



Graduate Program Review Guidelines

*Graduate School
UNC Wilmington*

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I. Rationale

The mission statement of the University of North Carolina at Wilmington underscores the importance of “strengthening and expanding its research, graduate, and professional programs.” Further, the university “shall strive, through regular communication with regional agencies and through continual assessment of programs, to meet the needs of southeastern North Carolina.” Important to realizing these goals is the periodic review of graduate programs to monitor their status, effectiveness, and progress. Periodic reviews are useful for providing information that can be used to strengthen and improve programs. They can also identify existing strengths and weaknesses, and help point out needs, priorities, and future directions for the program. Program reviews can also help academic units assess their relationships among and contributions to other academic programs within the university. Thus, program reviews are integral to strategic planning and resource allocation. Periodic reviews also allow the academic program to compare itself with similar programs at peer institutions and other programs nationally.

Effective graduate program reviews are typically a multi-stage process, with an initial self-study conducted by each program, followed by a site visit by peer academicians from outside the university. At each stage, the academic unit will review the findings with the dean of the Graduate School and dean of the appropriate college or school. The anticipated outcome of such reviews is to identify opportunities for the program, by examining its strengths and weaknesses, determining the overall quality of the program, and providing recommendations for improvement. The final outcome of the entire review process is to implement the agreed upon recommendations.

II. Components and Procedures

A. Components

Each review consists of the following:

1. Each graduate program will prepare and submit to the dean of the Graduate School a self-study that is reviewed and approved by the chair and dean of the appropriate college or school. The department will submit five (5) copies of the self-study to the dean of the Graduate School after review an approval for distribution. This report will be submitted to the provost, the dean of the appropriate college/school, and the outside consultants.
2. The college/school dean, chair, and graduate coordinator will work with the dean of the Graduate School to prepare a list of potential external reviewers, plan the site visit, and select a date for the site visit.
3. The site visit team (typically two to three individuals) will prepare a report describing the strengths and weaknesses of the graduate program, providing

opinions about the overall strengths of the graduate program, and making recommendations to improve the quality of the program. The college/school dean and chair will respond to this report, including any perceived inaccuracies.

4. The dean of the Graduate School and then the provost will review the site visit report and program response. They will study and prioritize any recommendations. Steps for implementation of recommendations will be outlined, including any budgetary implications and responsibility.

B. Procedures

About a year in advance of the review, the dean of the Graduate School will notify the chair or head of the academic unit that houses the program that a review has been scheduled. The chair should then appoint a committee, typically headed by the graduate coordinator(s) of the program, to prepare the self-study report. This committee (or committee chair) should meet with the chair, college/school dean, dean of the Graduate School, and provost before beginning the self-study to discuss the charge to the committee and a time-line for the program review components.

In preparing the self-study, all program faculty should be involved in considering the current status and future development of their unit. Toward the end of the process, a draft of the self-study report should be distributed to all program faculty for their input, which should be considered as the final draft is prepared. Participation of enrolled students, alumni, and professional staff should also be considered.

The self-study report should be submitted simultaneously to the college/school dean and the dean of the Graduate School. This document will be carefully reviewed for content, completeness, and accuracy, and if necessary, returned to the committee for revision. The report will not be distributed to the provost or outside consultants until all parties agree that the document is satisfactory.

The self-study committee and chair will submit the names of five or six possible external consultants for the site visit. The dean of the Graduate School, in consultation with the college/school dean and provost, will choose the outside consultants on the basis of their professional and academic expertise and experience. The dean of the Graduate School will extend invitations to the consultants to come to UNCW to meet with faculty members, students, and administrators. Copies of the self-study will be sent to the consultants in advance of their visit, along with graduate and undergraduate catalogues. The Graduate School will coordinate all travel arrangements for the consultants. The Office of the Provost will pay travel, lodging, meal expenses, and an honorarium. However, money for entertainment, receptions, or other social functions will not be provided. The chair, in cooperation with the Graduate School, will arrange the interview schedule.

Within a month after their visit, the external consultants will submit either a joint report or separate reports to the dean of the Graduate School, who will forward copies to the chair, college/school dean, and provost. The chair should distribute copies to the program self-study committee and other faculty members. He or she should also meet with the faculty to discuss the evaluation and recommendations made by the consultants.

