Self Study for

Academic Departments and Programs:

Procedures and Guidelines

Houghton College

Office of the Academic Dean
Self Study for Academic Departments and Programs

Periodically, each academic department conducts a self study of each major or program. One primary purpose is for faculty to reflect upon, evaluate, and improve their programs. Another is to meet professional accountability requirements for accreditation. Specifically, they examine programmatic goals and outcomes, budgets, personnel, library resources, and other appropriate dimensions in light of our overall college mission and the Houghton College Plan.

Departments should include all majors and programs in a comprehensive departmental report. In programs where there is only a minor (e.g., economics, family studies), the evaluation will take place at the same time as its related major. Other non-major programs like pre-medical, off campus programs, or first year honors will be treated like departments and be in the rotation.

The completed self study is submitted to the Academic Dean, who will create a summary of the findings and provide feedback to the program members and their area Associate Dean. The summary, without the other talking points and feedback, will be presented to the Academic Affairs Committee of the Board of Trustees for their information. The Academic Dean and Associate Academic Dean then work with departments to actualize the self study’s recommendations during the following year.

The self study provides a comprehensive source of information to audiences such as faculty, Academic Dean's Office, President's Staff, and our Board of Trustees. Further, our accrediting agency, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, has significant interest in outcomes assessment and increasingly, our external constituencies of current and prospective students and parents evidence a growing sophistication regarding appropriate queries of academic institutions. Thus, the process provides a framework within which to make improvements, meet accountability standards, and provide an opportunity for programs to showcase their successes.

The cycle of formal reviews is intended to touch every part of our curriculum once every ten years. The responsibility for this lies within departments and supported by the area Associate Dean through direct oversight, encouragement, planning assistance, and as a signatory. The Offices of Academic Records and Institutional Research & Assessment will also be involved. The timetable for self studies is established by the Academic Dean's Office. Discussions about inviting external reviewers always begin in consultation with the Academic Dean’s Office, which provides financial support for external reviewers.

The remainder of this document provides some structure, templates, and other information to assist departments. The majority of the study should be completed prior to the external reviewers’ visit, since the material will be sent to the reviewers for their preparation. Any additions following the external visit or a final response to the reviewers report should be included in the final report.
A. Self Study Elements and Format

The following outline offers aid in guiding departments by providing a standard format. The final report should be submitted electronically to the Academic Dean’s Office. The issues and questions here are not to be answered mechanically but serve as guidelines:

1. **Signature/cover page.** Cover information should include program name, department name, majors and programs evaluated, date report is due, and date of actual submission. Include electronic signatures by the department chair and area Associate Dean.

2. **Executive summary.** This is an abstract of 600 words or less. It includes a succinct description of the overall findings, a summary of the program’s (or programs’) strengths and weaknesses, indicators used to assess program quality, significant changes that have been planned or carried out, and summarized potential action items for consideration by the administration.

3. **Purpose statement, goals, and learning outcomes.** Provide either a departmental purpose statement or a purpose statement for each program evaluated. Then include any aspirational goals (what the department desires for students or encourages students to be). List also each program’s student learning outcomes (what students will actually do at the completion of the program—markers of success). Some departments may omit the aspirational goals and list only the purpose, learning outcomes, and assessments.

4. **Assessment plan for each program.** This section assumes that each program’s faculty have developed student learning outcomes and ways to assess them. Each program will be doing updates of student learning outcomes and reporting the findings annually. By doing that, an assessment plan takes shape. These simply roll into the self study report.

   a. **Types of assessment.** *Direct* assessment involves students demonstrating performance or providing observable evidence of performance related to the skills or knowledge to be acquired (Major Field Test results, certification exams, or rubrics rating recitals, portfolios, essays or other writing samples and student projects). Such evidence may be considered reasonably convincing and non-debatable (e.g., professional judgment via rubric of a portfolio; scores on an exam).

   *Indirect* assessment may be supportive but only correlative and thus somewhat debatable as to its meaning (e.g., 95% acceptance rate into medical or law school; student self evaluation). Best practices call for at least two direct assessments for each outcome, with indirect assessments not being required, but useful. Indirect measures exclusively are not considered sufficient.

   b. **Quantitative assessment.** Connect the student learning outcomes with a combination of direct and indirect assessments, and provide the criteria of achievement or success.

