

**GUIDELINES FOR  
IANR ACADEMIC PROGRAM REVIEWS  
AND  
IANR CENTER REVIEWS**

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## ***General Information***

While unit leaders and Academic Program Review (APR) coordinators should follow the guidance found in the APR Guidelines document approved by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) Academic Planning Committee (APC), executive vice chancellor, and IANR vice chancellor, the following is guidance unique to academic units and centers in the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources (IANR).

IANR Academic/Center Program Reviews (referred to as APRs) are managed by the Agricultural Research Division (ARD) Assistant Dean (referred to as the IANR APR manager) and the IANR Associate Vice Chancellor.

The NU Board of Regents (BOR) and Nebraska Legislature require periodic reviews of academic units (i.e., departments/schools) and centers. Except in extraordinary circumstances and by approval of the IANR senior leadership team, the time between reviews should not exceed 7 years.

APRs for academic units are scheduled every 6-7 years. Center reviews are scheduled every 5 years. Academic program and center reviews follow the same process. The differences are in the objectives of the reviews and the location receiving the final report. Completion of the reviews of academic programs are reported to the Office of the Chancellor while completion of the reviews of centers are reported to the Office of the Provost.

## ***Objectives of Academic Program Reviews***

The objective of the review is to provide an assessment of the unit's (department, school, or center) strengths and weaknesses in a way that informs the strategic (future) direction of the unit. The primary goal is to improve the unit's effectiveness and quality.

According to the Board of Regents, the mandated purpose of the periodic comprehensive review of academic programs is to review the teaching/learning program, with particular emphasis being given to the program's contribution to undergraduate education. As per the BOR Policy Statement on the Relationship of Teaching, Research and Service (1995: RP-2.1.6), "the first priority of the University of Nebraska and each of its campuses is teaching, with special emphasis on teaching the undergraduate or first-professional level student." Acknowledging this BOR mandated purpose, in IANR academic program reviews the self-study, site-visit, and feedback/responses should give attention to each mission area: teaching/learning, research, and extension/engagement. While unique attention may need to be given to each mission area separately, emphasis should be placed on how contributions in these mission areas work together in an integrated fashion to accomplish the overall mission of the department/school and institute. Focus should be placed on integration across mission areas.

The following must be prominent in the review:

- Visioning/strategic direction
- The relevance and impact of:
  - Teaching and learning, including the unit's undergraduate and graduate curriculum
  - Research and scholarship
  - Extension programming, partnerships and engagement
- Opportunities for and mentorship of graduate students

- The governance of the unit, including shared governance and policies/procedures
- Culture and climate and inclusive excellence

To accomplish these objectives, leaders should make efforts to fully engage the faculty in the development of the self-study, the site visit, the unit's response, and follow up.

### ***Objectives of Center Reviews***

The mandated purpose is to ensure that the center is fulfilling the stated purpose of the center and contributing to the mission of IANR and the university. The IANR objective of the review is to provide an assessment of the center's strengths and weaknesses in a way that informs the strategic (future) direction of the center. The primary goal is to improve the center's effectiveness and the quality of its outputs.

Recognizing that centers exist, in part, to bring scholars together across academic units to maximize interdisciplinary collaborations, these contributions should be given proper attention in the self-study, site-visit, and feedback/responses.

Leaders should make efforts to fully engage the department heads/school directors of contributing units and affiliated faculty in the development of the self-study, the site visit, the center's response, and follow up.

Centers that are embedded within an academic unit are reviewed in conjunction with the review of the academic program. Discussion of these centers is incorporated within the self-study document of the unit with which they are connected. They are reviewed by the academic program review team on the same site visit as the APR. Time must be built into the site visit itinerary for the review of the center. Stand-alone centers are reviewed independently of an academic unit.

### ***Review Process***

The review is an essential part of continuous improvement within the unit. It is positioned within a constellation of other activities related to the progress of the unit including visioning/strategic planning, program development, hiring, and leader development. Each of these aspects are interrelated and consequently dependent on one another.

