A CHECKLIST AND GUIDE FOR REVIEWING DEPARTMENTS OF ENGLISH

ASSOCIATION OF DEPARTMENTS OF ENGLISH
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Preface

The impetus for creating the documents contained in this volume grew out of an ADE committee recommendation, made in 1983, that ADE concern itself with the quality of English programs and therefore with departmental evaluation. As a first step, in the fall of 1983, an ad hoc committee developed a checklist that could be used by departments interested in self-study. The ADE Executive Committee reviewed and amended this committee's draft in March 1984, participants at the 1984 summer seminars suggested additional changes, and in December the Executive Committee approved the revised version for publication. As the “Checklist for Departmental Self-Study” began to take on final form, the Executive Committee decided that a companion document aimed at external reviewers of departments would provide a useful supplement and charged a second ad hoc committee with the task of developing “A Guide for External Reviewers.” This committee’s essay was approved with the “Checklist” in December 1984.

The primary purpose of the “Checklist” is departmental self-study, undertaken at the request of the institution or of the department. Most self-studies are initiated by institutions as part of institutional evaluations, but a number of departments also initiate periodic reviews of all or some of their activities. The results of these independent reviews are not distributed outside the department without the department's approval. Often such reviews serve as useful preliminaries to planning new courses or programs; at other times they provide the information needed to make a case for the effectiveness of a department's programs or its need for additional staff or other resources. Frequently they warn department members about weaknesses and encourage them about strengths. When done with good will, a review initiated by a department for its own use brings department members together for constructive talk about their work. For these reasons the authors of the “Checklist” and “Guide” view self-study as essential to maintaining and improving the quality of English departments and their programs.

The “Checklist” and the “Guide for External Reviewers” attempt to capture the collective wisdom of those who have participated in many reviews, who have considered the problems and the possibilities of review, and who are convinced of the need for self-study in colleges and universities. Because the “Checklist” is designed to be comprehensive enough for use in a wide variety of departments, few departments are likely to respond to all questions. And the questions themselves have various purposes. Many call only for simple description, so evaluation will depend on the department's situation; others suggest professional standards. The most searching—and perhaps the most crucial—require a department to evaluate a particular aspect of its work in terms of its objectives. The authors of the “Checklist” think it is most effective when all members of a department participate in the review. In large departments the initial work may have to be done by an executive committee or by an ad hoc committee, but the entire department should have the opportunity to comment on the initial work, to suggest changes, and to see the results of the assessment.

For many years departments have been reviewed by department members and by visitors from outside the department and institution, but few attempts have been made to establish a particular form for these reviews or to assess the effectiveness of the review process. Frequently departments must either take the time to invent their own forms for self-study or utilize institutional forms that may not be appropriate for them. The “Checklist” and the “Guide” can both simplify the task of self-assessment and provide a common basis for review among English departments. The Executive Committee invites comments about the strengths and weaknesses of the “Checklist,” which will be kept under review and revised as necessary.

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A Checklist for Departmental Self-Study

Introduction

1. What is the purpose of this self-study? How will the self-study be conducted? Who will participate in it? Who will see the report?
2. How is the department likely to react to the self-study? What is likely to be done as a result of it?

I. Aims

1. What are the department's major short-term and long-term aims? What does the department want to be distinguished for in the next five years?
2. Have the aims of the department—and hence its nature and functions—changed substantially in the last five years? If so, how and why? Does the department anticipate that its aims—and hence its nature and functions—may change in the next five years? If so, how and why?
   • In identifying aims, how does the department distinguish between undergraduate and graduate education? general and specialized education? conventional and continuing education?
   • In identifying aims, what role does the department give to developmental courses, ESL courses, basic skills courses, introductory courses, and general education courses?
   • In identifying the aims of the undergraduate program, what priority does the department give to training in skills and techniques? to disseminating information? to encouraging an understanding of humanistic issues?
   • In identifying the aims of the graduate program, what priority does the department give to humanistic education? to professional training? to writing theory as well as to literary theory and the study of literature? to training in creative and expository writing? to providing internships in relevant nonteaching jobs as well as in teaching?
   • In identifying aims at every level, what priority does the department give to innovation? Identify specific courses and programs that reflect innovations.
   • Where are the aims of the department stated? How are they communicated to faculty, especially new faculty, and to students? How are they used in planning or making decisions?
3. How do the aims of the department relate to the mission of the institution as a whole? to the role of the department in the college? to the needs and interests of the students?
4. How do the aims of the department relate to the recognized (i.e., traditional) aims of English departments? to the aims and activities of departments in nearby, competing institutions? to the needs of the region? to American society as a whole?

II. Courses and Programs

Statistical Information. Undergraduate and graduate: list of programs offered, dates of inception, of most recent revision; program enrollments over the last ten years; student credit hour by course and level; cost per student credit hour. Graduate programs only: number of students admitted to each program; number of degree recipients; average time to complete each program.*

*Statistical information is often more useful if presented in chart form.
Undergraduate Courses and Programs

1. What is the rationale for the undergraduate curriculum? for the numbering of courses? for course sequencing? for requirements and prerequisites? How was the curriculum developed? How have the programs changed in the last five years?

2. Is the plan of each degree program explicit? Who is responsible for reviewing each plan and program? What do enrollment figures suggest about the future of the various programs?

