

DRBU Academic Program Review Handbook

The Program Review Committee developed this handbook based on the [academic program review framework](#) DRBU developed and adopted in 2013. It serves as an explanation of DRBU program review practices that supplements but not replaces the program review framework.

Overview

Academic program review (APR) is “a cyclical process for evaluating and continuously enhancing the quality and currency of programs.”¹ This comprehensive evaluation, based on gathering and analyses of a wide range of evidence, consists of a combination of self-study and a review by peer evaluators external to DRBU. The results of the program review, including an action plan, inform and form a basis for decision-making in follow-up budgeting and short- and long-term planning that lead to enhancing quality and improvement of the program. Coordinated with strategic planning efforts, program review share the same 5-year cycle.

Organization

The Instruction Committee, with the Dean of Academics as its chair, has oversight over all instruction-related matters at DRBU, including academic program review. The accreditation liaison officer (ALO), who coordinates DRBU’s accreditation, strategic planning, and institutional review timeline, informs the Instruction Committee when the programs are due for a review. The Instruction Committee then selects two to three members from the teaching faculty to serve on the ad hoc Program Review Committee, with the ALO as the chair ex officio.

The Program Review Committee is responsible for carrying out the self-study and drafting the self-study report, recommending external reviewers to be appointed to the Board of Visitors by the Board of Trustees² and hosting the external review site visit, and recommending an action plan for improving and enhancing the programs to the Instruction Committee for adoption. Academic program reviews share the same cycle (five years) as DRBU’s strategic planning efforts. However, the Dean of Academics has the discretion to organize an interim review to meet the demand of DRBU’s regional accreditor.

The Academic Program Review Process

¹ Pg 5 of WSCUC’s [Resource Guide for Good Practices in Academic Program Review](#). On the same page, the Resource Guide also states that “Program review is a required element in the WSCUC accreditation process.”

“A program review is a cyclical process for evaluating and continuously enhancing the quality and currency of programs. The evaluation is conducted through a combination of self-evaluation, followed by peer-evaluation by reviewers external to the program or department and, usually, also external to the organization. It is a comprehensive analysis of program quality, analyzing a wide variety of data about the program. The results of this evaluation process are then used to inform follow-up planning and budgeting processes at various levels in the institution—program, department, college, university—and incorporated into the institution’s overall quality assurance system.”

² See Article 6 Section 2 of the [DRBU Bylaws](#)

The systematic and cyclic program review process consists of four (4) phases: 1) planning and preparation for the review; 2) self-study; 3) external review and action plan; 4) closing the loop. The following sections describe these phases and show them on a timeline.

1. Planning and Preparation

Planning and preparation activities typically take place during the academic year prior to the completion of the self-study and external review. This phase begins with the ALO calling a meeting with Dean of Academics and the Instruction Committee to notify them that DRBU needs to perform a program review on the MA or the BA program to conclude by the following academic year. This meeting typically takes place in the early part of the Spring semester. During the meeting, the Dean and the Instruction Committee form the ad hoc Program Review Committee with members of the teaching faculty.

During this phase, the Program Review Committee (PRC) typically performs the following tasks:

- Refresh on the program review process, including its purpose, scope, outcome, and timeline for completion
- Clarify roles and responsibilities of each committee member
- Develop decision-making mechanism for the committee
- Review the requirements and the template for the self-study report
- Propose external reviewer candidates for appointment and schedule external site review
- Refresh on all the resources (academic affairs, institutional research, etc.) available for the program review
- Recap findings and action plan from the last program review, including:
 - Results from mid-cycle and action plan updates
 - Findings and recommendations pertinent to the program under review from the most recent accreditation self-study, visiting team report and commission action letter. These are especially relevant if the accreditation review has taken place after the last program review
- Schedule committee meetings for the subsequent phases

2. The Self-Study

The self-study is a comprehensive and reflective inquiry into the well-being of the degree program. This inquiry aims not only to highlight the program's strengths and accomplishments and underscore areas needing attention and improvement, but also to inform its planning process. Driven by relevant qualitative and quantitative evidence, the self-study, which culminates in the drafting of a self-study report, is organized into four criterion areas:

1. **Program Alignment:** The key question to ask for this criterion is: Do the programs' stated functions—instruction and related activities, including curriculum development and support services for student learning—help to advance and meet the University's educational goals and priorities?

