DEPARTMENT

COLLEGE

University of Massachusetts Lowell

Programs

Academic Quality Assessment and Development
Self-Study and External Review Team Report

May, 2018
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 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. 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 adjusted somewhat 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.

PARTS OF AN AQAD

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 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 part of the AQAD from which all other parts come. The narrative is framed around the core criteria and related questions and followed by appendices that include the evidence from which the authors of the AQAD self-study draw for the details within the narrative. The self-study should also include a focus area that is 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 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 that follows.

- **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 insure action on key items.

- A summary of the AQAD report and action plan is submitted to the University of Massachusetts.

**Steps and Timing of the AQAD Review Process**

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<th>Deadlines</th>
<th>Activities</th>
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<td>March Prior to the AQAD Review</td>
<td>• Review cycle set in motion by Provost 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.</td>
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<td>• Set-up SharePoint folders for departments under review; Share samples of reports and templates for self-study and data.</td>
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<td>April Prior to the AQAD Review</td>
<td>• Provost Office sponsors an AQAD kick-off event with participation from each department to undergo AQAD the following academic year and the Office of Strategic Analysis and Data Management.</td>
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<td>• Discussion will resolve around making the AQAD review a strategic planning exercise for the following seven years.</td>
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<td>• The structure of the short self-study will be discussed as well as effective practices for choosing reviewers and a self-study team.</td>
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<td>• Chairs will be given a list of student and faculty data that they will receive. Additional data requests must be received by May 30th. Chairs may submit a secondary data request by October 1, and those data may be provided by the end of the Fall semester.</td>
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<td>September-October</td>
<td>• 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.</td>
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<td>• The Office of Strategic Analysis provides 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).</td>
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<td>• 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.</td>
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<td>• The department begins to schedule external review and surrounding activities.</td>
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| October | • The chair and the dean develop the emphasis of the AQAD review choosing a limited number of key analysis and planning areas.  
• The department sends a one-page summary of the self-study emphasis to the Dean and the Provost for feedback.  
• Department begins self-study. |
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<td>November 30th</td>
<td>• Dean and Department finalize the emphasis of review and consult with the Office of the Provost.</td>
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<td>January 15</td>
<td>• Department submits completed self-study to Dean and Provost.</td>
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<td>4 weeks prior to external review</td>
<td>• 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.</td>
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<td>February - March</td>
<td>• 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.</td>
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<td>3 weeks after the visit.</td>
<td>• The review team submits its report to the Department, with copies to the Dean and the Provost within three weeks of the campus visit.</td>
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<td>4 weeks after receiving report</td>
<td>• The Department submits a written response to the report and an action plan to the Dean.</td>
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<td>By May 30</td>
<td>• 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.</td>
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<td>By June 15</td>
<td>• 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.</td>
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<td>June 30th</td>
<td>• The Provost’s office meets with the Dean and the Department Chair to discuss the review and the action plan.</td>
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<td>Post Review</td>
<td>• The Provost forwards an executive summary of the review to the President’s Office.</td>
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AQAD Self-Assessment Report

I. Introduction

- Introduction to the Department and its Programs
- Progress since last AQAD review
- Summary of Programs and Review Status
- Program Enrollments and Graduation Rates

II. Core Criteria

1. The department should ensure that their goals and objectives are linked to the university’s mission and strategic goals and address the department’s plan for improving their position within their discipline. Explain how the department evaluates their purpose and planning in light of the campus mission and strategic priorities. The self-study should address 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?

   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. Evaluate 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. The self-study should include an evaluation of how the department has addressed 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?

   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 or 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?

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?

3. Evaluate 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/professional/creative activity, and public service/academic outreach as appropriate to the mission and regional context of the campus. Evaluate how the department has addressed the following questions:

a. In what ways 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 are these expectations met? To what extent is this consistent across the faculty? Are these expectations consistent with department policies regarding teaching assignments, merit allocations, and other aspects of faculty roles and rewards?

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?

e. 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 ways at the university?
4. Does the department ensure teaching/learning environments that facilitate student success? Departments shall provide learning environments that promote student success. Students are expected to learn both content and skills appropriate to the discipline. The department should indicate clear expectations for student learning 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 how the department has addressed 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 by gender, race and ethnicity? If relevant, to what extent has the department articulated learning outcomes for graduate students?

b. How is assessment of student learning outcomes, from both the undergraduate and graduate levels, used in reviewing or evaluating department curriculum and faculty; advising or other aspects of the academic program?

c. In what ways does the department evaluate student success, undergraduate and graduate, following graduation and the department’s contribution to that success? And how is this used in 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. Describe the extent of, and curricular role of, experiential learning and career development outside of the regular curriculum that you provide to majors?

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. Are department resources are used wisely? 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 how the department has addressed 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.?

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

IV. Conclusions

Appendices

- **Strategic Analysis and Data Management Report**
  - Enrollment Data
  - Retention Data
  - Graduation Rates
  - Student outcomes

- **Department Data**
  - Research productivity
  - Student outcomes
  - APCLAS Surveys

- **Faculty- CV**

- **Graduating student exit survey**

- **Detailed description of programs under review**

- **Departmental Infrastructure**

- **Annual Learning Outcomes Assessment Reports (beginning Fall 2017)**
Evaluation Report from External Review Team

PART I: Evaluation of the Five Core Criteria

The external review team should comment on each of the core criteria and the extent to which the department has demonstrated success in each.

PART II: Strengths and Weaknesses

- Strengths
- Weaknesses:

PART III: Recommendations

Department and Dean’s Response to External Review Team

Please respond in detail to any weaknesses and recommendations made by the external review team.

Departmental and Dean’s response to be included for each recommendation or weakness highlighted. The department and the dean, separately, should 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.