3. Describe the department’s nontraditional degree programs, such as a weekend college. What is the rationale for each program? How is each program staffed? evaluated? Are there distinct staffing patterns and assignments for each program? Are there differences in status among the programs? How do these programs relate to other courses and programs offered by the department?

4. How does the department encourage double majors? minors in English? What courses above the freshman level are intended primarily for nonmajors? Should the department give greater emphasis to courses for nonmajors? Which, if any, courses are restricted in enrollment?

5. What nondegree programs other than freshman English does the department sponsor? What is the rationale for these programs? Does the person who supervises a nondegree program have special qualifications? How is the person appointed and evaluated? How are such programs evaluated? How do these programs relate to the degree programs, if at all?

6. What is the rationale for the writing program (include freshman, developmental, and remedial courses and programs)? On what theories of writing is it based? On what theories of reading? On what theories of composition are used? What proportions of the department's total enrollments are generated by this program? How are students assigned to writing courses? Is the process satisfactory? How much writing are the students required to do? What kinds of writing? Is there any attempt to correlate the writing in this course with writing in other college courses? Is the freshman course supplemented by a writing center? Describe the organization and functions of the center. What is the relation between the training in the freshman course and that in advanced writing courses? What system of grading is used? Is it satisfactory? Describe the training program for those teaching composition. What approaches are used? What rank does the director of freshman writing hold in the department? In what ways do those holding professorial rank in the department participate in the writing program? What percentage of the classes in freshman composition is taught by part-time instructors? What is their rate of pay? When are they notified of their appointments? Are they voting members of the department? What is done to maintain their morale?

7. Describe the department’s honors courses and programs. What is the department’s attitude toward these courses?

8. How does the department distribute its resources in support of its various programs and courses? What institutional or departmental constraints are there on this distribution?

Graduate Courses and Programs

1. Describe each of the graduate degree programs. What is the rationale for each graduate degree program and how is that rationale related to the overall aims of the department?

2. How is the rationale for each degree program reflected in the breakdown between regularly offered courses and individual study? in the foreign language requirement? in the breadth and depth of the comprehensive examination? in the emphasis given the thesis or dissertation? in the makeup of the instructional staff?
3. Describe the mechanisms by which graduate programs are begun, reviewed, and altered. What are the requirements of each of the current programs? Describe how the department tries to balance the interests of faculty members and the demands of students and programs in designing the graduate curriculum.

4. What is the administrative structure of the graduate program? What committees are involved? How are students involved in this structure? Do graduate courses tend to be "owned" by senior professors, or is there a policy that rotates courses among qualified faculty?

5. Describe any extension, outreach, or continuing education component within the graduate program. What commitment, if any, does the department have to nontraditional students?

6. In what ways have graduate programs changed during the past five years? What changes are now being contemplated?

7. What proportion of departmental effort is allocated to the graduate program?

**Development and Description of Courses**

1. How are new courses developed? To what extent and how frequently are courses and course patterns reviewed? On what basis are decisions made to add, drop, and modify courses?

2. Do published documents designed for students realistically describe the department's courses and programs? Are the documents consistent with one another? What assumptions about the aims of the department do they express or imply? Are students and faculty members asked to review these documents periodically to see whether they are congruent with actual practice?

3. How do the department's courses fit into the institution's general education requirements?

**Teaching**

**Kinds**

1. What teaching methods are used in the department? To what extent has the department discussed teaching methods?

2. What support is offered (equipment, released time) to help faculty members strengthen their teaching and implement designs for their courses?

3. What encouragement or discouragement is provided for varying teaching methods?

**Uniformity and Standards**

1. How are standards determined and maintained? How does the department attempt to keep grading reasonably uniform? How does it handle the faculty member who grades far too generously or too harshly?

2. Does the department make regular attempts, by peer observation or other ways, to assess teaching excellence and to make this information available to the individual teachers? What role do students play in the evaluation of courses and teachers? What instruments are used for student evaluation?

3. To what extent do administrators of multiple-section courses make available to faculty members scholarly publications, research reports, and other information that might improve the content and teaching of courses? What measures does the department take to establish uniform standards in these courses? Is there a common syllabus, the shared reading of papers and examinations? How is the amount of work required of students determined? How is this done in single-section courses?

4. What kind of support is provided part-time, new, or troubled faculty members to ensure standards?
5. How are student complaints about instruction handled? Are there ways to remedy problems if the complaints are deemed valid?
6. Do faculty members teaching overlapping courses (e.g., American realism, American novel) meet annually to ensure a minimum of duplication in assigned texts and class work?

Evidence of Effectiveness

1. What data (e.g., statistical data on majors and minors, success of transfer students, registration in elective courses, degrees conferred) does the department currently rely on to describe the effectiveness of its courses and programs?
2. What ongoing self-evaluation procedures are in place in the department?
3. What short-range and long-range anecdotal evidence (e.g., conversations with students, surveys of alumni, exit interviews) does the department currently use to determine the effectiveness of its courses and programs?
4. If uniform tests are used, are these measures valid and reliable? Did the department participate in their design or choice? How does the department use these data in advising or placing students in designing and staffing courses?
5. What measures other than the above has the department devised to evaluate the humanistic effects of its courses and programs?
6. Describe the areas in which the department’s graduate programs are particularly strong by national professional standards. What evidence supports this view? Describe strengths that might not be reflected in a national ranking. What evidence supports this view?
7. What do current and recent graduate students think of the graduate program? What methods were and are used to solicit their views?

