



University of Massachusetts Amherst

Campus Procedures for  
Academic Quality Assessment and Development (AQAD)

Incorporating University of Massachusetts  
System Guidelines (Trustee Doc. T98-033)

Office of Academic Planning and Assessment  
May, 1999

## Introduction

Academic Quality Assessment and Development (AQAD) is a component of the University Performance Measurement System. The primary purpose of this component is to assess and improve the core academic functions of teaching and learning, research/professional/creative activity, and public service/academic outreach through an ongoing system of quality control/program assessment at the unit level (i.e., department or program).

Each UMass campus has established, in consultation with the President's Office and in accordance with the system-level guidelines adopted by the Board of Trustees (Doc. T98-033), procedures for implementing AQAD. All programs will address the same core evaluation criteria, although these criteria will have varying degrees of relevance and applicability across the campus. Programs undergoing reviews for other purposes (e.g., accreditation) may, at the request of the Dean, submit these reviews in lieu of the AQAD review, provided the alternative review addresses the core criteria and associated questions. If not, the program shall prepare and submit a supplemental document addressing the core criteria.

## AQAD Review Process

1. Each program shall be reviewed on a regular cycle. Ordinarily, the length of time between reviews may be no more than five to seven years, but campus procedures may establish the circumstances under which exceptions to this timeframe may be granted. The Amherst campus has received approval to conduct the AQAD review of Communication Disorders on an eight-year cycle so as to allow overlap with the accreditation review, and to adopt the ten-year accreditation cycle for Music and Dance, all programs in the School of Management, and the School of Nursing with an AQAD "mini-review" to be conducted at the five-year mid-points.
2. Each program review shall be conducted with the participation of program faculty members.
3. The system guidelines require that each program review shall consist, minimally, of the following written documents: a program self-assessment, the external reviewers' report, a program response to the reviewers' report, and an action plan based on the review. These written documents will be submitted to the Dean. Faculty within the program will receive copies of all documents.
4. Each program shall be reviewed by a team of no fewer than two external reviewers from outside the campus (one reviewer may be from another campus within the University of Massachusetts system). The Dean, in consultation with the program chair and faculty members, will choose the external reviewers. The Amherst campus procedures give the Dean the responsibility for determining the emphasis of the visiting team's review, and provide that a common set of "core" questions will be directed to all visiting teams. This set of "core" questions is currently under development.
5. The Dean will review and comment on the written reports. The Dean's comments will be distributed to all program faculty, who may prepare a written response to the Dean's comments.
6. The Dean will forward the program self-assessment, external reviewers' report, program response to the reviewers' report, and his/her comments with faculty responses, if any, to the Provost. Prior to accepting the review, the Provost will meet with the program chair and the Dean to discuss the review and action plan.

7. The Provost will forward to the President’s Office annually, no later than June 30, an executive summary of the program reviews conducted. The documents comprising a review shall not, as a general matter, be circulated beyond the campus.

### Overview of the Review Process

2-3 months prior to review process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A pre-review conference is held involving the Department, the Dean, and the Provost’s Office. The purpose of the conference is to review procedures, answer questions, and discuss information needs. If the review coincides with a disciplinary re-accreditation, the extent of the overlap will be discussed and a determination made of what needs to be done (if anything) beyond accreditation requirements.</li> </ul>
1-2 months prior to review process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Dean meets with Department reps to determine the emphasis of self-study (i.e., relative weight to be given to the different elements of the self-study), with the assumption that areas of greatest concern will receive the greatest attention. A one-page summary of the self-study strategy is prepared by the Department and forwarded to the Dean and the Provost’s Office.</li> </ul>
Review process — fall cycle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• OIR/OAPA produce agreed-upon information.</li> <li>• Department prepares self-study.</li> <li>• Dean, in consultation with Department, determines emphasis of external review, selects external review team, and forwards any relevant material to the team.</li> </ul>
Review process — spring cycle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-study is provided to visiting team, and visit is conducted.</li> <li>• The visiting team’s report is delivered to the Department, with copies to the Dean and the Provost. The Provost may meet with the team, as recommended by the Dean. The Department prepares a written response to the report, and an action plan based on the review.</li> <li>• The Dean reviews and provides written comments on the reports. The faculty may respond to the Deans’ comments.</li> <li>• The Dean forwards the self-study, the visiting team’s report, the Department’s response and action plan, and the Dean’s comments (and faculty responses, if any) to the Provost. Depending on the outcome of the review, the Provost may meet with the Dean and the Department head to discuss the review and the action plan.</li> <li>• The Provost accepts the Dean’s review.</li> </ul>
Post-review (no later than June 30)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Provost forwards an executive summary of the review to the President’s Office.</li> </ul>

## Topics and Questions to Guide the Self-Study

1. Programs shall ensure that their goals and objectives are linked to the campus mission and strategic priorities, *and to their strategy for improving their position within the discipline.*

