Academic Quality Assessment and Development

Academic Program Review at UMass Dartmouth

AQAD Handbook: Process and Procedure

May 2008

Office of Academic Affairs
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Overview

AQAD — What it Is
Academic Quality Assessment and Development (AQAD) is a Trustee-mandated academic program review. It establishes a regular cycle of academic program reviews on all UMass campuses. Each review incorporates a self-study, a visit by external evaluators, and formation of an action plan.

On the Dartmouth campus the basic pattern is a seven year cycle. Programs covered by an external accrediting review process utilize the cycle of their accreditation process and are based substantially on that process.

AQAD reviews are applied at the department/program level to the academic majors, graduate programs, and related curricular units. AQAD focuses on program quality and effectiveness. Its results can be used as input to a variety of strategic and programmatic issues.

The process asks department faculty to gather information about their academic program and then assess academic qualities such as currency of curriculum, student successes, and faculty interests and strengths. A team of external evaluators then visits to conduct a review and prepare a written report. Consideration of the self-study and visit results produces an action plan.

The AQAD process is managed and results are applied at the campus level, by the Dean of the college and the Provost. Only an executive summary report is submitted to the President’s Office and Board of Trustees. The role that the President and Trustees play is to guarantee that the process occurs and is beneficial, not to be involved in its content or the interpretation of its results.

History and Context
AQAD is one element in a comprehensive, Trustee-mandated program called the Performance Measurement System (PMS). This system incorporates not only the AQAD review process but also a series of reports on units or functions such as libraries, K-12 outreach, research, and fundraising and a yearly data collection to monitor campus compliance with established targets or indicators.

PMS was approved by the Trustees in 1997. An ad hoc UMass committee with two representatives from each campus met during that year to draft criteria for the AQAD process. The resulting final document, UMass document T98-033, was enacted in 1998.

Each campus was charged to develop its own AQAD process and specific criteria, within the established UMass framework. An ad hoc Dartmouth committee created a document which, after administrative review on campus, received official UMass approval in 1999. This document enacts the approved 1999 UMass Dartmouth policies.

The Present Publication
This booklet organizes the UMass and the UMass Dartmouth AQAD processes and criteria into one comprehensive statement. Included are a step-by-step statement of the process, a schedule with deadlines, and the criteria and standards to be applied.

This booklet is produced by the Office of the Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, which is charged to guide the campus in the implementation of the AQAD process each year.
Ten-Year Program Review Schedule

See AQAD Schedule – Revised March 2008
Timing of the Annual Review Process — programs that do not have a formal accreditation review

The complete process is scheduled for three semesters. Processes and criteria follow in the next section of this booklet.

**Initial spring:**

- **March 1**
  By this date the Dean and (if desired) Provost’s designee have met with the department to organize the AQAD process and review criteria. An AQAD review organization has been determined; the Provost/designee is available to meet with departmental representatives and the college Dean to review process, documents, and schedule.

- **March 15**
  The Chair has submitted timeline and procedure to the Dean. The Dean will present the plan and schedule to the Provost/designee by March 30.

- **End of sem.**
  (a) *Data collection and analysis are concluded and a conceptual self-study has been drafted.*
  (b) Final schedule and plan have been submitted to the Provost/designee.

**The fall:**

- **October 1**
  The process for selecting the External Evaluation Team has begun. The process is to be concluded within the month.

- **November 1**
  By this date, arrangements for the visit will have begun. External reviewers’ visit occurs at the latest in February of the next year.

- **November 15**
  Draft of the self-study is presented to the Dean for review, changes, and approval.

- **December 15**
  The final self-study document is completed. The completed, approved self-study has been mailed to the reviewers by this date.

**Concluding spring:**

- **February 28**
  The deadline by which the external review is to occur on campus.

- **March 30**
  By this date the Dean has received the external reviewers’ report and circulated it to the department. The department may have exercised its right to submit to the Dean a “program response to the reviewer’s report.” The department will meet with the Dean to discuss findings and implications.

- **April 20**
  By this date, the department will have prepared a draft AQAD Action Plan, based on the self-study together with results of the external review, and submitted it to the Dean. Intensive discussions will result in a final Action Plan.

- **May 20**
  By this date a final Action Plan should exist. The Dean will forward review results (the self-study, external evaluators’ report, faculty response to the external report, if any) and the Action Plan to the Provost.

