

University of Massachusetts Lowell

Academic Quality Assessment and Development

Guide to the AQAD Self-Study and External Review Process

Incorporating University of Massachusetts System Guidelines (Trustees Doc. T97-111)

PLEASE CC ALL DOCUMENTS AND EMAILS
RELATING TO YOUR AQAD PROCESS AND REVIEW
TO AQAD@UML.EDU



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Overview

What is AQAD? The Academic Quality Assessment and Development (AQAD) process is a component of the UMass System Performance Measurement System and is required of all academic units. The primary purpose of this component is to assess and improve the core academic functions of teaching and learning, research/professional/creative activity, and public service/academic outreach through an ongoing system of quality control/program assessment at the unit level (i.e., department or program). Each UMass campus has established procedures for implementing AQAD reviews in accordance with the system-level guidelines adopted by the Board of Trustees (Doc. T98- 033). In this document, “Department” and “Program” are used as synonyms for “unit undergoing review”.

Each Program shall be reviewed on a regular cycle. Ordinarily, the length of time between reviews may be no more than five to seven years, but campus procedures may establish the circumstances under which exceptions to this timeframe may be granted. At UMass Lowell, we have approved some variances in the cycle in order to match certain external review schedules (e.g. accreditation). Each Program review shall be conducted with the participation of Program faculty members.

How can I use an AQAD to help my Department/Program? An AQAD is a tool that you can use to guide the pedagogical development and intellectual future of your department. It is an opportunity to reflect on your department’s strategic plan. It is an opportunity to assess your current state and ensure that you have clear strategic goals in teaching, research, and creative activity and are in tune with the campus priorities and at the leading edge of your discipline. You can use the process to assess the work climate and the learning climate to ensure that the department supports the inclusion and success of faculty and students. Although all AQADs must address the same general core criteria using the same general procedures, both the content and process may, with the approval of the Dean and Provost, be given one or more focal points to suit a particular unit’s needs.

A common misconception: Not infrequently, the AQAD process is viewed primarily as a way of making the case for additional faculty lines or other resources (e.g., space). The approach misconceives the role of AQAD. Requests for additional resources are made through the annual budget process, not AQAD. Departments are, however, strongly encouraged to use the AQAD process to think about internal reallocation of existing resources, generation of new funding, or as evidence of the need for additional resources when submitting through the approved budget process.

Elements of the AQAD Review

The AQAD consists of four sections: the self-study, the external review team report, the action plan response to the review team report by the department and Dean, and the summary report from the concluding meeting of the AQAD process between the chair, dean, the vice provosts and the provost.

The Self-Study: This is the central work of the AQAD process, from which all other parts follow. The narrative is framed around the core criteria and related questions and followed by appendices that include the evidence that the report’s authors have used to support the narrative. The self-study should also include a focus area chosen in consultation with the dean and provost office staff.

The External Review Team Report: The dean in consultation with the department chair and faculty and the Office of the Provost selects at least two reviewers who come from peer or aspirational peer institutions with administrative experience at the chair or higher level. Only one reviewer may come from within the UMass system. Prior to the beginning of the external review team visit, the dean and the Office of the Provost identify specific questions or issues for the external review team to

address in addition to the core criteria. The team writes a report based upon the template included in this guide.

The Action Plan Response: The department chair and faculty as well as the dean respond to the external review team report by developing an action plan based upon the identification of strengths, weakness and recommendations by the review team. This response forms the basis of the concluding meeting with the Office of the Provost in which the action plan is outlined along with the responsible offices to ensure action on key items.

The Summary Report: The Provost submits a summary of the AQAD report and action plan to the University of Massachusetts President’s Office.

The AQAD Review Process: Steps and Timing

Deadlines	Activities
Spring/Summer Prior to the AQAD Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review cycle set in motion by Provost’s Office. Deans/Department Chairs will receive a reminder of upcoming review. List of departments under review will be shared with Office of Strategic Analysis and Data Management. • Set-up Teams folders for departments under review; share samples of reports and templates for self-study and data. • Chairs will be given a list of student and faculty data that they will receive. Chairs may submit a secondary data request by October 1, and those data may be provided by the end of the Fall semester.
Early September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At the first department meeting of the semester (recommended) or another date in early September, representatives from the Provost’s office and DAIR will provide a kick-off discussion about the AQAD Process, to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the AQAD review as a strategic planning tool ▪ the structure of the self-study ▪ effective practices for choosing reviewers and a self-study team ▪ visit logistics • The Department Chair, the Dean, and the Provost’s Office meet to review procedures and answer questions including any overlap of the AQAD with a disciplinary re-accreditation. • The Office of Strategic Analysis provides initial data for the self-study by the end of September and can meet with the department to review the evidence and assist in the interpretation of the data (see Appendix).
September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The chair submits to the dean a list of five to seven potential external reviewers. The dean works with the Provost’s Office to approve the list. • The department begins to schedule external review and surrounding activities. • The chair and the dean develop the emphasis of the AQAD review, choosing a limited number of key analysis and planning areas. • Departments request any additional data from DAIR no later than October 1. It will take 2-3 weeks for fulfillment of additional data requests.
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The department sends a one-page summary of the self-study emphases to the Dean and the Provost for feedback and finalization. • Department begins self-study.
October - January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department writes the self-study.

