Purpose: The purposes of academic unit review (AUR) are to assess the quality and effectiveness of that unit, to potentially modify the unit because of the review, to further the University and Academic Affairs strategic plans, and to inform ongoing unit-level planning. As such, unit reviews are a critical element in ongoing improvement. AUR is an explicit core component of Higher Learning Commission accreditation. Hallmarks of good unit reviews are that they are evaluative and forward-looking, fair and transparent, and result in action.

Frequency and Cycle: Generally, a unit’s review will be undertaken no less than every five years. However, scheduling may be affected by the timing of program accreditation. Units with program accreditation schedule their University academic unit review to take place either at the same time as the accreditation process or within one year before or after it wherever possible. In cases where units have multiple program accreditations on different timeframes, a decision needs to be made about which accreditation most appropriately aligns to the AUR. The Academic Unit Review Schedule lists the academic year in which the self-study is to be conducted.

An external review must take place as a component of the AUR process at least every ten years. When units have program accreditation, the accreditation review visit may take the place of the external review visit for the University’s academic review process, and the timing of the visit will follow the accreditation requirements as long as some type of external review takes place at least every ten years. The unit leadership then develops annual follow-up reports and shares them with the college dean and the Director of Accreditation, Assessment, and Unit Review. Three years after the action plan is implemented the unit leader, college dean, Provost, and Director of Accreditation, Assessment, and Unit Review meet to discuss status of the plan.

“Unit” refers to the body of the whole: a department, school, center, or interdisciplinary studies program that stands as a whole. “Program” refers to areas of study within a unit, such as a major or minor, area of emphasis or concentration, interdisciplinary area of study that is a part of a larger unit, and/or degree level.

Units that are wholly accredited may use information in their accreditation self-studies and external reviewer findings for the academic unit review process as long as two criteria are met: that all of the topics listed in the Self-Study Guidelines are addressed by the accreditation and the accreditation takes place every five years or sooner. It is important to note that the focus of accreditation is meeting standards established by the discipline/profession, while the foci of unit reviews are unit operations and planning. In cases where accreditations do not fully meet these requirements, academic units and their deans should work with the Director of Accreditation, Assessment, and Unit Review to identify which sections of the AUR self-study can be completed using information prepared for the accreditation and which sections must be supplemented to meet the additional required elements of AUR. Units that are partially accredited may choose to review the entire unit at the time of accreditation, or they may choose to submit the accreditation
report as part of the larger unit review. For example, a unit in which only the undergraduate program is accredited may review the graduate program at the same time; a program that is reviewed every two years may submit a summary of those reviews at the time of the unit’s review.

**Steps in the Academic Unit Review Process:** (please note this timeline may vary to satisfy accreditation requirements)

1. Late in the summer before the academic year in which the unit review is scheduled, the Director of Accreditation, Assessment, and Unit Review convenes an orientation meeting for department chairs, school directors, or others whose units are about to undergo review. The meeting is designed to discuss the timeline and logistics of the review, objectives, and resources. Issues of relationship of the review to accreditation, if applicable, are to be addressed as well as a decision concerning if an external review will be part of the unit self-study.

2. During the fall semester the Office of Institutional Research and Decision Support provides a package of information to the unit that addresses some of the elements of the self-study, including students, class sections, grades, number of graduates, characteristics of faculty and staff members in the unit, instructional productivity and cost, and survey results disaggregated to the unit level. OIE may assist with providing information in additional areas as requested, including carrying out surveys of students, alumni, faculty and staff members, community members, etc. Other areas, such as Academic Systems and the Career Center, provide additional information, and the unit itself provides information, as outlined in the Self-Study Guidelines.

3. The unit conducts its self-study during the fall and spring semesters. A draft of the self-study document is sent to the Director of Accreditation, Assessment, and Unit Review by spring break with revisions as needed. All faculty and staff members in the unit should have an opportunity to review the draft self-study and provide feedback.

4. If an external review takes place, suggested external reviewers are discussed and agreed upon with the college dean and the Director of Accreditation, Assessment, and Unit Review. The final edition of the self-study is shared with the college dean and the Director of Accreditation, Assessment, and Unit Review by final exam week with revisions as needed.

5. If an external review takes place, the visit schedule is developed by the unit leadership and reviewers and is reviewed and agreed upon by the college dean and the Director of Accreditation, Assessment, and Unit Review during the summer.

6. External Reviewers’ visit (if applicable).

7. The external reviewers’ report is received (if applicable).

8. Units provide a concise, formal, written unit response to the external reviewers’ report and shares it with the college dean and the Director of Accreditation, Assessment, and Unit Review.