Out-of-Class Opportunities

1. What special programs, colloquiums, clubs, and informal get-togethers does the department sponsor? Who participates in these? What do current students and alumni say about these activities?
2. What, if any, “life experience” credits are available to students? What criteria are used as the basis for assigning such credit?
3. What opportunities, if any, for independent study are available for students? How is independent study supervised?
4. How does the department recognize students’ accomplishments, especially in writing and research outside the classroom?
5. What efforts are made to involve graduate students in professional associations and professional activities?
6. To what extent do students participate in the production of departmental publications?

III. Faculty

Characteristics

Statistical Information. Distribution in terms of age, rank, sex, ethnic origin, final degree, schools granting degrees, and specializations; number of part-time faculty and types of assignments, number of students they teach, and percentage of department’s courses they teach. Prepare a summary of types and number of publications and awards, teaching activities, and innovations.
1. What proportion of the faculty has achieved recognition for teaching? for scholarship? for participating in professional activities? What proportion has a reputation that extends beyond the limits of the institution? In what ways is this recognition useful to the department?

2. What is the nature and significance of the faculty’s publications and research? How do they influence the department’s courses and programs? What are the prospects for promotion on non-tenured faculty?

3. What is the rationale for the composition of the faculty in terms of fields of specialization?

4. In what ways does the faculty participate in professional associations and activities? In what ways does the faculty participate in community service and activities? How does this participation influence the department’s courses and programs?

5. How do faculty members demonstrate ability in teaching? How does the concern for teaching influence the department’s courses and programs?

6. Is election or appointment to the graduate faculty necessary for teaching in the graduate program? If so, what are the requirements for such status? How are faculty members with a primary or heavy commitment to graduate teaching viewed in relation to other faculty members? Are the two groups identical? If not, how are they differentiated?

7. What policies govern the employment of temporary and part-time teachers? Who is responsible for formulating these policies?

8. What is the status of the department with reference to affirmative-action guidelines? What efforts are being made to redress imbalances? How important is affirmative action to members of the department? to students?

9. What is the composition of the faculty in terms of age and rank? What is the effect of the distribution (in age and rank) on leadership within the department and the institution? What is the effect on teaching? To what extent have anticipated retirements been taken into account in long-range planning?

10. How does the composition of the faculty relate to the aims and functions of the department?

**Allocation of Effort**

*Statistical information.* Teaching workloads, class sizes, student credit hours per full-time-equivalent faculty member, advising and administrative assignments, direction of independent study, theses, and dissertations.

1. How do teaching workloads and class sizes in writing and literature courses compare with those recommended by ADE? (See “ADE Guidelines for Class Size and Workload for Colleges and University Teachers of English,” available at http://www.ade.org/policy/index.htm.) If the teaching workload and class sizes are larger than those recommended by ADE, what steps are being taken to correct the situation?

2. How are faculty members assigned courses, committee work, and administrative tasks? How do teaching loads vary by rank? What policies determine the assignment of “overload” and summer teaching? To what extent are teaching loads reduced for administrative assignments, research projects, or other reasons? What criteria are used? To what degree do assignments accommodate personal or professional needs or preferences?

3. How does the department ensure that all members post and keep regular office hours?

4. How much time do faculty members who teach writing courses spend in grading papers and holding follow-up conferences each week? Is this time considered a part of the teaching load?
Recognition of Faculty Achievement

1. What is the role of the department in determining promotions and tenure? of the department head? of the dean? of higher administrative officers?
2. What are the department’s policies on promotion and tenure? Where are the standards and procedures stated? Explain any changes that have been made in recent years in the department’s policies, standards, and procedures regarding promotion and tenure.
3. What is the relative importance of teaching, publications, institutional service, and other factors in promotion and tenure decisions?
4. Are some kinds of scholarship more likely to be rewarded than others (e.g., literary study, composition theory and practice, women’s studies, ESL)?
5. What forms of rewards and recognition—other than salary, promotion, and tenure—are available?
6. How does the recognition of faculty achievement fit with the department’s aims and functions?
7. What is the department’s attitude toward consulting work? Is it fostered? tolerated?

Recruitment and Development

1. Describe the procedures currently used to hire new faculty members, from the definition of the job to the entrance of the new person into the classroom. In what ways are procedures different at different levels or in different fields?
2. To what extent are long-range plans reflected in job definitions and hiring practices? Especially in departments where no new positions are being created, to what extent are vacancies used to move the department in new directions?
3. What role do people outside the department, such as deans, provosts, affirmative-action officers, play in the hiring process?
4. What support is provided by the institution to departments conducting a search? Are funds available for search committees to attend appropriate conventions or for candidates to come for on-campus interviews?
5. How are new faculty members informed about the department and institution? Who is responsible for assisting them with personal arrangements such as housing? How are they advised about requirements for reappointment, promotion, and tenure?
6. How is professional activity encouraged? In what ways are faculty initiatives in departmental activities encouraged? How do senior faculty members help junior colleagues become involved in professional activities?
7. How are research activities supported? How do senior faculty members help junior colleagues plan research projects and find publication outlets? Are there opportunities for colloquia for both senior and junior faculty members? How are leave and fellowship opportunities publicized? How is support for professional travel and research leave distributed when resources are limited?
8. How are teaching activities supported? What funds or released time are available for the development of new courses or methods? How do senior faculty members help junior colleagues improve their teaching?
9. How have faculty members used their leaves and released time in the past five years?
10. In what ways does the department encourage or support the retraining of faculty?
11. How does the department or institution handle personal problems and crises that affect professional responsibilities? In what ways, both formal and informal, does the department promote collegiality among faculty members?
12. How does the department assist junior faculty who are not given tenure? What is done to help them find other positions? What is done to reduce the morale problems of faculty in a terminal year?
IV. Students