After each of these parties has reviewed the report(s), the chair and administrators will meet to discuss the self-study, site visitors' report(s), and program response. The chair should be prepared to discuss specific issues raised in the consultants' report(s) (e.g., program strengths and weaknesses, faculty and student quality, resource needs, future directions and plans, etc.) and to relate these to the strategic plan of the program. Following this presentation, the college/school dean may comment on the report(s) and the chair's response. The meeting will then be opened for general discussion and questions.

Within 30 days of this meeting, the chair, upon consultation with the program faculty, will submit a written report to the college/school dean, outlining steps to be taken to correct deficiencies and build on strengths, incorporating the various recommendations into the future plans and directions for the program. Within the next 30 days, the college/school dean will respond to this report in writing. The college/school dean's report should include plans for implementing the changes or requests made by the chair. On issues where there is disagreement, the college/school dean should provide a justification for the position taken. Both written reports will be forwarded to the dean of the Graduate School for review. After any clarification or discussion necessary, the dean of the Graduate School will forward these reports to the provost, with a cover letter commenting on the plans for implementation of changes or requests. The provost may request a follow-up meeting if necessary. Otherwise, a follow-up meeting will be scheduled in 18 months to examine the progress made by the academic unit in response to the review.

The self-study, consultants' report(s), and the reports of the chair and dean will be considered the permanent record of the program review.

III. The Self-Study Report

A. Rationale

The self-study is a comprehensive written report that examines the current status of the program based on its activities and achievements over the past five years (or since the previous review). The self-study must contain sufficient information for a preliminary evaluation of the program's quality and will serve as a starting point for the external consultants' in-depth review. This document should identify strengths and weaknesses in curriculum and instruction, student quality, educational outcomes, research activities and funding levels, resource availability and needs, and special features or services provided by the program. Perhaps most important, the self-study should serve as

a vehicle by which the program can plan for the future, in conjunction with the university. Thus, the self-study should include mechanisms for solving current and projected problems, for building on current strengths, and for maximizing opportunities that are likely to develop within the discipline in the near future.

The Graduate School, chair, graduate coordinator, and program faculty are all involved in the preparation of the self-study. The chair appoints a committee of faculty (typically headed by the graduate coordinator and usually about five members) who compile the information, analyze the data, and prepare the text. The chair is responsible for the content, accuracy, and completeness of the document. The Graduate School can provide the committee with information from Graduate School databases such as:

- Data on graduate student admissions (number of applicants, number accepted, number enrolled, test scores, GPAs, etc.);
- A summary of reports from Graduate School Outside Representatives at thesis defenses;
- Summary data on proposals through the Office of Research Administration;
- Numbers of graduate teaching assistants, research assistants, and graduate assistants;
- Graduate Faculty criteria;
- Graduation rates.

Addresses of graduates of the program can be obtained from the Advancement office. Budget and enrollment data for the department or college can be obtained from university databases. If necessary, the Graduate School can facilitate your receipt of this information.

B. Guidelines for Preparing an Effective Self-Study

The self-study should incorporate the above kinds of information, as well as other information that committee members feel is important to the academic unit and its programs. The allocation of resources is an important matter to all academic units, but the self-study should not merely be a budget request. If so, the unit misses a unique opportunity to provide the administration information about its strengths, weaknesses, plans, and goals. Moreover, an unduly self-serving report in some ways loses its credibility. The report is likely to have its most favorable impact if the academic unit uses this chance to think creatively about its plans. Because members of the academic unit have limited information on their dean's and provost's budgets, resource matters are most usefully discussed by examining the implication for further development of several budget scenarios. For example,

What could the program support with a modest decrease (e.g., 3-5%) in support?

What could be accomplished if support remains the same?

What could be accomplished with a modest increase in support?

What could be accomplished with a significant increase, etc?

