All travel arrangements are made for reviewers by Academic Affairs. The final meeting schedule is outlined by Academic Affairs with input from the academic unit. See the template schedule below.

Final Report

The external review committee will submit its final report to the Dean, usually within six weeks of the visit. Copies will be sent to the Chair of the academic unit, EPC, the Provost, and the President.

After consulting with the academic unit members and within three weeks of receiving the final report, the Chair will write a response to the report and will share this written response with the Dean. The Chair, Dean, Provost, and EPC liaison will meet to discuss the findings and recommendations of the external committee and how to implement those that seem useful. Academic Affairs will write a memo on the external review and will file that memo along with the review committee's final report and the academic unit's response.

Committee findings may be discussed by EPC, with the Provost and/or Deans and/or Chair of the academic unit or other academic unit members in attendance at EPC's discretion.

As soon as the final report is received, Academic Affairs will pay honoraria to the reviewers.

Years Following the Site Visit

In the year or two following the site visit, the Chair should use the regular departmental annual report to outline which recommendations have been implemented and why, which have not been implemented and why, what impact the changes have had, and where the academic unit intends to head in the future. The Chair and Dean may also wish to schedule a follow up meeting at this time to discuss any outstanding issues related to the recommendations.

Template Schedule for Site Visit

Day One

- Meeting with Academic Affairs. This may include the Provost and/or Dean.
- Meeting with the Dean and a Professor representing the Educational Policy Committee.
- Meeting with the Chair.
- Meetings with individual faculty, or in small groups.
- Meetings with students in the major, and when appropriate, graduate students.
- Dinner can include the visiting committee, Provost, Dean, EPC liaison, department faculty.

Day Two

- Possible meeting with staff as appropriate.
- Visiting committee meetings.
- Concluding Visiting Committee Lunch/Meeting with Academic Affairs.

Template Letter to Possible Reviewers

DATE

NAME

ADDRESS

Dear NAME,

I am writing to you as the Dean of DIVISION at Wesleyan University to ask if you would be willing to be one of three external reviewers to participate in a scheduled review of the DEPARTMENT at Wesleyan (<http://www.wesleyan.edu/DEPARTMENT>). This is a regularly scheduled review that we carry out periodically with all departments and programs. As we consider how to allocate resources and best serve our students, while maintaining excellence in scholarship, the input of the external review committee will be invaluable. We are planning that the visit of the external review committee will take place over two days MONTH (DATES) or early MONTH (DATES) - the exact dates depending on the availability of the reviewers. In exchange for your expert help and advice, we offer a stipend of \$1250. Well before you come to campus, we will provide you with some background information about Wesleyan and the DEPARTMENT as well as a copy of the Department's self-study, commissioned for this external review. We anticipate sending these materials in MONTH. The outcome of the review will be a short report, and there will be ample time at the end of the visit for the committee to meet, plan and write the report.

Wesleyan is a very selective liberal arts university of around 2900 undergraduates and 200 graduate students in the natural sciences, mathematics and ethnomusicology. DEPARTMENT INFORMATION (interdisciplinary programs, number of faculty and visitor, number of majors and graduate students, etc.)

I am reaching out to you as a leader in your field and as someone with the breadth and wisdom to provide excellent advice and guidance. I do know that you have a very busy schedule, but we would greatly appreciate having the benefit of your help with our review. I will be following up this email with a phone call. If possible, please do send me some appropriate times to call. I hope that you will seriously consider our request and I look forward to talking with you soon.

Thank you for your consideration,

Sincerely,

NAME

Dean, DIVISION

TITLE

Cc: Lisa Sacks, Academic Affairs

Template Charge to External Reviewers

DATE

**External Review of the DEPARTMENT/PROGRAM
Wesleyan University
The Charge to the Visiting Committee from the Dean of DIVISION**

From its inception in 1831 as a small, Methodist-church-affiliated, single-sex institution, Wesleyan University has developed into a leading non-sectarian, co-educational private liberal-arts university dedicated to the integration of teaching with research and creative expression. Although, with around 2900 undergraduates and 200 graduate students, Wesleyan is somewhat larger than many colleges with which it is often compared, it remains a residential institution in which students enjoy both formal and informal interaction with the faculty. Faculty members are expected to be both productive and professionally visible scholars *and* superb teachers; indeed, the former role is expected to enhance the latter. As scholar-teachers, the Wesleyan faculty express their commitment to learning through the rigor of their own scholarship, the involvement of their students in research, the teaching of undergraduates and, in the natural sciences, mathematics, and music, the close guidance of graduate students.

Among the materials accompanying this Charge is Wesleyan's strategic plan, [*Towards Wesleyan's Bicentennial 2031, which*](#) was adopted by the Board of Trustees in November 2021 as a flexible framework for strategic decision-making on the allocation of resources in the next five to ten years. It is within this context that we ask the Visiting Committee to evaluate the DEPARTMENT/PROGRAM.

Some general questions we would like the Visiting Committee to address in its evaluation are:

1. Do the Department's activities measure up to the high expectations that Wesleyan has for its faculty and its programs? What are the Department's main strengths? What are its main weaknesses?
2. Does the Department function well, and do its faculty feel they are part of a well-functioning unit?
3. If there are gaps between the ideals of the University and the performance of the College, what might the College, the Office of Academic Affairs, or the University do to help close those gaps?
4. How is the Department regarded in a national context? What can the Department, the Office of Academic Affairs, or the University do to enhance the Department's national reputation and visibility?

5. How are the faculty regarded as scholars in a national or international context?
6. Given current trends in DEPARTMENT and related fields, what goals should the Department set for itself, and individual faculty for themselves, to keep up with developments in the areas relevant to the Department's mission, and to enhance their current profile?

In addition to these general questions, we would also be interested in the Committee's response to some questions specific to the DEPARTMENT.

7. LIST OF SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

[Include the following if applicable] I should state explicitly that the Department is not being reviewed at this time because it is in some sort of crisis. The review is part of our normal cycle. The thoughtful and candid appraisal of the Visiting Committee will be much appreciated by the Department, the Office of Academic Affairs, and the University.

Thank you for agreeing to undertake this important task.

NAME
Dean of DIVISION
ADDRESS
PHONE
EMAIL