

## **Program Review – Best Practices for a Successful Self-Study Process**

### **THE SELF STUDY**

In preparation for the review, the program conducts a self-study which provides an opportunity for the program to assess its strengths, identify areas for improvement and delineate its future goals. The self-study materials describe the current status of the program, including data about student characteristics, curriculum, faculty research and scholarship, etc. Particular emphasis is placed on the program's future goals and specific plans for attaining those goals.

### **TIMELINE**

- Start as early as possible on the self-study planning. Most programs take six months to a year to complete the self-study process.
- Define faculty and graduate student roles to coordinate key sections of the report and collectively agree to a timeline.
- Allow additional time for the self-study if the unit intends to hold retreats or administer surveys to faculty, students and alumni to secure feedback.

### **FORMAT**

- The manual, *Program Review at UNC-Chapel Hill*, includes guidelines for the format and structure of the self-study, sample data reports, as well as instructions on where to find data on campus.
- Most successful self-studies include a narrative with key figures and charts at the front, and then include all the supporting documents and additional data in appendices.
- Outline what will be included in which chapters. This step also ensures the same information is not repeated in multiple sections.
- The self-study should be bound or in ring binders, with a table of contents, and tabbed or otherwise easily identifiable sections. Double-sided pages save in space and costs.
- Many programs also choose to include an electronic copy of their self-study materials (e.g. a flash drive or an interactive CD) for ease in traveling and accessing material on a laptop computer. Use electronic media wherever possible instead of printing out large sums of paper, especially for faculty CVs, course syllabi, and other reference materials.
- Keep your review team members in mind as you develop and format your self-study. Consider the format and size you would want to read and travel with if you were on the receiving end of the package.
- Samples of the most recent program self-studies are available for review in The Graduate School. We also have a package of materials that represent best practice examples from some program's materials.

## **PROCESS ADVICE**

- The self-study is not intended to be one individual or group's perspective on the academic program. It should be a *collaborative* process with ownership by the entire unit.
- To start, discuss the main goals for the program review. What do you want feedback about?
- Consider forming talking/discussion groups from the entire faculty to develop issues, opinions and commentary on the self-study. Divide all faculty using neutral criteria (e.g., alphabetically) so everyone has a sense of involvement. Provide each group with a set of broad questions about the program, and allow a leader/chair to report back to the full faculty on the discussions.
- Select a core group to write a draft of the self-study report.
- Allow ample time for review and feedback by each discussion group and among the full faculty. Comment and revise until consensus is reached.
- Allow one or two faculty to serve as editors for the final draft. They can edit for tone and language, similar formatting, and other steps to ensure consistency across the different sections. They should not necessarily edit content to mirror only their own perspectives.
- Involve graduate students where appropriate, especially when assessing the status of the graduate program. Graduate students have a vested interest in the well-being of their program, and this involvement will also help prepare them for their future careers.
- Holding off-campus retreats, meetings, or even informal gatherings can be helpful when discussing the self-study ideas.

*For more information, please see the Program Review website at: <http://gradschool.unc.edu/policies/program-review/>*