Self-Study Guide

Administrative Program Review

Introduction

This guide is a companion document to the **APR Program Handbook**. Its purpose is to assist self-study team members with conducting their department's self assessment and creating their **Self-Study Report**. Teams are encouraged to utilize this **Self-Study Guide** as they prepare their reports, making adjustments to suit the individual situation or needs of their departments. Templates, samples and other resources have been developed to assist teams with collecting, analyzing and organizing their work for each of the sections described in this guide. These resources can be found on the *APR website*: www.bc.edu/apr. The APR staff and IRPA staff are also available to assist teams throughout the self-study process, providing additional training, facilitation and support to teams and their departments.

The body of the **Self-Study Report** should be 25-30 pages long, including recommendations. Additional material necessary to support findings and recommendations may be attached as appendices. The **Self-Study Report** should consist of the following sections:

1. Executive Summary (1-2 pages)
2. Department Profile (2-3 pages)
3. Mission and Alignment (1 page)
4. Vision Statement (1 page)
5. Activities and Products/Services (2-3 pages)
6. Customers and Cross-Unit Relationships (3-5 pages)
7. Internal Environment (Resources, Staff, Climate, Operations and Organizational Practices) (3-5 pages)
8. External Environment (Industry, Peers, Benchmarks and Best Practices) (3-5 pages)
9. Strategic Position and Direction (SWOT) (2-3 pages)
10. Goals and Recommendations (2-3 pages)

This guide provides an overview of each of the recommended sections of the self-study report and includes diagnostic questions and activities that will help guide teams through the self-study report.

There is no prescribed approach to conducting a self-study. Each team – with the advice of the APR Director and the department head – arrives at its own strategy. Teams may want to consider the following as they devise an approach:

- Seek out sources that can assist with answers to unfamiliar subject matter posed by the diagnostic questions and activities
- Gather information from a variety of internal and external sources in order to complete some of the sections in this guide.
- Involve members of the department in the review activities in order to increase participation and obtain additional perspectives.
- Include any issues not covered by the diagnostic questions that are important to the department. Similarly, exclude questions that do not apply to the department.

Overview

1. Executive Summary

The Executive Summary is a concise presentation of the self-study report's contents and should be able to stand alone, providing the reader with a preview of the team's work and key points of the self-study. It should not include information that is not included in the body of the report.

While it is the first section of the self-study report, the Executive Summary should be the last section that the team prepares before completing the report. The Executive Summary should be limited to one or two pages providing a brief overview of the key findings, important issues, conclusions and recommendations. It should:

- introduce the main concepts of the report
- present key findings and issues
- consolidate the team's SWOT/strategic position
- emphasize the team's recommendations

Suggested Length: 1-2 pages

2. Department Profile

This section provides a brief overview of the department and addresses the history of the department, organization, operations, important milestones, key accomplishments and statistics. It should be succinct and designed to give external reviewers easy access to information. Any supplemental material, such as timelines, charts and tables, should be included in an appendix and referenced in this section.

- ***Organizational Structure:*** Briefly describe the department's internal organizational structure, functional areas and relationships with other departments/reporting lines in the division. Include two organization charts showing (1) where the department is situated in the larger University organization and its reporting lines and (2) the department's internal organization showing individual positions and staff.
- ***Key Facts and Statistics:*** Provide the reader with an understanding of the size and scope of the department's operation, including budget size, scope of services and major activities.
- ***Notable Events and Accomplishments:*** Document significant events and accomplishments the department has experienced during the past 1 - 3 years, including projects, new responsibilities, organizational changes, new systems, etc.

Suggested Length: 2-3 pages

3. Mission and Alignment

Before self-study teams can begin the assessment and planning process, they will need to identify the department's mission. Not all departments have mission statements but each department has a purpose or reason for existing. Once team members have a clear understanding of the department's mission or purpose, they will have the proper framework for completing the diagnostic questions, collecting information, analyzing data and making informed recommendations for improvement.

If the department has an existing mission statement, the self-study team should review it as part of their self-study activities to determine if it adequately meets the needs of the department, staff and customers.