The program/center review process has several components:

- 1) Preparation;
- 2) A self-study;
- 3) A critical review of the unit that includes a site visit and report from the site visit team;
- 4) A final report from the department/school/center that provides a plan for implementing recommendations and addressing issues learned from the review;
- 5) Responses to the review developed by IANR deans and other senior leaders; and
- 6) Follow up.

## Preparation

Preparation for the APR should be ongoing. However, formal preparation begins one year prior to the semester in which the site visit will occur. At this time, the APR manager and AVC schedule a meeting with the unit leader to discuss what is expected of the APR and to lay out the timeline for the unit's APR. The unit leader identifies someone within the unit (may be the unit leader) to coordinate the APR process who serves as the APR coordinator. A meeting is also scheduled to include the unit's Administrative Assistant to review the logistics of the site visit about 4 months prior to the site visit. This meeting includes the unit's Administrative Assistant, the APR manager, the AVC, and the Administrative Associate for ARD. The unit leader and/or APR coordinator may also be included.

Approximately 12 months prior to the scheduled site visit, a date and time is identified for the deans to meet with the unit leader, APR coordinator (if assigned), and the faculty about the program/center review. For center reviews, department heads/school directors of contributing units should also be included in this meeting. During this meeting, the deans discuss the importance of the review for the unit and what they envision the review should accomplish considering the development and unique needs of the unit. If the deans have specific questions or issues that they would like to be considered in the review, they share these with the faculty and unit leader at this time to help them frame the review.

The unit leader and APR coordinator are asked to identify external reviewers (see below) who could provide the expertise that would result in useful feedback for the program/center. The list of names is to be given to the AVC, who will seek approval of the IANR senior leadership team.

The review team usually consists of three (3) to five (5) members who are external to the university and are representative of the disciplines, expertise, and activities of the unit. The central question guiding the selection of external reviewers should be "in light of the strategic direction of the unit, who is in the best position to provide feedback that will help the program achieve their aspirations?" One of these members is identified as the chair of the review team. This person is responsible for the functioning of the team, ensuring that the review team report is completed in a timely manner, and that the expected outcomes of the review and site visit are achieved. Representation from the private sector, including stakeholders, non-profit organizations, and state and federal government entities may be considered. Every effort should be made to strive for diversity in the team. While it is expected that the unit will determine those individuals who are most able and likely to give expected feedback on the program, the IANR senior leadership team must approve the list before invitations are extended.

For reviews of academic programs, the review team also consists of four (4) members who are internal to the university. These include two students (one undergraduate and one graduate) who are majors within the unit<sup>1</sup>, a faculty member not within the unit who is appointed by IANR senior leadership team to serve as the IANR faculty representative, and a member of the UNL APC who serves as the APC representative. In IANR, those internal to the university are expected to participate in all aspects of the site visit and generation of the report. For center reviews, there is not a requirement to include internal members to the team. There is not an APC representative on center review teams as the APC does not have oversight over center reviews.

<sup>1</sup> For departments without an undergraduate program an undergraduate student from an appropriate department will be selected.

No later than nine (9) months prior to the site visit, the unit leader and/or APR coordinator works with the APR manager and AVC to finalize dates of the site visit.

No later than seven (7) months prior to the site visit, the unit leader or APR coordinator contacts potential reviewers to ascertain their willingness to serve on the review team and to inform them about their role, dates of the site visit and expected outcomes<sup>2</sup>. A formal letter of invitation is sent by the AVC to those agreeing to participate on the review team.

*The unit must submit the program/center self-study 90 days prior to the scheduled site visit start date to allow sufficient time for the required review and feedback from the AVC FALS, APR manager, and the deans, and for making final changes and revisions. The APR manager will schedule a meeting to provide feedback and direction (if needed) on the document (although unit leaders are encouraged to consult with the deans, APR manager, and AVC FALS throughout the process as needed). The meeting with the deans should occur no later than 60 days prior to the site visit.*

The final version of the self-study is sent by the AVC to site visitors 30 days prior to the site visit. These documents are made available to site visitors electronically, although some site reviewers may request that they receive the documents in hard copy.

The unit leader and/or APR coordinator is responsible for distributing the final self-study report to unit faculty and staff, and to ensuring that those meeting with site visitors have the necessary information about the self-study and the unit.