- **August 30**
  By this date the Provost will have submitted to the President’s Office an executive summary of this program review.
Timing of the Annual Review Process — programs with accreditation reviews

The basic elements of the AQAD review will be followed, appropriately modified to fit the schedule of the external accreditation process.

**Ongoing obligation**

The Dean of the college must keep the Office of the Provost informed about accreditation review requirements and processes. When a review is pending, the dean will inform the Provost and designee about criteria, preparation, and specific scheduling.

**During the initial planning/preparation phases for the accreditation visit**

AQAD requirements and structures need to be reviewed against those for the external accreditation process. The Dean and people assigned responsibility for the process will meet with the Provost’s designee to review how the external accreditation process will accomplish the goals of an AQAD review and plan to address any substantive gaps.

**During the external accreditation review**

Any AQAD-related additional steps will occur together with the external accreditation steps.

**As the external accreditation review reaches a conclusion**

*Results or findings from the visit will have been modified or otherwise applied so as to serve as an AQAD Action Plan.* The Dean will forward results to the Provost. By August 30 or other date as adjusted, the Provost will have submitted to the President’s Office an executive summary of this review.
I. Introduction

Academic Quality Assessment and Development (AQAD) is an important element in the university’s Performance Measurement System, approved by the UMass Board of Trustees (document T98-033). UMass Dartmouth agrees that periodic, serious review of academic programs makes a valuable contribution to our efforts to maintain excellent educational quality.

The present statement of process, procedures, and criteria is based on and implements the UMass Board of Trustees policy as interpreted for the Dartmouth campus. Our campus interpretation, “Academic Quality Assessment and Development: Campus Procedures,” — from which this document is derived — was submitted to and approved by the Office of the UMass Vice President for Academic Affairs in April 1999.

II. Definitions and Purpose of AQAD

In AQAD, what is a “program”? The focus of the AQAD reviews is the academic majors and graduate programs, grouped by the academic department or other unit that offers them. Because AQAD concerns resources, faculty, etc., the unit is usually an academic department. (For interdepartmental academic units, the “department” role will be carried out by the program faculty identified for that unit and the “department chairperson” role will be carried out by the program’s director or coordinator.)

AQAD Review Cycle: UMass Dartmouth maintains a ten-year schedule of programs to be reviewed. The schedule, shown on page 2 of this booklet, lists each program and indicates the academic years in which its AQAD review is to be conducted. The Office of the Provost will maintain this list and determine the official cycle.

AQAD in Relation to Program Accreditation Reviews: In accordance with the guidelines, UMass Dartmouth has integrated into the AQAD process reviews that occur for formal program accreditation, as shown in our review cycle list. The President’s Office has approved this cycle in all cases, including Nursing and Clinical Laboratory Sciences which have 8 year accreditation review cycles. In cases where accreditation reviews cover only a part of the AQAD-required review, we will add the additional review activities needed to fill in the gaps.

The Purpose of an AQAD Review: The AQAD process asks department faculty to assess academic qualities such as currency of curriculum, student successes, and faculty interests and strengths. Specific criteria are listed later in this document. Each review incorporates a self-study, a visit by external evaluators, and formation of an action plan. AQAD focuses on program quality and effectiveness. Its results can be used as input to a variety of strategic and programmatic decisions.

The Results of an AQAD Review—the Action Plan: The AQAD process culminates in the approved Action Plan that is arrived at in a consultative process between the Dean and the unit being reviewed. The Action Plan indicates how the program or department intends to address any issues raised during the review and establishes programmatic priorities for the next review period.

Reporting of Results: The AQAD process is managed and results are applied, at the campus level, by the Dean of the college and the Provost. Only an executive summary
report is submitted to the President's Office and Board of Trustees. The role that the President and Trustees play is to guarantee that the process occurs and is beneficial, not to be involved in its content or the interpretation of its results.

III. Process of the Review

The timing of the review is outlined in the charts on pages 3 and 4. This section repeats the schedule, followed by detailed processes and criteria.

III.A. For programs that do not have an external accreditation review

This specific schedule and procedure are followed for programs that do not have a structure determined by an external accreditation review.

*The initial spring is used to organize the AQAD project, collect information, and prepare a conceptual draft self-study.*

**March 1**  
By this date the Dean and (if desired) Provost’s designee have met with the department to organize the AQAD process and review criteria. An AQAD review organization has been determined; the Provost/designee is available to meet with departmental representatives and the college Dean to review process, documents, and schedule.

**March 15**  
The Chair has submitted timeline and procedure to Dean. The Dean will present the plan and schedule to the Provost/designee by March 30.

