

ACADEMIC DEPARTMENT REVIEWS

The Executive Council has established the guidelines outlined in this document. While each department will have a unique agenda for its review, we expect that every department will follow the general outline of these guidelines, working closely with the Dean of the College and the Office of Analytic Support & Institutional Research. Our department reviews and these guidelines are part of a comprehensive academic planning and learning assessment program at Grinnell College.

What is gained from carrying out a department review?

The department review provides an opportunity for thoughtful reflection on the department's level of effectiveness in leading our students toward the outcomes of liberal learning, such as analytical and imaginative thinking in the liberal arts; persuasive and eloquent expression, both oral and written; free and open discussion that respects and values diversity; skill in the acquisition of new knowledge; critical evaluation of both one's own and others' ideas; breadth of knowledge across disciplines, including the connections between them; and depth of training in a major field. Self-study and reflection require initial consideration of all aspects of the department's program, in order to determine which aspects need more careful study and perhaps reform, to produce an even more effective curriculum and learning environment for our students.

The department, in a participatory process, should try to address the following questions:

1. Is its academic program up-to-date, sufficiently rigorous, and appropriately organized for our students?
2. Are its students, both majors and non-majors, meeting the learning expectations of its faculty and achieving the aims of liberal learning?

GUIDELINES AND PROCEDURES FOR DEPARTMENT REVIEWS

ACADEMIC YEAR PRIOR TO THE REVIEW:

The Dean will contact chairs of departments that are due to undergo a departmental review in the following academic year. The Dean will also inform the Executive Council of which academic departments will undergo review in the coming year. The Dean will ask an Associate Dean to meet with the chair and discuss the department's currently-practiced and new assessment activities that will produce answers to questions the department expects to ask of itself in the course of the self-study.

Upon receiving notification, the department should meet to discuss its preparation for a review. Among items to be considered are the following:

1. Will the department chair be responsible for coordinating the review, or will another member of the department assume the responsibility of coordinating the review?

2. Are most tenured or tenure-track members of the department going to be in residence during the year of the review? If some members will be on leave, in which semester will the majority of the department faculty be in residence in Grinnell?
3. How will members of the department who are on leave and away from Grinnell during the semester during which the review visit takes place participate in the review?
4. What issues does the department initially feel are most pertinent to be addressed by the review? Drawing upon information that can be gained from data queries performed by the Office of Analytic Support and the department's own ongoing assessment practices (e.g. exit interviews, portfolios, presentations by senior majors), are there one or two questions the department would especially like to address concerning students' learning outcomes?

FIRST SEMESTER OF THE REVIEW:

The review, taking place over the course of a year, will consist of a department self-study and culminate in a visit by a (usually) two-person external review team. In preparation for the visit by the external team, the department will develop a self-study dossier to be sent to the reviewers. The dossier will include information about the department, a detailed description of the findings of the self-study, and appropriate supporting materials.

External Reviewers:

One of the earliest stages in a review is to develop a list of suggested external reviewers. The list should include individuals from corresponding departments in institutions similar to Grinnell College, as well as from institutions that may be somewhat different but are known to have strong departments. Please note on the list any particular strengths of individuals named, and also any known personal connection, Grinnell College affiliation, or professional relationship with a member of the department under review. The list should include the suggested reviewers' name, address, telephone number, and e-mail address.

The department chair should meet with the Dean to discuss the list of suggested reviewers and rank them in order of suggested contact. The department and the Dean will determine the outside review team and an appropriate timetable leading to the on-campus visit. If the Dean and the department disagree on the membership of the team, the department will select one member and the Dean the other. The Dean's Office will be responsible for contacting the selected reviewers, and will arrange dates for the review visit. The Dean's Office will also work with the reviewers to arrange their travel reservations, campus visit schedule, honorarium payment, and their lodging during the visit.

Department Self-Study Dossier:

As its central responsibility in preparing for the review team's visit, the department is responsible for assembling the self-study dossier. The dossier will normally include the following components:

- A statement of department learning goals for majors and non-majors
- A "map" of departmental courses that identifies just where in the curriculum students are offered opportunities to meet each of the specific learning goals

