

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY  
UNIT REVIEW GUIDELINES for 2022-2023

## UNIT REVIEW FRAMEWORK

The hallmarks of strong unit reviews are that they are evaluative, forward-looking, fair and transparent. They result in action. The purposes of unit reviews 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

Unit reviews demonstrate BSU's commitment to educational achievement and improvement through ongoing assessment of student learning. The unit review is an explicit core component of Higher Learning Commission accreditation under *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. Specifically, core component 4.A. requires the institution to demonstrate responsibility for the quality of its educational programs and 4.A.1. requires the institution to maintain a practice of regular program reviews.

### Frequency and Cycle

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

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 Unit Review

Units accredited by a specialized accreditor may schedule their unit review 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 unit review.

Units that are wholly accredited by a specialized accreditor may use information in their accreditation self-studies and external review findings for the unit review process as long as two criteria are met:

- (1) all of the topics listed in the Unit Review Self-Study Guidelines are addressed by the specialized accreditation and
- (2) the 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 unit review self-study can be completed using information prepared for the accreditation and which sections must be supplemented to meet the additional required elements of unit review. 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**

As a component of the unit review process, an external review must take place at least once every ten years. For units with disciplinary accreditation, the accreditation review visit may take the place of the external review visit for unit review. The timing of the visit will follow the accreditation requirements, as long as some type of external review takes place at least once every ten years. The unit leadership then develops annual follow-up reports and shares them with the College Dean. 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.

## UNIT REVIEW STEPS

### PREPARATION (July-August)

1. The Director of Assessment and Accreditation confirms the cohort and hosts meetings for the cohort and interested leaders. Information about timeline and the unit review process is shared during cohort meetings.
2. Institutional Research and Decision Support (IRDS) distributes unit review data packets that include the unit's 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), and survey results disaggregated to the unit level. In cases where the department may be struggling with enrollments, 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. Units consult appropriate offices to obtain revenue and expenses (including expense/FTE), application data (where applicable) or student post-graduate placement data (where applicable).

### SELF-STUDY (August-February)

1. Discuss with the Dean whether the unit review process will include an external review.
2. Obtain data packet from IRDS. Obtain additional relevant data from Career Center and other offices on campus.
3. Conduct a collaborative self-study. 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, discuss external reviewers with the College Dean. Confirm external reviewers. Develop agenda and share with the College Dean and the Director of Assessment and Accreditation. The College Dean should approve in advance the questions that will guide both the unit's self-study and the external reviewer's report. Confirm dates for the external review, which will occur after the self-study is complete.

### 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 an exit debriefing meeting between the Provost, Director of Assessment and Accreditation, College Dean, and unit Chair/Director to discuss the self-study and corresponding action plan. Progress reports to the Dean may be embedded within the Dean's annual reports to the Provost. If an external review occurs, the exit debriefing meeting with the Provost will take place *after* the external reviewers' report is received.
3. Three years after the action plan is created, a follow up meeting takes place with unit leadership, College Dean, Provost, and Director of Assessment and Accreditation to discuss progress toward the goals in the action plan.

## UNIT REVIEW COMPONENTS

### 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 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 they relate 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.

### EXTERNAL REVIEW

It is important that an external review take place at least once every ten years. If an external review is conducted, units need to budget for this purpose. Reviewers are chosen by the unit leadership with the approval from the Dean. Names of reviewers and their credentials should be submitted to the Dean during the spring semester in which the unit review self-study is conducted. After the self-study is complete, units 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. The external reviewers' visit schedule is developed by the unit leadership and is reviewed and agreed upon by the College Dean.

The complete self-study is sent to approved external reviewers. After the external review is conducted and the report is received, the unit will develop a brief written response. For more information, refer to the External Reviewer Guidelines later in this document.

### ACTION PLAN

A 1-2 pg. action plan is developed based on findings from the self-study and external reviewers' report. The unit leadership, College Dean, Provost, and Director of Assessment and Accreditation meet to discuss the findings of the review and an action plan. Units will report to the College Dean their progress toward achieving the goals of the action plan. The unit's progress can be included in the annual reports submitted to the Provost.