The following are some suggestions for preparing a useful self-study:

- *Responsiveness.* The report should adhere to its outline and be thorough, but succinct, digestible, and crisp. Issues of program quality and its products should be addressed; extraneous issues should be ignored.
- *Documentation.* The report should be data-based. Valid internal and external peer comparisons are very helpful. Simplistic, selective, and out-of-context summaries are counter-productive.
- *Tone.* The report should be constructive in tone. Instead of dwelling only on problems, focus on challenges, aspirations, and goals. External reviewers express concern about “ax-grinding,” defensive, or lecturing styles.
- *Objectiveness.* The report should be appropriately candid, introspective, and analytical. It should feature an honest look at the status of, and opportunities facing, the academic unit. The report must be credible to be useful.
- *Perspective.* The report should be forward looking, consistent with department, college, and University strategic plans and planning, and neither an unconstrained “wish list” nor an exercise in self-congratulation. Needs should be addressed comparatively, with appropriate attention to priorities and spending.
- *Accuracy.* The committee responsible for preparing the self-study report must work with the head of the academic program to ensure the accuracy of the statements contained in the document.

C. Suggested Outline and Criteria for Review

The following is a suggested outline for a self-study for program review. Academic programs may alter this outline or include additional information if it will allow them to communicate more effectively or efficiently. An Executive Summary of no more than 500 words that emphasizes the important points of the self-study should precede the body of the program review.

1. General characteristics of and brief history of the academic unit
Include the departmental mission statement, departmental goals, dates new degree programs were established, significant additions to the faculty, and major changes in the orientation of the academic program.
2. Findings of previous reviews
Specify the date of the previous review. Briefly outline the major findings and recommendations of the previous review and the responses to them. What were the strengths and weaknesses? Did the faculty and administration agree with the recommendations? What actions were taken as a result of the recommendations? What efforts have been undertaken to improve or refine good programs, to seize opportunities?
3. General program characteristics
A description of the degree program(s), including the educational objectives, goals, and curriculum, should be provided. There should be a discussion of how this

program enhances departmental, school or college, and institutional objectives, including those aspects of the program that make it unique, and those which are interdisciplinary. Explain how the philosophy of the academic unit is reflected in the students' programs of study. Use supportive data to analyze the success of the program. Demonstrate how well the program's specified educational objectives are being achieved.

4. Certification, interdisciplinary, and other programs

Describe any relevant graduate-level certification programs that the academic unit offers or participates in. How does the certificate program interface with the program under review? How many students and faculty participate in these programs? Describe any graduate-level interdisciplinary programs that the academic unit participates in. Describe community resources, joint programs, affiliated centers, cooperating institutions, etc., which contribute to the program.

5. Facilities

A description of the facilities used for the graduate program, as well as the areas used by faculty for their research and scholarly activity, should be provided. There should be a discussion of the adequacy of the support facilities, including library holdings, computer networks, graduate student support, support for pursuing grants and contracts, etc. The report may include a description of facility utilization for courses, number of graduate courses offered each semester, average class size, etc. The self-study should assess the current status of the facilities, as well as the highest priority needs.

6. Personnel

a. Tenure track faculty

List by rank including date of hire, highest degree earned, graduating institution, and one or two areas of expertise and research interest. Append an abbreviated (five pages maximum) vita for each faculty member. The focus in the vitae should be on creative productivity during the past five years. Information on graduate faculty membership should be included.

b. Non-tenure track faculty

Describe the program's use of visiting faculty, faculty associates, part-time faculty, and graduate students in the instructional and research programs.

c. Staff

List and describe staff support positions, including administrative or research assistance, secretarial, technical, student advising, etc.

7. Graduate students

a. Describe the current students using data such as GRE, MAT, or GMAT scores, grade point averages, and retention rates. If available, data from previous years may be included. Demographic information, including race/ethnicity and gender, should be provided. Include information on the applicant pool as well,