9. A meeting is held with the Provost, Director of Accreditation, Assessment, and Unit Review, college dean, and chair/director to discuss findings and discuss and reach consensus concerning an action plan that is then prepared by the unit leadership and shared with the college dean and the Director of Accreditation, Assessment, and Unit Review.
10. Annual progress reports are prepared and shared with the Provost, Director of Accreditation, Assessment, and Unit Review, and college dean. These may be embedded within annual reports.

11. Three years after the action plan is created, there is a follow up meeting with unit leadership, college, dean, Director of Accreditation, Assessment, and Unit Review, and Provost to discuss status of the action plan.

**Self-Study:** The primary audiences for the self-study are the unit, the external reviewer(s), the college dean, and the Provost. The self-study will begin with a reflective assessment by the unit in response to a series of questions about its current status as per the topics listed in the Self-Study Guidelines. The self-study will then define and justify a direction for future activities in teaching, research, and service as related to the university’s strategic plan and/or accreditation guidelines. This may require reconsideration in whole or in part of the unit’s mission and goals. See the Self-Study Guidelines document for further details.

**Support for Faculty Work on the Self-Study:** The Provost’s Office may provide faculty travel funding or summer salary support for work on the self-study upon request of the unit leadership and college dean. The support is typically $1,000 for one faculty member for one summer for each unit.

**Process and Outcome for External Review:** It is important that an external review take place at least once every ten years. After the self-study is completed, it is sent to an approved external reviewer (see below). After the external review is completed and the report received, the unit will develop a brief written response. A meeting with unit leadership, college dean, Director of Accreditation, Assessment, and Unit Review, and Provost will then take place to discuss the findings of the review and an action plan that will then be created by the unit leadership. When the Provost approves the plan, it will be implemented and reviewed annually in annual reports to the college dean and the Director of Accreditation, Assessment, and Unit Review. The final step of the review process is a meeting to review progress after three years with the unit leadership, Provost, college dean, and the Director of Accreditation, Assessment, and Unit Review.

**Logistics for Conducting External Reviews:** If an external review is conducted, units will generally bring to campus one or two external reviewers depending upon the complexity of the unit, although accrediting agencies will often send a team of reviewers. Funds of up to $2,000 including expenses are available in the Office of the Provost for each unit review. Because accrediting agencies may require a higher fee from the university, colleges with accredited units will need to budget additional monies for this purpose. Funds will be transferred to the colleges upon receipt of documentation, including letters of agreement with reviewers or agencies and verification of expenses. Generally, reviewers’ fees will not be paid until receipt of the report.

Reviewers are chosen by the unit with the approval of the dean and the Director of Accreditation, Assessment, and Unit Review. Names of reviewers and their credentials should be submitted to
the dean and Director of Accreditation, Assessment, and Unit Review by the end of the spring semester of the year in which the review is scheduled. The external reviewers’ visit schedule is developed by the unit leadership and reviewers over the summer and is reviewed and agreed upon by the college dean and the Director of Accreditation, Assessment, and Unit Review. For more information, refer to the *External Reviewer Guidelines* document.

**Action Plan:** Following receipt of the external reviewers’ report, the unit leadership will prepare a brief written response. The unit leadership, college dean, Provost, and Director of Accreditation, Assessment, and Unit Review will then meet to discuss the findings of the review and an action plan that the unit leadership will then develop.

**Annual Reports:** Units will annually report progress toward achieving the goals of the action plan to the college dean and the Director of Accreditation, Assessment, and Unit Review.

**Three-Year Follow-Up Meeting:** The unit leadership, college dean, Provost, and Director of Accreditation, Assessment, and Unit Review will meet three years after implementation of the action plan to discuss its status.

**Consideration of Value Added:** The university recognizes that some units will not be self-sustaining because of the nature of the discipline, and yet the university may still choose to support them as part of a well-rounded, liberal arts education. In these cases, the unit should provide reliable data comparing faculty, facilities, equipment, budget, student enrollment numbers, placement data, etc., to peer institutions, making the argument that, while not revenue-producing, the unit is operating on par with other, similar units and is therefore being a good steward of its resources.

**Process For Off-Cycle Reviews**

The Provost may initiate an abbreviated off-cycle review at any time for particular units or for individual programs offered within a unit, especially in cases where there are significant upward or downward trends in a unit’s enrollments or overall budgetary picture. In these cases, the Provost will ask the unit to address a specific set of questions in an abbreviated report, will ask OIRDS to provide the appropriate data set to guide the review, and will establish a time-line for the completion of the abbreviated self-study and the review cycle. The Provost will also determine whether or not an external reviewer is required for the off-cycle review.
SELF-STUDY GUIDELINES 2019-2020

The primary audiences for the self-study are the unit, the external reviewer(s) (if applicable), the college dean, and the Provost. The self-study will begin with a reflective assessment by the unit in response to a series of questions about its current status as per the topics listed in the following section. The self-study will then define and justify a direction for future activities in teaching, research, and service as related to the university’s strategic plan and/or accreditation guidelines. This may require reconsideration in whole or in part of the unit’s mission and goals. A self-study should provide a strong narrative and relevant data on the unit’s past and current work, as well as identify goals and aspirations for the near and long terms.

