The purposes of academic unit review (AUR) are to:

1. assess the quality and effectiveness of the unit
2. potentially modify the unit because of the review
3. further the University and Academic Affairs strategic plan
4. inform ongoing unit-level planning

AURs demonstrate BSU’s commitment to educational achievement and improvement through ongoing assessment of student learning. The AUR is an explicit core component of Higher Learning Commission accreditation:

CRITERION 4: TEACHING AND LEARNING: EVALUATION AND IMPROVEMENT
The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs, learning environments, and support services, and it evaluates their effectiveness for student learning through processes designed to promote continuous improvement.
4.A. The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs.
1. The institution maintains a practice of regular program reviews.

Hallmarks of good unit reviews are that they are evaluative and forward-looking, fair and transparent, and result in action.

Frequency and Cycle

A unit’s review will be conducted every five years. The AUR schedule is posted on the website and lists the academic year in which the self-study is to be conducted.

Off-Cycle Reviews
The Provost may initiate an 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 and will establish a timeline 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.

Disciplinary Accredited Programs and AUR

Units accredited by a specialized accredditor may schedule their AUR to take place either at the same time as the accreditation process or within one year before or after an accreditation review. 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.
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 Academic Unit Review Guidelines are addressed by the accreditation review and the reaffirmation of accreditation takes place every five years or less. 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, including the budgetary implications of academic programs offered in the unit. In cases where accreditations do not fully meet these requirements, academic units and their deans should work with the Director of Assessment and Accreditation 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.

**External Reviews**

An external review must take place as a component of the AUR process at least every ten years. For units with disciplinary accreditation, the accreditation review visit may take the place of the external review visit for AUR. 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 Assessment and Accreditation. Three years after the action plan is implemented the unit leader, college Dean, Provost, and Director of Assessment and Accreditation meet to discuss status of the plan.

**Key Terms**

**Program**
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.

**Unit**
The body of the whole: a department, school, center, or interdisciplinary studies program that stands as a whole.
Steps in the Academic Unit Review Process

PREPARATION (Summer-August)

1. Director of Assessment and Accreditation confirms cohort for the upcoming academic year.
2. Institutional Research and Decision Support (IRDS) distributes unit review data packets including department revenue and expenses (including expense/FTE), application data (where applicable), enrollments, student credit hour generation, retention and graduation rates, number of graduates, characteristics of faculty and staff members in the unit (including faculty FTE data), student post-graduate placement data, and survey results disaggregated to the unit level. In cases where the department may be struggling with enrollments, IRDS will include reports on student and labor market demand for the relevant academic programs. IRDS may assist with providing information in additional areas as requested, including carrying out surveys of students, alumni, faculty and staff members, community members, etc.
3. Director of Assessment and Accreditation hosts an introductory meeting for the annual cohort and interested leaders.
4. Information about timeline and the unit review process is shared.
5. Mentors are identified and cohort members are confirmed.

SELF-STUDY (August-February)

1. Decision: Will you include an external review?
2. Collect information and data from relevant areas, such as the Career Center and IRDS.
3. Distribute self-study within the unit for feedback.
4. Unit leaders share self-study draft with Director of Assessment and Accreditation.
5. If an external review is included:
   a. Discuss external reviewers with the college Dean and the Director of Assessment and Accreditation.
   b. Confirm reviewers and visit, develop agenda and share with the college Dean and the Director of Assessment and Accreditation during the summer. If an external review is mandated, then the college Dean and Director of Assessment and Accreditation should approve in advance the questions that will guide both the unit’s self-study and the external reviewer’s report.
   c. External review occurs and the external reviewer report is received.
   d. Prepare a concise response to the external reviewers’ report and share it with your college Dean, who reviews the report and works with the department to develop an action plan. The action plan may include a variety of recommendations, including ones to expand, sustain or close particular academic programs offered by the unit. Add this response to the unit review report.
FEEDBACK (March-May)

1. The final self-study is shared with the college Dean and the Director of Assessment and Accreditation by April 15.
2. Participate in meeting between the Provost, Director of Assessment and Accreditation, college Dean, and unit chair/director to discuss the self-study and corresponding Action Plan. Annual progress reports to the Provost and Dean may be embedded within annual reports.
3. Three years after the action plan is created, there is a follow-up meeting with unit leadership, college, Dean, Provost, and Director of Assessment and Accreditation to discuss status of the action plan.

Components of AUR

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 begins 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 in this document. 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 in this document for further details.

