

# Boston College Academic Program Review



Guidelines  
October 2010

## **Academic Program Review Guidelines**

Academic Program Reviews are intended to:

- ❖ assess the quality and effectiveness of academic programs, in departments and schools;
- ❖ stimulate program planning and improvement;
- ❖ ensure that current and proposed programs are consistent with University-wide strategic priorities;
- ❖ promote fairness and efficiency in the allocation of academic resources in response to the needs of the entire Boston College community;
- ❖ support the planning and budgeting processes of the University;
- ❖ respond systematically and efficiently to requirements for self-assessment from NEASC and other accrediting agencies.

On a regular cycle determined by the appropriate dean and the Provost, each department will conduct an Academic Program Review.

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TAB 1

## Timeline for Academic Program Review

Step/Process		Fall Start	Spring Start	Person(s) responsible	Comments/Specific Tasks
1. Confirm departments to be reviewed		Ongoing	Ongoing	Provost's Office	
Phase I	2. Notify department and establish schedule for completion	September	May	Provost's Office/ Department/ Dean	The Provost's Office, the Dean, and the department agree on a plan and schedule for the review, based on the department's particular demands and circumstances.
	3. Initial departmental meeting	September	May	Provost's Office/ Departmental Self-Study Team	Discuss the process in greater detail, review the self-study guidelines, survey resources and tools, and identify specific needs. Review departmental data for factual accuracy.
	4. Department gathers department-specific information	September - November	May - August	Department	
	5. Follow-up departmental meeting	November	August	Provost's Office/ Departmental Self-Study Team	Review departmental data. Discuss additional elements that the department may wish to collect.
	6. Conduct the self-study	December - April	September - January	Department	A liaison from the Provost's Office will meet periodically with self-study teams to help teams troubleshoot and answer questions as they arise.
Phase II	7. Submit names of proposed external reviewers to Provost	February 1 <sup>st</sup>	December 1 <sup>st</sup>	Dean/ Department	Prepare list of nominees to be considered for the external review team.
	8. Finalize membership of the external review team for site visit	April	January	Provost's Office/ Dean	Final selection is the responsibility of the Provost, who invites the external reviewers to conduct a site visit of the department.
	9. Schedule external review site visit	May	January	Provost's Office/ Dean/ Department	

	Step/Process	Fall Start	Spring Start	Person(s) responsible	Comments/Specific Tasks
	10. Submit the final self-study report to Provost	May 1 <sup>st</sup>	February 1 <sup>st</sup>	Department	
	11. Review and revision of the self-study report	Summer/ Early Fall	February/ March	Provost's Office/ Dean/ Department	

Phase III	12. Site visit by external reviewers	Fall	Spring	Provost's Office/ Dean/ Department	
	13. External reviewers submit final report to Provost	TBD	TBD	External review team	Provost's Office will distribute copies of the report to the Dean and department.
	14. Submit departmental response to external reviewers' report to Dean	Four weeks after report delivered	Four weeks after report delivered	Department	
	15. Submit departmental response and Dean's review of departmental response to Provost	Two weeks after department report delivered	Two weeks after department report delivered	Dean	

Phase IV	16. Priorities and recommendations meeting	ASAP after external reviewers' report	ASAP after external reviewers' report	Provost's Office/ Dean/ Department	Depending on the contents of the report and the recommendations, this step may involve a series of individual or group conversations among members of the department and administration.
	17. Development of an action plan	Four weeks after priorities & recommendations meeting	Four weeks after priorities & recommendations meeting	Department	The action plan includes: (1) goals, (2) specific actions for the department to take to achieve the goals, (3) metrics/performance measures to ascertain whether and to what extent the goals have been met, and (4) an overall timeline for implementation.

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## The Academic Program Review Process

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The Academic Program Review process will extend over two academic terms. Some departments will begin the review process in the Fall term and complete the process in the Spring; other departments will begin in the Spring term and finish the following Fall. The process is the same for both start times, and comprises the phases described below.

### ***Notification and preparation***

As early in the process as possible, the Provost's Office will notify the department of its selection for academic program review. The department identifies who will serve on its self-study committee.