2. **Effective Student Learning:** Arguably the crux of academic program review activities, the key question to ask for this criterion is: How effective are the programs in helping students develop intellectual skills represented by the program's student learning outcomes? Evidence and analyses from the programs' assessment efforts are the most important type of evidence to be considered in this criterion, as academic assessment directly and thoroughly examines the effectiveness of programs in advancing learning in students.
3. **Professor Quality and Development.** Quality and development of professors directly impact student learning and educational experience. DRBU is a teaching university, and professors are not expected to engage in conventional academic research nor be area experts. Key questions to ask in reviewing programs under this criterion are: How effective are professors in carrying out the programs and affecting student learning? How well do professors respond to the University's needs? How is DRBU facilitating its professors' development?
4. **Sustainable Practices:** Even if the programs are well-aligned to institutional mission and effective in bringing about student learning, efficiency and sustainability of program operation is yet another dimension that warrants regular and thorough review. Key questions to ask in reviewing programs under this criterion are: What institutional resources and support do these programs have? How well do programs find and utilize available resources? How efficient are programs' operations and practices? Can programs continue to carry out their stated functions effectively over time?

The Program Review Committee coordinates the study of compiled and organized evidence and drafts the self-study report. A more detailed account and a template of the self-study report is contained in a later section of this handbook. The self-study report is the primary basis upon which the Instruction Committee and the external reviewers evaluate the degree program. By addressing the prompts in the template thoroughly and concisely, the drafters aim to present a mindful and candid self-reflection of the program, identify areas of strengths and weaknesses, and propose initial ideas for plans of improvement. The PRC completes and submits a draft of the self-study report to the Instruction Committee. After incorporating feedback and comments and obtaining approval from the Instruction Committee, the PRC distributes the report to the teaching faculty and the external reviewers. The external reviewers should receive the self-study report in the first part of the Fall semester and no later than six weeks prior to the external review site visit.

3. External Review and Action Plan

External Review

The external review is similar to accreditation review in format, but has a narrower focus of a single degree program. After receiving and reading the program's self-study report, a panel of two to three peer reviewers from other institutions visit DRBU's campus for an on-site review. During the campus visit, the panel typically inquires about key aspects of the program through

interviews with faculty, staff, and students; inspects facilities, procedures and records; and observes classes. The reviewers then compose the external review report based on the self-study report and their findings and observations from the campus visit. This report by informed outsiders provides DRBU valuable recommendations and insight on the program's strengths as well as areas needing improvement.

Timeline of the external review. The appointment of the external reviewers and the scheduling of the site visit takes place in the Spring semester prior the year of the program review. The most optimal window for the site visit, which is conducted over the course of one and one-half day, is the four-week period prior to the Thanksgiving holidays. The PRC distributes the final self-study report to the external reviewers no later than six weeks prior to the site visit. It is also good practice for the PRC to schedule a conference call with the reviewers two to three weeks before the site visit to check in and address any last-minute concerns.

The PRC and the Instruction Committee meet with the panel of reviewers before the conclusion of the site visit. During this "exit interview", reviewers present key findings and recommendations to the committees. The reviewers should plan to complete the external review report within a month after the visit.

External reviewer selection. Typically, each panel consists of two to three reviewers. The Instruction Committee, after consulting with the PRC, propose external reviewer candidates to the Board of Trustees for appointment to the Board of Visitors. According to the DRBU Bylaws, members of the Board of Visitors serve renewable 3-year terms. The PRC should check the Board of Visitors' current membership before identifying and proposing new candidates.

The PRC and the Instruction Committee should consider the following set of criteria when searching for suitable candidates to become reviewers:

- Be a tenured (or equivalent) member of teaching faculty of a teaching-oriented accredited college or university
- Be responsive to DRBU's mission and educational model
- Be capable and willing to perform and complete the review in timely fashion

At least one of the reviewers on the panel should have the following additional qualifications:

- Have current or prior experience as an administrator at a level of program chair or higher at an institution similar to DRBU
- Have prior experience related to the accreditation process, learning outcome assessment, or academic program review
- Hold an appointment at a program/institution that DRBU's program aims to emulate
- If possible, serve on the faculty at a "Great Books" institution

All reviewer candidates need to be vetted for conflicts of interest.

Action Plan

Upon receiving the report, the Instruction Committee and the PRC write an executive summary, and distribute the report and the summary to the teaching faculty for responses. Based on the findings and recommendations from the self-study report and the external review report, and responses from members of the teaching faculty, the Instruction Committee begins to draft an integrated action plan for improvement over the 5-year cycle.