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, Provost, and Director of Assessment and Accreditation will then take place to discuss the findings of the review and the action plan created by the unit leadership. When the Provost approves the plan, it will be implemented and reviewed annually in annual Program Assessment Reports to the college Dean and the Director of Assessment and Accreditation. The final step of the review process is a meeting to review progress after three years with the unit leadership, Provost, Dean, and the Director of Assessment and Accreditation.

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. Because accrediting agencies may require a higher fee from the university, colleges with accredited units will need to budget additional monies for this purpose.

Reviewers are chosen by the unit with the approval of the Dean. Names of reviewers and their credentials should be submitted to the Dean by the end of the spring semester prior to the academic year in which the review is scheduled. The external reviewers’ visit schedule is developed by the unit leadership and is reviewed and agreed upon by the college Dean. For more information, refer to the External Reviewer Guidelines portion of this document.
**Action Plan:** Following receipt of the external reviewers’ report, the unit leadership will prepare a brief written response. The unit leadership, Dean, Provost, and Director of Assessment and Accreditation 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 for the Annual Program Report.

**Debriefing Meeting:** At least three days prior to the debriefing session with the Provost, submit the following documents to the Provost:
- self-study
- a summary of the recommendations made by external reviewers, if external reviewers were used
- executive summary of the unit review
- an action plan from the unit, which includes a three-year plan

After the debriefing meeting, the Director of Assessment and Accreditation will send an email notice to the Provost, Dean and Department Chair with notes from the debriefing conversation, date of the next interview, and if applicable, revisions needed to the action plan. This closes the feedback loop.

**Three-Year Follow-Up Meeting:** The unit leadership, Dean, Provost, and Director of Assessment and Accreditation 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.
SELF-STUDY GUIDELINES

The primary audiences for the self-study are the members of 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 Dean, and the Director of Assessment and Accreditation and revise it as necessary.
- Divide the workload. Several persons in the unit can work on drafts of sections of the self-study.
- 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 OneDrive 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.

The following are options for self-study topics. Each unit should select the most relevant areas for their self-study document. Note: Addressing each item below is discouraged.

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (1 page)
   A. Strengths
   B. Challenges
   C. Recommendations

II. ACADEMIC OBJECTIVES OF UNIT
   A. Brief history of the unit
   B. Unit-level objectives
   C. How are the objectives reviewed? (draw from annual program assessment report)
   D. How do these objectives differ from those in similar units elsewhere?
   E. How do the unit’s goals align with the University’s strategic plan?
   F. Significant changes in the objectives since the last review.
III. ACADEMIC UNIT DESCRIPTORS
A. BSU organizational affiliation (school, college)
B. Location(s)
C. Accreditation status of the unit, if any
D. Description of programs within the unit
E. Majors, minors, certificates and other curricula offered
F. Rankings or significant recognitions since last review

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

V. STUDENTS
A. Brief summary of the unit’s application and admissions trends for its various programs. What do these trends suggest about the health of the unit’s programs?
B. Summary of unit enrollment history and trends. What do these trends suggest about the health of the unit’s programs? Are there any enrollment ceilings? If so, explain.
C. What are the completion and attrition rates of the unit’s students? How successfully are students moving through the curriculum and graduating in a timely fashion? What do these trends suggest about the health of the unit’s programs?
D. What are favorable characteristics and/or problems in enrollment in specific courses, areas, locations, or modes of instruction?
E. How are students advised?
F. How has the university’s strategic plan affected the unit’s students?
G. To what extent are students satisfied with the quality of instruction, advising, career and/or graduate/professional school preparation, and other relevant issues? How successfully have the students been able to obtain appropriate job placement or graduate school placement after graduation?
H. Units that are struggling to maintain healthy enrollments in any of their programs should obtain and then characterize national and regional data on student and labor market demand (such as found in reports from Hanover, EAB, or some other similar research). In these cases, please summarize these data and implications for the programs in question.
VI. FACULTY
A. 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:
D. Teaching: student and peer evaluations
E. Scholarly productivity: publications and papers, exhibitions, creative endeavors, research funding, etc.
F. Notable Service: unit, college, university, and community
G. 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?
H. How has the university’s strategic plan affected the unit’s faculty?
I. Characterize the unit’s allotment of faculty FTE to teaching, research and administration over the period under review. How has the unit performed in terms of student credit hours generated per faculty FTE? What trends characterize the unit’s distribution of faculty FTE over the period under review? What issues affect the unit’s distribution of faculty FTE?

