VCU Academic Program Review

Self-Study Guiding Questions

Overview

These self-study guiding questions are designed to create the right conversations for reflection and planning in key areas:

- Teaching and learning
- Research, scholarship and/or creative expression (to focus on work that has been peer-reviewed, critically-reviewed or has received significant recognition due to impact at a local/national/international level)
- Service (to include contributions to community engagement, inclusive excellence, service-learning, R.E.A.L., patient care, other vital college/school and university priorities and outside/non-VCU professional service)
- Other subjects as determined by faculty and administration in dialogue

Throughout the self-study, faculty should keep in mind three broader questions:

1. Where are we now?
2. Where do we want to go?
3. How will we get there?

Responses should reflect:

- A clear vision of "program excellence"
- Evidence of frank discussions and inclusivity of perspectives
- Analysis, evaluation and application of data, avoiding use of unexplained data
- References to peer and aspirational institutions for evidence-based benchmarking

The questions are arranged in two categories: degree granting unit-level and program-level. Additional instructions are located in the *VCU Academic Program Review Handbook.*

Executive summary

Unit-level questions cover:

- I.   Mission
- II.   Faculty
- III. Staff and other resources
- IV.   Other (determined by faculty or administration)

Program-level questions cover:

- I.   Program background
- II.   Curriculum
- III. Student learning outcomes assessment quality review
- IV.   Student success
- V.   Faculty
- VI.   Other (determined by faculty or administration)

UNIT-LEVEL QUESTIONS

A "unit" is a department, center or office that houses an academic degree program. Unless otherwise stated, responses should cover the period since the last program review. (* = required question.)

I.   **Mission**

Effective academic units are mission-driven. A unit mission statement should be clearly defined and appropriate to the disciplinary field(s) in which it operates. Units should use this section of the self-study as an opportunity to evaluate and, if necessary, improve their mission statements.

   A.   What is our unit's mission?*
   B.   Is our unit's mission relevant, or does it require updating? (Please explain answer and revise mission, if necessary.)*

        For conversation (not required)
        •   How is our unit's mission related to the university's mission and current strategic plan?
        •   How does our mission challenge and/or advance the boundaries of our field?
        •   How does our mission communicate the distinctiveness of our unit?
        •   How does our mission address teaching and learning, research and/or public service?

   C.   Where is our unit's mission published (e.g., website, *Bulletin*), and is it consistent and current across publications? (If not, please address discrepancies.)*

II.   **Faculty**

Faculty play a critical role in determining the quality, effectiveness and continuous improvement of VCU academic units and degree programs. This section allows units to reflect on key issues related to faculty. A complete picture will reflect all faculty perspectives.

   A.   Are all faculty academically qualified to teach in the discipline (i.e., possess a master's or doctoral degree in the teaching discipline, or a master's degree with 18 graduate hours in the teaching discipline)? If not, what is the justification?*

        Note: Please ensure all faculty credentials are current and loaded in the designated VCU system.

   B.   What are our faculty achievements of note in teaching and learning, research/scholarship/creative expression and patient care (if applicable)? A table is acceptable.*

        Note: Reports of research/scholarship/creative expression should focus on work that has been peer-reviewed, critically reviewed or has received significant recognition due to impact at a local/national/international level. Examples from non-traditional and emergent areas, such as digital humanities, may be reported here along with traditional examples.

   C.   How do we rate our faculty's productivity in research, scholarship and/or creative

expression compared to faculty in peer and aspirational institutions? Please provide evidence to support response.*

For conversation (not required)
- How is faculty productivity, for tenured and tenure-line faculty, defined in our discipline?
- What are the baseline expectations in our unit?
- Do we adhere to and apply our baseline expectations evenly across the faculty?