The action plan aims to address the recommendations from both the self-study and the external review reports with realistic and concrete measures to improve the program. A well-written action plan lays out priorities for the degree program for the current program review cycle and informs resource procurement and allocation. The following is a list of key components of the action plan:

- Compilation and prioritization of recommendations from both the self-study and the external review reports.
- Proposals for strategies and measures to respond to the prioritized recommendations.
- Itemization of resources needed to implement the action plan, including distinguishing between acquiring new resources and redistributing existing resources.
- Outlines of timeline for implementation and completion of action items in the plan.

The following list of questions may help guide the creation of an integrated plan of improvement for each recommendations:

- What are the core priorities and what is the sequence of action to be taken for each recommendation?
- What opportunities exist to extend and build on present strengths and what are the major obstacles that impede the program's progress?
- What improvements are possible through reallocating existing resources?
- What improvements can only be addressed through additional resources?

The Instruction Committee should distribute the action plan to the teaching faculty for discussion and adoption. After adoption, the Dean and the Instruction Committee work with DRBU administrative leadership to ensure timely implementation of the action plan and publish the self-study report, the external review report, and the action plan on the DRBU website.

The Dean and the Instruction Committee should complete the action plan draft within two weeks of receiving the external review report. The Dean and the Instruction Committee should aim to propose the revised action plan for adoption by the teaching faculty no earlier than two weeks after the draft is distributed to allow time for the professors to provide feedback. This External Review and Action Plan phase of the program review should conclude no later than January 31 to allow the Dean and the Instruction Committee to include appropriate items from the action plan in budgetary planning for the upcoming academic year.

4. Closing the Loop

Yearly, during the budget planning period in the early Spring, the Instruction Committee should check on the progress of the action plan's implementation. The committee should aim to address the following questions:

- Has the program implemented action items from the plan in a timely fashion? If not, provide explanation.
- What significant changes has the program made in the past year? How are these changes related to the action plan?
- What resources (existing or new) have been allocated to support the implementation of action plan?
- Has the implementation of the action plan led to (intended or unintended) improvements in the program?
- How will the program implement the action plan for the upcoming academic year? Is there a need for any adjustment?

The Instruction Committee composes a short progress report based on these discussions and distributes it to the teaching faculty. These annual progress reports become a piece of evidence for the next program review self-study.

Program Review and Accreditation

Dovetailing its academic program review process with the reaffirmation process of its external accreditor is a common practice for institutions with programs that require external accreditation such as professional licensure (for example, see page 8 of Azusa Pacific University's [Program Review Handbook](#)). In these instances, the same self-study report is used for both the program review and accreditation reaffirmation, and the visiting reviewers assembled by the accreditor for the reaffirmation process serve also as the external reviewers for the program review. For institutions that have adopted the practice described above, degree programs that are not externally accredited cannot rely on the reaffirmation process and need to separately carry out their own program review.

DRBU's two programs require no additional accreditation or licensure beyond DRBU's regional accreditation and therefore each will carry out program review on a 5-year cycle. However, DRBU is an institution designed as an integrated whole in support of the one MA and one BA program taught by a single, undifferentiated teaching faculty. Given the comprehensive nature of self-study and visiting team site review, the two degree programs would get much attention and in-depth reviews through the accreditation and reaffirmation processes.

Therefore, the PRC should make use of relevant outputs from the most recent accreditation review into the program review process: the program review self-study report should incorporate sections from the accreditation self-study report that are relevant to the degree program; and when drafting the action plan, findings and recommendations from the accreditation visiting team report and commission action letter that directly relate to the degree program should be considered together with those from the external review report.

Components of the Self-Study Report

The comprehensive, evidence-driven examination of the degree program is captured in the self-study report. The following is a list of components of the self-study report with suggested prompts. This template was developed after consulting WSCUC's [Resource Guide for Good Practices in Academic Program Review](#) (2013) and similar templates from several colleges and universities³ in the Western Region.