- A list of key questions or issues on which the department would like research or advice
- Basic information about the College to frame the review (Dean's Office can supply this section)
- Some history of the department and description of its current circumstances and culture (e.g., tradition and format of department meetings, activities and involvement by the SEPC, customary practices of mentoring early-career faculty and of advising students, sense of community among the majors)
- An account of how the department's curriculum has evolved over time, and whether the current curriculum is new, well-established, or in transition;
- Vitae of all department faculty members
- Catalog listing of department
- Syllabi of recently offered courses
- Course enrollment records
- Reports of surveys of current students and of alumni majors
- Reports of transcript analysis of student curricular behavior
- A statement of the findings of department learning outcomes assessment work
- In addition, departments should consider using other sources of information such as
 - Interviews with faculty concerning their professional and departmental goals
 - Surveys of faculty in departments that require or recommend courses in the department under review
 - Interviews with Writing, Math and/or Science Lab staff members

Support from the Office of Analytic Support and Institutional Research:

The Office of Analytic Support and Institutional Research may assist with development of student and alumni surveys, transcript analyses, documentation of learning goals, interview protocols, or learning outcomes assessment activities. Contact the office early in the self-study process to develop a plan of work that is reasonable and can be done in the time available. For example, surveys often require six or more weeks to complete the development, data collection, and reporting cycle.

Alumni surveys usually include questions regarding what jobs and/or further education the person has pursued since graduation, how the major has contributed to their activities, and what other comments they have on the effectiveness of the department's program. It is usual to survey the most recent ten years of graduates. Transcript analysis questions are also tailored to inform departmental issues. Here are some questions asked in the recent past:

- What's the breakdown of our graduating majors by gender, U.S. students of color, international?
- How many of our majors take how many semesters of which foreign languages?
- How many of our graduating majors earned at least 12 credits in each of the other divisions?
- How many students who take the introductory course go on to take another course?
- If majors have done a MAP, is it more often before or after taking our senior seminar?
- How many of our majors also completed a second major or a concentration—and which ones?
- How many of our majors take how much math/statistics, and do those with higher-level math courses tend to earn higher grades in our department's upper-level seminars?

Assessment

The department will be expected by reviewers to describe learning goals related to the discipline or field of study for its majors and for non-majors. Ideally, the department will describe progressive goals that

enable students to develop increasing sophistication within the discipline or field. Further, the department should be able to specify (on a curricular “map”) where in its curriculum students can be expected to learn the various knowledge, skills or capacities outlined.

Departments will be expected by reviewers to have some means of directly assessing whether students are meeting the learning goals. In its Self-Study, the department should report evidence of students’ learning outcomes. Reviewers will also expect the Self-Study to note changes in courses, curriculum, or pedagogical practice the department has made in response to its assessment of learning outcomes.

Evidence of students’ learning may be gathered by in-class activities embedded in the regular components of a course, or separate activities designed for the purpose of assessment. The purpose of assessment is, primarily, to discover the effectiveness of current pedagogies and curriculum; it is not about evaluating individual students or individual faculty members. The results of assessments should be used to take a fresh look at what the department teaches and how it is taught. At its best, our assessment practices will be focused on current, meaningful inquiries that the department generates for itself, and which can guide responsive improvements in teaching methods and curricular structures.

Course grades are typically not considered an adequate means of direct assessment. For example, participation and improvement may both be valid components of a course grade, yet a student could improve and participate energetically without in the end grasping a particular skill or body of knowledge that the department deems important. Likewise, asking the students how much they have learned is not a sufficient measure, though research has shown that self-reports can enhance and support direct measures, especially when student comments help identify specific pedagogical practices that may have detracted from or supported students’ motivation and engagement as a basis for effective learning.

Departments are encouraged to consult with the Office of Analytic Support and Institutional Research in the design and implementation of assessment activities. This office can help identify resources, methods, and data to further the department’s assessment interests. Assessment should be an ongoing activity over the years, but the self-study is a good time to report on current findings and the actions being taken in regard to them. This information will give the external reviewers and the Executive Council a more complete perspective on the department's program.

APPROXIMATELY TWO MONTHS PRIOR TO THE EXTERNAL REVIEW VISIT

Department Self-Study Dossier:

Self-Study Chair gathers documents to be included in the self-study dossier.

Self-Study Chair finishes writing the department’s summary of its self-study.

APPROXIMATELY ONE MONTH PRIOR TO THE EXTERNAL REVIEW VISIT:

Department Self-Study Dossier:

The self-study chair provides the Dean’s Office with three copies of the department’s self-study dossier. A copy of these materials, together with a copy of the Grinnell College Catalog, Grinnell College Fact Book, and any other materials requested by the reviewers, will be sent by the Dean’s Office to each of

the reviewers. Also please provide your Division chair with a copy of the self-study dossier. The Division chair serves as a liaison between the department and the Executive Council in the department review.