### ***Planning and data collection***

The Provost's Office will meet with the department and review the self-study guidelines. The purpose of the initial meeting is to establish a schedule for the review and to assess any particular departmental needs or requirements. The Provost's Office may designate a program review liaison from the Provost's Office who will work with the department to facilitate the schedule and review process.

During the first phase of the program review, the department should closely review the data available in the Departmental Data Reports and the University Factbook to determine what supporting data is already available.

### ***The self-study***

The departmental self-study should be a candid internal assessment that describes the department's activities, analyzes each program's strengths and weaknesses, and makes recommendations for improvement.

Specific strategies for conducting the self-study are provided in greater detail in this guide. In general, the self-study includes the following:

1. follow-up from previous review (if any);
2. description of the department: size; scope of teaching and learning, research, and service activities; departmental operations and resources;
3. analysis of the academic programs, including: instructional methods; faculty preparation and development; scope of scholarly activities, publications, and external funding; academic support services; and an assessment of quality and effectiveness demonstrated by student-learning outcomes;
4. recommendations, including goals and priorities for the department for the next five to ten years; rationale for the recommendations; analysis of projected risks, benefits, and outcomes. If additions are proposed, information about programmatic features to be discontinued should be included.

As part of the self-study process, the department will recommend external reviewers for the site visit. These external reviewers should be nationally or internationally known experts who the

department believes would contribute a considered and impartial analysis. The final selection is the responsibility of the Provost's Office, who invites the external reviewers.

The department will submit to the Provost a final draft of its self-study. The Provost's Office will review the report and may request additional information from the department.

### ***The site visit***

A team of distinguished scholars or specialists will be invited to review the self-study report, visit the campus, and report to the Provost its assessment of the department's programs and recommendations. The members of the external review team will be chosen and invited by the Provost, after consultation with the Dean and department. Selection criteria will be based on the capacity of prospective reviewers to contribute to a timely, thorough, and meaningful review of the department's self-study and specific recommendations. The team generally comprises at least three members.

The Provost's Office and the department will jointly plan the site visit schedule. A typical site visit may span two days, during which the external reviewers meet with faculty, department constituencies (undergraduates, graduate students, etc.), various administrators, the Dean, and the Provost. The external review team will submit a written report of its review to the Provost, who will forward it to the Dean and department. The department will then be given the opportunity to submit a response to the external report to the Dean. The Dean will forward the department's and the Dean's responses to the Provost.

### ***Development of a plan of action***

After the receipt of the external report and the department's and Dean's responses, the department, the Dean, and the Provost will review the priorities and recommendations emerging from the reports.

The Academic Program Review process concludes with the development of an Action Plan. The Action Plan will include: (1) departmental and program-specific goals, (2) specific actions for the department to take to achieve the goals, (3) metrics or performance measures that will be used to ascertain whether -- and to what extent -- the goals have been met, and (4) an overall timeline for implementation.

TAB 2



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## Self-Study Outline

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*This outline is not a prescribed format, but departments are strongly encouraged either to adopt this outline or to develop a similar structure that will organize the report in a way that best communicates the results of the self-study.*

### **Introduction**

The introduction may include information about any previous reviews and discuss the department's response to the recommendations emerging from the last review. If there have been significant curricular changes since the last review, those may be discussed here or in the body of the report.

### **Description**

This part of the self-study is descriptive, rather than analytical. This section should communicate the mission of the department and the goals and objectives that shape current practice. The descriptive section should also convey a sense of the size, quality, and scope of the department's activities, including teaching and learning, research, and service. Finally, the description should include a discussion of current departmental resources (support personnel, annual budget, space, special equipment, etc.) and their allocation.

### **Analysis**

The self-study should provide an assessment of the quality and effectiveness of the department's programs, with attention to analysis of student learning outcomes, and an analysis of the department's teaching, research, and service activities.

### **Recommendations**

The self-study report should conclude with clear and specific recommendations for actions the department could take to capitalize on its strengths and minimize its weaknesses. This section provides an opportunity for the department to use the information gathered and analyses conducted in the self-study process to think strategically about goals and initiatives, including introduction or discontinuation of programs, reallocation of resources, etc.