**End of sem.**  
(a) *Data collection and analysis are concluded and a conceptual self-study has been drafted.*

(b) Final schedule and plan have been submitted to the Provost/designee.

*Organization*

The department chairperson may take on the leadership role for AQAD or may name an AQAD program chair, and the department may identify team leaders for one or more task forces to handle aspects of the review.

The Provost/designee will be available to meet with the chairperson, AQAD program chair, team leaders, and college Dean to review the steps in the process, the required written documents, the process for the external review, and the overall schedule.

The department will present to the Dean a timeline and procedure for preparation of the self-study document and the subsequent review activities, and the Dean will address any modifications proposed to the process or schedule, consulting the Provost/designee as needed.

*Each department (program) will prepare a self-assessment document (self-study).*

These self-studies have the following features:

- Each assessment will be based on approved goals/objectives or a planning statement for the unit, which indicates how the general goals and specific objectives for the program fit within the mission and strategic objectives of the college and campus.
- The self-study will (a) describe the program’s objectives, structure, curriculum, and content; faculty and other resources; students served; and methods for program and learning outcomes evaluation and program improvement; (b) provide information and data required in the AQAD process; and (c) provide a self-analysis of strengths and steps to effect improvement and realize planning goals. Key concerns will be program competitiveness, student types, enrollments and degrees awarded, and the effective
use of resources.

- Information required in the AQAD process shall address the AQAD policy’s “Core Criteria and Related Questions.” That list is given in the following section.
- The structure of the main report shall be narrative, interpolating or appending data and indicators as appropriate.
- A significant presentation and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data are required, as established in Section V.

Fall semester is used to complete the self-study document and organize the external visit.

October 1  The process for selecting the External Evaluation Team has begun. The process is to be concluded within the month.
November 1  By this date, arrangements for the visit will have begun.
November 15  Draft of the self-study is presented to the Dean for review, changes, and approval.
December 15  The final self-study document is completed. The completed, approved self-study has been mailed to the reviewers by this date.
February 28  The deadline by which the external review is to occur on campus.

Approval of the self-study document

A draft of the self-study is presented to the Dean for review, changes, and approval. The Dean may require changes before a final version is given to the external reviewers.

Each department (or program) will receive an external review:

- Each Department will be reviewed by a team of external evaluators.
- There shall be at least two external members in a team. (Only one may be from another UMass campus.) Reviewers shall have recognized stature and expertise in the academic area of review and should be able to give an unbiased review that is not influenced by previous or existing relationships with the department.
- After consultation with the department chairperson and AQAD leaders and through them the faculty, the Dean will identify appropriate reviewers in a ranked list of final choices. Availability will determine final choice of the two reviewers. The dean may direct specific questions for the external evaluators to address in addition to the general review charge.
- The Provost must approve the final external evaluation team. In a formal letter, the Provost invites them to campus and conveys the charge to the review team. The charge is to apply the “Core Criteria and Related Questions.” The Dean may also direct specific questions for the external evaluators to address.
- An honorarium is provided to the reviewers by the Office of Academic Affairs, which also contributes to the funding for travel, lodging, and meals. The Provost/designee maintains a budget for this purpose, allocating approximately equal amounts for each unit being reviewed; if circumstances require additional expense, cost sharing is negotiated.
- In sufficient time before their visit, the external team will receive copies of the self-study and other materials.
- While on campus the review team will tour facilities and meet with at least the following: program faculty, students, and administrators. One meeting is with the
Dean (alone), another with the Provost and designee (alone).

- After their visit, the team will prepare a written report and forward it to the Dean. (Reviewers will not receive their honoraria until after their report arrives on campus.)
- The Dean will forward copies of the external review report to the unit’s faculty, who may prepare a written response.

The external visit occurs early in the concluding spring and is followed by preparation of the AQAD Action Plan. Results are reported.

February 28 The deadline by which the external review is to occur on campus.

March 30 By this date the Dean has received the external reviewers’ report and circulated it to the department. The department may have exercised its right to submit to the Dean a “program response to the reviewer’s report.” The department will meet with the Dean to discuss findings and implications.

April 20 By this date, the department will have prepared a draft AQAD Action Plan, based on the self-study together with results of the external review, and submitted it to the Dean. Intensive discussions will result in a final Action Plan.

May 20 By this date a final Action Plan should exist. The Dean will forward review results (the self-study, external evaluators’ report, faculty response to the external report, if any) and the Action Plan to the Provost.