January 15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department submits completed self-study to Dean and Provost.
4 weeks prior to external review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department sends the self-study to the visiting team. Consider posting ancillary documents (CVs, tabular data, course syllabi, etc.) on-line for the reviewers' ease of access. The Provost sends the visiting team a letter, thanking them in advance for their service and laying out the key focus areas for the review.
February - March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External review visit. The Provost and/or designees meet the review team, provide the charge, and conduct an exit interview. The dean and/or designee do the same. The team provides preliminary findings.
3 weeks after the visit.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The review team submits its report to the Department, with copies to the Dean and the Provost within three weeks of the campus visit.
4 weeks after receiving report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Department submits a written response to the report and an action plan to the Dean.
By May 30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Dean reviews and provides written comments on the report, response, and action plan to the faculty. The faculty may then respond to the Dean's comments.
By June 15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Dean forwards the self-study, the visiting team's report, the Department's response and action plan, the Dean's comments, and faculty responses to the Dean's comments (if any) to the Provost.
By June 30th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Provost's office meets with the Dean and the Department Chair to discuss the review and the action plan.
Post Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Provost forwards an executive summary of the review to the President's Office.

THROUGHOUT THE PROCESS,
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AQAD Self-Assessment Report Template

I. Introduction

- Introduction to the department and its programs
(The AQAD should address degree programs at all levels, including certificate and online degree programs, and, as appropriate, address department contributions to relevant interdisciplinary programs)
- Summary of progress since last AQAD review
- Summary of programs and review Status
- Brief analysis of Program Enrollments and Graduation Rates (data to be appended)

II. Core Criteria

1. **Departments must ensure that their goals and objectives are linked to the university's mission and strategic priorities.** Explain how the department evaluates their purpose and planning in light of the campus mission and strategic priorities. Identify the department's discipline-specific goals, such as the development of specializations, and address the department's plan for improving their position within their discipline.

Evaluate the department in light of the following questions:

- a. What is the department's mission, and is it clearly aligned with the campus mission and direction?
- b. How does the department's mission relate to curriculum; enrollments; faculty teaching, research/professional/creative activity and outreach? Is it aligned with the campus strategic priorities?
- c. How does the department promote diversity and inclusion? How does the department attend to demographic diversity among students, faculty, and staff? What efforts are made to ensure an equitable and supportive work and learning environment?
- d. Discuss the department's current standing within the discipline, make mention in particular to graduate studies (if applicable) and research. What strategy does the department have for increasing this standing?

2. **Departments must ensure the relevancy, rigor, and coherence of curricula.** Do the programs offered provide a high-quality education for students? The curriculum should reflect an awareness of changing knowledge, trends in the discipline, and the professional context for curriculum.

Evaluate the department in light of the following questions:

- a. How does the department determine curricular content? How does the curriculum relate to current existing standards, if any, of the discipline?
- b. What internal or external measures of review are employed to ensure that the curriculum is relevant and up-to-date, including efforts to include significant contributions of diverse researchers and scholars in the field, and to embed requirements or pedagogical approaches that support inclusive topics and engage diverse learners.
- c. How does the department ensure that support is provided to students to ensure their timely progress toward degree completion? Expand beyond advising models to include other departmental efforts or departmental participation in university-wide initiatives.

- d. Are the curricular offerings structured in a logical, sequential and coherent manner? Is there an appropriate balance between breadth and depth? How does the curriculum address departmental and university-wide learning objectives? Departments may wish to include curriculum maps for individual programs.
- e. If consistent with the department's mission, does the curriculum adequately prepare students for further study or employment?
- f. In what way does the department contribute to the education of students in terms of general knowledge, critical thinking capacity and other essential cognitive skills? How does the department ensure that students achieve the Core Essential Learning Outcomes?

3. Departments must ensure faculty quality and productivity. Departments shall ensure that faculty members possess the expertise to assure effective curriculum development, instructional design and delivery, and evaluation of outcomes. Faculty should exhibit awareness of trends in the discipline and the professional field as appropriate. Collectively, faculty should be involved in teaching, research or creative activity, and public service/academic outreach as appropriate to the mission and regional context of the campus.