### **Supporting documentation**

It is not necessary to document all data in the self-study that comes from the Departmental Data Report. However, it is expected that additional data developed by the Department for the self-study will be appended to the report.

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## Preparing the Self-Study Report

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There is no prescribed format for the self-study report. The only requirements of the self-study are that: (1) it reflects the department's thoughtful and deliberate assessment of the quality and effectiveness of its programs, with attention to analysis of student learning outcomes; (2) it includes certain core information relating to departmental operations and infrastructure (described below); and (3) it communicates meaningful short-term and long-term goals and priorities for the department.

An outline of the elements that are generally included in a self-study report is provided below. Although this is not a prescribed format, departments are strongly urged to adopt this outline or develop a similar structure that will organize the report in a way that best communicates the results of the self-study.

### Introduction

The introduction to the self-study should give an overview of the self-study contents, and should provide the timeframe in which the study was conducted. The introduction may also include information about any previous reviews and discuss the department's response to the recommendations emerging from the last review. If there have been significant curricular changes since the last review, those may be discussed here or in the body of the report.

### Description

The department's self-study should begin with a description of the department. The purpose of the descriptive part of the self-study is to give the reader an introduction to the department and its programs. This section is descriptive, rather than analytical. It should convey a sense of the size, quality, and scope of the department's activities, including teaching and learning, research, and service. The description should also include a discussion of current departmental resources (support personnel, annual budget, space, special equipment, etc.) and their allocation. This portion of the report will generally include:

#### ❖ Overview of the department, including

- The departmental mission statement
- The department's current short-term and long-term goals, as well as any specific objectives relating to those goals
- A description of any measures, metrics, or indicators that the department uses to assess its progress toward those goals
- A description of departmental resources – this may include:
  - A description of departmental structure and administration
  - General information about faculty and support personnel
  - Information about infrastructure, such as the annual budget, space utilization, special equipment, library holdings, etc.
- A description of departmental expenditures and allocations during the relevant period of time

#### ❖ Description of undergraduate, graduate, and continuing education programs, including

- Course and program enrollments
- Description of expected learning outcomes at each student level

- Results of any surveys assessing student satisfaction, student experience, or student learning outcomes in the department
- ❖ **Description of teaching, advising, and mentoring activities, including**
  - Departmental summaries of teaching loads, by professional rank and type of appointment
  - Summary of the department's approach to advising
  - Description of the department's undergraduate research opportunities
  - Departmental participation in university and external faculty mentoring and development programs
- ❖ **Description of the department's research and scholarship activities, including**
  - Summary of recent research and scholarship accomplishments by the department's faculty
  - Summary of external funding efforts by the department's faculty
  - Discussion of any interdisciplinary research projects with faculty in other Boston College units or in other universities
- ❖ **Description of service activities by the department's faculty, including**
  - Service to the department and the University
  - Service to the profession
  - Other external service

Some of these data are provided to departments in the Departmental Data Reports issued in February and June of each year. Other information will need to be collected by the department. Departments are encouraged to elicit participation from a wide range of stakeholders during this phase. Information collected from faculty, staff, graduate students, and undergraduate majors and non-majors will contribute to a rich description of the department, and will help focus the department's analysis.

## **Analysis**

The department's self-study should provide an assessment of the quality and effectiveness of its programs, with attention to analysis of student learning outcomes, and analyses of the department's teaching, research, and service activities. How each department approaches these analyses will vary, but the department should strive to provide comprehensive analyses of all of the descriptive information discussed above. Section Three of this handbook includes an array of guiding questions that may help frame the analysis.

