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
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Introduction

What is an AQAD? An Academic Quality Assessment and Development (AQAD) is a component of the University Performance Measurement System and is required of all academic units. The primary purpose of the AQAD is to assess the core academic functions of teaching, learning, research/professional/creative activity, public service, and academic outreach on a regular basis. Each UMass campus has established procedures for implementing AQADs that are in accordance with the system-level guidelines adopted by the Board of Trustees (Doc. T98-033).

The system guidelines require that programs be reviewed at least every seven years, but UMass Amherst has approval for some variances in order to match external review (e.g., accreditation) schedules. These include an eight-year cycle for Communication Disorders, and 10-year cycles 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.

How can I use an AQAD to help my Department/Program? An AQAD is a tool that you can use to guide the pedagogical development and intellectual future of your department or program. It is an opportunity to assess your current state and ensure that you have clear, strategic goals in teaching, research and creative activity that are in tune with campus priorities and at the leading edge of your discipline. Although AQADs must address the same general core criteria (see Appendix) using the same general procedures, both the content and process can be adjusted to suit each unit’s needs.

In particular, we urge you to use the visit from external reviewers as an occasion to celebrate and explore the creative and intellectual frontiers of your discipline. Consider, for example, inviting the most exciting and innovative leaders in your field to give short public presentations on the first afternoon of their visit that engage faculty and students both within and outside of your department. These talks, or “futures seminars” could be followed by a panel or salon-style discussion that features lively dialog between the visitors and your faculty. You may even want to film these events and put them on your website as advertisement to colleagues and potential students. The Provost’s office would look forward to attending any form of public event that you choose to host. The second day of the reviewers’ visit could include the more traditional closed-door sessions with faculty, staff, and students in order to focus on topics of specialized intellectual and pedagogical interest. Creating more opportunities for public and private dialog about the intellectual trajectory of your field would add a great deal of value to the AQAD process for your faculty, draw high-profile scholars to give public lectures, and educate the campus community about your discipline and your department’s accomplishments.

Parts of an AQAD. An AQAD minimally consists of three documents: a program self-assessment, a report from external reviewers, and a program response to the external report that includes an action plan.

1. The centerpiece of the self-assessment is a short (@ 20 page) narrative that describes the current state of your department, its aspirations, and the key issues that it faces. (CVs or tabular data can be added as appendices.) The narrative should be developed in consultation with your Dean so that there is a common understanding of your goals. Note that the strategic planning documents you wrote during the 2014-15 academic year likely address most, if not all of the required core criteria. Those documents can be updated to add new data or address additional topics.

2. The Dean, in consultation with the department Head/Chair and faculty, will identify a team of at least two external reviewers, one of whom can be from another campus in the UMass system. The Dean, department Head/Chair, and faculty will work together to determine the emphasis of the visiting team’s review, and the Provost will have the opportunity to identify
specific issues or questions that should be addressed. The Provost will approve team membership and may add a member. When more than one unit in a school or college is undergoing review, the Dean is responsible for providing a common set of “core” questions for all visiting teams. The review team is charged with providing a written report based on the self-study, the questions posed by the Dean, and their experience on campus.

3. The key product of the AQAD process is the action plan, which addresses 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.)

**Steps and Timing of the AQAD Review Process**

| Early Fall | • The Department Head/Chair, the Dean, and the Provost’s Office meets to review procedures, answer questions, and discuss information needs. If the AQAD coincides with a disciplinary re-accreditation, the extent of the overlap will be discussed and a determination made as to what (if anything) needs to be done beyond accreditation requirements. |
| Early-mid Fall | • The Dean meets with Department representatives to discuss the emphasis of 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 for feedback. |
| Mid-late Fall | • Dean, in consultation with Department, finalizes the emphasis of external review and submits it to the Provost for approval.  
• Dean recommends external review team to the Provost.  
• OIR/OAPA provides data for the self-study (see Appendix).  
• Department prepares self-study and plans activities surrounding the external review. |
| 6 weeks prior to visit from External Reviewers | • Send the self-study to the visiting team. Consider posting ancillary documents (CVs, tabular data, course syllabi, etc) on-line for the reviewers’ ease of access. |
| March – June | • External reviewers visit. The Provost presents the review committee with its charge during an entrance interview and conducts an exit interview at the end of their visit.  
• The visiting team delivers report to the Department, with copies to the Dean and the Provost.  
• The Department prepares a written response to the report and an action plan based on the review.  
• The Dean reviews and provides written comments on the reports to the faculty. The faculty may respond to the Deans’ comments.  
• 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 to the Dean’s comments, if any) to the Provost. The Provost’s office will meet with the Dean and the Department Head/Chair to discuss the review and the action plan.  
• The Provost accepts the Dean’s review. |
| Post-review (no later than June 30) | • The Provost forwards an executive summary of the review to the President’s Office. |
Appendix: Core Criteria for the Self-Study

(From Trustee Doc. T98-033. Italics indicate additions to the system guidelines)

Institutional data to address these questions are available through the Office of Information Research (OIR; http://www.umass.edu/oir/) and the Office of Academic Planning and Assessment (OAPA; http://www.umass.edu/oapa/oapa/). You may be interested in Academic Analytics, a web-based tool that reports comparative data on faculty scholarly productivity in Ph.D. programs. (e.g., publications, citations, awards, grant dollars). The campus is licensed for Academic Analytics, and department heads and Chairs may be credentialed to access the database. Please contact the administrative assistant in OIR if you are interested in accessing the tool. Academic Analytics will then schedule a webinar to instruct users on how to use the database.

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?

Metrics on Freshman and overall retention and graduation rates shall be provided for the period since the previous AQAD review.

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?