Boston College

Administrative Program Review

Program Handbook

Self-Study Team Edition

May 2016

Table of Contents

APR Handbook: Self-Study Team Edition

About APR

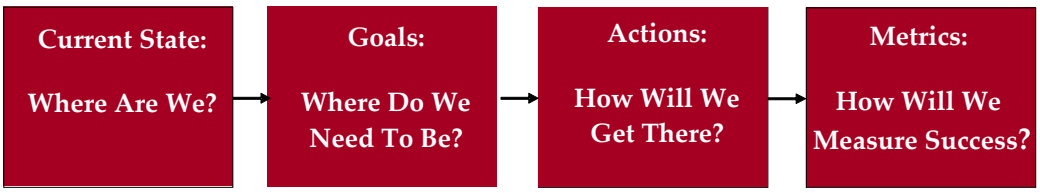
APR Handbook: Self-Study Team Edition

What Is APR?

Administrative Program Review is a long-term, continuous process, with repeating cycles in which every administrative department periodically undertakes a rigorous review of its own operations. Key components of a review are (1) a self-study and planning process by the department and (2) an in-depth visit by a team of reviewers from outside the University.

The purpose of Administrative Program Review – along with Academic Program Review – is the ongoing and constructive improvement of all aspects of Boston College. Administrative Program Review specifically gives each administrative department an opportunity to step back from its everyday activities to consider how it supports the University's mission, to examine its strengths and areas for improvement, and to plan its own future. The result for each department is a clear set of priorities, an action plan for pursuing them and metrics to indicate progress, as shown in **Figure 1** below.

Figure 1: APR Framework



Why APR Makes Sense at Boston College

Administrative Program Review fits with the University's strategy, its cultural roots and the standards to which it holds itself; more specifically:

- APR is called for in the University's Strategic Plan and supports the realization of the plan.
- The APR process is consistent with and supports Jesuit principles of higher education, which call for self-examination, the pursuit of excellence and service to others.
- A process like APR is called for in the accreditation standards to which the University must adhere.

Overview of the APR Process

Each department undergoes a complete review cycle every seven years. A cycle consists of the following:

- *Full Review:* In the first year, the department undertakes a full review. After a preparation process, a self-study team reviews its own department, identifies issues and makes preliminary recommendations. Using the self-study results as its starting point, an external review team conducts a site visit and makes its own recommendations. After discussions of both reports among the department and members of the administration, the department finalizes an action plan and implementation begins.

- *Progress Reports:* The department provides updates every six months to the APR Office about its progress towards reaching its goals. The APR Office will consolidate this information with that received from other departments and prepare regular status reports for the Executive Vice President and Board of Trustees.

For a more detailed description, see The APR Process beginning on p.7.

The APR Organization

The process is organized operationally and supported by the Office of Administrative Program Review. The APR Office is part of the Office of Institutional Research, Planning & Assessment (IRPA), which reports directly to the Executive Vice President. IRPA also provides critical analyses, project planning, facilitation and strategic planning services to the process. The Office of Administrative Program Review is available to answer questions.

- Mike Pimental, Director of APR and Strategic Planning Services, 617-552-3111 or MICHAEL.PIMENTAL@BC.EDU.
- Denice Koljonen, APR Program Manager, 617-552-3739 or DENICE.KOLJONEN@BC.EDU.
- Jen Foley, APR Project Manager, 617-552-2881, or Jfoley@bc.edu .

Additional information about APR, along with program documents, team guides, samples and templates, can be accessed on the *APR website*: *www.bc.edu/apr*.

APR's Outcomes and Benefits

A department that has completed a successful Administrative Program Review will be able to demonstrate the following outcomes:

- Established clear priorities that link to University-wide priorities
- Improved short-range and long-range planning to achieve those priorities
- Participation and input from members of the department regarding improvement
- Integration of assessment methods into its operations for continual feedback
- Improved levels of customer and employee satisfaction
- Enhanced communication within the department
- Support for managers and employees to develop and improve skills
- A broader understanding of University processes
- Access to peer institutions and experts
- Collection and use of data to justify plans and proposed changes

The process aligns administrative priorities with the University's strategic direction, creates a clearer, shared understanding of each administrative department's role in carrying out those priorities, promotes a deepened sense of purpose, and ultimately leads to a more effective administrative organization.

A cumulative effect of these efforts is a continued shift in the University's culture toward valuing self-examination, strategic thinking and mission-aligned planning. Such a culture allows for the continuous pursuit of excellence, enhanced customer service, proactive management, the prudent use of data in decision making, effective communication and institutional learning.