It is important to follow the guidelines, but also for the unit to effectively tell its story. Suggestions for developing a good self-study are as follows.

- Allocate sufficient time to draft the self-study; share it for review by unit colleagues, the college dean, and the Director of Accreditation, Assessment, and Unit Review; and to revise it as necessary.
- Divide the workload. Several persons in the unit can work on drafts of sections of the self-study. Consider using Box or other file sharing methods so that collaboration is seamless.
- Be concise. A relatively brief, but well-supported narrative will be most effective when shared with external reviewers and the college and University leadership. Use appendices and Box links as needed.
- Take advantage of this opportunity. The report is the place to highlight the unit’s achievements, to thoughtfully discuss how the unit and its degree programs can be improved, and plan for the future.

All of the topics listed on the next page must be addressed in the Ball State academic unit review self-study. Units that have program accreditation may use information in their accreditation self-studies and external reviewer findings for the academic unit review process given the understanding that academic unit review applies to the entire unit and focuses on continuous improvement rather than compliance with disciplinary standards. In cases where units have multiple program accreditations on different timeframes, a decision needs to be made about which accreditation most appropriately aligns to the academic unit review.
I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
   A. brief statement of strengths, challenges, and recommendations

II. ACADEMIC OBJECTIVES OF UNIT
   A. Brief history of the unit
   B. What are the unit’s objectives?
   B. What evidence is there that these objectives are being met?
   C. How do these objectives differ from those in similar units elsewhere?
   D. To what degree are the unit’s goals congruent with those of the University’s strategic plan?
   E. Significant changes in the objectives since the last review, if applicable.

III. ACADEMIC UNIT DESCRIPTORS
   A. Majors, minors, certificates and other curricula offered
   B. Location(s)
   C. Organizational affiliation (school, college)
   D. Accreditation status of the unit, if any
   E. Description of programs within the unit
   F. Rankings or significant recognitions since last review

IV. STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES AND CURRICULUM
   A. In what ways are the unit’s student learning outcomes assessed?
   B. What are the major findings of assessment of student learning and how have they been used to improve student learning?
   C. What courses and/or curricular programs have been adopted and/or dropped since the last review? Why?
   D. What are the trends, needs, and future directions in the unit’s curriculum?
   E. How does this curriculum compare to others in similar institutions, i.e., size, scope?
   F. Does the curriculum meet the objectives stated above? How? Why or Why not?
   G. In what ways does the unit’s curriculum reflect the university’s strategic plan?
   H. In what ways does the unit’s curriculum reflect the university’s core curriculum?

V. STUDENTS
   A. Give a brief summary of unit enrollment history and trends. Are there any enrollment ceilings?
B. What are the completion and attrition rates of the unit’s students?
C. What are favorable characteristics and/or problems in enrollment in specific courses, areas, locations, or modes of instruction?
D. How are students advised?
E. How has the university’s strategic plan affected the unit’s students?
F. To what extent are students satisfied with the quality of instruction, advising, career and/or graduate/professional school preparation, and other relevant issues?

VI. FACULTY

A. What has been the change in faculty composition since the last review?
B. What is the capability of faculty to meet unit needs?
C. Characterize the performance and productivity of faculty in the last five years in the following areas: (NOTE: Submitted vitae of all faculty members, including current part-time faculty, are a requirement of this evaluation.)
   1. Teaching: student and peer evaluations
   2. Scholarly productivity: publications and papers, exhibitions, creative endeavors, research funding, etc.
   3. Notable Service: unit, college, university, and community
D. Professional development: additional study, retraining, etc. (For graduate program review): What are the unit’s requirements for selection of graduate faculty? Is the graduate faculty sufficient in number and expertise?
E. How has the university’s strategic plan affected the unit’s faculty?

VII. SUPPORT FOR THE UNIT

A. What support is given the unit in terms of:
   1. Budget
   2. Space
   3. Staff
   4. Travel
   5. Computer and Technology Services
   6. Library Services
B. What types of internal and external research support has the program received for each of the last five years?

VIII. UNIT MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

A. Give an evaluation of unit leadership, citing such areas as personnel, budget, teaching assignments, etc.
B. What are the specific areas which need to be addressed by future leaders of the program?

IX. ALUMNI/AE INFORMATION

A. Units should include results of alumni surveys.
B. Units with professional programs should include results of employer surveys.

IX. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Give a summary of the unit, its strengths, problems, prospects, and recommendations that immediately flow from the evaluation. Please limit to no more than five pages.