Section One: Introduction, Context, and Mission Alignment

Areas to address:

- *The internal context: how is the program situated within DRBU? What degree does it grant?*
- *How does the program contribute to the public good?*
- *The external context: how does the program address the need of the external environment?*
- *A brief history of the program, including major changes that has been made since the last review*
- *Description of the program's educational objectives and learning outcomes*
- *How is the program aligned with DRBU's mission?*

Section Two: Response to Recommendations from Previous Review

- *List recommendations compiled in the action plan from the previous cycle*
- *Describe actions taken by DRBU in response to these recommendations and any improvement as results of these actions.*

Section Three: Effective Student Learning

A. Curriculum, Pedagogy & Learning Environment

- *How do the program's curriculum and pedagogy aim to facilitate students' advancement in learning outcomes?*
- *What practices are in place to ensure some uniformity in grading standards, course content, and learning outcomes across the curriculum?*
- *Do students understand the philosophy behind the educational model?*
- *Are the courses well sequenced and reliably available in sequence?*
- *Has the program been reviewed by external stakeholders, such as faculty or administrators from peer institutions, or compared with similar programs?*
- *How does the program determine and modify curricular content?*
- *How is the contemplative component integrated into the curriculum?*
- *What are the co-curricular learning opportunities (internship, work-study, study abroad)?*
- *What is the relationship between the BA and MA program, if applicable? Are any courses cross-listed? If so, how do the requirements for the graduate students differ from the undergraduates in those courses?*

³ [Azusa Pacific University](#), [University of San Francisco](#), [St Mary's College of California](#)

Evidence in this category might include:

- *A curriculum flowchart and description of how the curriculum addresses the learning outcomes of the program (curriculum map)*
- *A comparison with curricula at selected other institutions and with disciplinary/professional standards*
- *A description of other learning experiences that are relevant to program goals (e.g., internships, work-study, study abroad or other international experiences, lectures, etc.), as well as how many students participate in those experiences*
- *Section of faculty governance on curricular changes*
- *Results of survey studies from students and faculty members*

B. Student Learning & Success

- *Do students make advances in the program learning outcomes? If so, are they growing in the learning outcomes at an expected level? How is the level determined?*
- *What have been the major findings from assessment efforts? Have the findings been used to make changes?*
- *What is the evidence that the changes made based on those findings are effective?*
- *Do students stay in the program and graduate timely?*
- *Do they continue advanced study? Do they find employment after graduation?*
- *Do students affect policy and operations (e.g. student membership on program committees, representation at faculty meetings, etc.)?*
- *Does the program provide regular channels of communication for students to provide feedback?*
- *How are program expectations communicated to students?*
- *Are students kept informed of their progress in meeting intended learning outcomes?*

Evidence may include:

- *Annual results of direct and indirect assessments of student learning*
- *Ongoing efforts by the department to “close the loop” by responding to assessment results*
- *Student retention and graduation rate trends (disaggregated by different demographic categories)*
- *Graduate school*
- *Job placement*
- *Graduating student satisfaction surveys (and/or alumni satisfaction surveys)*
- *Current student feedback*

C. Students

Evidence may include students:

- *Gender, race/ethnicity, age*
- *GPA from previous institution, type of previous institution*
- *Standardized test scores*
- *Employment status*
- *Diversity report*

Section Four. Faculty Quality and Development

- *What are the qualifications and qualities of the teaching faculty in relation to DRBU's mission and educational model?*
- *Does the teaching faculty has sufficient capacity and collectively possess sufficient skills and background to deliver the program's curriculum under its somewhat unique pedagogy?*
- *How are teaching assignments made within the program?*
- *Does the program monitor its overall teaching effectiveness? How?*
- *To what extent do Faculty enjoy teaching the courses they teach?*
- *Other than classroom teaching, how is the Faculty involved in student learning and development (e.g., mentorship and advising)?*
- *Describe briefly teaching faculty governance structure. Do all faculty members participate and feel included in decision-making? How is participation in shared governance encouraged and valued?*
- *In what ways does the program help foster professional development and growth of the faculty?*
 - *In teaching across the curriculum*
 - *In teaching under the discussion-driven, seminar-centered pedagogy that eschew lecturing*
 - *In improving student learning*
 - *How are junior Faculty members mentored with respect to their teaching and service?*
- *Does DRBU have a teaching faculty staffing plan for the future?*
 - *Can DRBU reasonably expect to retain a large percentage of its current professors?*
 - *Is the program planning for a strong enrollment growth?*
 - *Are there anticipated retirements that need to be taken into account in long-range planning over the next 5 to 10 years?*
- *Describe the review process for teaching faculty*
- *Are information and expectations communicated effectively, especially to junior Faculty?*

Evidence may include:

- *Number of full-time faculty (ratio of full-time faculty to part-time faculty)*
- *Student-faculty ratio*
- *Proportion of faculty with terminal degree*
- *Institutions from which faculty earned terminal degrees*
- *Faculty workload*
- *Mentoring processes/program*
- *Professional development opportunities/resources (including travel and research funds)*
- *Sufficient time for course development*
- *Measures of teaching effectiveness (e.g., course evaluations, peer evaluations of teaching, faculty scholarship on issues of teaching and learning, formative discussions of pedagogy among faculty)*
- *Faculty participation in development opportunities related to teaching, learning and/or assessment*
- *Service for each faculty member*
- *Distribution of faculty across ranks (or years at institution)*
- *Course assignments*
- *Co-teaching/mentoring arrangements*
- *Faculty diversity*