About APR Teams

APR Handbook: Self-Study Team Edition

The Department Review Teams

Three teams are formed to manage review activities for each department undergoing a review. They are as follows:

- *Self-Study Team:* members of the department conducting the review. They are the thinkers, analysts and authors of their department's self-study report and they are the best source of knowledge on the department itself, insofar as they are familiar with its work, staff, context and operations based on first-hand experience.
- *External Review Team:* experts on the relevant field/function from other respected universities who bring to bear a wealth of knowledge about their discipline. They conduct an onsite visit and prepare a report to the department with insights and feedback on its issues and trends and recommendations for improvement.
- *Action Planning Team*: usually led by the department head, who is responsible for the successful creation and implementation of the department's action plan. The team may include members of the self-study team or other members of the department.

Additional participants in the department's APR activities include the area Vice President, whose advice and support are critical; department staff, who provide assistance and input; and a range of support personnel that the review teams can call on during their self-study activities.

Self-Study Teams

All members of the self-study team are drawn from the department conducting the review. Although most teams are typically composed of 3-5 members, there is no prescribed number of members for a self-study team. The number and composition of a self-study team is based on factors such as the size of the department, the skill sets of individual staff members and the expected complexity of the review. One self-study team member is appointed as the team lead.

The department head determines the size and composition of the self-study team and appoints its members. The department head should appoint members who serve a variety of roles in the department to ensure that different perspectives and expertise are represented. The department head may also choose to participate as a member of the self-study team. Additional criteria include the following:

- Credibility and knowledge about the department and its operations
- Understanding of the wider University organization and how it works
- Strengths in analysis, data collection and organizing information
- Demonstrated writing skills
- Ability to work effectively with other members of the team

The self-study team members provide expertise on the department, but their collective knowledge of the department may not be exhaustive and they may need to elicit information from other department members. The team members specific primary duties are:

- Collecting and analyzing data
- Seeking inputs from other members of the department and from its constituents
- Conducting analyses to answer questions posed by the APR process
- Preparing the report and preliminary recommendations

In addition, the self-study team is responsible for communicating regularly with the rest of the department during the review. The self-study team may also be asked to assist with the creation of the department's action plan and continue in an advisory role during its implementation.

The self-study team members work on the self-study on a part-time basis over a six- to nine-month period. Meetings are scheduled as determined by the team lead and team members. There is no prescribed way of organizing or making decisions, but teams should meet early in the process with their department head to determine the best approach and determine schedules. Teams are encouraged to consider the following suggestions:

- Plan time to meet outside of the office.
- Meet on a regular basis.
- Plan meetings that are at least two hours in length.
- Assign roles early in the process that are based on study team member's strengths. Assess regularly whether the roles are productive.
- Consider alternating who is leading meetings based on which step in the process the team is engaging.
- Set agendas for meetings and bring assignments to each meeting.
- Allow time for brainstorming. This is a valuable part of the process.

Key Interactions

Key Interactions of the self-study team members include:

- Meeting with members of the department's administration and Vice President to identify the scope of the review and receive guidance about areas of interest that should be considered as part of the review.
- Interacting with team members, members of the department, as well as with the department's constituents.
- Working with the APR and IRPA offices to obtain guidance, identify additional training, provide support, suggest resources and help the team meet its goals for quality and on-time delivery. The IRPA staff is also available to assist teams with their information gathering and goal setting activities.
- Meeting with external reviewers to clarify self-study report and/or provide additional information.

- If other departments are conducting APR at the same time, meet with counterparts who are conducting reviews. The APR Office can coordinate periodic self-study team meetings for teams undergoing reviews at the same time. These lunch meetings allow members of various teams to meet, discuss their experiences, share ideas and suggestions, as well as focus on learning in more detail about specific sections of the Self-Study.

Deliverables

Self-Study Report: Self-study teams create this primary deliverable as a result of their review activities. The report should:

- Be based on information gathered by the teams throughout the review, including answers to a series of diagnostic questions covering a range of topics related to the department.
- Follow a recommended outline and include specific recommendations.
- Be approximately 25 – 30 pages in length, including recommendations.
- Provide supporting materials as appendices.

Action Plan: Team members may also be asked to assist the department head with the creation of the department's action plan. This plan articulates specific steps the department needs to take during the next five years to address the opportunities and challenges defined in the self-study and carry out its recommendations. It is developed based on the self-study, the external review and additional discussion.