## **Self-study**

The unit leader or APR coordinator, with the help of the faculty, is responsible for developing a self-study document that frames the issues in a way that provides the team with what they need to be helpful. At a minimum, the self-study report should be:

- Issues driven
- Forward looking
- Strategic
- Focused on how the unit can use the visit to drive 2-3 thrust areas within the department/school/center
- Tailored to provide maximum utility to the department/school/center

Faculty should be engaged meaningfully throughout the self-study process including the development of the document.

The self-study should document how the unit's strategic direction, contributions and accomplishments align with the strategic direction of the university and IANR. Given the priority at the university and in IANR for creating environments where every person and every interaction matters, the self-study must document unit efforts and accomplishments related to inclusive excellence (i.e., valuing diversity, addressing equity, improving access, and striving for inclusion and belongingness).

The unit leader, APR coordinator, and/or faculty should generate a list of questions (5-8 works well) that they would like the site visit team to address as a result of their review. These questions should be

<sup>2</sup> AVC FALS or APR manager may contact the external reviewers if this is in the best interest of the unit.

designed to generate a response that will provide the unit with feedback about how they can take the program to the next level of excellence in strategic areas, and/or how they can address grand challenges. This list of questions is part of the self-study document and positioned in a way that orients the team to the issues that will be most helpful for them to address. The deans and other members of the IANR senior leadership team may also provide questions or request specific information from the site visit team.

The material included in the self-study document and its organization is up to the discretion of the unit leader and/or APR coordinator. However, care should be taken to ensure that the self-study document includes material that will facilitate well-informed responses to questions posed to the site visitors.

The self-study should be informed by data. The university provides a standard packet of institutional and unit specific data to facilitate an evidence-informed self-assessment of the unit. These data should be included as an appendix to the self-study. Additional data summaries may be requested of IANR Data Analytics. If additional data is requested, the request should be made through the AVC no later than 5 months prior to the scheduled site visit.

While visuals (e.g., pictures, graphics) are appropriate, these should only be used to facilitate understanding and reading. Care should be taken that these do not distract from the purpose of the document. Recommendations include the following:

- Write to the intended readership. The readership of the document is (in order of priority): 1. Review team (which will include individuals outside the discipline), 2. Unit leaders, faculty, and staff, 3. IANR leadership, 4. University leadership.
- Demonstrate strategic direction. Description of past accomplishments is important to describe how the department is positioned to build on these accomplishments moving forward, but not just for the sake of listing these accomplishments. Give readers enough information about the context that they understand it but focus attention on strategic (future) direction.
- Focus the content on areas of strategic priority. This may mean that some areas of the unit will not be given as much attention in the document as others. Unpack for the reader those that pertain to the thrust areas and acknowledge others as context.
- Be succinct. Wordiness obfuscates.
- Use headings liberally.
- Number pages.
- Create a table of contents (with hyperlinks for electronic versions)
- Include supporting information in appendices (limit the amount of this information that is included in the main document)
- Keep the overall length to a minimum

Unit leaders and/or APR coordinators may request exemplars of self-study documents from the APR manager.

## **Site visit**

The unit leader and/or APR coordinator are responsible for proposing a site visit itinerary that will allow the team to get what they need to provide useful feedback. A proposed site visit itinerary template is below. This itinerary must be approved by the APR manager, AVC, and the IANR senior leadership team, who may make modifications as desired.

The site visit team usually arrives on a Sunday or Monday afternoon. The site visit will launch with a dinner meeting consisting of the site visit team and members of the IANR senior leadership team (who issue the charge to the site visit team). The unit leader does not attend this meeting.

Most site visits for academic programs will include meetings over 4-5 days (inclusive of the days in which the charge and exit meetings occur), although this may vary depending on the size and complexity of the unit and the questions being asked by the site visitors. Site visits for centers can usually be completed within 3 days (inclusive of the days in which the charge and exit meetings occur).

For academic program reviews, it is typical for the site visitors to meet with the deans, APR manager and AVC FALS for breakfast the morning of the last full day of the site visit to answer any questions or provide additional detail about the context in which the unit resides. This meeting may not occur with center reviews.