If the department does not have a mission statement, self-study team members should work together to identify the main components of the department's mission or purpose.

- Does the department's current mission statement adequately define the purpose of the department today? If it does not, what changes would you suggest?
- Do customers and employees have a clear understanding of the department's purpose? Why or why not?
- How does the department identify its place in the broader University community?
- Describe how the department's mission supports and aligns with the missions and strategic plans of the division and the University.

Suggested Length: 1 page

4. Vision

Mission speaks to *"who we are"* and **Vision** refers to *"where we are headed"*. Vision provides a clear, easily understood image of the future. While missions tend to endure over time, visions describe how the department will carry out its overarching goals and actions to live out its mission in the coming years, often 1 - 5 years. Vision is the manifestation of the mission and it brings the mission to life. Vision motivates staff and stakeholders in effecting change and improvement, driving the department towards its desired future state. It is important for planning teams to develop a picture of a desired state that supports the department's mission, or an image of the future you seek to create.

Although the vision statement is positioned after the mission statement in the self-study document, the team should develop its vision only after the team has a common understanding of the desired state as well as some grounding in the current state. This is often most effective following a SWOT analysis (see section 9). The APR Office is available to facilitate a SWOT/visioning exercise with your team/department staff. The visioning exercise involves examining how to stretch the current state to move towards the desired state. Questions to consider:

- Where do we want to be in 5 years?
- What will we look like?
- What types of works/services/programs will we be providing?
- How can we leverage or intentionally build/create/position the good work we are already doing to help us move toward our strategic vision?
- What will have to shift or change to advance our vision?

Suggested Length: 1 page

5. Activities and Products/Services

Once self-study teams have identified the department's mission, they will have an understanding of why the department exists and how it fits into the broader University community.

This section involves examining the functional responsibilities and activities the department performs to carry out its mission. Teams will identify key functions, activities, products and services carried out by the department and examine how they relate to the department's mission and customers' needs.

- Describe the main functional responsibilities, activities and services the department performs to carry out its mission.
- Using the template found on the *APR website*, characterize those activities as (1) core activities, (2) necessary support activities, (3) "nice to haves" and (4) unnecessary activities and estimate the percentage of the department's time that is spent on each activity.
  - Compare the activities' importance to the mission and the department's time spent on the activities. Are the department's activities aligned with its mission?
  - In light of the department's mission and goals, examine the existing mix of products and services.
  - Are there products and services that customers need or request that the department does not provide? If so, what are they, how important is it that the department provides them and what is the feasibility of providing them?
  - Are there products or services that could be discontinued? If so, how would their elimination affect the department's operation?
- Examine how the department's time and resources should be organized in light of its key responsibilities and activities, making recommendations as appropriate.
- Consider how the department determines that services/activities are being delivered efficiently and/or effectively. Do metrics and performance measures already exist? As teams study the department's activities and products/services, they should assess existing measures and/or develop new ones.

Suggested Length: 2-3 pages

6. Customers and Cross-Unit Relationships

Understanding the needs of the customer and effectively delivering on those needs is a significant measure of an organization's performance. Once the department's mission and functions are defined, it is important to determine if these elements are aligned with customer needs and expectations.

This section deals with identifying the department's customers and constituents, understanding the voice of the customer, assessing the department's products and activities in light of the customer and creating strategies for ongoing analysis and action.

Customer Groups:

- Describe the department's range of customer relationships. The list should include (1) primary customers, (2) secondary constituents, (3) internal partners and (4) other stakeholders.
- Using the template found on the *APR website*, examine the relationship the department shares with each of its customer groups, identifying their main needs and determining the level of interest or volume associated with the department's key products and services.

Customer Needs and Feedback:

- The Self-study team should collect customer feedback, satisfaction information and suggestions from its key customer groups. This can be accomplished through interviews, focus groups and surveys. Please contact the APR Office and IRPA staff early in the self-study process for assistance with collecting and analyzing customer data.
- Describe the measures taken by the department to assess customers' needs and satisfaction on an ongoing basis, both formal and informal. What metrics are used to do so? How is this information used?
- How does the department respond to those identified needs? What are some of the changes or improvements that have resulted from customer feedback?
- Describe how the department informs customers and potential customers of available products and services and changes/improvements it makes.