Statistical Information. Undergraduate students: enrollments in upper- and lower-division courses; institutional and departmental attrition rates; number of part-time and adult students; high, low, and average entrance examination scores of majors, of students in remedial and freshman courses; grade point averages of majors in English courses and other courses. Graduate students: number in each graduate program; high, low, and average GRE scores; teaching assistants (number and support for); placement of MAs and PhDs for the last five to ten years.

Enrollments and Placement

1. What trends do these data reveal in overall enrollments in specific courses, in majors, in remedial courses, and in graduate programs? What do these data indicate about students’ continuing or changing interests?
2. Characterize the training and preparation of majors and graduate students.
3. What do the enrollment rates in upper- and lower-division undergraduate courses indicate about the vitality and balance of the department’s programs?
4. What other trends or attitudes do these data reveal?
5. How successful has the department been in placing its graduate students? What does the department do to provide career counseling or job placement for its undergraduate students?

Recruitment and Attrition

1. How does the department recruit students for its programs and courses? How effective are the methods?
2. How is financial aid for students determined? What attempts are made by the department to increase this aid?
3. What are the attrition rates in the various kinds of courses? How do they relate to the institutional attrition rate? What are the attrition rates in programs such as the major and graduate programs? If these rates seem high, what causes can be identified? How can the situation be corrected?
4. How do the department’s attrition rates relate to the department’s aims and functions?

Participation in the Life of the Department

1. What procedures are used to make students feel welcome in the department?
2. To what departmental meetings, business and social, are students invited? What events are students invited to help plan? On what departmental committees do students serve?
3. What student advice is sought when the curriculum is reviewed? when schedules are planned? when candidates for faculty positions are discussed?
4. How do undergraduate students feel about the life of the department? How do they express their feelings? How does the faculty respond? How do graduate students feel about the life of the department? How do they express their feelings? How does the faculty respond?

V. Resources

Support Services

1. How are services and access to equipment and facilities distributed to faculty members in the department and among departmental programs?
2. What kinds of support are provided for teaching and for research and public service activities? How might the bookstore better serve the department?

3. If secretarial assistance is inadequate, how can it be improved? Describe arrangements for mail distribution, scheduling, and record keeping.

4. Describe the kinds of academic, career, and psychological counseling provided by staff outside the department. What kinds of liaisons are there between the department and these counselors?

5. What provisions are made for personal safety? Are support services available on weekends and evenings and during the summer?

6. Library resources:
   - How can the library holdings and facilities be improved to meet the research needs of faculty and students?
   - Is the interlibrary loan program adequate? the reference collection?
   - What arrangements are there for faculty participation in planning collection development?
   - What arrangements are there for determining the strengths and weaknesses of the library before setting faculty goals and planning faculty development?
   - Describe the resources and programs aimed at meeting the library needs of the department’s undergraduate and graduate students.
   - How responsive is the library to user needs in setting hours, in responding to faculty and student questions, and in providing access to up-to-date resources for literature searches?
   - How are library services provided to off-campus sites?

**Equipment**

1. What arrangements have been made so that faculty members have access to word processors, computers, duplicating machines, audiovisual equipment, typewriters, telephones?

**Physical Facilities**

1. What are the policies affecting the assignment of office space within the department and within the institution? How might the design or arrangement of office space be improved?

2. What are the policies affecting the assignment of classrooms? How might the design or arrangement of classroom space be improved?

3. What problems do faculty members have gaining access to physical facilities (including faculty and department offices) on weekends and evenings and during the summer?

4. In what ways do the physical facilities encourage or limit the educational process? In what ways do they fail to meet the department’s needs?

5. What space does the department have for faculty conferences? for students to meet? for coffee? Does the department have a library?

**Financial Support**

**Statistical Information.** An analysis of faculty salaries (in large departments, range and average for each rank; in small departments, range and average for all ranks); operational expenses; support for visiting lecturers, small conferences, films, and other academic activities.

1. What has been the annual rate of increase in faculty salaries for the last ten years? How do the department’s salaries compare with those of other departments in the institution? with those of comparable departments of English?
2. If the department awards merit raises, describe the criteria used. Who establishes the criteria?
3. What provision is there for members of the department to participate in decisions concerning the allocation of the department’s nonsalary and salary budgets? Who makes decisions when there are competing demands for limited funds? What arrangements exist for faculty members to consult the head and dean about their salaries?
4. To what extent are the department’s funding and course offerings dependent on enrollments or other factors partially within the control of the department? What effect do enrollments or other factors partially within the control of the department have on hiring, promotion, curriculum, standards, and allocation of resources?
5. What support does the department receive for leaves, research, travel to professional meetings, faculty development, substitute teachers? How are such funds allocated? Has the level of support changed in recent years? If support for these activities were increased substantially, how would the department allocate the additional funds? If there are necessary cuts, how would it distribute the burden?
6. Are sufficient funds available to keep library holdings, software, and other instructional materials current?
7. What special funds are there for prizes and other awards for outstanding students in English?
8. Does the department maintain a fund for incidental expenses?
9. Does the department seek endowments? How is this done? Is the process satisfactory? How are such funds used? Does the department publish a newsletter for students and alumni?
10. What level of financial support would be adequate for the department to carry out its aims and functions? In what ways does it ensure support for innovative programs, recruiting, and social and educational functions?