APR Handbook: Self-Study Team Edition

APR Process Overview

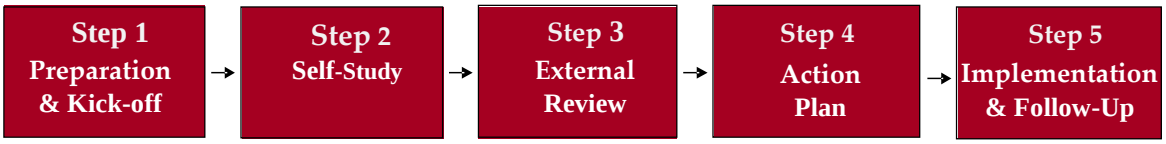
Administrative Program Review is a five-step process designed to help departments assess their current position, identify their strengths and opportunities for improvement and establish plans for their future. **Figure 2** below identifies these steps at a high-level.

Each step includes a set of activities managed by department teams and others involved in the process. Departments participating in the APR process typically take one year to complete the five steps.

This section of the handbook is designed to provide self-study teams with a detailed description of the APR steps and related activities. It also provides self-study teams with information about those parts of the review that are managed by the self-study team and additional areas where self-study team members may participate or assist other department teams.

It is important to note that this is a general framework for the APR process and may vary by department, depending upon the specific needs of the department or division. The APR Office and department administration will work together to adjust this framework, as needed. Members of the self-study team are encouraged to speak with their department head or the IRPA APR staff if they have any questions about the process or any of its related activities.

Figure 2: Five Steps of Administrative Program Review



Step #1: Preparation and Kick-off

1.1 Notify Department and Establish Schedule - The APR Director begins by orienting the department head and Vice President to the APR process. Based on the orientation and additional discussions, the department head and the APR Director agree on a plan and schedule for the review.

1.2 Select and Appoint Self-Study Team - The department head, in consultation with the Vice President and the APR Director, selects department members to serve on the self-study team, and designates one member as the team lead.

1.3 Conduct Self-Study Team Orientation - The self-study team members attend APR orientation and training sessions designed to review APR in greater detail, guide teams through the self-study, provide resources and tools to assist teams during their work and identify further training needs. Teams will receive initial training during this Orientation to assist them with their information gathering activities. The members of the self-study team will also attend additional training sessions designed to review the APR in greater detail, guide teams through the self-study, provide resources and tools to assist teams during their work and identify further training needs.

1.4 Launch the Self-Study – The APR Office, together with the department head, organizes and delivers an informational kick-off meeting for the members of the department. The APR Kick-Off Meeting is held to provide all members of the department staff with an overview of APR and its related processes. The objectives of the Kick-Off Meeting include introducing APR to members of the department and gaining support for APR activities. The Vice President and department head are encouraged to assume active roles in the department kick-off meeting in order to show support, set the tone and provide leadership for the department's activities.

Shortly after orientation, the self-study team will have an individualized wrap-up session with the APR staff. During this meeting, members of the self-study team will review the materials from the orientation session, establish project plans, set priorities and identify future resource and training needs.

Step #2: Self-Study

2.1 Review the Self-Study Guide and Answer the Diagnostic Questions - In the Self-Study Guide, team members are introduced to a series of diagnostic questions and activities that guide them through a thinking process about their department. The Self-Study Guide will highlight areas of focus for the review and prepare the team to write an effective self-study report. The Self-Study Guide is located on the *APR website* along with additional resources, samples and templates to help teams address each of the self-study sections.

2.2 Collect Additional Information – The IRPA APR staff work with the self-study team to identify the information needs and data sources that are required to conduct an effective review of the department. Teams will need to gather additional information and data to supplement their review activities. The Office of Institutional Research, Planning and Assessment (IRPA) is available to collect data and information about each department to serve as a starting point in the self-study. The *APR website, Information Gathering Resources & Samples* contains worksheets to help the team prepare its questions and data needs. These efforts should include:

- An examination of the department's internal and external environments to assess the department's current position and identify opportunities for future growth and improvement.
- Information gathering through (1) a variety of data collection methods, such as surveys, focus groups, interviews, and document reviews, and (2) multiple information sources, such as customers, staff, administration, peers and professional associations.
- Seeking out subject matter experts in the department or at the University as needed to help with questions or areas that the members of the team may not be able to answer on their own.

2.3 Identify Issues and Preliminary Recommendations and Metrics - Once the self-study teams have reviewed the Self-Study Guide, answered the diagnostic questions, completed the activities and collected additional information, they should be able to analyze the results, identify key issues and suggest plans for future growth and improvement. Areas for consideration include:

- Review the department's mission and current goals to determine if they are appropriate for the department. Teams should consider whether these should be changed or adjusted based on their findings.