Cross-Unit and Cross-Functional Relationships:

- Describe the department's key relationships to other departments within the division and University.
- Does the department provide products or services in conjunction with other departments? If so, please describe them. How is the work coordinated between the departments? Is there overlap or duplication of services with other departments?
- Are there cross-unit processes (i.e., within the VP area) or cross-functional processes (i.e., across VP areas or University-wide) that should be improved? If so, identify them and offer suggestions on how they may be improved.

Suggested Length: 3-5 pages

7. Internal Environment (Resources, Staff, Climate & Organizational Practices)

The self-study team's environmental scan should include an examination of the department's internal and external environments. Performing a SWOT (strengths-weaknesses-opportunities-threats) analysis to identify the department's strengths, competencies and capabilities as well as its development needs will help the self-study team focus on relevant areas for analysis and potential improvement. Only those areas which impact current or future operations should be covered. This will also help the team and others in the department as they begin to formulate strategies to better position the department to take on the planning activities associated with the APR process.

Completing this section will require collecting information from internal sources. Self-study teams should consider surveys, interviews and focus groups, as appropriate to their needs. Teams should contact the APR Office for assistance with facilitating SWOT exercises, conducting focus groups or creating surveys.

As teams work on their self-studies, they will need to analyze the resources available to the department to carry out its mission and goals and develop an understanding of its departmental operations, i.e., workplace climate, planning processes, communications and organizational improvement processes.

This section of the assessment involves examining the current status of the department's resources, identifying how they support the department's existing activities and considering how they may be rearranged or reallocated to better support the department's future plans and goals. Key resources to evaluate include: budget, staffing, technology and space.

Budget

- Conduct an analysis of the department's budget allocations and expenditures for the past three fiscal years.
  - Describe how the department's budget is managed and maintained locally.
  - Offer a comprehensive look at resource trends for the department.
  - Provide explanations for any budget variances that may exist.
  - How are financial resources spent on each of the core functional activities?
- Provide a projected analysis for at least two successive years of income and expenses, provide any planned or anticipated changes.
- Does your budget support your short-term and long-term goals? If not, is there a way to reallocate resources to better support goals?
- In light of the current economic environment, what measures can the department take to reduce costs or improve efficiencies?
  - How do you identify and measure cost effectiveness of this unit? List the top benchmarks used to assess cost effectiveness.
  - Should the department make adjustments to its budget allocations so that it can operate more effectively? What constraints would need to be addressed?
  - Are there any financial efficiencies that could be derived from collaborating with other departments?
  - Are there other measures the department can take to reduce costs or improve efficiencies? Should the department make these adjustments to its budget allocations so that it can operate more effectively? What constraints would need to be addressed?
  - Describe any efforts during the past 5 years to cut costs or operate more efficiently.

Staffing

- Describe the staffing complement for the department and each of its teams or sub-units. Include the number of employees, full-time equivalents (FTE's) and types of employees (e.g. regular, temporary/contractor, professional, manager, support, students, hourly, salary, etc.).
- Are there opportunities to rearrange work or reallocate staff to improve operations?

Performance Management:

- Describe the department's performance management process.
- How are individual and department responsibilities and expectations determined?
- How are they communicated to the department's employees?
- Describe how individual employee goals are aligned with department and division goals.

Staff Development:

- In general, do staff members have the skills required for the department to perform at a high level now? Do they have the skills that will be required in the future?
- What types of training does the department provide to develop these skills? What additional training may be helpful?
- Describe the mechanisms in place to help employees manage their growth, professional development and career progression.
- Are there processes in place for orienting new employees and transitioning departing employees?

Workplace Diversity:

- Describe how workplace diversity is managed in the department.
- Identify the efforts to enhance representation, involvement and the climate to create a diverse community in the department.

Workplace Environment:

- Describe the general morale, attitude and culture of the department. If improvements could be made, what are they?
- What mechanisms are in place to develop teamwork and enhance employee involvement, participation and engagement?