VI. Operations

Governance

1. Does the department have a set of bylaws or guidelines for its organization and operation? If so, how were guidelines formulated? Are they reviewed regularly? If not, how is the department organized for the purposes of governance?
2. How is the department head chosen and what are his or her powers and responsibilities? Is the head evaluated periodically by the faculty? What are the governance procedures that provide for a change in leadership? What are the procedures for resolving conflicts between the head and the faculty?
3. How are other departmental administrators (e.g., directors of freshman composition, graduate studies, creative writing) chosen? Are these administrators evaluated periodically by the department faculty? What are the governance procedures that provide for a change in leadership?
4. What tasks and responsibilities does the head ordinarily delegate to aides and committees? In what ways is the head regularly available to members of the department?
5. In what ways do faculty members participate in decision making in the department?
6. How often are department meetings held? What are they used for (e.g., to disseminate information, present committee reports, explore issues, make major policy decisions)? What changes, if any, in the frequency or format of these meetings would the department consider useful?
7. What is the committee structure of the department? How is committee membership determined? What authority do committees have? Do committees have specific charges? To whom do they report? Is there provision for rotating membership on committees? How is committee work rewarded?
Collective Bargaining

1. If a collective-bargaining agreement exists, in what ways does it determine salaries and influence such departmental activities as hiring, evaluation of faculty, workload, departmental administration, and so on?
2. To what extent does collective bargaining contribute to the aims and functions of the department? To what extent does it pose difficulties?

Relations to Other Units within the Institution

1. What kind of joint programs does the department participate in? Does the department teach any courses for other departments? What procedures are used to evaluate these programs and courses?
2. What role does the department play in the college in such matters as general education? interdepartmental and interdisciplinary studies? writing across the curriculum?
3. How many department members sit on institutional committees? Which committees? How are committee members selected? Are certain members of the department tagged too frequently for these duties?
4. How is the department involved in establishing or reviewing matters of collegewide academic policy (such as admissions requirements, non-English degree requirements, methods of program or curricular review)?

Relations with Outside Institutions and Agencies

1. Describe internships and other activities the department sponsors or participates in with local and regional schools, colleges, universities, cultural institutions, and businesses.
2. Describe conferences or other activities outside the traditional curriculum that the department sponsors.
3. To what extent are the department’s courses or programs designed to meet needs expressed by local industries or government agencies?
4. Describe the kind and number of joint appointments or visiting professorships the department arranges with other institutions. What criteria are used for establishing these professorships? How are candidates selected?
5. Describe methods of articulation among feeder high schools, two- and four-year colleges, and graduate institutions.
6. Describe the department’s contributions to the community and the public-relations services available to the department for promoting its programs.

VII. Conclusions

Strengths

1. What are the department’s outstanding characteristics?
2. What are the most promising prospects for future development?
3. Is there a consistency between ends and means in the department?

Areas of Concern

1. What worries department members most about students, program, or faculty?
2. What specific steps might be taken to eliminate these worries? If they cannot be eliminated, what can be done to work with them? Which areas of concern should receive the attention of the department this year? in the next five years?

Unrealized Opportunities

1. What previously unnoticed areas for growth or strength emerged from taking a close look at the department?
2. What specific steps might be taken to fulfill unrealized opportunities?

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A Guide for External Reviewers

Some General Observations

As departmental self-studies and external reviews of departments become standard institutional practice, faculty members may be asked to act as external reviewers. General academic reputation probably leads to the nomination, and total experience as a faculty member concerned with curricula and academic administration provides the real qualification, but the role itself imposes restraints and makes demands that are not usually part of academic training. This paper is intended to help external reviewers draw on the experience of those who have learned by trial and error.

In general, an external reviewer is a mediator between those who allocate resources of all kinds and those who use them, but that definition allows many variations. At one extreme, reviewers may be brought in by the designers of a particular departmental program—a new degree program, for example—to provide an outside, experienced perspective on a plan. In such a case, the person who allocates and the person who uses what is allocated may in the flesh be one person in different roles. In other cases, the outsider may be called in to help decide whether the life-support systems should be removed from a moribund program or whether something worth saving can be extracted. Often the reviewer can restore confidence to the administrator who has become skeptical or even cynical about the validity of faculty requests for the institution's limited resources. Time, people, money, space, and equipment always seem in short supply. The outside perspective is especially helpful to administrators whose own disciplines may thrive on systems not appropriate for English.

Most reviews are routine checkups of programs with satisfactory general operations—some problems and some excellent work. In routine reviews the outside perspective highlights superior work that may be taken for granted and not adequately rewarded and identifies which persistent irritations are inherent in the work itself and which indicate real problems. Reviewers may also call attention to overvalued routine activities that would benefit from changes or to local opportunities the department has not fully recognized. The reviewer not only mediates but provides the voice of experience, the voice of the profession, as a context for departmental hopes and practices.

