

Sample Questions for External Reviewers

Introduction

The purpose of the academic program review is to assess:

1. the program's contribution to the vision, mission and values of the University;
2. the quality of the program curriculum, faculty, and students;
3. the program's current resources and sustainability;
4. the quality of program administration;
5. present and projected student demand for the program;
6. the department/program's plan for the next five years.

The questions outlined below are intended to assist the external review team in their assessment of the department/program. We recognize that time constraints will preclude a detailed response to every individual question but the final report should attempt to provide an assessment around the key issues of mission and goals, curriculum and instruction (including assessment), faculty, students, diversity, resources and future direction. In assessing these areas, we would like the reviewers to measure our program against the generally accepted standards in the discipline, programs at the reviewers' own institutions, and benchmark top-tier programs around the nation.

The University of San Francisco has a single, simple goal for the program reviews: to help the University become one of the finest liberal arts institutions in the nation, providing a rich and rigorous education in the Jesuit, Catholic tradition.

A. MISSION AND GOALS

I. Mission

The Mission of the University of San Francisco is as follows:

“The core mission of the University is to promote learning in the Jesuit, Catholic tradition. The University offers undergraduate, graduate and professional students knowledge and skills needed to succeed as persons and professionals, and the values and sensitivity to be men and women for others. The University will distinguish itself as a diverse, socially responsible learning community of high quality scholarship and academic rigor sustained by a faith that does justice. The University will draw from the cultural, intellectual and economic resources of the San Francisco Bay Area and its location on the Pacific Rim to enrich and strengthen its educational programs.”

(University of San Francisco, Statement of Vision, Mission and Values
September 11, 2001).

1. Is the department/program’s mission clearly aligned with the University’s mission and strategic priorities? Does the program effectively educate leaders who will fashion a more humane and just world?
2. Are the department/program’s mission and goals clearly articulated and communicated to faculty, students and staff as well as other campus constituencies?

II. Goals

1. After reading the departmental/program self-study and conducting a site visit, how would you characterize the quality and performance of the department/program?
2. Overall, how does this program compare to the benchmark top-tier programs nationally?
3. The Board of Trustees requires a rating for each program. Please rate the overall quality of the program – excellent, very good, good, adequate or poor according to the following definitions:

Excellent: The program is significantly above the level one would expect to find at a top-tier liberal arts college or university. “Excellent” implies that the quality of the program would be readily recognizable by disciplinary experts in the field who are external to the institution.

Very Good: The program is at the level one would expect to find at a top-tier liberal arts college or university. “Very good” implies that the program has the potential to become an outstanding or excellent program, a standard that would be readily recognizable by disciplinary experts in the field who are external to the institution.

Good: The program is at an acceptable level that one would expect to find at a top-tier liberal arts college or university. “Good” implies that there are a few notable areas where improvements could be made. This level of performance would be readily recognizable by disciplinary experts in the field who are external to the institution.

Adequate: The program needs to address critical issues in order to improve its current status. There are many areas where improvement may be warranted in order for the program to function at a level that can be tolerated at a top-tier liberal arts college or university. These areas would be readily recognizable by disciplinary experts in the field who are external to the institution.

Poor: The program is demonstrably below the level one would expect to find at a top-tier liberal arts college or university. The program needs either (i) significant improvement in key areas; (ii) needs to be merged with or consolidated into another program; or (iii) should be discontinued. This situation would be readily recognizable by disciplinary experts in the field who are external to the institution.

B. CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

I. General

1. Please comment on the enrollment, retention and graduation rates and trends for the department/program’s curriculum.
2. Do the department/program’s curriculum provide breadth, depth, and challenge in the light of current scholarship?
3. Do the department/program’s curriculum educate students in the values, knowledge and skills appropriate to the discipline?
4. Has the curriculum kept pace with developments in the field? How does the curriculum compare with those of comparable institutions?
5. Does the department/program provide a stimulating, challenging learning environment for all students?
6. Do the current emphases within the curriculum complement the strengths and interests of the faculty?
7. Do the current emphases within the curriculum meet the needs and interests of the students and current trends within the discipline?

8. Does the department/program have adequate procedures in place to determine whether it is meeting its instructional goals and objectives and to determine and refine curricular content?
9. Is the department/program involved in creating a “living-learning” community on campus (for example, does it participate in residential life programs)?
10. Does the program appear to have adequate human and fiscal resources (support staff, space, laboratories, computer technology, equipment, income and expense budgets, etc.) to be or become an exemplary program? Is the program supported with sufficient leadership at the program, College, and University levels?

II. Undergraduate Program

1. Does the undergraduate program have a coherent design characterized by continuity, breadth, sequential progression, and a synthesis of learning? Please assess the content and organization of the curriculum.
2. Are the instructional goals of the program appropriate for the students and to what extent does the curriculum, *as it is normally implemented*, support these goals?
3. Do the courses offered in the various modes of instruction (lecture, seminar, laboratory, clinical practice, fieldwork, etc.) provide an appropriate balance for the instructional program?
4. Do courses effectively include use of instructional media, computers, and other modern technologies and employ innovative teaching strategies?
5. Does the advising of students seem appropriate and effective?
6. What is the overall quality of the undergraduate program?