August 30 By this date the Provost will have submitted to the President’s Office an executive summary of this program review.

In response to the external review, the department will prepare an Action Plan:

- The department will prepare a draft Action Plan based on their self-study together with results of the external review, forwarding it to the Dean.

  This Action Plan is the key product of the AQAD program review process, indicating how the program or department intends to address any issues raised during the review and establishing programmatic priorities for the next seven-year period. The Action Plan should address not only immediate issues but whether subsequent actions are needed once the review itself is concluded.

- Intensive discussions between the Dean and department result in this final Action Plan. The goal is to produce an Action Plan acceptable to the department, approved by the Dean, and endorsed by the Provost.

Results will be reported to the Provost and then, in summary, to the Office of the President.

- The Dean will forward review results (the self-study, external evaluators’ report, faculty response to the external report, if any) and the Action Plan to the Provost.

- The Provost must submit to the President’s Office an executive summary of the program review thus concluded. The documents comprising a review shall not be circulated beyond the campus.

III B. For programs with a formal accreditation review:

The basic elements of the AQAD review will be followed, appropriately modified to accord with the structure and processes of the external review. The schedule will be based on the timing of the external accreditation process.
It is expected that the Dean of the college must keep the Office of the Provost informed about accreditation review requirements and processes. When a review is pending, the Dean will inform the Provost about criteria, preparation, and specific scheduling.

An important activity at this stage is to determine if the criteria and measures in the accreditation review are congruent with those specified for AQAD. If AQAD elements are not covered, they shall be reviewed as additional activities. The Dean and people assigned responsibility for the process will meet with the Provost’s designee to review how the external accreditation process will accomplish the goals of an AQAD review and plan to address any substantive gaps. For example, if an accreditation review covers only undergraduate programs, graduate programs must also be reviewed. If an accreditation review does not require an on-site visit, an AQAD on-site visit will occur.

At the conclusion of the external accreditation process, results or findings from the visit are modified or otherwise applied so as to serve as an AQAD Action Plan. An Action Plan is the key product of the AQAD program review process for programs with external accreditation reviews as well as those without them. The Action Plan indicates how the program or department intends to address any issues raised during the review and establishes programmatic priorities for the next review period.

The Action Plan is presented to the Dean for approval and then forwarded to the Provost. The goal is to produce an Action Plan acceptable to the department, approved by the Dean, and endorsed by the Provost.

As is the case with the non-external-accreditation AQAD reviews, the Dean will forward the AQAD Action Plan and other review results to the Provost, and the Provost will submit to the President’s Office an executive summary of the program review thus concluded. The documents comprising a review shall not be circulated beyond the campus.
IV. Core Criteria and Related Questions That Must Be Addressed in the AQAD Review

This section states criteria and questions for the reviews. Each review must specifically address these criteria. These are stated directly from the UMass AQAD policy document, and as such they apply to all UMass campuses.

Reviews should follow the structure of these criteria as an organizing outline for the self-study report.

1) **Programs shall ensure that their goals and objectives are linked to the campus mission and strategic priorities.**
   The program should evaluate its purpose and planning in light of the campus mission and strategic priorities. The review should answer the following questions:
   - What is the program’s mission and how well is it clearly aligned with the campus mission and direction?
   - How does the program’s mission relate to curriculum; enrollments; faculty teaching, research/professional/creative activity, and outreach? How well is it aligned with the campus strategic priorities?

2) **Programs shall ensure that curriculum is relevant, rigorous, current and coherent.**
   The need to provide a high quality education for students should be the primary consideration when evaluating the relevancy, currency, and coherence of curricula. Evaluation of the curriculum should reflect an awareness of changing knowledge, trends in the discipline, and the professional context for curriculum. The review should answer the following questions:
   - How does the program determine curricular content? How well does the curriculum relate to current existing standards of the discipline?
   - What internal or external measures of review are employed to ensure that the curriculum is relevant and up-to-date? How does the program assess its achievement of defined objectives and how successful is the program at using the results for improvement?
   - Are the curricular offerings structured in a logical, sequential and coherent manner?
   - Is there an appropriate balance between breadth and depth?
   - If consistent with the program mission, how well does the curriculum adequately prepare students for further study or employment?
   - In what ways does the program contribute to the education of students in terms of general knowledge, critical thinking capacity and other essential cognitive skills?

