

Montana State University

Guidelines for External Program Review

The Board of Regents of the Montana University System (BOR) requires a review of every degree (including options and minors) every seven years. Campuses may use program accreditation reviews to satisfy the provisions of this policy.

Two particularly relevant sections from this policy are:

1. Each campus will report the results of its internal program review, for the preceding year, at the November meeting of the Montana Board of Regents. Those reports will focus especially on the decisions associated with the future of each program, following its review.
2. The annual reports will include additional information and explanation for programs that do not meet the criteria set out below, especially if the campus decision is to retain or continue the program. That criteria is as follows:
 - a. for undergraduate programs:
 1. The graduation rate, on a rolling three-year average, is less than ten (10) students; and
 2. the student-faculty ratio in the 300 and 400-level courses that are the responsibility of the program is in the bottom third of student/faculty ratios on the campus; and
 3. the average credit hour figure in the 300 and 400-level courses that are the responsibility of the program are in the bottom third of credit hour figures on the campus.
 - b. for masters degree programs, a graduation rate that averages three (3) or fewer students on a rolling average, during the three years preceding the internal campus review.
 - c. for doctoral degree programs, a graduation rate that averages two (2) or fewer students on a rolling average, during the three years preceding the internal campus review.
 - d. In addition to the programs identified above, the provisions of this subsection shall apply to any program where overall enrollments – as measured by majors and overall student credit hours generated – has decreased by 20 percent or more since the last time it was reviewed.
 - e. the criteria described in 5a., b., c. and d. above shall be included as part of the information concerning each program that is part of the annual report submitted to the Montana Board of Regents.

As the primary organizational structure for academic programming, reviews will be conducted at the departmental level. A departmental review will cover all degrees, options, certificates (over 30 credits), and minors housed in the department. The scope of departmental reviews will not be limited to degree and certificate programs, and may include the full range of departmental activities.

External reviews are conducted by a team of two or three disciplinary experts from other institutions, possibly assisted by an MSU faculty member from a closely related field. Internal reviews are conducted by a team of two or three MSU faculty. For internal reviews, the goal is to identify faculty with closely related disciplinary expertise and/or whose students regularly take courses in the department under review. The constitution of the review committee is determined by the Provost with extensive input from the college Dean and the Department Head and faculty.

External reviews are normally conducted during a two day visit; we request that final reports be submitted to the Provost within two weeks of the visit. Internal reviews may be extended over several months (because the reviewers are on campus) with final reports due within two weeks of the conclusion of the final scheduled meeting. Departments have the primary responsibility for scheduling all events.

In preparation for the review (both internal and external), the department prepares a self-study to assist the reviewers in better understanding all aspects of departmental activities. This self-study can rely heavily on existing documents and institutional data so as to reduce as much as possible the burden on departments. However, a key aspect of the self study is the departmental strategic plan, which if not regularly reviewed, should be reviewed in preparation for this process. Specifically, the self-study must contain the following items:

1. Institutional Data (provided by the Office of Planning and Analysis)
 - a. Institutional overview
 - b. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)
 - c. Delaware Data
 - d. Data addressing BOR criteria
2. Strategic plan (including description of strategic planning process)

A strategic plan describes the department's mission, its strength (including evidence for those strengths) and describes specific goals with clearly articulated priorities. It should address all areas of departmental activity including, but not limited to, undergraduate education, graduate education, research, outreach, and college/university service. In short, the plan answers the questions, What do we care about? What are we good at? How do we know we are good at these things? and What do we want to become? In addition to providing ongoing direction for departmental decision-making, the value of the strategic plan is that it allows reviewers to assess the department against its plan.
3. Departmental assessment plan and most recent updates.

Departmental assessment plans, available at <http://www.montana.edu/wwwprov/assessment/assessmentplans.htm>, describe the expected learning outcomes for all majors within the department

and describe the process by which the department regularly monitors its progress in helping students meet those goals. The updates provide evidence that the plan is being implemented and the resulting data acted upon as appropriate. Additional detailed information not included in the public updates may be included in the self-study.

4. Relevant material from MSU catalog (including curriculum tabs)
5. Brief overview and self-assessment of the department (may include links to department web site)
6. Current (abbreviated) CVs for faculty (suggested length: 2-3 pages each)
7. Narrative describing any significant changes in departmental curriculum over the past several years

The department is welcome to include other material aimed toward helping the reviewers better understand the department, its faculty, and its students. In many cases, professional disciplinary organizations can provide a great deal of guidance on issues of learning assessment, curriculum, and planning; departments are encouraged to utilize such resources.

Although likely to be compiled by a lead individual or team, departments are encouraged to engage all faculty in the process of generating the self-study document.

During the visit, reviewers meet with the following individuals or groups:

1. Provost
2. College Dean
3. Department Head or Chair
4. Tenured and tenure-track faculty
5. Adjunct faculty, post-doctoral fellows, and other non-tenured faculty
6. Graduate Students
7. Undergraduate Students
8. External constituencies (if appropriate)
9. Others at the request of the reviewers

The reviewers conclude their visit with an exit interview with the Provost, Dean, and Department Head. During this interview, and in the subsequent written report, the reviewers will be asked to address the following issues:

1. What are the strengths of the department? Please list any specific commendations.
2. What are your overall observations of the quality and the rigor of the academic programs?

3. How well does the curriculum represent the field in terms of breadth and currency? Does the curriculum evolve appropriately in response to changes in the field?
4. Please comment on the overall level of faculty productivity as it relates to the stated mission of the department.
5. What is your overall assessment of the quality of graduates produced by the programs in the department?
6. Please identify any weaknesses or unrealized opportunities and provide specific recommendations for action.

We request that the final written report be organized using the following general headings, although the committee is welcome to adjust this to fit its unique needs as it sees fit:

1. Members of Review Committee
2. Process
Please provide a brief overview of the structure of the review with special attention paid to any components not described in this document. This is especially important for an internal review in which the reviewers often work directly with the department through much of the process.
3. Scope of Review
Please provide a short narrative describing the specific areas that were reviewed. Also, if any areas of departmental activity were not reviewed, please list these specifically.
4. Assessment of Strategic Plan
5. Challenges
The challenges should relate specifically to the department's ability to meet the goals of its own strategic plan.
6. Opportunities
These are the specific recommendations that the review team makes designed to assist the department in achieving its goals.