UMass | Dartmouth

University of Massachusetts Dartmouth

**Procedures for Academic Quality Assessments
and Development (AQAD)**

Incorporating University of Massachusetts System
Guidelines (Trustee Doc. T98-033)

Office of the Provost

Office of Institutional Research and Assessment
October 2019

Introduction

What is an AQAD? The Academic Quality Assessment and Development (AQAD) process is a component of the UMass System's Performance Measurement System and is required of all academic units. The primary purpose of AQAD is to assess the core academic functions of teaching, learning, research/professional/creative activity, public service, and academic outreach on a regular basis. Each UMass campus has established procedures for implementing AQADs that are in accordance with System-level guidelines adopted by the Board of Trustees (Doc. T98-033). In this document, "department" and "program" are used interchangeably to reference a unit undergoing review.

The System guidelines require that programs be reviewed at least every seven years, but UMass Dartmouth has approval for some variances in order to match external review (e.g., accreditation) schedules.

How can AQAD be used to assist a department/program? An AQAD review is a tool that can be used to guide the pedagogical development and intellectual future of a department or program. It is an opportunity to assess its current state and ensure that the department has clear strategic goals in teaching, research, learning outcomes, and creative activity that are aligned with campus priorities and at the leading edge of the discipline. Although all AQADs must address the same general core criteria (see Appendix) using the same general procedures, both the content and process may, with the approval of the Dean and Provost, be adjusted somewhat to suit a particular unit's needs.

A common misconception. Not infrequently, the AQAD process is viewed primarily as a way of making the case for additional faculty lines or other resources (e.g., increased graduate stipends). This approach misconceives the role of AQAD. Requests for additional resources are made through the annual budget process, not AQAD. For units that are not externally accredited, AQAD provides a mechanism by which the units can evaluate currency of curriculum, and identify opportunities for improving program outcomes and student learning outcomes. Departments are encouraged to use the AQAD process to also think about internal reallocation of existing resources. Examples include updating curricula and course offerings, increased instructional or student supports, and evaluation of pre-requisite structures to improve retention and graduation rates.

Parts of an AQAD. An AQAD minimally consists of four documents: a program self-assessment that addresses the Core Criteria (See Appendix), a report from external reviewers, a program response to the external report that includes an action plan developed by the unit and reviewed by the Dean, and a President's office executive summary from the Provost. The conclusion of the AQAD process is a meeting of the department Chair, the Dean, and the Provost.

1. The centerpiece of the self-assessment is a short (@ 20 page) narrative that describes the current state of the unit, its aspirations, and the key issues that it faces (CVs or tabular data can be added as appendices). The narrative should be developed in consultation with the Dean so that there is a common understanding of review goals. College/School strategic planning documents will prove very useful (when appropriately updated to add new data and/or address additional topics) in the preparation of the self-assessment.

2. The Dean, in consultation with the department Chair and faculty, will identify a team of at least two external reviewers, one of whom can be from another campus in the UMass system. Ideally, reviewers will come from public research universities and will have administrative experience at the level of a Department Chair or higher. The Dean and Department Chair or designee will work together to determine the emphasis of the visiting team's review, and the Provost will have the opportunity to identify specific issues or questions that should be addressed. The Provost will approve external review team membership. The review team is charged with providing a written report based on the self-study, the questions posed by the

Dean and Provost, and their experience on campus.

3. The key product of the AQAD process is the action plan, which specifies how the Department plans to address any issues identified in the written report by the external reviewers. The action plan should also indicate whether any subsequent action is needed once the review itself is completed (e.g., follow-up on specific issues, earlier-than-normal subsequent review, etc.)

4. The President's Office report (also required for external reviews) should include a brief summary of the major findings and action plans. Specific information required for the report includes the following questions:
   - Does the department have articulated learning outcomes?
   - What means are identified to measure student attainment of those outcomes?
   - How does the department use the assessment data on student learning outcomes?
   - How have freshmen retention and graduation rates changed since last review?

Timeline and Steps of the AQAD Review Process

Timelines	Activities
Fall (Year and a half prior to reviewers' site visit)	The Provost or designee/s, Department Chair, the Dean, and the Director of OIRA meet to review procedures, answer questions, and discuss information needs. If the AQAD coincides with a disciplinary re-accreditation, the extent of the overlap will be discussed, and a determination made as to what (if anything) needs to be done beyond accreditation requirements. OIRA provides data for the self-study and can meet with the department to review the evidence and assist in the interpretation of the data (see Appendix). Dean recommends external review team to the Provost. After approval of external reviewers, the Department begins to schedule external review and surrounding activities. The Department Chair sends a letter to reviewers that includes the Academic Quality Assessment and Development Guidelines.
Fall (Year and a half prior to reviewers' visit)	The Dean meets with department representatives to discuss the emphasis of self-study, with the assumption that areas of greatest concern will receive the greatest attention. A one-page summary of the self-study strategy is prepared by the department and forwarded to the Dean and the Provost for feedback. Department begins self-study.
November (Semester prior to visit)	Dean, in consultation with department, finalizes the emphasis of external review and submits it to the Provost for approval.
January 15 (Same semester as spring visit)	Department submits completed draft self-study to Dean and Provost for review.
6 weeks prior to visit	Department sends the self-study to the visiting team. Consider posting ancillary documents (CVs, tabular data, course syllabi, etc.) on-line for the reviewers' ease of access.

	The Dean sends the visiting team a letter, thanking them in advance for their service and laying out some areas of focus for the review.
February - March	External reviewers visit. The Provost presents the review committee with its charge during an entrance interview and conducts an exit interview at the end of their visit.
April 15th	The visiting team delivers its report to the department, with copies to the Dean and the Provost.
May 15th	The department submits a written response to the report and an action plan to the Dean.
June 1st	The Dean reviews and provides written comments on the report, response, and action plan to the faculty. The faculty may then respond to the Dean's comments.
June 15th	The Dean forwards the self-study, the visiting team's report, the department's response and action plan, the Dean's comments, and faculty responses to the Dean's comments (if any) to the Provost. The Provost accepts the Dean's review.
June 30th	The Provost's Office meets with the Dean and the Department Chair to discuss the review and the action plan, if finalized.
October	The Provost forwards an executive summary of the review to the President's Office.

Appendix: Core Criteria for the Self-Study

Institutional data to address these questions are available through the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (OIRA; https://www.umassd.edu/oir/).

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 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? 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 does the curriculum relate to current existing standards, if any, of the discipline?

    - What internal or external measures of review are employed to ensure that the curriculum is relevant and up-to-date?

    - 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, does the curriculum adequately prepare students for further study or employment?

    - In what way 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:

    - Do faculty possess the appropriate background, experience and credentials?

    - Are the program 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?

- In what ways does the program foster professional development and growth of faculty?

- In what ways 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 is assessment of student learning outcomes used in reviewing or evaluating program curriculum and faculty?

- In what ways does the Program evaluate student success following graduation and the program's 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?

- Metrics on freshman and overall retention and graduation rates shall be provided for the period since the previous AQAD review.

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 does the program maximize the use of its human resources?

- In what ways does the program maximize the use of material resources, such as space, equipment, operating funds, etc.?