The voice of the profession should not be confused with mere orthodoxy or divine revelation. The profession speaks with many voices, and reviewers should be enough aware of diversity to recognize the consequences of different professional decisions. Reviewers should avoid merely substituting their own goals and solutions for those of the hosts. Preserving what works in the host's program is surely the basis for prudent economy, so the reviewer's job may be to reassure the hesitant, but the review also may require challenging the status quo with new perspectives. A program operating without much fuss still may not represent the best choice among options.

The Particular Task

Many colleges know exactly what they want when they seek an outside reviewer, and some do not, but most are a little vague about expressing the details. You should settle some issues before you accept the assignment. Some details are almost always covered quickly in the first letter or phone call. The institution offers an honorarium of a definite amount, makes a general reference to "expenses," and names—but does not always define carefully—the activity to be reviewed. Often a campus visit is required. The length of the visit may even be stated, but its nature is often left open. The institution promises some documents by a specific date and ordinarily requests that a report of the review be delivered by a general date. You should view such a letter or phone call as the basis for negotiating a fuller understanding.

You should determine, for example, who is to receive the report and what they really want. Is it the dean? a collegiate committee with a general function? a committee for the specific occasion? the de-
partment? a subsection of the department? or some combination? Aside from who gets the report, who really asked for it and why? How will it be used? What finality will be accorded to the remarks in it? Probably you cannot readily discover what private reasons exist along with the public reasons, although you can look for implications and hints. Your role alters markedly if the crucial decisions that flow from the report are made by the dean instead of by the department itself. The amount of explanation and documentation is affected. A dean may need substantive arguments justifying class size, while the department may need details about the effects of placement tests on freshman English.

Although many colleges and universities have developed internal guidelines for reviews and although a few have established offices to arrange for the management of reviews, you cannot be sure they will have defined what materials should be supplied to consultants. You can expect a packet of general publications—catalogs, faculty handbooks, course schedules, publicity for new students, course descriptions, and the like. Sometimes the department sends a packet of materials intended for new or prospective faculty members. These documents are useful, but the crucial ones are those specifically related to the evaluation; they are implied in ADE’s “A Checklist for Departmental Self-Study” (included in this volume), and they represent the department’s effort to know itself. In brief, you ought to receive documentary material sufficiently in advance that you can come “knowing” the program as it appears on the record. The documents provide information from which you can construct hypotheses about what is strong, what is hazy, and what needs attention in the program. These hypotheses in turn direct the visit.

The exact schedule of a visit to the campus probably must wait for the examination of documents, but it is well to know in advance how long a visit is expected or allowed to last and what people will be available to meet with you. Will you want to see the dean or the vice-president or faculty members from other departments or various students? What kind of documents will you want to see on campus? student files? minutes of meetings? course enrollment files? Will you want to visit classes? Will you have stenographic help available on campus? Will someone make appointments? If you are to be one of a team of reviewers, who are the others? Will one person chair the group? Will each report separately, or will there be collaboration? Will the areas for reviewing be set in advance? The exact arrangements will vary, but in the end the visit must permit you to test the hypotheses you formed in advance as well as to suggest additional ones.

Decisions on who is to receive a report will determine its nature; still, issues of length and specificity should be discussed in advance. How many copies should be supplied by what time and to whom? Is the cost of stenographic help to be considered a reimbursable expense? If several reviewers come together to produce a single report, will the visit be long enough to allow a first draft to be prepared on site? If one of a team prepares the report, is the extra time represented in the honorarium? Will you be expected to make an oral report before leaving the campus?

Some of the questions may be answered by the decision not to answer them in advance, but such questions are legitimate ways of defining what is expected. They may help you decide whether you have the time, temperament, and knowledge to undertake certain tasks. The discussions provide each party to the agreement an opportunity to develop confidence in the other.

Some Notes on Self-Preservation

Hosts are concerned about making efficient use of your services, but they also like to be expansive, and they may not adequately consider your physical limitations, of which you have likely become all too aware over the years. Schedule open periods during the day. You need time for rest and time to fit in interviews you didn't anticipate. You may on occasion fall behind and need to catch up. In the evenings you may wish to avoid the temptation to be wined and dined. The hosts want to be gracious, and it is pleasant to be accorded honor, but occasional outside reviewers, enamored of the grape and seduced by Bacchus, have found the next day full of reminders of their excesses. You may wish to
specify in advance that you need evenings for work so as to forestall hurt feelings. At least, you may identify what kind of social amenity you'd find manageable. There must be time for reflection, drafting, and planning. And sleep.

Reading the Documents

The time between receiving advance materials and making a visit (if one is to occur) is critical to success. During this period you study the documents to raise glimmerings, intuitions, ideas, and hypotheses. Without such formulations you will not be able to focus the visit sufficiently to make the work possible. You may find gaps in the information, sense areas of uncertainty, and detect underlying motives. You try to sort out what seems crucial and what seems relatively unimportant. You begin to discover the place of the department in the institution.

The preparation is crippled if advance materials are inadequate. You should ask yourself what documents will be necessary for the kind of evaluation you have been asked to conduct. Will you need the department's self-study? department, school, and university goals statements? department policy and planning statements? faculty résumés? catalogs? faculty handbooks? previous evaluation reports? Reviewers disagree about the wisdom of using various documents. For instance, some may read previous evaluations to obtain an important historical perspective, but others fear that previous reports may bias their judgments. Some documents undoubtedly need not be copied and can be examined on the site. If the institution has limits on what can be examined, both sides should know in advance the implications of such limits. What is certain, though, is that you should get the materials soon enough to permit asking for additional materials before a visit, and you should also be able to seek other kinds during the visit.