Time must be reserved in the schedule for individual faculty and staff members to meet individually and confidentially with the external review team members. Typically, faculty and staff members are informed of the time in which these meetings will occur and are asked to reach out to the APC representative to schedule a 15-20 minute block of time to meet confidentially with the external review team members.

The site visit concludes with two exit interviews in which the site visitors provide a preview of the observations and recommendations that will appear in their written report. One of these meetings is with the IANR senior leadership team and the other is with the unit leader and faculty<sup>3</sup>. A third meeting may also be held with the unit leader if the review team or the unit leader requests it.<sup>4</sup>

The site visit team is expected to submit a final external review team report within 30 days of the site visit that documents their observations, responses to questions, and recommendations. This report is sent to the APR manager, who forwards it to the unit leader, the APR coordinator (if there is one), the AVC FALS, and the deans. Between 31 and 40 days after the site visit, the AVC FALS, APR manager, the deans, unit leader and APR coordinator meet to debrief the site visit and site visit report.

## **Final report**

The unit leader and/or APR coordinator are expected to submit a report (unit's response) that documents what they learned from the site visit and that describes their plan for addressing site visit team recommendations and other ideas that have come from the review (The APR manager works with and follows up with the unit leader and/or APR coordinator about this report). Consistent with principles of transparency, inclusion, and shared governance, the unit leader and/or APR coordinator should engage the faculty and staff of the unit in drafting the unit's response to the review team

<sup>3</sup> For center reviews, department heads/school directors of contributing units are included in this meeting.

<sup>4</sup> For center reviews, this meeting may also include department heads/school directors of contributing units.



report. This final report is to be submitted to the APR manager no later than 60 days after the site visit. This report should include:

- 1) response to all specific APR recommendations as they relate to unit, college/division, IANR, and UNL strategic plans;
- 2) timelines for accomplishing agreed upon changes;
- 3) identification of those responsible for implementing changes;
- 4) resources required and unit contribution to those resources;
- 5) indication of how success in accomplishing these changes will be measured; and
- 6) a statement of how these changes relate to the unit, college/division, IANR, and UNL strategic priorities and direction.

The APR manager forwards the report to the deans and AVC. Between 61 and 70 days after the site visit, the AVC, APR manager, deans, and unit leader meet to discuss the unit's final report. As a result of feedback received, changes or clarifications to the report may be requested. The final version of the report should be returned to the APR manager within two weeks of the meeting. A letter summarizing the dean's response, drafted by the APR manager, is due to the IANR vice chancellor within 90 days of the site visit. The APR manager sends a copy of this letter, the unit's response, and the site visit team's report to the APC, informing them that the APR has been completed.

### **Senior leadership team responses to the unit's final report**

For academic units, the vice chancellor sends a letter to the chancellor acknowledging completion of the APR. The letter from the deans can be attached as a summary of the findings and plan moving forward. For centers, the report of completion of the APR is documented on a spreadsheet received by the APR manager and AVC from the Office of the Provost. The APR manager completes the spreadsheet and returns it to the assistant to the provost by the deadline in August.

### **Follow up**

It is expected that the review will be a catalyst for continued growth within the unit. In the case of academic programs, the AVC will schedule a meeting with the unit leader approximately one year after the final report is submitted to follow up about the review and what the unit is doing in response. In the case of centers, this meeting will be scheduled by the APR manager.

### **Responsibilities**

#### **Unit/center is responsible for:**

- Preparing a self-study
- Identifying strategic questions for the site review team
- Identifying recommendations of site review team members
- Arranging all flight, hotel, ground transportation and other needed arrangements of external reviewers (It is up to the unit on how they will handle travel arrangements, but it is recommended that the unit books the flight and hotel for review team)
- Compiling and making the necessary copies of the department/school/center review self-study document and supporting materials
- Arrangements for scheduling meeting rooms, audiovisual equipment, meals, coffee breaks and others
- Finalizing site visit itinerary

- Processing reimbursements to reviewers for travel
  - Use “Visiting Personnel and Miscellaneous Expense Voucher” to process expenses such as meals, mileage, parking
- Creating final report
- Working with the department’s business center to create a financial report including all the expenses that are covered by the Dean’s offices.