The Program should evaluate its purpose and planning in light of the campus mission and strategic priorities, *and should assess its standing among similar programs nationally.* The review should answer the following questions:

- What is the Program's mission and is it clearly aligned with the campus mission and direction?
- How does the Program's mission relate to curriculum; enrollments; faculty teaching, research/professional/creative activity, and outreach? Is it aligned with the campus strategic priorities?
- *The Program should discuss its strategy for promoting diversity.*
- *How does the program contribute to campus-wide curricular needs through general education and service instruction?*
- *What is the Program's current standing within the discipline, especially with respect to research and graduate education? What goals does the Program have in terms of its national standing?*

2. Programs shall ensure that curriculum is relevant, rigorous, current and coherent.

The need to provide a high quality education for students should be the primary consideration when evaluating the relevancy, currency, and coherence of curricula. Evaluation of the curriculum should reflect an awareness of changing knowledge, trends in the discipline, and the professional context for curriculum. The review should answer the following questions:

- How does the Program determine curricular content? How does the curriculum relate to current existing standards, if any, of the discipline?
- What internal or external measures of review are employed to ensure that the curriculum is relevant and up-to-date?
- Are the curricular offerings structured in a logical, sequential and coherent manner? Is there an appropriate balance between breadth and depth?
- If consistent with the Program mission, does the curriculum adequately prepare students for further study or employment?
- In what way does the Program contribute to the education of students in terms of general knowledge, critical thinking capacity and other essential cognitive skills?

3. Programs shall ensure faculty quality and productivity.

Programs shall ensure that faculty possess the expertise to assure effective curriculum development, instructional design and delivery, and evaluation of outcomes. Faculty should exhibit awareness of trends in the discipline and the professional field as appropriate. Collectively, faculty should be involved in teaching, research/professional/creative activity, and public service/academic outreach as appropriate to the mission and regional context of the campus. The review should answer the following questions:

- Do faculty possess the appropriate background, experience and credentials?
- Are faculty current in relation to the knowledge base and content of the discipline and curricular offerings?
- Are the program expectations for faculty involvement in teaching, research/professional/creative activity, and public service/academic outreach activities appropriate; and how are these expectations met? Are these expectations consistent with program policies regarding teaching assignments, merit allocations, and other aspects of faculty roles and rewards?
- In what ways does the Program foster professional development and growth of faculty?
- In what ways does the Program faculty lend its professional expertise — as expressed through teaching and research, scholarly and creative activity — to off-campus constituencies?

4. Programs shall ensure teaching/learning environments that facilitate student success.

Programs shall provide learning environments that promote student success. Students are expected to learn both content and skills appropriate to the discipline. The program should indicate clear expectations for student learning outcomes. The teaching/learning environment should be accessible to all students, should include a variety of instructional methodologies, and should provide timely feedback to students. The review should answer the following questions:

- *What is the program looking for in its students? What kind of students is the program well suited to serve? How does the program define “quality” in terms of admission to the program (when relevant)?*
- *To what extent does the program have articulated learning outcomes (content and skills) for students? (Outcomes should be articulated at both the undergraduate and graduate level and by sub-fields, when relevant.) By what means are these outcomes measured? Are they achieved by most students? For programs with graduate research or teaching assistantships: To what extent does the program have articulated learning outcomes for the TA/RA experience? By what means are these outcomes and the quality of the experience assessed?*

- *How are program expectations communicated to students? Are students kept informed of their progress in meeting intended program outcomes?*
- How is assessment of student learning outcomes used in reviewing *and modifying* program curriculum, *advising, and other program elements*, and in evaluating faculty?
- In what ways does the program evaluate student success following graduation and the program's contribution to that success?
- What is the role of the core faculty in teaching lower division, upper division and graduate courses? What is the rationale for these assignments?

5. Programs shall ensure that resources are used wisely.

Programs shall ensure that the resources available are used to meet Program goals and objectives, and as appropriate, engage in use of innovation to enhance resources; should engage in both intra- and inter-campus collaboration; and should demonstrate a commitment to effective and efficient use of resources. The review should answer the following questions:

- What process does the Program use to allocate resources?
- In what ways does the Program maximize the use of its human resources?
- In what ways does the Program maximize the use of material resources such as space, equipment, operating funds, etc.?
- *What strategies does the Program employ to develop alternate sources of revenue (private giving, grants and contracts, etc.), and to share costs with other public and private entities?*