- considering number of applicants, number of students admitted, number of students matriculating, and criteria used for admission to programs. Describe how graduate students are recruited and what kinds of orientation and advising efforts are made to help them remain in good standing. Append any printed materials given to students that describe program requirements and explain academic standards and governance procedures. Include information about student support, such as access to computers, lounge space, office space, financial support, teaching assistantships, research assistantships, departmental scholarships, university-wide scholarships, tuition remissions, student travel grants, etc. Indicate high priority needs.
- b. Include information on student performance measures, such as student presentations and publications; awards received by students for teaching, research or performance; percentage of graduates who attain licensure or certification (if appropriate); placement of program graduates; and time to degree, percent retention.
 - c. Describe the role of teaching assistants in the graduate program.
8. Affirmative action
- Describe the program's efforts to obtain support for members of minority groups, disabled students and faculty, and members of underrepresented groups. Append the university's affirmative action statement.
9. Summary of research and scholarship of the academic unit
- a. Introductory summary statement
- Include highlights from each of the following categories to summarize faculty productivity over the past five years.
- b. Publishing, performances, or exhibitions
- Provide a statement for the department identifying outstanding contributions that faculty members have made in scholarly publishing, exhibitions, original stage productions or performances, editing of journals, or other contributions to scholarship. Name the key journals in the field (so readers can better interpret the individual vitae), and mention specific examples of work that have made an impact at national or international levels.
- c. Funded projects
- Describe major funding obtained within the last five years. Identify agencies, amounts, key individuals, results, and benefits to students or the academic unit's research programs.
- d. Presentations at refereed conferences
- Name the key conferences for the disciplines involved and describe faculty participation in these conferences.

- e. Leadership roles
Identify leadership roles filled by faculty members in professional organizations, especially at the national or international level.
 - f. Honors and awards
List the scholarly awards made to faculty over the last five years; briefly identify the significance of the award.
 - g. Community service related to program goals
Present a summary statement describing outstanding service related to the program's goals.
 - h. Other evidence of faculty productivity important to the academic unit.
10. Goals and objectives: Strengths and weaknesses
- The content of this section should focus on academic, development, personnel, and long and short-term planning issues. Include here program-specific educational goals and objectives and planning issues related to their achievement. Present the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the graduate program. Consider the following:
- a. Immediate and long range problems to be overcome
 - b. Opportunities for development
Describe current regional, national, or international needs that could provide career opportunities for graduates, potential partnerships with related programs, possibilities for unique research or funding or research or service projects, etc.
 - c. New degree programs
Describe new graduate programs that the academic unit plans to offer in the future. Indicate the planning stage for any new program. What is the time-line for the program? How does it complement existing programs? Are additional resources needed?
 - d. Future personnel needs
Describe the academic program's projected needs or desires in each of the above categories.
 - e. Long range goals and strategic plan for the academic unit
 - f. Specific activities leading to attainment of these goals

IV. External Review

A. Guidelines for Recommending External Reviewers

- Recommended individuals should be senior faculty members who hold the rank of professor and be respected in the profession, particularly in the areas of specialization important to the program under review.
- If a review is being conducted in anticipation of an accreditation review, some of the recommended individuals should also have a thorough knowledge of the specific accreditation procedures that will be used.
- Reviewers should be experienced in academia so that they can help realistically evaluate the program's plans for growth and development, as well as the academic content of the research and publication efforts of the faculty. Reviewers should be familiar with common academic practices, and resources at similar institutions and programs.
- It is best to avoid former mentors or close friends of faculty members, people who have taught at UNCW or applied for positions at UNCW (or are likely to apply), or people from institutions very different from UNCW.

B. Procedures

The chair should provide in a memo separate from the self-study the names, addresses, current phone numbers and email addresses of five or six recommended reviewers. For each name, provide a summary statement giving the person's qualifications, a sentence or two about how the person's expertise matches the specializations in the academic unit, and a description of the person's past experiences with the unit or its faculty members.

C. Scheduling

1. Coordination

The Graduate School coordinates the visits which are usually one and a half to two days long, with the reviewers arriving the evening before and leaving the evening or late afternoon of the second day. If you have questions, call Angie Edwards at 962-4117. She will arrange the meetings with University administrators. The department will be in charge of arranging tours of its facilities and scheduling the appropriate meetings as described below.

2. Visits with students

Some of the most helpful meetings are those with students. Because students often bring up questions for which the reviewers will want to seek answers, these meetings (two meeting times are useful) should be set up fairly early in the schedule. Brown bag lunches or coffee hours are good opportunities for

discussion. After the reviewers are introduced and their purpose explained, faculty members should leave so that the students feel free to discuss issues that either they or the reviewers may bring up.