As appropriate, the unit review may address the following topics:

A. What are the characteristics of students who select this unit and its programs in terms of ability, motivation, career goals, etc.? Areas of discussion might include: test scores, GPA of previous degree, academic awards, financial aid based on merit, and student research including publications, papers published, and research funded.
B. How are students involved in the department’s operation?
C. What do students do when they graduate? For example, how many are employed in related fields or are continuing their education? How many are unemployed? In what way does the program relate to these employment activities? In what ways is the unit active in aiding students with employment opportunities?
D. What are the academic standards promoted by faculty, i.e., course requirements, grading patterns and rigor?
E. Compare the university’s support of the unit with support given similar programs at similar institutions.
ACTION PLAN GUIDELINES 2019-2020

The Action Plan is 1-2 pages. It should include a list of prioritized goals, objectives, and reliable and meaningful measures to identify whether the goals and objectives have been met.

The Action Plan is the basis for the 3-year Academic Unit Review follow-up Provost meeting and should be considered in annual reports.

The suggested format is a table that includes:

1. Goal/action/objective
2. Responsible person/area
3. Evaluation metric
4. Resources needed
5. Alignment with program goals, the College Strategic Plan, and the University Strategic Plan.
EXTERNAL REVIEWER GUIDELINES 2019-2020

The purposes of academic unit review (AUR) are to assess the quality and effectiveness of that unit, to potentially modify the unit because of the review, to further the University and Academic Affairs strategic plans, and to inform ongoing unit-level planning. As such, unit reviews are a critical element in ongoing improvement. AUR is an explicit core component of Higher Learning Commission accreditation. Hallmarks of good unit reviews are that they are evaluative and forward-looking, fair and transparent, and result in action.

It is important to understand that the focus of AUR is the unit (department, school, or other unit) as a whole. This is why program accreditation does not wholesale substitute for AUR since the focus of accreditation is specific programs, and the AUR also deals with issues such as the unit’s relationship to the operations and plans of its college and the University.

The AUR cycle is generally every five years, but the timing may change to accommodate the requirements of program accreditation, where it exists. An external review must take place at least every 10 years. External review for program accreditation may take the place of external review for the University’s internal AUR process, in whole or in part, as determined by the unit leadership, college dean, and the Director of Accreditation, Assessment, and Unit Review.

The typical AUR schedule calls for units to develop their self-studies during the academic year as noted in the AUR schedule. As part of that process the unit leadership, college dean, and the Director of Accreditation, Assessment, and Unit Review discuss whether an external review will take place, to what extent an accreditation review might substitute for AUR external review, and the specific timing and components of the external review. The unit suggests possible reviewers to the college dean and the Director of Accreditation, Assessment, and Unit Review. The unit leadership contacts the prospective reviewers in the spring or summer, confirms participation and dates, discusses the logistics of the review, and shares the self-study and any supporting materials. External review visits typically take place between September and November, unless they need to be scheduled at a different time due to accreditation requirements or other circumstances. The reviewers’ report is expected to be received within one month of the visit. The unit leadership will contact the reviewers within two weeks of receiving the report to discuss any errors of fact.

One or two external reviewers typically serve as the review team, but this may vary due to program accreditation requirements, the complexity of the unit, and specific expertise sought. The reviewers, or at least one reviewer, will be engaged in an academic career and trained in the discipline(s) or areas being evaluated. The reviewer(s), or at least one reviewer, should be from an institution similar in size and scope to Ball State University. If possible and in the interest of impartiality, reviewers should not be Ball State alumni, friends, or collaborators with any members of the academic unit under review. If not possible, relationships between the reviewer and the unit under review should be disclosed.

Academic Unit Review Guidebook 2019-2020- Updated September 2019
Questions? Jennifer Wies 285-2443 or jrwies@bsu.edu
The Office of the Provost makes $2,000 available in total for honoraria and travel reimbursement to support each AUR. Units and/or colleges often supplement this funding. The unit typically funds the reviewers’ expenses, then the Office of the Provost transfers $2,000 to the unit after the reviewers’ report is received. The unit leadership and the reviewers should discuss and agree upon honoraria and travel details and reimbursement prior to the visit.

The external review report should typically consist of about 15 to 40 pages. It should include the following sections:

- a brief summary of the objectives and context of the review and the logistics and participants for the visit
- detailed feedback to the unit concerning its objectives, changes since the last review, relationship to other units in the University and to the University and college strategic plan, curriculum, student learning outcomes assessment, enrollment, student characteristics, the composition of the faculty and staff, faculty contributions in the areas of teaching, research/scholarship/creative activity, service/engagement, resources (budget, equipment, space, etc.), and unit leadership
- summary information about strengths, weaknesses, challenges, and opportunities of the unit