- Review the department's activities and products/services as they relate to its mission and goals. Teams should offer suggestions for improvement or other changes/enhancements.
- Analyze customer feedback on whether their needs are being met and what improvements they would recommend. Teams should develop strategies for eliciting customer feedback on a regular basis and using it to improve the department's work should be considered.
- Develop an understanding of the department's current position as it relates to its internal and external environments. Teams should use this information to conduct a SWOT Analysis (strength-weaknesses-opportunities-threats) and formulate strategies.
- Examine the resources available to the department to carry out its mission and goals. If there are opportunities for realignment or reallocation, teams should offer suggestions.
- Develop recommendations and preliminary goals and action plans that identify the future state to be achieved and how the department will get there.
- Establish metrics that can measure (1) the department's progress with its action plan and (2) the department's performance as it relates to its on-going operations.
- Create a list of specific issues, questions or concerns that can be shared with the external reviewers for guidance/advice as they conduct their external review.

This list is not exhaustive; teams may wish to conduct additional analyses based on the nature of the department's work and its specific needs. It is important to note that the results of these activities should be considered a rough draft for direction-setting purposes, since they may change – perhaps significantly – during subsequent steps of the APR process.

Administrative Program Review is considered a "zero-sum" activity; that is, it is not an exercise through which departments are expected to ask for more resources or staff, but rather, where new initiatives are expected to be made possible through reorganization or reallocation of resources.

2.4 Create the Self-Study Report - At this stage, the team is ready to draft the self-study report. This report should follow the framework outlined in the Self-Study Guide. However, within these guidelines, the team has latitude to tailor the report in ways that they feel will best help the department and the University. Some points to consider include:

- The report should be based on answers to the diagnostic questions and the information gathering/analysis conducted by the self-study team.
- The report should address only the topics that are relevant to its department in the Self-Study Guide as well as any others that the team has identified as important.
- The report should focus on the key issues and goals and include specific recommendations for future growth and improvement.
- To ensure maximum clarity, reports should be typically no more than 25 – 30 pages, including recommendations, which are specific, concise and actionable.
- The team should attach any supplemental materials as appendices.

Before the self-study report is complete, feedback is collected and incorporated. Potential sources of valuable feedback are colleagues in the department, the Vice

President, the department head, the APR Director, the APR Program Manager, the APR Project Manager, and others in the department's administration. This step prevents possible controversies or delays that might otherwise occur later. However, since the self-study report is confidential, it should not be distributed outside of the department, except with the agreement of the department's administration.

2.5 Submit the Self-Study Report - The self-study team submits its completed Self-Study Report to the APR Director. The APR Office then distributes copies of the report to the Executive Vice President, the department head, Vice President and other department administrators, as appropriate to the department. The APR Director also includes a copy of the Self-Study Report with the information packet that is sent to the department's external reviewers, who will use it as the starting point for their external review.

Step #3: External Review

3.1 Identify External Reviewers - The APR Director manages this process with input and advice from the department head, Executive Vice President, Vice President and possibly others. Candidates are identified and contacted early in the process to ensure their availability. The final selection is the responsibility of the APR Director who invites the external reviewers to conduct a site visit of the department.

The identification and selection process is designed to identify leaders in their fields who represent the best programs and highly reputable institutions. In most cases, the only other specific qualification is objectivity. However, for a department whose purpose is closely tied to the University's religious mission, at least one external reviewer may be expected to have worked in or with a Catholic or Jesuit institution.

3.2 Meet with and Assist the External Review Team - The self-study team does not drive the external review activities, but does serve the following important roles:

- *Meet with the External Review Team:* During the first day of the site visit the external reviewers meet with the self-study team as a group to discuss the self-study report, clarify questions and gain the team's perspectives on key issues. External reviewers will also have meetings with the department head, members of the department and customers/constituents of the department.
- *Assist the External Review Team, as needed:* Members of the self-study team may be asked to assist with logistics or help the external reviewers in other ways that make their limited time on campus more effective.

The External Reviewers visits are coordinated and facilitated by the APR staff. APR assists reviewers with the logistics of the review (travel arrangements, hotel accommodations, etc.). APR also oversees room reservations and the ordering of meals on campus during each review.

3.3 Review the External Review Team Report - When the external reviewers' report has been submitted, the department head reviews it to ensure its accuracy.