3. Visits with faculty members

Depending on the size of the faculty, two or three meetings may be needed so that most faculty will have a chance to express their opinions. There should be a small meeting with the faculty who prepared the self-study report, and with the graduate advisory committee or other committees whose work relates to the program review. The chair should not attend these meetings with faculty.

4. Visits with departmental administrators

At least an hour should be scheduled for the reviewers to meet with the chair. Because the reviewers will usually have questions from their discussions with students and faculty, some time for this visit should be saved for late in the schedule.

5. Visits with university administrators

As part of the efforts to incorporate the results of the reviews into general university planning, meetings will be scheduled with the Provost, Dean of the Graduate School, and the dean of the appropriate college or school. The scheduled times for these meetings will be provided to the academic unit approximately one month in advance so that the rest of the schedule can be planned.

D. Evaluation Report

The reviewers should consider both the self-study report and the on-campus visit when making their evaluation of the program's quality. In their evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the program and in making recommendations for improvement, the reviewers should consider the following:

- Program quality, including the program's rationale and goals; status of accreditation (if appropriate); quality of curriculum and instruction; quality of graduate faculty; quality of graduate students; admission standards and procedures; and appropriateness of training as measured by regional/state/national need for graduates and placement of program graduates.
- Program characteristics, including any unique characteristics of the program; productivity (graduates, attrition, enrollment trends); and student scholarship.
- Support, including number, use, and remuneration of graduate teaching assistants, research assistants, or other graduate assistants; extramural support; and number of graduate faculty involved in mentoring.

- Facilities, including adequacy of laboratory and studio facilities (if applicable); equipment; library resources; computer services; classroom and office space; and general intellectual environment.
- Recommendations for improvement, including both immediate and long-term suggestions.

APPENDIX A
Suggested* Timeline for Graduate Program Review

Time*	Process
Spring	Graduate Dean notifies Chair and College/School Dean that review is scheduled in one year. Graduate Program Review Guidelines given to Chair.
August/ early September	As soon as departmental self-study committee is established, the committee meets with Chair, College/School Dean, Graduate Dean, and Provost to discuss charge.
August-November	Self-study document prepared.
November 15	Chair sends memo to Graduate Dean with names of possible external reviewers.
December 1	Self-study submitted to Graduate Dean and College/School Dean.
December 15	Self-study submitted to Provost.
December/Jan	External reviewers contacted for spring site visit and receive self-study.
February	Site visit
March 31	Report submitted to Graduate Dean by external reviewers. Graduate Dean forwards copies to Chair, College/School Dean, and Provost.
April 15	Chair meets with Provost, Graduate Dean, College/School Dean to discuss self-study, site visitors' report, and program response.
May 15	Chair submits report to College/School Dean.
June 15	College/School Dean responds to Chair's report. Copies of College/School Dean's response and Chair's report forwarded to Graduate Dean.
June 30	Graduate Dean forwards reports to Provost. Provost may schedule immediate follow-up meeting.
18 months later	Follow-up meeting

***Note: Dates may be modified to consider departmental needs and schedule.**

APPENDIX B

Sample Site Visit Schedule

Day 1

Meet site visitors at airport, etc. and take to hotel. Dinner if appropriate.

Day 2

Departmental representative escorts visitors from hotel to Graduate School.

8:30-9:15	Charge to team with Dean and Associate Dean of Graduate School.
9:30-10:30	Meet with Department Chair.
10:30-11:45	Meet with Graduate Coordinator and tour facilities.
11:45-12:30	Meet with graduate students.
12:30-1:15	Lunch with faculty.
1:15-2:00	Meet with self-study committee/faculty.
2:00-3:00	Meet with graduate students.
3:15-4:00	Additional meetings with interested faculty.
4:00-5:00	Meet with Dean of College or School.

Dinner with faculty

Day 3**

Departmental representative escorts visitors from hotel to UNCW.

8:00-9:00	Meet with Provost.
9:00-10:30	Team conference to discuss findings and to assign internal reporting functions.
10:30-11:30	Concluding interview with Chair.
11:30-12:30	Exit interview with Dean and Associate Dean of Graduate School.

** Additional departmental meetings with different committees, students, etc. may be scheduled as needed and site visit may extend into the afternoon.