D. What is our mechanism for rating our faculty's commitment to and delivery of excellent teaching and learning, and what is our critical assessment of the rating mechanism?*

E. Given what we know about our faculty's commitment to and delivery of excellent teaching and learning, where are our strengths and where can we improve? Please provide evidence.*

F. What are our unit's definitions of faculty diversity, inclusion and equity?*

G. What are our goals for faculty diversity, inclusion and equity (i.e., inclusive excellence), and to what extent are we achieving our goals? Please provide explanations and evidence.*

H. How are we doing at recruiting *and* retaining faculty talent? Please provide explanations and evidence.*

For conversation (not required)
- How do our faculty recruitment and retention goals and practices reflect a commitment to diversity, especially with respect to underrepresented faculty?
- If we have experienced high faculty turnover, to what types of institution are our faculty going?
- Do we conduct exit interviews? If so, what can we learn from the data?

I. How are new hires selected, oriented, supported and integrated into our unit?*
   1. Fulltime faculty (with special attention to junior faculty)
   2. Part time or adjunct faculty

For conversation (not required)
- What faculty development opportunities do we provide?
- Could we provide additional faculty development opportunities? If so, what would that look like?

J. How do we define and determine faculty workload? Do we implement faculty workload in a fair and consistent fashion? Please provide explanations and evidence.*

For conversation (not required)
- Do we see inequities in service distribution? If so, who is most negatively affected, and to what do we attribute those inequities?

K. Overall, how will building on and/or addressing our faculty's greatest strengths and/or opportunities for improvement contribute to the goal of excellence?* (This question does not require duplication of prior responses. It is an opportunity to think strategically about program excellence.)

III. Staff and Other Resources

Staff are vital university employees in academic units. This section provides the opportunity to reflect on key issues related to staff. Additionally, this section allows for reflection on non-personnel support resources.

A. How are we doing at recruiting and retaining highly qualified staff?*

For conversation (not required)
- Do we provide staff development? How can we improve staff development?
- How can we increase the efficiency of available staff?
- Do we conduct exit interviews of departing staff? If so, what do the results suggest?

B. How do we define staff diversity, inclusion and equity (inclusive excellence) for our unit? How are we doing in each area? Please provide evidence.*

C. What is our assessment of resources needed for technology, lab space and other non-personnel operational requirements?*

For conversation (not required)
- Is there a particular resource that, if we had it, would make a major, measurable difference in our unit's or programs' quality and/or effectiveness?

D. What efficiencies can we create through a strategic re-thinking of existing resources?*

IV. Other unit-level questions as suggested by faculty and/or administration

PROGRAM-LEVEL QUESTIONS

The purpose of these questions is to facilitate reflection and planning for degree program excellence. A unique set of responses for each degree program (i.e., bachelor's, master's, doctoral and professional) included in the current cohort is required. For example, a unit with three degree programs will complete three distinct sets of responses so each program is evaluated separate from others. Certificates are not included in academic program review.

Unless otherwise stated, responses should cover the period since the last program review.

(* = required question)

I. Background

A. When was the original degree program approved, and when was the last time the unit undertook a comprehensive review of the program with the goal of making improvements? (An extensive history of the program is not required. Instead, provide a succinct response that is sufficient to give an uninformed reader context. A table format is acceptable.)*

B. What is the degree program's stated purpose? Is the degree program's purpose relevant, or does it require updating? Please explain with evidence.*

C. Where is the degree program's purpose published (e.g., website; Taskstream; *Bulletin*)? Is it consistent and current across all publications? If not, please bring all publications current.*

D. How do we define "program excellence" for this degree program? Where are we now relative to this definition? Be specific. Include a discussion of peer and aspirational degree programs at other institutions to contextualize responses and for benchmarking.*

II. Curriculum

The VCU faculty is responsible for the content, quality and effectiveness of the curriculum. The faculty develops educational programs that embody a coherent course of study, are compatible with the stated mission and goals of the institution, and are based upon fields of study appropriate to higher education. This section of the self-study gives units the opportunity to evaluate their curricula. A separate response is required for each program.