**APR manager is responsible for:**

- APR manager administrative assistant schedules all meetings that the APR manager and AVC attend
  - Planning Meeting 12 months prior to semester site visit occurs
    - Includes unit leader/center director, APR manager, and AVC
  - Meeting with unit/center faculty 12 months prior to scheduled site visit
    - Includes unit leader/center director, APR coordinator (if applicable), deans, APR manager, AVC, unit/center faculty
  - Meeting with department/center to discuss logistics
    - Includes unit head, unit administrative assistant, APR manager administrative assistant, APR manager, AVC
  - Meeting with unit leader/center director to review self-study document (if needed)
    - Includes unit leader/center director, APR manager, AVC, deans
    - Meeting must occur no later than 60 days prior to site visit
  - Meeting with External Review Team to discuss Logistics
    - Includes AVC, APR manager, External Review Team Members
  - Charge Dinner (1<sup>st</sup> Day of site visit)
    - Includes VC, senior associate VC, AVC, APR manager, deans, external review team (does not include unit leader/center director)
  - Breakfast with Deans (4<sup>th</sup> Day of site visit)
    - Includes AVC, APR manager, deans, external review team (does not include unit leader/center director)
  - SLT Exit Report Meeting (5<sup>th</sup> Day of site visit)
    - Includes VC, senior associate VC, AVC, APR manager, deans, external review team (does not include unit leader/center director)
  - Meeting with Unit Head to Review Departmental Response
    - Includes: AVC, APR manager, deans, unit leader/center director
  - Unit/center Final Report Review Meeting
    - Includes: AVC, APR manager, deans, unit leader/center director
  - For centers—meeting with APR manager and center director one year after final report is submitted to follow up about the review and the center’s response.

**AVC is responsible for:**

- Sending formal invitation to external reviewers
- AVC FALS administrative assistant schedules meeting with AVC FALS and unit leader one year after final report is submitted to follow up about the review and the unit’s response.

## **Expenses**

It is suggested that the unit create or identify an existing cost center/cost object specifically for the review to track expenses. Units/centers cover all expenses up front and are reimbursed after the review as follows:

### **Expenses covered by Deans' office (split based on FTE's by CASNR, ARD, and Extension)**

- Charge Dinner on 1<sup>st</sup> Day
- Breakfast with the Deans on 4<sup>th</sup> Day
- Honorariums for external reviewers:
  - Departments: \$1,500 for chair; \$1,000 for members
  - Centers: \$1,000 for chair; \$750 for members
    - Honorariums should be added to the Visiting Personnel Form along with expenses that qualify for reimbursement.
- Travel expenses for external reviewers: flight, mileage, lodging, and meals not provided during review

### **Expenses covered by unit:**

- Printing
- Food/beverage/snacks (except meals described above covered by Deans' offices)
- Social event with unit faculty (optional)

## ***Sample site visit agenda***

### **1st Day**

- Reviewers travel to UNL
- Evening dinner meeting with IANR senior leaders
  - Meeting does not include the unit leader
  - Review charge should be in a separate room if possible, or the service staff should be asked to not enter the room until the review charge has been conducted.

### **2nd and 3<sup>rd</sup> Days**

- Allotted time for discussions of the unit teaching, research and outreach portfolio. If needed, introductions can be provided by the unit leader, APR coordinator, or a faculty member.

### **4<sup>th</sup> Day**

- Breakfast with reviewers, deans, APR manager, and AVC FALS
  - **Morning – Meetings scheduled by Unit**
    - Faculty
      - *Meetings by appointment should be in a neutral location, not in the unit leader's office.*
    - *Staff (excluding assigned staff member)*
  - **Afternoon – Review team meeting to finalize report**

### **5th Day**

- **Morning**
  - *Exit meeting with IANR senior leaders and review team*
  - *Exit meeting with unit leader and faculty*
  - *A separate meeting may be scheduled with the unit leader if the review team or the unit leader thinks this would be in the best interest of the unit.*
- **Afternoon**
  - Reviewers departure