Technology:

- Identify recent changes that have occurred as a result of the changing technological environment and describe how the department stays current in this area.
- Describe how the department uses technology to improve its operations, products and services.
- Suggest how technology can be leveraged further for the department to be more productive and introduce new or enhanced services.

Space:

- How well does the department's current space configuration meet its needs?
- What reallocation or renovation could be done to aid the department in accomplishing its goals? What constraints would need to be addressed?

Planning Process:

- Describe the department's planning process to prepare for the future, including how it works, the short-term and long-term planning time horizons, who is responsible, who else is involved, etc.
- Describe how strategic decisions are made in the department. Who is involved in the process (e.g., managers, staff or customers)?
- What kind of information does the department rely on in planning and decision making? Describe how this information is collected, analyzed and incorporated into the decision-making process.

Communication:

- How do managers keep employees informed of the department's plans and activities?
- Are employees encouraged to share feedback, suggestions, concerns and ideas?

Organizational Improvement:

- Does the department have an overall approach to promoting organizational improvement? If so, what is it?
- Does the department have defined performance goals or targets? If so, what specific measures or metrics does the department assess on an ongoing basis?
- How does the department encourage and incorporate input and suggestions from customers?
- How does the department document and back up critical functions (e.g., process documentation, cross-training, shared drives, workflow maps)?

Suggested Length: 3-5 pages

8. External Environment

An important element of the APR process involves a thorough examination of the department's present state in its environment. Conducting an environmental scan will provide self-study teams with useful information in a number of areas:

- the state of their department's industry or field
- peer comparisons with similar organizations
- benchmark data about industry standards
- best practices and suggestions for improvement

This section will require collecting a variety of information from multiple sources. Self-study teams should consider a variety of methods such as peer interviews, internet searches, professional association materials and industry reports. Once the information has been collected, teams will need to analyze the information and draw conclusions about their departments from this research.

Industry Information and Best Practices:

- How does the department seek out best practices and suggestions for continuous improvement? What can the department do to bring these best practices to BC?
- What are the current trends in the department's service area nationwide?
- What has the department done to accommodate changes in its environment and continuously improve? What more could be done?

Professional Associations:

- Describe how members of the department interact with the professional associations or trade groups relevant to the department's industry.
- What information from these groups can inform the planning process?

Industry Standards and Benchmark Information:

- What are the sources of benchmark data and industry standards?
- How do the department's services/activities compare to these standards?
- If standard benchmarks do not exist, how can the department develop these measures internally and locate comparison data?

Peer Groups:

- Identify the department's peer institutions and factors used when compiling this list.
- What performance measures do managers use to compare the department's services/activities to those of peer institutions? How do these measures compare to those of peer institutions?
- What are some of the innovations being employed at peer institutions and how can the department bring these innovations to BC?
- Teams are encouraged to conduct interviews with representatives from peer institutions to compare services and identify best practices.

Regulatory Environment:

- What laws, regulations or other requirements external to the University impact the work of the department?
- How does the department ensure it remains current and compliant with these legal requirements?

Suggested Length: 3-5 pages

9. Strategic Position and Direction

The environmental scan and other APR activities can generate a large amount of data and information. While much of this information is useful to the department, it has been collected from multiple sources and in multiple formats. Before teams can identify opportunities and develop strategies, this information will have to be analyzed, categorized and organized.

The SWOT framework helps teams to organize its key findings and determine how this information can be leveraged to enhance the department's planning and decision-making processes. A SWOT matrix template and additional resources are available on the *APR website* to assist teams with completing this section of their reports. In addition, you can contact the APR Office to facilitate a SWOT exercise for your department. This exercise is an excellent opportunity to gather input from the whole department.

Teams should conduct a SWOT Analysis (strengths-weaknesses-opportunities-threats) to identify the key internal and external factors that are important to the department. It helps the team develop an accurate perception of the department's current strategic position. It also helps to define the scope and key analytic needs. It puts boundaries on the reach of the analysis and makes the efforts more manageable and meaningful by focusing on the key strategic areas.