## **Recommendations**

The self-study report should conclude with clear and specific recommendations for actions the department could take to capitalize on its strengths and minimize its weaknesses. This section provides an opportunity for the department to use the information gathered and the analyses conducted in the self-study process to think strategically about its goals and the specific steps needed to reach those goals. The recommendations should encompass the short-term (one year), the intermediate-term (5 years), and the long-term (10 years), and should include:

- ❖ The goals and priorities for the department for the next five years, and their associated costs

- ❖ Ways in which the department will respond, in research plans, curriculum changes, and/or re-examination of mission, to possible national and international developments and/or challenges/opportunities in the fields of the department
- ❖ Benchmarks that can be used to gauge departmental performance, effectiveness, and efficiency
- ❖ Possible sources of external funding that the department could pursue in the future
- ❖ Foreseeable faculty retirements and plans for any new faculty hires in light of the prospective market for the scholars in the fields of the department

The recommendations should be made in three possible scenarios:

- ❖ With existing resources, including the possibility of reallocating resources within the department
- ❖ With resources increased by 10%
- ❖ With resources decreased by 10%

### **Supporting Documentation**

Much of the information the department will need to conduct a thorough self-study can be obtained either from existing University data systems, or through departmental records or files. Not all of the data relied upon during the process of the self-study need be included in the self-study report, but it is expected that certain data will be appended to the report. At a minimum, the report should include the following:

- ❖ Complete list of courses and enrollments for the period relevant to the analysis
- ❖ Departmental summaries of teaching loads (with detail for each faculty member)
- ❖ Up-to-date curriculum vitae for all departmental members
- ❖ List or summary of faculty publications for the period relevant to the analysis
- ❖ Any other data specifically needed to support the department's goals and recommendations

A list of such supporting data generally used in the course of the self-study, along with notes to assist in obtaining this data, is included in Section 4 of these guidelines.

TAB 3

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## Guiding Questions for the Analyses

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### Questions to guide analysis of the department's mission and goals

1. How does the department define its mission? (What is its scholarly focus? Its areas of particular excellence? Who does the department serve, and who benefits from the department's activities?)
2. Does the department's written mission statement reflect the department's purpose, primary activities, and stakeholders?
3. What are the current, relevant critical issues and approaches in the field, and how are they reflected or addressed in the department's mission statement?
4. How do the department's short- and long-term goals support the department's mission?
5. How does the department evaluate its progress in meeting its short- and long-term goals? What measures does the department use? How is the progress communicated or recorded?
6. How does the department contribute to the mission of the College/School and the mission of the University?
7. How are the department's mission and goals communicated to faculty, staff, and students?

### Questions that may guide assessment of the academic programs

1. How does the department's graduate curriculum support the missions of the department, the College/School, and the University?
2. What changes have been made in the graduate curriculum in the past five years? Why did the department make these changes—on the basis of what evidence?
3. How does the department's undergraduate curriculum support the missions of the department, the College/School, and the University?
4. What changes have been made in the undergraduate curriculum in the past five years? Why did the department make these changes—on the basis of what evidence?
5. How does the department participate in interdisciplinary graduate and undergraduate programs? Has this participation changed over time?
6. How does the department assess student learning outcomes for its majors and minors? Assessment of student learning involves: a) making the department's expectations explicit and public; b) setting appropriate criteria by which to rate achievement of expectations; c) gathering, analyzing, and interpreting evidence to

determine how well student performance matches expectations; and, d) using the resulting information to document and improve the department's programs.

7. How are student-learning outcomes communicated to faculty, staff, and students?
8. On the basis of available data measuring student satisfaction and student-learning outcomes, what does the department judge to be the main successes and shortcomings of its undergraduate and graduate programs?
9. How does the department contribute to student formation? In what ways does the department facilitate the integration of students' intellectual endeavors with their everyday life experiences? How does the department create opportunities to integrate curricular and co-curricular experiences? To what extent does the department promote formal and informal interactions among students, faculty, and staff?
10. How does the department educate current and new faculty about student formation and its relationship to the University's mission?
11. Which departments at other institutions are the department's peers? How are they different from (or similar to) the department?
12. Are the department's rankings an accurate measure of its place among its peers?
13. What does the department do to increase its visibility? To attract graduate students?