Reviewers develop techniques for reading the documents supplied in advance. They quickly scan all the materials to get a sense of the whole and then read parts in the light of that whole. They examine some materials in the light of other materials to find correlations or inconsistencies. They make routine searches for certain information or evidence. They note the proportion of attention devoted to certain subjects and the way the language is overly careful in some sections. The mere presence or absence of materials can be telling.

Experienced reviewers know that some questions are crucial to all departments, so they simply check the documents for answers. These questions fall natural into six areas: aims, courses and programs, faculty, students, resources, and administration. The ADE “Checklist” contains a fairly exhaustive list of questions about these areas.

The aims of a department, for instance, should be compared with those of larger units within the institution. They often are written at different times, with different frameworks, or with different values, and they may be inconsistent. The resulting comparison may suggest whether central administrators will support key department proposals. You should also analyze the consistency of the department's aims and the department's long-range plans. Current practices may neglect some goals or suggest new goals. Any discrepancies may reflect the unending conflict between intention and opportunity.

Some stock questions are likely to be helpful in suggesting whether existing courses and programs are appropriate for reaching the goals. What is the average class size for freshman English? Are undergraduate requirements prescriptive or open-ended? Are limits imposed by what is actually scheduled or by the authority of advisers? Should the two MA degrees in the department be collapsed into one, or are they distinct enough to warrant separation? Are the course offerings in a department adequate to support the PhD program? Does the catalog indicate what courses are offered regularly so that students can plan their curricula? Questions like these are debated in some form in all departments; often you can anticipate crucial questions by noting the subjects of recent professional debates or of ADE summer seminars.

The nature of the faculty sets crucial limits on whether a department can meet its aims. Is the faculty suitably distributed among the different areas of specialty? Is there any correlation between age
groups and disciplines, which may suggest problems of authority or future development? What commitment to scholarship and professional activity is expected in theory and in practice? Have promotion and tenure standards changed so that older faculty judge younger faculty who have significantly different qualifications? Does it matter? The “Checklist” invites many kinds of description of the faculty and governance, but you must depend on your experience to discover which data are useful in judging the human resources available to do the suggested work.

Similarly, questions about students, general resources, and administration often emerge. Has the number or quality of students in a program changed over time? Are enrollment drops in one area behind the push to develop a new program in another? What are teaching loads? Do class sizes fit the teaching required? How adequate are classrooms? offices? library holdings? travel, photocopying, and telephone funds? Are the resources appropriate for the aims? Does the committee structure suggest the maturity of the department? the power of the chair? access to the chair? Who actually makes decisions?

Though experienced evaluators bring many standard questions to a set of advance materials, they know that the materials themselves generate new questions. Identifying full sets of questions early enough enables you to formulate an interviewing strategy. You may wish to ask for interviews not on the preliminary schedule established by the dean or department. You may even begin tentatively writing parts of the report to see what further questions emerge from the writing process.

**The Campus Visit**

The major purposes of the campus visit are to alter or confirm the hypotheses that have been formed in advance, to discover new information, to gain a tacit feel for the place, and to form additional hypotheses. The visit establishes an independent view of the department even though most of the information is actually supplied by the host. By virtue of being an outsider with experience, you are an ally in helping a department identify its best practices so that it can build on them in ways that allow for risk taking, experimentation, and free rein (within established limits) of faculty talents.

There will be gaps in the information sent before the visit, and questions will arise from reviewing the material. Formal or informal interviews provide an important way to fill these gaps and thus supply evidence to support your generalizations. Some reviewers like to visit faculty members in offices or to talk to them in groups; some find students in the library and halls, some visit with them in classes. Situations dictate the types of questions to be asked. Some questions are best asked in general ways. For example, you might ask students, faculty, and departmental administrators the following general questions: “How can I most help you accomplish what you need to accomplish? How can I best help you explain what you need to explain to those who affect your work?” Such questions draw out priorities of concern on campus. Other times more specific questions are in order. Of students you might ask, “How much was covered in the survey you took? Do you have problems with scheduling required classes? Do you feel that the department helps its majors feel at home?” Of a faculty member you might inquire, “In a typical week how much time do you allocate in your class to lecture, discussion, and testing? How long does it take you to read all of your students’ papers? Are there facilities for duplicating student papers for class discussion?”

The actual questions must fit the context in which they come up. The answers may represent fact, but they surely are perceptions. You should be cautious about what you count as evidence. Some answers reveal how different people perceive their roles. Others will show how processes at different levels of the college or university help or hinder faculty members in accomplishing goals. Some might even indicate how much the system depends on the grapevine. Whether general or specific, the questions should invite differing points of view, identify hidden agendas, and find the anxieties that weaken the program. No questions are good ones unless you really listen to the answers, so you should resist the temptation to offer suggestions too soon. You need those answers to complete your image of the department so that you can describe what you have found. Your description of the department set off against the department’s self-image provides the basis for any proposals you might wish to make in your report.
Description is a crucial function of the reviewer, for it provides a perspective that challenges what is otherwise taken for granted. Even a completely sympathetic view, not challenging the self-study—is likely to provoke some new lines of thought in the department, but you will usually be expected to make some specific suggestions for action as well. People expect changes, and they may well have formed specific queries. You may see several trial balloons rise while you visit with different people on campus. Even if the main result of your visit is to confirm the work in progress, a list of tentative questions and suggestions may be useful. You should be careful about being too grand in your thinking, though. Most institutions could do better if they had more money, but they rarely have large discretionary accounts. If you just recommend more expenditure, you probably have avoided some issues. To be sure, sometimes you must point out the consequences of underfunding. Composition sections with sixty students are too large, so someone needs to find money for more sections or be willing to declare that composition isn’t needed, after all. Often, though, what you need to recommend will be offered to you on campus, and the idea merely waits for you to supply a proper perspective from your sense of the profession so it can be embraced as new policy.