3) **Programs shall ensure faculty quality and productivity.**
   Programs shall ensure that faculty possess the expertise to assure effective curriculum development, instructional design and delivery, and evaluation of outcomes. Faculty should exhibit awareness of trends in the discipline and the professional field as appropriate. Collectively, faculty should be involved in teaching, research/professional/creative activity, and public service/academic outreach as appropriate to the mission and regional context of the campus. The review should answer the following questions:
   - How appropriate are the faculty’s background, experience, and credentials?
   - Discuss faculty currency in relation to the knowledge base and content of the discipline and curricular offerings?
   - Are the program’s expectations for faculty involvement in teaching, research/professional/creative activity, and public service/academic outreach activities...
appropriate; and how are these expectations met? Are these expectations consistent with program policies regarding teaching assignments, merit allocations, and other aspects of faculty roles and rewards?

- How successfully does the program foster professional development and growth of faculty?
- How successfully does the program faculty lend its professional expertise – as expressed through teaching and research, scholarly and creative activity – to off-campus constituencies?

4) **Programs shall ensure teaching/learning environments that facilitate student success.**

Programs shall provide learning environments that promote student success. Students are expected to learn both content and skills appropriate to the discipline. The program should indicate clear expectations for student learning outcomes. The teaching/learning environment should be accessible to all students, should include a variety of instructional methodologies, and should provide timely feedback to students. The review should answer the following questions:

- To what extent does the program have articulated learning outcomes (content and skills) for students? By what means are these outcomes measured? Are they achieved by most students? How successful is the program at using the results for improvement?
- How well is assessment of student learning outcomes used in reviewing or evaluating program curriculum and faculty?
- How successfully does the program evaluate student success following graduation and the programs’ contribution to that success?
- What is the role of the core faculty in teaching lower division, upper division and graduate courses? What is the rationale for these assignments?

5) **Programs shall ensure that resources are used wisely.**

Programs shall ensure that the resources available are used to meet program goals and objectives, and, as appropriate, engage in use of innovation to enhance resources; should engage in both intra- and inter-campus collaboration; and should demonstrate a commitment to effective and efficient use of resources. The review should answer the following questions:

- What process does the program use to allocate resources?
- In what ways and how well does the program maximize the use of its human resources?
- In what ways and how well does the program maximize the use of material resources such as space, equipment, operating funds, etc.?
V. Core Data and Other Data to Be Used in AQAD Reviews

Data for Use in the Reviews

The core data for UMass Dartmouth will be an annual series of standard tables that present information about budgets, faculty, students, instructional activities, and so forth, for all departments of the campus—the AQAD Databook. The core data are sources of facts and attributes to be used in the analyses but are not co-extensive with the analyses.

Annually the Office of the Provost will prepare the core data tables about all programs and distribute them to all academic units, through the Office of Institutional Research, Planning, and Assessment. We will do this (a) to allow each unit to know consistent information about itself and all other units; and (b) to provide a sequence of consistent data reports across the time periods between each unit’s individual review.

The Office of Institutional Research, Assessment, and Planning will also provide a standard department-level report that assembles key information separately for each department. A number of areas in the core data will depend on departmental records or data collection. Other data resources available include the standard campus statistical publications, retention/graduation study, etc.

Uses of the Core Data and Other Data

Every AQAD review must use the core data in its analyses and address the issues raised therein. The core data tables are intended (a) to foster consistent application of information and (b) to insure coverage of the key facts in the AQAD self-analyses. Their interpretation will differ in specific departmental and programmatic contexts.

- A significant presentation and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data are required in the self-study. The presentation and analysis will cover at least the following aspects:
  - program competitiveness
  - student types
  - enrollments and degrees awarded
  - effective use of resources (resources available—budgetary and also physical and human resources—and how the program uses them)

- The Office of the Provost will design a minimum table of data that AQAD reviews are expected to provide and analyze. A department may add additional tables and other presentations of data.

- A department may bring in additional information that helps interpret the core data or that adds to it. In some areas, such as discussions of resource use and faculty productivity, focused interpretation will be required. Furthermore, it is expected that the core data will be analyzed in terms of key ratios such as student/faculty ratios, cost/benefit ratios, and so forth. Rather than stating a specific set of these ratios, however, we expect these to derive from the department’s responses to AQAD’s “core criteria and related questions.”

- In addition, it is expected that each department will assemble systematic data and information about curriculum standards, faculty productivity and qualifications, and learning outcomes to support the AQAD “core criteria and related questions.” Departments will base their presentation and analysis of information on their approved departmental assessment programs.