#### **Questions to guide analysis of teaching, advising, and mentoring**

1. How are departmental teaching assignments determined, and what role does data on student credit hour (SCH) distributions play in those assignments?
2. What is the standard teaching load of faculty by rank and status, and what is the basis on which those reductions occur?
3. How is the teaching of each faculty member in the department evaluated?
4. How have student course evaluations been used to improve teaching? What specific improvements have been made on the basis of course evaluations?
5. What studies of teacher effectiveness and student learning, other than University course evaluations, has the department undertaken? What steps has the department taken to improve teaching and how effective have these measures been?
6. Do the department's faculty take part in University programs to improve teaching?
7. What effort is made by the department to stay apprised of pedagogical best practices in the discipline or field?
8. How does the department choose, prepare, and support graduate student teachers? Part-time faculty?
9. On what basis does the department estimate needs for adjunct full-time and part-time faculty?

10. What are the goals of the department's advising of its majors? Master's degree students? Doctoral students?
11. How are advising programs organized? How are the advising responsibilities distributed among the faculty?
12. What training of faculty advisors does the department do? How is the effectiveness of faculty advising evaluated and rewarded?
13. Has the department conducted studies of undergraduate students' satisfaction with departmental advisement? Graduate students' satisfaction?

#### **Questions to guide analysis of research and scholarship**

1. In light of the data presented on faculty research productivity what is the relationship between the quality and quantity of the department's scholarship and its teaching, advising, and service workloads?
2. What are the appropriate levels of faculty research productivity in the department at the present, by faculty rank?
3. What are the research strengths of the department?
4. Do members of the department engage in interdisciplinary research projects with faculty in other departments?

#### **Questions to guide analysis of faculty service**

1. In light of the data presented on faculty service, are the department faculty sufficiently engaged in the work of the department? Is the work evenly spread among faculty?
2. Are the department faculty sufficiently represented on College and University committees and task forces?
3. Do the department faculty demonstrate a commitment to the community outside the University?
4. Do the department faculty adequately serve, and lead, their professional organizations?

#### **Questions to guide analysis of department resources**

##### **Faculty**

1. In light of the faculty demographic data presented, how does the current age, gender, ethnicity, and rank distribution of the faculty compare to the optimum, as the department would define it?
2. What are the department's current hiring plans for the next five years?



3. How would you describe the department's hiring and retention efforts in the past five years? How many applicants were there for open positions? How many offers were made before a candidate accepted? Which institutions hired candidates who did not accept the department's offer? How many faculty, with offers from other institutions, were retained in the past five years? How many were lost, and to whom? (Lost would include those who departed for reasons other than a better offer/institution.)
4. Has the department made efforts to diversify its faculty? If so, in what ways?
5. How would you characterize the intellectual life of the department, and what is being done to improve or maintain it?
6. How does the department support, counsel, and mentor junior faculty? How is the review of junior faculty conducted?
7. How does the department evaluate senior faculty members?

### **Students**

1. What efforts are made to attract and inform undergraduate majors? How does the department engage undergraduates in the department's programs or in faculty research? How does the department assist with job or graduate school placement?
2. How does the department assist in the professional development of its graduate students? How does it assist its graduate students in obtaining employment?

### **Department Administration**

1. What are the roles, functions, responsibilities, and compensation (stipend and/or course reduction) of faculty administrative positions in the department?
2. What committees exist in the department, and what are their responsibilities?
3. What are the roles, functions, responsibilities, and reporting lines of department staff?
4. What efforts have been made to diversify the staff?
5. How would you describe the work and working relationships of department administrators, faculty, and staff, within the department and with the Dean and the University?

### **Resources**

1. Is the equipment available to the department adequate for the current state of the department? Is there sufficient operating support (maintenance contracts, technical staff, etc.) for the department's equipment?
2. In light of the data presented on library holdings, are appropriate library resources available to the department?

3. In light of the data presented on department space, is the space currently available to the department appropriately allocated?
4. Is the staff support (administrative, clerical, technical, etc.) now available to the department appropriate?
5. How are department resources (equipment, space, staff support) allocated? How could they be reallocated?

TAB 4

## Guide to Data and Data Sources

The self-study should convey a sense of the size and scope of the department's activities, including teaching and learning, research, and service. It should also discuss departmental resources. To provide this complete description, the following is a list of data that the department may need to refer to, or include in the self-study.