### EXIT DEBRIEFING MEETING

A meeting with the unit leadership, College Dean, Provost, and Director of Assessment and Accreditation takes place to discuss the findings of the review and the action plan. At least three days prior to the debriefing session with the Provost, units submit the following documents to the Provost:

- self-study
- external reviewers' report and summary of the recommendations
- executive summary of the unit review

- action plan including goals/actions/objectives, responsible person/area, evaluation metric, resources needed, and alignment with college/university strategic plans

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 meeting, and if applicable, revisions needed to the action plan. This closes the feedback loop. The action plan is implemented and reviewed annually by the unit. Progress toward the action plan can be included in the unit's annual Program Assessment Reports to the College Dean and the Director of Assessment and Accreditation.

### THREE-YEAR FOLLOW-UP MEETING

The unit review process includes a 3-year follow-up meeting with the unit leadership, College Dean, Provost, and Director of Assessment and Accreditation to review the unit's progress toward the goals in the action plan.

## 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, the Provost, and the Director of Assessment and Accreditation.

The self-study will begin with a reflective assessment by the unit in response to a series of questions about its current status per the topics listed in this section. The self-study will then define and justify a direction for future activities in teaching, research, and service 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. The 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, while also effectively telling the unit's story. Suggestions for developing a good self-study are:

- Allocate sufficient time to draft the self-study; share it with unit colleagues, College Dean, and Director of Assessment and Accreditation to provide input and feedback.
- 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. Use appendices and OneDrive links as needed.
- Take advantage of this opportunity. The report is the place to highlight the unit's achievements, 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 not required.

- I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (1 page)
  - A. Strengths
  - B. Challenges
  - C. Recommendations
- II. ACADEMIC OBJECTIVES OF UNIT
  - A. Begin with a brief history of the unit.
  - B. Provide unit-level objectives.
  - C. How are 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. Note any significant changes in the objectives since the last review.

### III. ACADEMIC UNIT DESCRIPTORS

- A. Describe BSU organizational affiliation (school, college).
- B. Indicate location(s).
- C. Report accreditation status of the unit/programs, if any.
- D. Describe programs, majors, minors, certificates and other curricula (including UCC courses) offered by the unit.
- F. Share rankings and/or significant recognitions since last review.

### IV. STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES AND CURRICULUM

- A. List program-level learning outcomes for majors and certificates.
- B. In what ways are the program-level learning outcomes assessed?
- C. In what ways are the course-level student learning outcomes (SLOs) assessed?
- D. If the unit offers UCC courses, how are the UCC cognitive skills assessed? How has your unit assessed UCC course offerings, and how have these assessments been used to improve student learning in core courses?
- E. What are the major findings of assessment of student learning and how have they been used to improve student learning? Share a few examples.
- F. What academic programs and/or courses have been adopted and/or dropped since the last review? Why?
- G. What are the trends, needs, and future directions in the unit's curriculum?
- H. How does this curriculum compare to others in similar institutions, i.e., size, scope?
- I. Does the curriculum meet the program-level outcomes stated above? How? Why or Why not?
- J. In what ways does the unit's curriculum reflect the university's strategic plan?
- K. In what ways does the unit's curriculum contribute to the university's core curriculum?

### V. STUDENTS

- A. Briefly summarize 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. Summarize the unit's 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.
- B. 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?
- 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?
- G. How successful have the students been in 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. Describe any changes 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:
  - 1. Teaching: student and peer evaluations of teaching
  - 2. Scholarly productivity: publications and papers, exhibitions, creative endeavors, research funding, etc.
  - 3. Notable Service: unit, college, university, and community service
- D. Describe faculty professional development, additional study, retraining, etc.
- E. For graduate program review, what are the unit's requirements for selection of graduate faculty? Is the graduate faculty sufficient in number and expertise?
- F. How has the university's strategic plan affected the unit's faculty?
- G. 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. Describe support given to 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. Consider the 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.
- D. What is the department's expense/student FTE and its gain/student FTE over the period under review? How does this ratio compare to departments at our peer institutions and national averages? What accounts for the unit's performance on this metric?
- E. 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. Provide an evaluation of unit leadership, citing such areas as personnel, budget, teaching assignments, etc.
- B. What are the specific areas that 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. Include results of alumni surveys.
- B. Units with professional programs should include results of employer surveys.