- *Courses taught along with the number of units*

Section Five. Sustainable Practices

A. Recruitment and Admissions

- *What are the trends in numbers of student applications, admits, and enrollments reflected over a 5-8 year period?*
- *Are there any external trends related to Great Books programs that are relevant to DRBU's program?*
- *What is the program looking for in its students?*
- *What kind of students is the program well suited to serve?*
- *What are the requirements for admission to the program, if any?*
- *Are there any internal procedures for accepting credit from elsewhere? What are they? (transfer policy)*

B. Allocation of Resources

Student support

- *How are students advised and mentored?*
- *Is advising valued and rewarded by the program?*
- *How is advising organized and how is advising quality maintained?*
- *How is the advising process evaluated? If it has been evaluated, what were the results of this evaluation?*
- *Are there less formal opportunities for Faculty/student interaction?*
- *Other resources:*
 - *Academic and career advising programs and resources*
 - *Tutoring and supplemental instruction*
 - *Basic skill remediation*
 - *Orientation and transition programs*
 - *Financial support (scholarships, fellowships, teaching assistantships, etc.)*
 - *Support for engagement in the campus community*
 - *Support for non-cognitive variables of success, including emotional, psychological, and physical interventions if necessary*

IT resources

- *What programmatic features address the state of information literacy? What resources are needed for these? What forms of technology resources does the program currently use? Are there adequate IT resources for sustaining the program?*
- *Library: What is the program's assessment of the library's holdings and services? What are the special strengths in available resources as they relate to the current program? How has the program utilized its library liaison and its library budget?*
 - *Library print and electronic holdings that support the program*
 - *Information literacy outcomes for graduates*

- *Technology resources available to support the pedagogy and research in the program*
- *Technology resources available to support students' needs*

Facilities

- *Describe the current instructional facilities. To what extent do these facilities meet the needs of the program? If any of these resources are inadequate, what plans have been made to correct these deficiencies? What additional facilities, if any, are needed in order to improve the quality of the programs or educational experiences being offered?*
 - *Classroom space*
 - *Instructional laboratories*
 - *Office space*
 - *Student study spaces*
 - *Access to classrooms designed for alternative learning styles/universal design*

Staff

- *Summary describing administrative staff and their supporting role.*
- *What has been the turnover rate in these positions in the past five years? If it is high, what steps have been taken to identify and address the problem?*
- *What changes, if any, are underway to strengthen the staff support for the program's activities?*
- *What professional development and training opportunities are provided for the staff (evaluation and promotion, reclassification, opportunities to enhance/obtain skills, etc.)?*
 - *Clerical and technical staff FTE supporting program/departmental operations*
 - *Financial resources*

Financial Resources

- *Operational budget (revenues and expenditures) and trends over a 3-5 year period*

Section Six. Summary Reflections

This portion of the self-study report typically interprets the significance of the findings in the above analysis of program evidence and proposes initial ideas for plan of improvement. Its purpose is to determine a program's strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement. The initial recommendations for improvement, along with recommendations from the external reviewers, will be taken up during the Action Plan phase of program review to build an evidence-based integrated plan for improvement over the 5-year cycle. It is helpful to have questions that guide the interpretation of the findings, such as:

- *Are the curriculum, practices, processes, and resources properly aligned with the goals of the program?*
- *Is the program effective in facilitate student learning?*
- *Does the program have the necessary processes and systems to assess student learning?*
- *Are student learning outcomes being achieved at the expected level?*
- *Are the quality of teaching faculty, their governance and review systems, and the resources for training and development effective in offering a quality program?*

- *Are the programs' practices sustainable?*

When identifying initial recommendations for improvement, keep in mind that these will be used during the Action Plan phase to develop into more detailed plan for improvement over the five-year cycle. Therefore, the questions guiding the Action Plan phase of the review should be considered in the background:

- *What are the core priorities and what is the sequence of action to be taken for each recommendation?*
- *What opportunities exist to extend and build on present strengths and what are the major obstacles that impede the program's progress?*
- *What improvements are possible through reallocating existing resources?*
- *What improvements can only be addressed through additional resources?*