

PERIODIC PLANNING FOR DEPARTMENTS AND PROGRAMS

(Revised 9/3/09)

The Committee on Academic Policy supports the periodic review of each area of our academic program, to help ensure its strength, vigor, and vitality. Each department or academic program will conduct a review every 5-10 years to assess its strengths and weaknesses and to provide opportunities for strategic planning.

Defining the Issues

The process of a department/program review begins with meetings among the Dean, a subcommittee of the CAP, and the faculty of the department/program to discuss the department's/program's mission. Items to be discussed can include the overarching departmental/program goals relative to the mission of the college, the department's/program's contribution to the general education of Hamilton students, and the strengths and weaknesses of the department's/program's curriculum in serving concentrators, and disciplinary standards. Given that each department/program will have unique goals and circumstances, the participants at this meeting may emphasize particular features of the process (e.g., faculty retreat, visits to other institutions, survey of recent graduates, a campus visit by an external review team, etc.) that will be incorporated into the plan. A tentative timetable will be established for the intervening steps of this planning process and a prospective deadline will be set for the delivery and discussion of the final summary prepared by the CAP subcommittee.

Identification of Department/Program Goals

A department/program self-study is the next step in the review process. Department/program members will meet (perhaps in a retreat setting) to review 1) the outcomes of the previous planning effort, 2) to re-evaluate and redefine, if necessary, the department's/program's goals, and 3) to identify the ways in which the department/program intends to accomplish these goals. A department/program self-study might begin with consideration of these overarching questions:

What are the goals of the department/program for the next five years? How will the department/program be able to measure how well it is achieving its goals? Goals may be related to curriculum, pedagogy, personnel, facilities, etc.

What does the department's/program's faculty want its concentrators to be prepared to do immediately upon graduation? Ten years after graduation? What does the department's/program's faculty want its non-concentrators to be prepared to do immediately upon graduation? Ten years after graduation?

Are the department's/program's expectations for scholarly activity on the part of its faculty congruent with its mission? In what ways and to what extent can concentrators become involved in the scholarly activities appropriate to the disciplines represented by the department's/program's faculty?

There are many ways to address these issues –one mechanism to generate ideas and information may include the identification of and visits to outstanding departments/programs at comparable schools. By articulating why such programs are among the best, the

department's/program's faculty can begin to develop a sense of possibilities to consider. These "scouting expeditions" can provide fresh perspective on how common issues are addressed elsewhere as well. The office of the Dean of the Faculty can assist with arrangements for visits by members of the department/program to such institutions. The department/program, with the assistance of the Dean and the CAP subcommittee, may also find it helpful to conduct a survey of recent graduates (including concentrators and non-concentrators) to help assess its success and to identify potential issues that the self-study should address.

Creating the Department/Program Plan

Once a department/program has defined its goals, the next step in the process is to articulate how the department/program plans to achieve and assess these goals in a 4-6 year period. This plan should address issues related to the following topics:

Curriculum-

What changes to the present curriculum will be necessary to prepare concentrators and non-concentrators better for what the department/program wants them to be able to do upon graduation and thereafter? Are there changes to the field that are not yet reflected in the course offerings of the department/program, and how does the department/program plan to address these changes? What commitment does the department/program have to the education of non-concentrators, either through its own courses or through faculty participation in interdisciplinary introductory courses? What are the enrollment trends in the department/program (based on information provided by the Registrar), and what does the department/program plan to do, if anything, to address them? Are the department's/program's courses sufficiently rigorous? Are the patterns of grade distributions appropriate? By what measures will the department/program be able to determine the success of its courses, the concentration, and its overall mission? A survey of department/program alumni and other forms of student input may be useful in addressing these questions.

Scholarship-

What role does faculty scholarship have in the department? What is the appropriate balance between teaching and scholarship for department/program faculty?

Personnel-

Are any retirements or other personnel changes anticipated within the next 4-6 years? What are the implications of any change for curricular offerings, faculty job descriptions, etc? Will the department/program be requesting the addition of tenured or term faculty positions? Are junior faculty being properly mentored? What are the personnel barriers to long-term planning? Does the culture of the department/program encourage the faculty to work together as a team?

Facilities-

What facilities changes, major equipment purchases, changes in library resources, staff and administrative resources, etc. will be helpful, necessary, or essential for the

department to fulfill its goals in the coming 4-6 years? (N.B. This information may be particularly helpful for the development office as it identifies fund-raising opportunities).

Assessing the Department/Program Plan - External

When the Dean and the CAP subcommittee receive the department/program self-study and plan, the Dean, the CAP subcommittee, and department/program chair will meet to discuss the next steps in the review process. For instance, the Dean and the department/program may wish to identify faculty from comparable departments/programs at other institutions, especially faculty from outstanding departments/programs, so that the Dean can engage as many of five of them to evaluate the department/program plan by examining of information sent to them by the Dean. These materials should include the department/program goals and plans, CV's of department/program faculty members, department/program catalogue copy with course syllabi, and any other information the Dean, CAP subcommittee, or department/program considers useful. Among the questions these external consultants should be asked to address:

Are the department's/program's goals appropriate for the department/program and for the college? Does the department's/program's plan set out reasonable steps to achieve these goals? What are appropriate measures for determining the degree of success in achieving these goals?

What are the strengths and weaknesses of the plan in relation to the department/program curriculum, specializations of existing personnel, faculty scholarship and development, and facilities?

Are the members of the department's/program's faculty sufficiently aware of professional developments in their field? Does it appear that members of the faculty continue to participate in the post-graduate conversations in their areas of expertise? Are there indications of potential concern over the continuing development of members of the faculty? What is the reputation of this department/program among professional colleagues?

Alternatively, the Dean, in consultation with the CAP subcommittee and the department/program, may arrange for a visit to the campus by a team of two (or possibly three) external consultants to interview faculty, staff, and students, to assess the facilities and other resources, and to delve into the fine details of the department's/program's goals and plans that may not be apparent in the written documents. For example, is the quality of interpersonal interaction among faculty, and between faculty and students, conducive to the fulfillment of the department's/program's mission? Are the department's/program's facilities and equipment adequate for what the College expects of the department/program and for what the department/program itself hopes to achieve?

Assessing the Department/Program Plan - Internal

The subcommittee of CAP, in consultation with the Dean, will evaluate the department's/program's goals and plans and the reports of the external consultants. In

addition, the subcommittee of the CAP may explore issues further by interviewing members of the department and meeting with students. Among the questions the CAP subcommittee, perhaps in conjunction with a visiting review team, might want to raise (either before or after the formal review) are these:

Is there an equitable distribution of teaching assignments and research expectations among the department's/program's faculty?

Is there an appropriate balance between resources devoted to concentrators and those devoted to non-concentrators?

Is there a proper balance between resources devoted to teaching and resources devoted to research, and are there beneficial interactions between these two types of activity?

Is there appropriate mentoring and evaluation of junior faculty? Does the department/program use an appropriate method of acquiring first-hand knowledge of teaching performance at all levels?

Does the department/program establish and achieve appropriate diversity and intercultural objectives?

Are there appropriate procedures for addressing safety and environmental concerns, and for the use of animal or human subjects in research?

Does the department/program adequately assess outcomes for its students?

At the conclusion of the review process the subcommittee of the CAP will prepare a summary of its findings and share and discuss this with the full CAP. The CAP will then send the summary to the members of the department/program and the Dean. The Dean, the CAP subcommittee, and the faculty of the department/program will meet soon thereafter to discuss the results of the review and to discuss the implementation of the plan.