



Cornell University Faculty Committee on Program Review

PLANNING FOR AN EXTERNAL REVIEW

Departments frequently find that planning for the external review is the most valuable part of the process. However, departments vary widely in their approaches to planning. FCPR was encouraged by department chairs to share some of what appear the more effective practices.

In general, departments that have good communication processes, regular discussions about their program, and a strategic plan that is regularly revised have the easiest time in dealing with the requirements of the Program Review. Departments that have regular accreditation reviews tend to be better prepared. The External Program Review is an opportunity, if done properly, for faculty, staff, and students to participate in setting goals and developing strategies to reach those goals. Participation by all members of a department, including time to reflect on discussions, is key.

Good planning practices:

- Encourage retreats and other in-depth discussions among all faculty about program direction, priorities, and needs. One department used a professional facilitator from Cornell who was familiar with planning to run a planning retreat. The advantage of a facilitator is that it allows all participants to be involved in the discussion and it accesses a wider range of planning tools.
- Employ seminar programs or special conferences to assist with planning. Invite leading scholars and/or society presidents to address future opportunities and challenges in the discipline. Consider presentations about education and outreach, not just research. One department devoted a semester of weekly seminars to considering issues key to future evolution of their programs. Invited speakers from outside the department alternated with seminar periods devoted entirely to within-department discussions among faculty and students.
- Allow all faculty to buy in and take ownership of the department plan. Where the chair or a small group of faculty prepare materials on behalf of the unit, it is too easy for some faculty to hold divergent views about department direction. Also, students and staff are typically excluded from such top-down processes.
- Encourage transparency. Most departments delegate the writing of specific sections of the report to small groups of faculty and staff. Letting everyone see and comment on the report as it is assembled is important.
- Engage related departments within Cornell as part of the planning process. The External Review Team (ERT) should not discover that related departments are not communicating and are failing to interact synergistically.
- Involve students, post docs, and staff in the planning. The ERT visit should not be the only opportunity for students and staff to voice opinions about their department.