**The Report**

Reporting is the final step for the reviewer. Often it takes two forms: an oral report at the end of the campus visit and a written report a few weeks later. These reports usually become the basis for a department’s plans for immediate and future action.

The audience for the oral report might be one person (such as a dean or a department chair) or a group (such as the entire department or the self-study committee). The purpose of the oral report is to give the audience an overview of your impressions, to identify possible errors of perception, and to forestall surprises on either side. If you are a member of a team, you will need time to discuss all major findings with team members and to discover areas about which you agree or areas about which you agree to disagree. In fairness to the department, all major points that will be discussed in the written report probably should be mentioned in the oral report. Smaller points can be left for the written report. In tone, your oral report should be as congruent as possible with your later written report, so you should outline your oral remarks carefully. The outline offers the additional advantage of giving you a reliable way to make final notes on specific points if discussion with the audience follows your oral report. If a team has done the review, the presenter of the oral report should probably compile the final report, but anyone can do it, and the task may even be divided so that each reviewer speaks.

Your written report may have several unnamed audiences as well as the official one. In some cases (which are best discouraged) only a dean might read the report. A collegewide review committee or collegewide administrators might read only the summary section; the department or a group of its representatives might read the entire document or only the part affecting their own work. More likely the report will go to several groups, each of which will read in its own way. The purpose of the written report is to offer your observations in such a way that they can be used as a guide for future action. Usually the report is most successful when it cites the content of the self-study only to establish contexts and focuses principally on the observations and reactions of the reviewers, but the self-study is usually the key reference text on which the reviewers’ descriptions and suggestions are based.

The review probably should begin by identifying strengths and assets, because the proposals for change are more easily accepted when the tone is encouraging. Each section in the report, therefore, might start with strengths and then offer suggestions on using the strengths to greatest advantage. Quoting comments made by faculty members or students—though without giving names—lends authenticity. (Statements made to you in confidence must not be identifiable to a source, and the ideas should stand on their own merit.) Finally, the whole report can be organized to fit the areas of concern laid out in the “Checklist” or in the self-study, but sometimes the discussion has to be shaped to accommodate a particular goal of the evaluation.
Who writes a team report is determined by the specific situation. The host might ask each reviewer to prepare a complete report, or each of you might prepare a section of the report, with one person designated as the compiler of the complete final version. Or you might be expected to work out a division of labor with other team members on your own; you will likely discover during the interviewing process the particular sections to which you feel you can contribute most effectively. Whatever the specific arrangements, if you are working as part of a team, you might want to know the general plan in advance of the campus visit so that you will be clear about your responsibilities from the start.

Most experienced reviewers try to avoid mentioning any person by name. They refer instead to the role (e.g., department chair) or office (e.g., the office of the president). In some cases, you may be asked to write a separate report on the evaluation of a specific role (department chair, director of freshman English, a dean); this report should be considered confidential and should be understood to be written for limited circulation. You ought to be alert to the possibility that partisans on one side of a campus issue might use or overuse your statements in ways you don’t intend. You may indeed have been called to referee some dispute, but wherever you identify such differences take special care to be explicit about the limits of your recommendations.

Reports fifteen to twenty pages long will ordinarily preserve emphasis while allowing adequate supporting references. At some institutions, the format of the written report must conform to specifications set by the department or institution or other group, but usually the reviewer creates a form in accord with function. For ease of reading, you might want to divide your report into clearly headed sections. A table of contents is useful, especially in a report that evaluates a number of programs or a number of areas of concern within a department. A summary of strengths and of suggestions for improvement at the end of the report provides emphasis, helps readers who skim the report, and serves as a checklist for those who will be required to respond to it. Reviewers should ease anxiety by reporting promptly, but if one has reviewed the written materials carefully and focused the visit with particular points to be checked, the report should emerge rather easily.

One detail easily overlooked in the intensity of preparing the report is an expression of thanks, either in a cover letter or in a section describing the procedure of the review and acknowledging help. The labor of being reviewed and the courtesy accorded reviewers are almost always beyond a department’s usual workload, so gracious recognition is in order.

**Conclusion**

External reviewers must expect the unexpected. Each host department is unique, and the extraordinary logistics confronted by a host department planning a review inevitably leads to a new problem or two. During one visit a blizzard struck, the school was closed down, and the whole schedule was revised on the spot to accommodate those few available for interviews. But even when everything goes as planned, routines are upset, and people are asked to confront issues they thought they had suppressed. Casual statements by reviewers are accorded weight they’d never get at home. That suggests caution, but it also describes an opportunity to help people and departments become more useful.

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