III. Graduate Program

1. How does the structure of the graduate program (process of admission, course requirements, evaluation) compare to other graduate programs in the country?
2. How does the quality of the graduate program compare with the high-ranking programs in other institutions? What are the strengths and weaknesses of this program?
3. Do the department’s proposals for improving the graduate program seem likely to be effective?

4. Assess the future demand for graduate students in the academic and professional areas covered by the program.
5. What is the overall quality of the graduate program?

IV. Assessment

1. Is the program assessment plan comprehensive enough? Are there key program outcomes that the department has not evaluated and should be evaluated in the next 3-year assessment cycle?
2. Are there assessment methods that the program should consider using to measure its success in achieving its program learning objectives?

C. FACULTY

1. Please comment on the faculty demographic data contained in the departmental/program self-study and assess the department/program's future hiring priorities.
2. One objective is for our programs to be exemplary, distinctive, and reach national and international prominence. How does this program fare in relation to that goal?
3. Is the faculty distinguished in terms of their contributions to scholarship and creative work; teaching; and service to students, the profession, and community? Is the faculty sufficiently active in research or creative work to support superior academic programs?
4. How does the quality of the scholarly and/or creative work of the faculty rate in terms of national standards of the discipline? How do the teaching and research specialties in the program compare to trends within the discipline?
5. Comment on the quality of recent tenure-track appointments in the program. Do the latest faculty appointments represent careful planning with respect to depth and breadth of curriculum?
6. To what extent is the scholarly and/or creative work of the faculty integrated into the department's graduate and undergraduate programs?
7. How appropriate is the balance among subspecialties within the department/program? Are all areas represented sufficiently for undergraduate majors and graduate students to receive a well-rounded education?

8. How appropriate is the balance of faculty with respect to senior and junior appointments, diversity (women and underrepresented groups), and full-time vs. part-time appointments?
9. Please comment on the department/program's efforts with regard to professional development and growth, particularly among junior faculty.
10. Please comment on faculty workloads and the balance between teaching, research and service responsibilities.
11. Please comment on departmental/program governance and by-laws. How is the department/program organized and how well is it governed? Is decision-making participatory and inclusive? Is leadership encouraged and developed?

D. STUDENTS

1. Does the program provide a rich learning environment and distinctive education in the discipline? Does it prepare students to make a real contribution to society?
2. Does the performance of students, as evidenced by papers, course examinations, comprehensive examinations, and theses or other projects indicate satisfactory preparation in the discipline?
3. Please assess the effectiveness of student participation in the academic life of the program, including undergraduate research and other opportunities for student/faculty collaborative work.
4. Does the program effectively monitor student academic progress and assist underperforming majors?
5. What efforts are made to create an intellectual and social climate that fosters student development and learning (e.g. clubs, student chapters of professional organizations, etc.)?

E. DIVERSITY

1. Please describe and evaluate the department's diversity in terms of faculty, students and staff. How does it compare with departments at the very best institutions?
2. Does the program effectively promote diversity and build awareness of and sensitivity to multicultural issues?
3. What factors facilitate or impede the department's ability to recruit and retain faculty, students and staff from underrepresented groups?

F. RESOURCES

1. How does the total amount of resources provided to the department/program compare with those at similar institutions?
2. Do you agree with the department/program's assessment of its most pressing equipment and resource needs?
3. Does the department/program have adequate support staff?
4. How well do the university's computer hardware and software policies and campus support for technology meet the department/program's current and future needs?
5. What additional resources and facilities, if any, are needed to improve the quality of the programs being offered?
6. Are there low-cost, short-term solutions that could be used to address any of the program resource needs during periods of scarce resources?
7. Are there innovative ways to address the program's resource needs in order to increase the program's quality while keeping it financial sustainable?

G. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

1. What are the department/program's strengths? In what ways could the department/program be considered a leader in its field?
2. What are the department/program's weaknesses and where could it most improve? What further challenges do you foresee the department/program facing in the coming years?
3. What changes will occur in your field over the next five to ten years that will impact the future direction of the department/program?
4. Are there differences between the department/program's view of its role and the College/School and University expectations for the department/program?
5. How would you describe the morale and atmosphere within the department/program? Does the department/program enjoy the kind of collegiality among its members that is conducive to sustaining and enhancing its excellence?
6. Please comment on the department/program's integrated plan for improvement over the next five years.
7. What should be the core objectives and priorities for the department/program over the next five years?

8. What opportunities exist to extend and build on present strengths and what do you see as the major obstacles that impede the department/program's progress?
9. What improvements are possible through reallocating existing resources?
10. What improvements can only be addressed through additional resources? What are innovative ways to address these needs?