Internal Factors:

- ***Strengths*** are those activities, systems, and procedures that are done well and can be exploited.
- ***Weaknesses*** are those internal factors that keep the department from performing well. For example, what knowledge, skills or resources may be lacking?
- Areas to consider include: intellectual resources, location, efficiency, infrastructure, delivery time, relationships with customers, cost advantages.

External Factors:

- ***Opportunities*** are those external elements in the environment that may open avenues to the achieve success in the future. They may represent ways to combat weaknesses and improve operations.
- ***Threats*** are activities or events that may interfere with the achievement of success in the department.

Strategic Position:

Describe the department's current strategic position based on the above SWOT analysis.
The current strategic position is the starting point for developing strategies to achieve their vision of the department's future. It is also where key issues or challenges should be discussed because addressing these issues are often key drivers in setting goals and objectives. For example,

- Is the department well-positioned for the future?
- How can the department build upon its strengths to improve its position?
- How can the department improve its current position in areas identified as weaknesses?
- Have opportunities been identified to combat weaknesses and improve operations?
- What opportunities in its industry or field can the department take advantage of?
- How can the department leverage its strengths to take advantage of these opportunities?
- What actions should the department take to address potential threats?
- How can the department mitigate its weaknesses in light of these threats?

Suggested Length: 2-3 pages

10. Goals and Recommendations

This final section of the APR report involves putting all the pieces of the puzzle together in a manner that will lead to short-term and long-term improvement and growth for the department. Self-study teams have been gathering ideas and suggestions throughout the self-study process and now they will transform these ideas into preliminary recommendations, which will then serve as the foundation of the department's **APR Action Plan**. This process involves:

(1) Identifying the department's goals

(2) Developing objectives that support the goals

(3) Recommending specific actions and timelines

(4) Establishing desired outcomes and measures

Teams should also assemble 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. Consider the following bullets when completing the Goals and Recommendations section of your report:

- Describe the changes and actions the department should make to improve its overall strategic position.
- Describe how these recommendations impact the department's current planning and decision-making processes.
- How do they correspond to the direction in which the department needs to move?

Department Goals:

- Identify the current goals for the department and division. This will serve as an organizing framework for the department's recommendations and action plan.
- Describe how the department's goals are aligned with and contribute to the division goals and the University's mission, goals and strategic plans.

Recommendations:

Recommendations should address the areas discussed in the previous sections, as appropriate, including the department's mission, activities, products/services, customers, cross-unit relationships, internal and external environments, resources, SWOT and the approach to planning, managing and organizational improvement. Teams are also encouraged to include additional areas or issues of importance based on the nature of the department's situation and its specific needs. A Recommendations and Goal Setting template and other resources are available on the *APR website* to assist teams with completing this section of their reports. The following is a list of specific areas for consideration:

- Reviewed the department's **mission** to determine if it is appropriate for the department. Teams should consider whether it should be changed or adjusted based on their findings.
- Studied 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.
- Reached out to **customers** to identify their needs and collect feedback. Developing strategies for eliciting customer feedback on a regular basis and using it to improve the department's work should be considered.
- Developed 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 and formulate strategies.

- Examined 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.
- Examined the department's **workplace environment** and suggested ways to enhance communication, staff development, diversity, leadership and performance management practices.
- Formulated recommendations for identifying and implementing **continuous process improvements** and **integrating technology** into the department's operations.

Teams should consider recommendations that address short-term (immediate), mid-term (1 – 3 years) and long-term (5+ years) needs. Additional considerations include the following:

- Providing recommendations that are specific, concise and actionable.
- Identifying appropriate owners, resources, time frames, and priorities.
- Developing 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.
- Considering the department's organization and its place in the broader operational structure.
- Providing details about how other departments can participate in carrying out a recommendation that impacts one or more other departments or the broader organization and how they and the broader organization will benefit from it.
- Clearly identifying challenges or issues associated with the recommendation or a desired course of action so that the external reviewers may provide guidance/advice on these matters as part of their review.

APR 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.

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, particularly after conversations with the external reviewers.

Suggested Length: 2-3 pages