#### X. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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

As appropriate, the unit review *may* also 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.

## EXTERNAL REVIEWER GUIDELINES

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 unit review process, in whole or in part, as determined by the Provost and College Dean.

As a reminder, the purposes of unit review are to assess the quality and effectiveness of the unit, to potentially modify the unit because of the review, to further the University and Academic Affairs strategic plans, to inform ongoing unit-level planning, and to triangulate assessment, planning and budgeting. As such, unit reviews are a critical element in ongoing improvement. The unit review is an explicit core component of Higher Learning Commission accreditation. Strong unit reviews are evaluative, forward-looking, fair, transparent and action-oriented. External reviews are a critical element in the unit review process.

The focus of the unit review is the unit (department, school or other unit) as a whole. This is why program accreditation does not automatically substitute for the unit review, since the focus of accreditation is specific programs, and the unit review also deals with issues such as the unit's relationship to the operations and plans of its college and the University. The unit review cycle is generally every five years, but the timing may change to accommodate the requirements of program accreditation, where it exists.

The typical unit review schedule calls for units to develop their self-studies during the academic year indicated in the unit review rotation schedule posted on the VPAA website. As part of that process the unit leadership, College Dean, and Provost discuss whether an external review will take place, to what extent an accreditation review might substitute for the external review, and the specific timing and components of the external review.

If it is determined that an external review is warranted, the unit leadership suggests possible reviewers to the College Dean. After completion of the self-study, 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 specific 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. In the interest of impartiality, external reviewers should not be Ball State alumni or friends/collaborators with any members of

the academic unit under review. If this is not possible, relationships between the reviewer and the unit under review should be disclosed.

The unit funds the external reviewers' expenses; thus unit leadership should obtain approval from the College Dean for the honoraria, travel expenses and reimbursement prior to the visit. Upon approval by the College Dean, the unit leadership and external reviewer(s) should discuss and agree upon the honoraria, travel details and reimbursement prior to the visit.

The external review report ranges from 15 to 40 pages. It should include the following sections:

- Summary of the objectives, context of the review, 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; alignment with the College and University strategic plans; curriculum; student learning outcomes assessment; enrollment; student characteristics; 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.

## ACTION PLAN GUIDELINES

The information listed below should be included in appendices in the self-study, and units may wish to include additional information. The unit will provide some of this information itself, while IRDS and other areas at the University will provide additional information. Some of the information may not be applicable depending on the nature of the unit. The information should be referenced/summarized in the narrative of the self-study as appropriate.

The Action Plan should be 1-2 pages and address each of the review team's recommendations. It should include specific actions to be taken, by whom, and over what timeframe. 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.

1. Goal/action/objective
2. Responsible person/area
3. Evaluation metric
4. Resources needed
5. Potential barriers (if applicable)
6. Timeframe
7. Alignment with program goals, college strategic plan and University strategic plan

1 Goals/ Actions/ Objectives	2 Responsible Person/Area	3 Evaluation Metric	4 Resources Needed	5 Potential Barriers	6 Timeframe	7 Alignment with program goals and College/University Strategic Plans

For some recommendations, the action plan may include two contingent actions, 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 might be able to 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 unit should (1) state that the recommendation requires resources that are outside of the direct control of the program and (2) 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.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

**Q:** How are external reviewers chosen?

*A: Units are required to submit a list of possible external reviewers to the College Dean by March during the year in which self-study is conducted. The review team should be agreed upon, contacted, and confirmed prior to final exam week in the spring semester in which the self-study is conducted. 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 typically review a particular unit?

*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 College 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, College Dean, and Provost (or representative).*

**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 College 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, College 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 College Dean. Three years after the creation of the action plan, a follow-up meeting takes place with the unit leadership, College Dean, Provost, and Director of Assessment and Accreditation to discuss progress toward the goals in the action plan.*

**Q:** Who is the contact for the unit review process?

*A: Carole Kacius, Director for Assessment and Accreditation, 285-2443 or [cakacius@bsu.edu](mailto:cakacius@bsu.edu).*