   This section should pair each goal with its associated outcome(s) and its associated assessment method(s), whether a direct or indirect measure. One possible format:
Goal 1 (e.g., The department seeks to instill in students fundamental knowledge of....)
Outcome 1.1 (e.g., Senior capstone students will write and present a research paper demonstrating knowledge of....)
Assessment Method 1.1.1 (e.g., Capstone faculty completes a rubric evaluating the paper....)
Assessment Method 1.1.2 (e.g., Capstone faculty completes a rubric evaluating an oral poster presentation of the paper....)
Outcome 1.2 (e.g., Students will score above the 50%ile on the Major Field Test....)

5. Qualitative assessment. Programs may gather other useful evidence, including student focus group information, alumni survey data, student interviews.

Regarding all assessment, please consider such questions as:

➤ What does an analysis of student success in achieving the major/program’s learning outcomes reveal?
➤ What is the department conclusion regarding the strengths and weaknesses through results revealed by assessment via the major’s capstone course and other information?
➤ Does the department use student assessment to make curricular changes? What are some examples of changes as a result of assessment efforts?

5. Quality of the program's inputs, processes, and outcomes. Include here in tabular form student enrollment and credit-hours-sold trends over the last five years in each major/minor/program; degrees conferred in the last five years in each area; empirical or anecdotal information from our alumni (gathered through the alumni survey); and other direct or indirect indicators of quality not displayed in the assessment results (e.g., graduate school admissions, disciplinary exams, awards, or certificates). (Note: the Academic Records Office and the Institutional Research & Assessment Office can be helpful in providing access to much of this information although some would be available on the Houghton Web site.)

Simple listing of qualities and data are not sufficient, however. These should be accompanied by concise narrative comment and analysis about what the data and information means, and what implications may be drawn.

6. Faculty description. Provide the following and include full-time faculty vitae as an appendix:

➤ List the full-time and part-time permanent faculty in the department.
➤ Note any faculty changes occurring since the last review (ten years).
➤ Summarize the kinds of scholarly endeavors each faculty member has engaged in over the last three years.
➤ Describe the typical advising load within the major/department.
➤ What future changes in faculty expertise may need to occur to strengthen the program?

7. Internal and external demands for the program(s). Describe the program's standing by detailing the need for it and its attractiveness. Internal demands relate to the position and purposefulness of the program within our college context.
What might need to happen to increase its attractiveness, if necessary?
Should there be changes here?
To what extent does the program contribute to the overall college mission?

8. **Departmental faculty initiatives regarding this program.** Consider these questions:

- What new program ideas or changes have been developed in the last five years?
- What creativity has occurred in curricular offerings and what has been the outcome of these changes?
- What new changes need to be made in the future and what rationale supports these proposed changes?

9. **Finances.** (These should relate to the total department.) Describe the overall fiscal operation of the department/program with regard to its size and scope, including but not limited to:

- Sources and reliability of operating income (will vary widely across departments)
- Balance of revenue to expenses (cost of delivering its program)
- The extent to which regular budget allocations for personnel, space, equipment, and materials are appropriate and sufficient to sustain the program
- Procedures for shaping the budget requests
- Financial planning (planning within 3-5 years)

10. **Facilities, equipment, health, and safety.** Evaluate the extent to which the department/program meets acceptable standards regarding facilities, equipment, health, and safety in relation to the needs of:

- Your students in the major
- General (non-major) students
- Faculty
- Curricular offerings and levels

Give particular attention to the adequacy of goals for student learning outcomes, program size and scope, and availability and capacity to remain technologically current, especially if your program requires continuous equipment upgrading.

11. **Library and learning resources.** Evaluate the extent to which program needs are met regarding:

- Overall requirements of the program(s)
- The extent to which collections and electronic access support:
  1) current and projected curricular offerings and levels
  2) the needs of students
  3) faculty teaching and research
Services (reference, document delivery, reserve, etc.)
Facilities
Financial support
Personnel
Library/research instruction

12. Application of the self study findings to program planning. Please address these questions:

- Summarize any decisions and changes made based on on-going assessments (for example, course and curriculum, faculty characteristics, instructional facilities, funding priorities, assessment procedures)?
- What decisions were considered or made on the basis of the external review?
- What decisions have been considered or made based on the in-house review?
- What additional resources are needed to implement those changes?
- What recommendations for action should be forwarded to the administration?