Step #4: Action Plan

4.1 Meet to Discuss Priorities and Recommendations - Once the external reviewer's report has been received**,** the department head meets with the Vice President, Executive Vice President, the APR Director, the APR Program Manager and others, as appropriate for the department, to discuss the contents of the APR reports, answer questions and set high-level direction for action planning and implementation.

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 to ensure that broad perspectives are considered and that there is clarity about and support for the direction that has been set.

4.2 Draft an Action Plan - Once there is agreement about the high-level direction for the Action Plan, the department head then appoints the team that will write the department's Action Plan. This is typically the existing self-study team, since they have already put thought into future changes in completing the *Recommendations* section of the self-study. The team's composition may be adjusted, however, to accommodate schedules and workloads.

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, (4) specific assignments and (5) estimated timelines for implementation. An on-line database program is used to create and track the action plan.

The APR Office is available to assist teams with creating their action plans. A sample Action Plan template, training videos on how to use the database program, and the database link (requires prior authorization) can be accessed on the *APR website*.

4.3 Approve the Action Plan - The department head submits the Action Plan to the Vice President and Executive Vice President, who review it, ask questions as needed, and request changes if appropriate. The department head makes sure that any concerns are addressed and necessary changes made. Once the Action Plan is finalized, the goals do not change (except possibly in cases effected by organizational changes). Adjustments may be made to other plan details, as needed, but only with the agreement of the department head and that of the Vice President and the APR Director.

4.4 Communicate APR Reports and Action Plan to the Department's Staff - The department head meets with the members of the department to share and discuss the results of the APR process. Agenda items may include:

- Sharing details of the APR reports. Because these reports are considered confidential, they should not be distributed.
- Eliciting feedback and suggestions.
- Discussing concerns.
- Presenting the details of the Action Plan and resulting department activities.

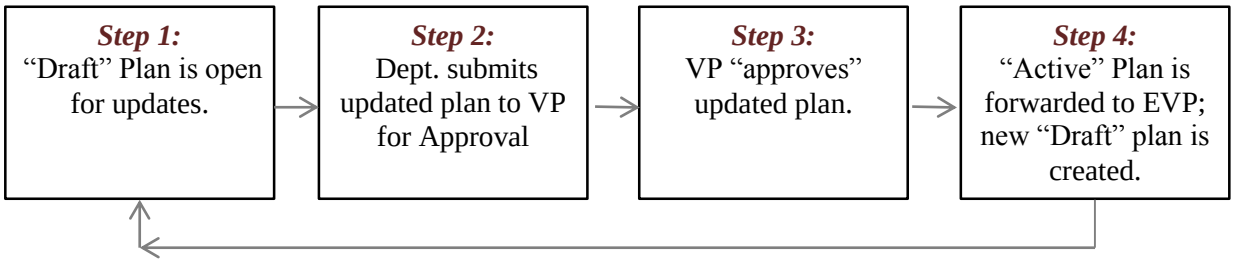
Step #5: Implementation and Follow-up

5.1 Implement the Action Plan - The department then initiates the implementation of the Action Plan, with guidance from the IRPA APR staff. The APR Office can provide additional support and/or training, if needed, as the Action Plan is implemented.

5.2 Monitoring and Periodic Updates - The department head provides regular updates to the APR Director, who prepares periodic updates on APR activities for the Executive Vice President, the President and the Board of Trustees.

The department is expected to demonstrate that changes required to ensure the successful implementation of the Action Plan have been made and that the implementation is on schedule. This is the focus of the 6-month updates. The department head drives the implementation plan and updates, enlisting the help of members of the self-study team and/or other members of the department as needed.

The database has a built-in automated approval workflow capability to obtain the necessary VP and EVP approvals. This feature is not fully operational for all VPs at this time. Rather, the process is tailored to satisfy each VP's established organizational processes.



Step #1: Update the department's ***'Draft'*** action plan at any time during the 6-month period. e.g., objective status, notes, timeframe adjustments on all incomplete objectives.

Step #2: When prompted via an e-mail reminder one month before the next update is due, finalize the updates on all incomplete objectives, and hit the "***Submit for Approval***" button to e-mail the updated plan to the Vice President (or delegate/designee).

Step #3: The VP will review the updated action plan and hit the "***Approve***" button.

Step #4: The now-approved "***Active***" plan is forwarded to the EVP and archived in the APR Office. The system automatically creates a new "***Draft***" copy that is instantly available for the next 6-month update. Notes and updates can be added throughout the next 6-month period. An automatic email reminder is generated when it is time to complete/submit the update and the cycle repeats.