*Italics* indicate additions to the system guidelines

## General Issues

1. **Development of Data.** The Provost's Office will work with the Graduate School to ensure that data provided to support the AQAD process is as consistent and comprehensive as possible.
2. **Resource Context.** When communicated to departments, the AQAD should be set in the context of constrained resources. The emphasis should be on the wise use of resources, rather than the need for new resources.
3. **Nature of the self-study.** While the system policy dictates the general areas to be addressed, and poses some specific questions within each of those areas, there are no other specific requirements relating to the self-study. We recommend the following:
  - The self-study should be a narrative which targets the key issues facing the department, not an exercise in filling in a form. The role of Deans would be crucial in setting the expectations for the emphasis of the self-study.
  - Before work on the self-study begins in earnest, a short (i.e., one-page) summary of the self-study strategy should be developed by the Dean and the Department to ensure that everyone is operating under the same set of expectations.
  - The self-study document itself should be limited in size, probably no more than 20 pages or so (but with CVs, tabular data, and so forth included as appendices as needed).
4. **Overlap with Disciplinary Accreditation.** The AQAD process was designed to maximize overlap with disciplinary accreditation, so as to minimize unnecessary duplication of effort. Within this context:
  - The Dean should determine how AQAD will fit with disciplinary accreditations. The Dean may choose to "piggy-back" the processes, ignore the accreditation cycle altogether, or adopt some other strategy. In the event that AQAD reviews and disciplinary accreditations do coincide, the following considerations apply:
  - Re-accreditation requirements vary widely by discipline. The process therefore includes a point at which disciplinary requirements are compared with AQAD requirements, and a determination is made regarding what the Department needs to do (if anything) beyond disciplinary requirements.
  - In a few cases, disciplinary accreditation occurs at longer intervals than the AQAD policy allows (seven years). In those cases there are two possibilities: 1) secure an exception to the seven-year requirement (currently, only applicable to Communication Disorders); or 2) create a "mid-term" process that is somewhat less comprehensive than the full AQAD review. This might involve, for example, a self-study but no visiting team. In such a case, the self-study might only address issues highlighted in the previous full review. The "mini-review" option is proposed only for Music & Dance, the School of Management, and the School of Nursing, each of which is on a ten-year accreditation cycle.

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5. "Core" Questions for the Visiting Team. While the Dean will determine the emphasis of each visiting team's charge, a set of basic questions to be addressed by each visiting team should be developed. The core questions will be developed in consultation with the Deans.
  
6. Action Plan. The key product of the AQAD process is the action plan, which indicates how the Department plans to address any issues raised during the review. The action plan should also indicate whether any subsequent action is need once the review itself is completed (e.g., follow-up on specific issues, earlier-than-normal subsequent review, etc.).

## Core Data

It is recognized that many kinds of information will be used by the program and the visiting team during the course of the AQAD process. Much of this will come from the program itself, from disciplinary bodies, and from a variety of other sources, and will differ in form and content from program to program. Some kinds of information can be made available from the reporting systems of the University itself, thereby making it possible for programs to assemble some “core” data with relative ease, and also making it possible to take advantage of familiar definitions and reporting formats. The University can also provide access to some kinds of comparative information that might otherwise be difficult for programs to obtain on their own. The following information will be made available by the Office of Institutional Research (OIR) to each program participating in AQAD review.

1. Core Data. OIR maintains extensive information on program activity from several perspectives. Ten-year trend data will be provided for the following indicators:
  - Undergraduate and Graduate Admissions (including applications, acceptances and enrollments and acceptance and yield rates).
  - Undergraduate and Graduate Enrollment (headcount student majors).
  - Degrees Awarded by Degree Program Level.
  - Instruction to Majors and Non-Majors (FTE Instructed Students, graduate and undergraduate).
  - Student/Faculty Ratios (by type of instructor).
  - Expenditures for Sponsored Activity per Tenure System Faculty (by direct and indirect expenditure).
  - Educational Expenditures per FTE Instructed Student.
  
2. Comparative Data Across Institutions. The University has also developed several new sources of information that will be applied to the AQAD process for the first time. The first of these is a set of workload and productivity indicators developed through the National Study of Instructional Costs and Productivity (NSICP), sponsored by the University of Delaware. UMass Amherst is one of 26 Research I institutions (and 83 institutions of all classifications) now participating in the NSICP. Participation allows us, for the first time, to have access to a variety of productivity measures by discipline in a comparative context. While the NSICP is still under development, we will use the AQAD as an opportunity to field-test the data and explore their validity and reliability. The NSICP data include the following:
  - Distribution of Student Credit Hours and Organized Class Sections by Faculty Category and Course Level.
  - Number of Student Credit Hours, Organized Class Sections, and FTE Instructed Students per FTE Instructional Faculty.
  - Instructional Cost Ratios (including direct instructional expenditures per FTE student, personnel cost as a percent of expenditures, and research expenditures per FTE faculty).

3. Student Perceptions of the Major. It has been difficult in the past to gain insight into student perceptions of the quality of teaching or advising within their majors because of a lack of consistent approaches and because campus-wide alumni surveys usually fail to include enough respondents from any given major to permit meaningful analysis. In 1998 UMass Amherst launched a new survey of graduating seniors. The response rate was excellent, making it possible report data at the departmental level for the first time. Programs will be provided with data for their own majors, as well as some contextual information relating to the campus as a whole.

In addition to the information indicated above, the Office of Institutional Research (OIR) and the Office of Academic Planning and Assessment (OAPA) are prepared to work with programs in developing other ways to inform the AQAD process.