Overview of the department	Data provided by Departmental Data Reports and University Factbook:	Data the department should gather:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Degrees granted, most recent years</li> <li>❖ Faculty counts, by level and tenure status, most recent years</li> <li>❖ Demographic profile of faculty</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Description of special equipment, library holdings, etc.</li> </ul>

Academic program information	Data provided by Departmental Data Reports and University Factbook:	Data the department should gather:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Courses taught, by rank and type of instructor, current academic year</li> <li>❖ Course enrollment counts, by level of instruction, most recent years</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Expected learning outcomes at each student level</li> <li>❖ Surveys assessing student satisfaction or student experience in the department</li> <li>❖ Course evaluations</li> </ul>

Teaching, advising, and mentoring activities	Data provided by Departmental Data Reports and University Factbook:	Data the department should gather:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Total student credit hours taught, by faculty rank and status, most recent years</li> <li>❖ Average class size, percent of courses with enrollments under 20 and over 50, most recent years</li> <li>❖ Courses taught, by type of instructor</li> <li>❖ Number and percentage of all courses taught by faculty of each rank and status</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Number of undergraduate majors participating in faculty research</li> <li>❖ Number of undergraduates writing honors or senior theses</li> <li>❖ Faculty participation in dissertation direction and service on dissertation committees</li> </ul>

Research and scholarship activities	Data provided by the Office of Sponsored Programs	Data the department should gather:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Number of proposals submitted for external funding during the prior year, by faculty member</li> <li>❖ Dollar amount of proposals submitted, by faculty member</li> <li>❖ Annual dollars awarded by source and type, by faculty member</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Summary of department faculty's current research and scholarship accomplishments</li> <li>❖ Lists of faculty honors/awards</li> <li>❖ Lists of publications for each faculty member</li> <li>❖ List of major speeches or presentations by faculty to professional groups</li> <li>❖ Curriculum vitae for all faculty</li> </ul>

Service activities	Data provided by Departmental Data Reports and University Factbook:	Data the department should gather:
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Professional service activities of each faculty member</li> <li>❖ Summary of university and external service of each faculty member</li> </ul>

TAB 5

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## Frequently Asked Questions

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### What is the purpose of Academic Program Review?

Academic Program Review provides the University with an ongoing process for systematic assessment, planning, and improvements across academic departments. Academic Program Review contributes to overall planning efforts at the department, school, and university levels.

### How is a department selected for review?

The Provost's Office works with the deans to set a schedule of review for each department or program. The process is cyclical, with each department engaging in a review every five to seven years. When appropriate, the Provost's Office and the Dean will structure the review schedule to align with a school or department's professional accreditation schedule.

### How long will a review take?

The review process will extend over two academic terms. Some departments will begin the review process in the Fall term and complete the process in the Spring, others will begin in the Spring term and finish the following Fall.

### What does the Academic Program Review process involve?

The department will prepare a Self-Study Report, and a team of External Reviewers will visit the department and also prepare a report. These two reports will be used to produce a common set of recommendations and an action plan.

### How do we carry out the self-study?

The Academic Program Review Guidelines provide an outline for departments to follow, but the review process does not rely upon specific or standardized criteria. Departments are expected to adhere to the program review timeline and general framework, but each department or program has the latitude to approach the self-study in its own way. However, because each review is unique, it is essential that the department, the Dean, and the Provost's Office agree on the department's plan for the self-study at the *beginning* of the process.

### Are there any tips for the structure of the final report?

- ❖ It is not necessary to answer every single question in the self-study guides. The questions are intended to prompt reflection and discussion among those conducting the self-study. Not all of the guiding questions will be relevant to each program. Follow the basic format (i.e., the main section headings), and use the questions as guidelines only.
- ❖ Remember that an Academic Program Review examines a program as it *currently* exists; notable events, challenges, and accomplishments from the program history may be briefly described if necessary and relevant, but the focus of the review should be the current state of the program.

- ❖ The self-study report need not include every possible reference. Keep the report and appendices as succinct as possible and include a list of documents that are available on request or may be provided to the external reviewers on-site.
- ❖ Be concise. Identify the issues and information essential to the reviewers' understanding of the program.