External Reviewer Guidelines for Program Review

Within the process of program review, the external review provides an independent and broad perspective on the program. This document provides recommendations from the University Program Review Subcommittee (UPRS) and Academic Programs for conducting an effective and meaningful external review.

Selecting and Hosting an External Reviewer

1. The program faculty identifies 3-5 potential candidates to conduct the external review and contacts them to solicit interest. Candidates should hold faculty rank (or the equivalent) in a similar program, or have a significant professional reputation in the field. In the case of disciplinary or professional accreditation, the accrediting body may have policies regarding the visiting team. If the program needs help recruiting reviewers, Academic Programs can make a system-wide request.
2. Interested candidates submit their CVs and a cover letter or email indicating their interest to the program review lead or department chair.
3. The program faculty submit a list of potential candidates to the school dean, who selects the external reviewer in consultation with the program faculty.
4. The program notifies Academic Programs of the choice, providing contact information, CV, and dates of the program review.
5. Academic Programs invites the external reviewer for the dates specified.
6. The program faculty works directly with the external reviewer in setting up the itinerary and agenda for the visit. The program faculty informs Academic Programs of the agenda.
7. The program faculty provides the selected reviewer with the self-study and other relevant materials at least two weeks prior to the visit; a month is recommended.
8. Program faculty is responsible for ensuring that the external reviewer has the time and resources necessary to complete an effective review and meet with all relevant stakeholders.
9. The external reviewer is responsible for their own travel and lodging.
10. The external reviewer sends the report to the program and to Academic Programs within 4 weeks of the visit. Payment of $1500 is processed and sent to the external reviewer. (Recommended: program faculty should advise Academic Programs upon receipt of the report.)

Planning the Visit

1. The external reviewer should have formal scheduled meetings with the department/program chair, school dean, and AVP of Academic Programs. These meetings must be scheduled in advance.
2. The external reviewer should meet with program faculty; faculty can determine the most appropriate way to schedule meetings but there should be an opportunity for reviewers to meet with lecturers as well as tenured/tenure-track faculty, and a chance to meet with junior faculty and senior faculty separately.
3. The program faculty or the external reviewer may identify other stakeholders,including faculty from other departments, liaison librarians, staff, program graduates, community partners, business partners, etc.
4. A meeting with students should be scheduled; this can be a lunch meeting or other informal gathering.
5. A tour of relevant campus facilities (classrooms, library, laboratories, performance venues, etc.) is recommended.
6. Please allow time for the reviewer to complete all paperwork with Human Resources and the Office of Academic Programs.
7. Program faculty may wish to schedule an informal meeting with faculty in addition to the more formal meetings. This may be a lunch, dinner, or reception, as appropriate.

Guidelines for External Reviewers

External reviewers provide valuable insights for program faculty to inform ongoing program development and improvement. Program review at SSU focuses on four major areas: curriculum, assessment, staffing and resources, and students. UPRS and Academic Programs recommend external reviewers be guided by the following considerations, especially in comparison to other programs and in the context of the academic field.

1. Curriculum coherency and currency.
2. Relevance and clarity of learning outcomes and integration with curriculum.
3. Meaningfulness and effectiveness of learning outcomes assessment and use of assessment for program improvement.
4. Sufficiency of resources and how they affect the quality of the learning experience; consider, for example, faculty, facilities, support, information resources, and research resources.
5. Understanding of students' needs, challenges, and characteristics and ability to effectively serve the program's students.