VII. SUPPORT FOR THE UNIT
A. What support is given the unit in terms of:
   • Budget
   • Space
   • Staff
   • Travel
   • Computer and Technology Services
   • Library Services
   • Start-up Funds
   • Faculty Lines
   • Course Fees
   • Graduate Assistantships

B. What is the unit’s overall budgetary picture in terms of its revenues and expenses? What factors have affected the unit’s overall trends in terms of revenues and expenses? If the unit is running a deficit, what steps can it take to create a more sustainable budgetary picture?
C. What is the department’s expense/student FTE and its gain/student FTE over the period under review? How does this ration compare to departments at our peer institutions and the national averages as found in the Delaware Study? What accounts for the unit’s performance on this metric?
D. 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? What are the unit’s strategic priorities, and how can future leaders help the unit to achieve them?

IX. ALUMNI/AE INFORMATION
   A. Units should include results of alumni surveys.
   B. Units with professional programs should include results of employer surveys.

X. 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. Age of the unit
   B. 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.
   C. How are students involved in the department’s operation?
   D. 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?
   E. What are the academic standards promoted by faculty, i.e., course requirements, grading patterns and rigor?
   F. Compare the university’s support of the unit with support given similar programs at similar institutions.
Action Plan Guidelines

The Action Plan should be no more than one page, but needs to address each of the review team’s recommendations and must include specific actions to be taken, by whom, and over what time frame. It needs to include goals, objectives, and reliable and meaningful measures to identify whether the goals and objectives have been met. It also needs to address this work in the context of the College’s and University’s strategic plans.

Please include a table in the Action Plan with the following format:

<table>
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<th>Action</th>
<th>Responsible Person/Area</th>
<th>Metric</th>
<th>Anticipated Outcome/Goal</th>
<th>Resources Required</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Potential Barriers</th>
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The Action Plan may consist of two alternate plans, one based on current resources and one based on conditional resources not under the program’s control (e.g. additional funds allocated by the Dean). The unit might not be able to take action, or take only limited action, on a recommendation, particularly if the recommendation is dependent upon resources outside of its control (such as resources from the Dean or Provost). In those cases, the program should communicate the following in the Action Plan:

- State that the recommendation requires resources that are outside of the direct control of the program
- Develop two contingent actions for that recommendation, one that assumes the resources will be allocated, and one describing actions that will be taken without additional resources
External Reviewer Guidelines

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 Assessment and Accreditation.

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 Assessment and Accreditation 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 Assessment and Accreditation. 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 following the self-study year, 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 reviewer(s) 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.

The unit funds the external reviewers’ expenses; thus unit leadership and the reviewers should
discuss and agree upon honoraria and travel details and reimbursement prior to the visit.

The external review report typically consists of 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
Academic Unit Review Frequently-Asked Questions

Q: How are external reviewers chosen?
A: Programs are required to submit a list of possible external reviewers to the college Dean by March during the year in which the self-study occurs. Prior to the end of the spring semester in which the self-study takes place, the review team should be agreed upon, contacted, and confirmed for the review. The timeline and process for selection of the external reviewers may need to be modified to accommodate program accreditation requirements where they exist.

Q: How many external reviewers review any particular program?
A: The typical expectation is one or two reviewers, but this may vary due to accreditation requirements and/or the complexity of the unit and specific expertise that is sought.

Q: Who handles the scheduling of the reviews?
A: Departments and schools are in charge of scheduling, in consultation with the external reviewers. A draft schedule should be shared with and agreed upon by the Dean and the Director of Assessment and Accreditation. Reviews are typically scheduled for the middle of the fall semester (September-November) following completion of the self-study. In most cases, site visits take two days and should include meetings with faculty members, staff members, students, the Dean, and the Provost (or representative). The details of the external review visit may vary due to accreditation requirements.

Q: How does the department or school respond to the external review report?
A: Units should submit the external reviewers’ report and a brief response to the report to the Dean and the Director of Assessment and Accreditation within two weeks of receiving the external reviewers’ report. Before the end of the semester in which the external review takes place, the unit leadership, Dean, Provost, and Director of Assessment and Accreditation meet to discuss the review results and action plan. By the end of the fall semester of each subsequent year, an annual follow-up report is prepared by the unit leadership and shared with the Dean and the Director of Assessment and Accreditation. Three years after the creation of the action plan, a follow-up meeting takes place with the unit leadership, Dean, Provost, and Director of Assessment and Accreditation to discuss status of the action plan.

Q: Who is the contact person for the unit review process?
A: Carole Kacius, Director for Assessment and Accreditation, 285-2443 or cakacius@bsu.edu.