B. Condensed summary and timeframe related to a program’s self study

1. Goals and learning outcomes. Departments should have completed the purpose, goals, student learning outcomes, and the assessment plans noted in numbers 3 and 4 above. See Daryl Stevenson for other assistance and helpful templates/forms.

2. External peer reviews. The department chair should discuss the process and purposes of the external visit with the area Associate Dean and Academic Dean prior to any decisions about or contact with personnel. Expenses and a modest honorarium will be supported by the Academic Dean’s Office. Refer to the appendix for a typical visit protocol.

3. Surveys, test scores, rubric data, and other information sources. The Institutional Research & Assessment Office can assist in creating and collecting survey information from current majors/minors and recent alumni. Compilation of the data is a joint endeavor by the program faculty, department, the Institutional Research & Assessment Office, and the Academic Dean’s Office. Relevant data from college-wide surveys such as the National Survey of Student Engagement, the Student Satisfaction Inventory, and the Collegiate Learning Assessment should be taken into account. There is often relevant information in the IDEA system’s Survey Group Report for the department. Programs may require a Major Field Test or GRE scores.

4. Due dates. Departmental self study evaluations are completed every ten years, with annual learning outcomes assessments in each program. The ten year self study report should be disseminated and discussed within the department and disciplinary area, and submitted to the Academic Dean’s Office for review and response. The final report is due June 1 of the evaluation year.

5. Review and response. The academic dean will write a summary and response, and then review it with the departmental faculty and their area Associate Dean prior to the October board meetings. The response will include the summary prepared for the Academic Affairs Committee of the board for information. Departmental follow up of the findings and recommendations occur the following year.
6. **Responsibility.** Department chairs and colleagues are responsible for initiating and overseeing a self study. Their area Associate Dean works with the department to ensure timely initiation and completion, ensure regular annual learning outcomes assessments, assist with logistics of external visitors, and provide general support.

7. **Schedule for self study.** Refer to the Academic Dean’s Office Web site for the schedule.

8. **Timeframe, events, and resources for departmental/program self study.**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeframe</th>
<th>Event/Item/Resource</th>
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<tr>
<td>Spring prior to review year</td>
<td>Letter of notification from the Academic Dean</td>
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<tr>
<td>In late spring or May prior to review year</td>
<td>Departmental faculty, with their area associate dean, meet to review these guidelines, shape strategy, assign components, determine goals of process</td>
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<tr>
<td>May prior to review year</td>
<td>Meet with the academic dean, discuss possible evaluators/consultants, determine principal issues, discuss logistics and procedures</td>
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<td>Summer (or earlier)</td>
<td>Determine target alumni with Executive Director of Alumni Relations and develop/send alumni survey instrument; plan fall student survey.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Resource: Institutional Research and Assessment Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>Early September</td>
<td>Finalize evaluators/consultants, make Inn reservations</td>
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<tr>
<td>September - December</td>
<td>Begin to gather data. Sources: enrollment trends — web site or seek Daryl Stevenson’s help; Faculty information — HR (Virginia Jacobson); Budget reports and trends — Accounting (David Mercer); Space usage — Records (James Hutter); Dashboard and benchmarking data — IR/A Office (Daryl Stevenson).</td>
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<td>Fall Semester</td>
<td>Write first draft of report: all faculty in program/department.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Early December</td>
<td>Complete draft report, including thorough edit. Use the IR&amp;A Office for support, feedback, and editing assistance.</td>
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<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>Final draft of review complete, sent off to evaluators/consultants (minimum three weeks’ advance of visit)</td>
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<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>Prepare schedules, appointments for visitors. Source for material regarding specifics of a good visit — see Ben King</td>
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<tr>
<td>February-March</td>
<td>Evaluators/consultants visit campus (1-2 day visit — note: an external evaluator protocol document is being developed)</td>
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<td>April-early May</td>
<td>Report of visiting evaluators received</td>
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<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>Final meetings, edits, revisions, responses to external report prior to submission of final document</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 1</td>
<td>Final report filed electronically with academic dean</td>
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<tr>
<td>August-September, post-review year</td>
<td>Discussions with academic dean about summary of findings and feedback</td>
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<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>Summary of findings shared with Academic Affairs Committee of Board</td>
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<tr>
<td>October through May</td>
<td>Complete the follow through of recommendations</td>
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