Evaluate the department in light of the following questions:

- a. Do faculty possess the appropriate background, experience and credentials? To what extent does the faculty reflect the diversity of the students and the discipline?
- b. Explain how faculty are current in relation to the knowledge base and content of the discipline and curricular offerings. To what extent is the faculty contributing to the disciplinary knowledge base and achieving recognition within the university and within the broader discipline?
- c. What are the department's expectations for faculty involvement in teaching, research/professional/creative activity, and public service/academic outreach activities appropriate; and how does it ensure that these expectations met? What mechanisms does the department use to ensure that expectations are consistent across the faculty? Are these expectations consistent with department policies regarding teaching assignments, merit allocations, and other aspects of faculty roles and rewards? How are any differences and/or disparities in expectations or workload identified and addressed? What steps has the department taken to clarify expectations and create opportunities for teaching and clinical faculty?
- d. In what ways does the department foster professional development and growth of faculty? How are assistant and associate professors mentored in teaching, service and research/creative and professional activity? What supports does the department provide to ensure success and retention for faculty, including for diverse faculty?
- e. How does the department foster an inclusive work environment that supports the success of all faculty members?
- f. In what ways does the department faculty lend its professional expertise—as expressed through teaching and research, scholarly and creative activity—to off-campus constituencies? In what ways are the faculty engaged in these efforts at the university?

4. Departments must ensure teaching and learning environments that facilitate student success. Programs shall provide learning environments that promote student success. Students are expected to learn both content and skills appropriate to the discipline, and to develop the intellectual skills represented by the Core Curriculum Essential Learning Outcomes. The

program should indicate clear expectations for program student learning outcomes, and demonstrate that they are meaningfully assessing those outcomes. The teaching/learning environment should be accessible to all students, should include a variety of instructional methodologies, and should provide timely feedback to students.

Evaluate the department in light of the following questions:

- a. To what extent does the department have articulated learning outcomes (content and skills) for students in each degree option? (Note all undergraduate and graduate programs.) By what means are these outcomes measured? Are they achieved by most students? To what extent do the achievements vary across students who are members of underrepresented groups?
- b. How is assessment of student learning outcomes, from both the undergraduate and graduate levels, used in reviewing or evaluating department curriculum, faculty, advising or other aspects of the academic program? How does the department employ equity-minded assessment approaches?
- c. In what ways does the department evaluate undergraduate and graduate student success following graduation, and the department's contribution to that success? How is post-graduation data used to inform curricular revisions?
- d. What is the role of the core faculty in teaching lower division, upper division, and graduate courses? What is the rationale for these assignments?
- e. How does the program provide opportunities for experiential learning and career development within or outside of the regular curriculum, and how does the department ensure that those experiences are valuable? How does the department ensure that such opportunities are made equitably to all students?
- f. To what extent do your department's retention and graduation rates reflect national disciplinary rates and university-wide ones? What are the trends by gender, race and ethnicity?
- g. How are students advised in your department and what measures of success through the program do you use?

- 5. Departments must ensure that resources are used wisely and equitably.** Departments shall ensure that the resources available are used to meet department goals and objectives, and as appropriate, engage in use of innovation to enhance resources; should engage in both intra and inter-campus collaboration; and should demonstrate a commitment to effective and efficient use of resources.

Evaluate the department in light of the following questions:

- a. What process does the department use to allocate resources?
- b. In what ways does the department maximize the use of its human resources?
- c. In what ways does the department maximize the use of material resources such as space, equipment, operating funds, etc.?
- d. How does the department ensure that such resources are equitably distributed?

III. Strategic Planning and Focus Area: Future Goals & Specific Objectives

The department should address any strategic planning and focus area goals identified for their review, including measures for evaluating progress toward goals and objectives.

IV. Conclusions

Appendices

- Data Analysis and Institutional Research Management Report
 - Enrollment Data
 - Retention Data
 - Graduation Rates
 - Student outcomes
- Department Data
 - Research productivity
 - Student outcomes
 - Previously submitted Annual Program & Curriculum Learning Assessment (APCLAS) Survey Responses
 - Departmental Work Climate Assessment (facilitated by ADVANCE)
- Faculty CVs
- Graduating student exit survey instrument and results, if applicable
- Detailed description of programs under review
- Departmental Infrastructure

External Review Team Evaluation Report

The external Review Team is asked to include the following sections in their report:

Part I: Evaluation of the Five Core Criteria

Commentary on each of the core criteria and the extent to which the department has provided evidence of success in each.

Part II: Strengths and Weaknesses

A constructive description for use by the department and UMass Lowell leadership to assist in reflection and future planning.

Part III: Recommendations

Concrete steps recommended for the department, where possible, triaged by degree of urgency/importance, including expected outcomes of recommendations.

Department and Dean's Responses to External Review: Action Plan Response

The department and the dean, separately, each develop an action plan based upon the external review team report and submit that to the Office of the Provost as the basis for the meeting with the Office of the Provost.

These documents should provide detailed, constructive response to each weakness and each recommendation made by the external review team.

Provost's Response to the AQAD Process: Summary Report

The Provost prepares a brief summary response to the entire process and final conclusions for submission to the UMass President's Office.