A. What is our process for curriculum oversight and review? Do we see opportunities for improvement? If not, why? If so, how?*

B. Where and how are our program requirements published? Are program requirements for each program clearly defined and identical across all publications (i.e., website, *Bulletin*)?*

    For conversation (not required)
    • Could a prospective student understand all of the requirements for successful program completion based on publicly available information? How do we know?
    • Do we see opportunities for curricular "clean up?" For example, removing courses from the system that we no longer offer.

C. Do we consider any aspects of our curriculum to be especially innovative as compared to the field? What are they and why (please provide evidence)?*

    For conversation (not required)
    • Do we see a need to create or revise courses to update our curriculum? If so, what are they? (Be detailed.)
    • Are any of our existing on-campus degree programs potentially suitable for a hybrid or online modality? Do we see any opportunities for our unit to offer new program in high-demand area? If so, please list the programs and briefly describe the potential market demand.

- Is our unit incorporating any no-cost/OER (open educational resources) or low-cost course materials into courses in our programs? If so, how?

D. How is our program structured to engage students in research, scholarship and/or creative expression?*

For conversation (not required)
- What are some of our students' noteworthy achievements in these areas?
- What challenges limit our students' engagement in these areas and/or our faculty's ability to provide opportunities?

E. What have we done to engage our students in other areas of REAL (relevant, experiential and applied learning) (e.g., internships; service-learning; civic engagement; other)?*

For conversation (not required)
- What are some of our students' noteworthy achievements in these areas?
- What challenges limit our students' engagement in these areas and/or our faculty's ability to provide opportunities?

F. Overall, what are the strengths and weaknesses of our curriculum?*

For conversation (not required)
- What do our students say?
- What do our graduates say?
- What do our industry partners/employers say?

III.   Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Quality Review

Whereas the curriculum is designed for student learning, the process of student learning outcomes (SLO) assessment is designed for faculty learning. SLO assessment is how faculty learn if their curriculum is working as predicted. The curriculum is the hypothesis, and assessment is the test.

VCU academic units conduct SLO assessment annually as a distinct process from academic program review. During academic program review, units review the quality of their programs' annual assessment plans and practices. These questions facilitate assessment quality review.

Please see the Assessment Quality Review Criteria form in Taskstream.

IV.   Student Success

Closely aligned with the curriculum and student learning outcomes assessment is student success. Students are the heart of VCU. Student success is a key indicator of a degree program's quality and effectiveness. For this section, units should evaluate the success of their students with a view toward continuous programmatic improvement. The unit's responses should be grounded in most recent student success data.

A. How do we define student success in our unit?*

For conversation (not required)
- What are the characteristics or behaviors of a successful student in our program? What does a successful student in our program look like?

B. How do we rate our students' success metrics for this degree program and what can we do to improve them. Please provide benchmarks from peer and aspirational programs to contextualize self-ratings.

1. Enrollment trends?*
2. Retention trends?*
3. Time-to-degree and graduation trends?*
4. Post-graduation student achievements?*

For conversation (not required)
- Can we do anything different or creative to reduce our students' debt load that might improve 1-4? If so, what?
- Do we see new opportunities to incorporate no-cost/OER (open educational resources) or low-cost course materials into courses in our programs that might improve 1-4? If so, how?
- What skills and knowledge make graduates of our degree program(s) distinctive compared to graduates of peer programs in the Commonwealth and/or US? Can we make any improvements that would enhance their distinctiveness?

C. How might our course schedule assumptions and/or course schedules themselves be supporting or hindering the success of our students?*

D. Overall, what are our greatest student success-related strengths and opportunities for improvement? Please provide evidence, including student input, if possible.*

V. Faculty

A. Does an academically qualified faculty member coordinate this program? Please explain if not.*

(Note: The faculty member may be a program director, director of graduate studies or department chair. The designated faculty member must be an expert in the field that is represented by the academic program.)

B. What is the proportion of student credit hours in this program taught by full time and part time faculty in this program? What is our assessment of the adequacy or appropriateness of this figure?*

VI. Other program-level questions as suggested by faculty and/or administration