External Review Visit Planning:

Once the Dean’s Assistant sets up travel and lodgings, a detailed schedule is developed for the external reviewers’ visit to campus. Their visit usually spans a full two-day period. The reviewers will arrive the evening prior to the first day, and may depart the evening of the second day or early in the morning after the second day. It is sometimes beneficial for the reviewers to meet with a number of members of the department at one time, either supplemental to or in lieu of meetings with department members individually. If such a meeting is to be conducted over a meal, we need to limit the number of department faculty members in attendance to no more than four, and regret we cannot include partners or spouses of department members. As categorized for auditing purposes by the Finance Office, this is a meeting for business rather than social purposes, where discussion should be focused upon departmental issues.

The Dean’s Office will prepare an itinerary for the reviewers’ visit. This itinerary will normally include:

- Information about who will pick up the reviewers at airport and transport them to campus.
- Lodging information.

Schedule of meetings will normally include:

- At the beginning of the visit, an initial one-hour meeting with the Dean (this may also include the President for part of the meeting) and Associate Dean selected by the Dean;
- Meeting with department’s divisional representative to Executive Council (Division chair);
- Meetings with all department members, including both the Regular (tenured, tenure-track, Senior Lecturer) faculty and also the faculty members in term positions;
- Meetings with members of departments with which there is regular interaction by the department being reviewed;
- Meeting with the SEPC and (if appropriate) other student groups. These meetings often work well over lunch or an informal dinner (such as a pizza dinner);
- If appropriate, visits to observe individual classes or rehearsals;
- At the end of the visit, a concluding one-hour meeting with the Dean.
- Review teams often appreciate having time to meet by themselves at the conclusion of the visit to begin work on the review report. Attempts should be made to arrange for such time, if possible, at the end of the visit. If the reviewers are remaining on campus through dinnertime on the second day of their visit, for example, it can work best for them to have dinner just with each other, to allow them time to discuss their visit and outline the report.

NOTE: Expenses associated with departmental reviews are paid from a separate account administered by the Dean’s Office. Please have all invoices, bills for transportation, meals, lodging (if other than Grinnell College housing), etc. sent to the Dean’s Office for payment. The Dean’s Office will issue payment of the honorarium to the external reviewers upon receipt of their final report, a W-9 and Iowa CER form.

FOLLOWING THE REVIEW VISIT:

Be prepared to answer any questions that may arise from the reviewers.

Once the reviewers' report is received, the department chair (or, if appropriate, the department as a whole) is invited to meet with the Dean to discuss the report.

To conclude the review, and if possible by the end of the academic year in which the external review visit took place, the department should prepare a concise written response to the external reviewers' report including, if appropriate, plans for implementation of suggestions made by the reviewers. The Dean will take the key review materials (the Department's self-study report, the external reviewers' report, and the department's response) to the Executive Council for discussion. The Division chair, having a deeper familiarity with the review materials and having met with the external reviewers, will add perspective and be able to answer questions that arise in this discussion. The Executive Council will in brief form make recommendations as appropriate for consideration by the department, other College committees, and the administration.

The statement of department learning goals will be posted online alongside other departments' statements of principal goals (objectives for majors and non-majors). The intent is to foster broader understanding of both shared and unique learning perspectives within the Grinnell College community and to document departmental missions and objectives.

Attachment: SELF-STUDY QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS

The Executive Council considers the following questions especially important for our department reviews.

- I. What are the expectations of the department related to:
 - A. Student academic achievement
 - B. Faculty professional development
 - C. Curriculum development

- II. A. What knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics does the department expect of students who graduate with a departmental major?
B. How does or how will the department determine the extent to which its students meet these expectations? How does or how will the department determine if its majors meet the College's expectations that our students learn to make effective written and oral arguments, including the use of quantitative reasoning in these arguments?

- III. What major changes have occurred in the department or discipline during the past ten years in each of the following areas:
 - A. Faculty and Personnel
 - B. Curriculum
 - C. Budget
 - D. Physical facilities
 - E. Equipment and use of technology

- IV. What significant changes does the department anticipate during the next three to five years?

- V. What does the department regard as its greatest strength?

- VI. What does it regard as its greatest weakness or need?

- VII. What is needed to improve the department program? What are the impediments to making these improvements?

- VIII. Many of the above questions might lead to consideration of specific department issues such as the success of its introductory courses in presenting the discipline to students who plan to become majors and to those who do not, the quality of the senior-year experience of its majors, the extent to which its alumni pursue successful careers and develop life-long learning skills, and the level of the departmental response to the needs of one or more interdisciplinary concentrations or to specific institutional initiatives, such as our writing-across-the-curriculum efforts or our increased emphasis on multicultural education.