

TEXAS WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY
QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

ADMINISTRATIVE DEPARTMENT
SELF-STUDY AUDIT
(Three - Four Year Cycle)

Table of Contents

Introduction and Background 2

The Administrative Department Self-Study Audit Process 3

 1. Self-Study 3

 2. Audit 4

 3. Departmental Improvement Plan..... 4

 4. Administrative Department Self-Study Audit Report 4

After the Audit: Closing the Loop 5

Keys to Effective Audits and Improving Administrative Services..... 6

Seven Common-Sense Principles and Practices 7

Suggested Time-Line for Administrative Department Self-Study Audits 9

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Introduction and Background

The goal of an Administrative Department Self-Study Audit is to achieve high-quality student services and administrative support services at Texas Wesleyan University. If colleges and universities do not deliver high-quality education accompanied by high-quality services, resolving other important issues such as cost and access will make little difference.

The purpose of an Administrative Department Self-Study Audit is to elicit thoughtful conversations among administrative staff about how to produce tangible improvements in the quality of administrative support services without having to spend more money. An audit includes a self-study by the department and a site visit by peers from outside the department or institution. Program auditors evaluate the expected service outcomes established by the department and the department's "service-quality processes"—the key staff activities required to produce, assure, and regularly improve the quality of student support services and administrative support services.

An administrative department audit asks how staff organize their work and the kinds of data they use to make decisions, as well as how staff members can use the resources available to them and work collegially to do better. Good administrative-quality processes systematize a department's approach to quality, instead of leaving it mainly to unmonitored individual initiative. Furthermore, the audit process identifies real problems, generates tangible ideas for improvement, and creates conversation with colleagues on and off campus.

The Administrative Department Self-Study Audit Process

In its most basic form, the process constitutes four components:

1. A self-study
2. An audit and report by an outside peer reviewer
3. A departmental improvement plan as a result of the self-study and audit
4. An Administrative Department Self-Study Audit Report consisting of items 1 – 3, above

Each of the four components is described below.

1. Self-Study

A. The self-study includes developing a comprehensive statement of service goals (“outcomes”) for the administrative/student support area.

The statement of service goals should be informed by the service outcomes outlined in the annual assessment plans.

B. The self-study also includes developing a comprehensive statement of whether the department is meeting each of the specified service goals.

C. Most importantly, the self-study includes developing an improvement plan.

The discussion around each service goal should be informed by:

- i) The measurements and methods of assessment established in the annual assessment plans along with the reports on results of this assessment;
- ii) Interviews with users of the service—students, faculty, staff, alumni and others as well as consultation between users and staff members that supplement what is done during annual assessment; and
- iii) Regular staff meetings to discuss “what is working” and “what is not” as well as to build enthusiasm for experimenting with new service procedures.

In preparing the self-study, the department should review the “Keys to Effective Audits and Improving Administrative Services” on page 6 in this document.

2. Audit

After completion of the self-study, an outside peer reviewer (or reviewers, depending on the size and mission of the department) should be invited to campus. Peer reviewers should come from institutions and/or departments that are similar in mission and scope to the one being reviewed.

The peer reviewers or peer auditors evaluate the expected outcomes of the services and the "service-quality processes"—the key staff activities required to produce, assure, and regularly improve the quality of services.

There are three steps to the peer review/audit:

1. Prior to coming to campus, the auditor should review the departmental self-study. This review will facilitate an understanding of the mission and expected service outcomes of the department and an understanding of the information already gathered by the department about actual outcomes, discussions held, and proposed actions to improve.
2. Once on campus, the auditor will engage in conversations with students, faculty, staff, and others, such as alumni, to learn more about the department, to evaluate the effectiveness of the department and its services, and to engage in a collegial exchange of ideas. These conversations should be facilitated by the department through the development of an agenda/schedule in consultation with the auditor/reviewer.
3. After visiting the campus, the auditor will submit a report to the department regarding the services and outcomes, including suggestions for improvement.

3. Departmental Improvement Plan

After receipt of the auditor's report, the department will prepare an improvement plan based on the department's own recommendations in the self-study and the auditor's recommendations. The plan to improve may require changes or modifications in processes, written materials, or other actions to reach expected service outcomes or may require changes in the departmental goals themselves. Any changes should then be reflected in the strategic and operational and assessment plans that are submitted as part of the regular assessment documents, due during fall semester following the Self-Study Audit.

4. The Administrative Department Self-Study Audit Report

The department will prepare a report to include the following:

- A) The self-study
- B) The auditor's report, and
- C) The departmental improvement plan

This report will be submitted to the vice president and to the assessment office (associate provost) as part of the regular assessment planning and reporting cycle during the fall semester following the Administrative Department Self-Study Audit. This report should be submitted along with the documents that are regularly due at that time.

After the Audit: Closing the Loop

After the Administrative Department Self-Study Audit has been completed, the most important aspect is to act upon the information gained and to implement the improvement plan. As noted in the introduction, the purpose of the Self-Study Audit is to produce tangible improvements in the quality of academic support and student services (without having to spend more money).

Keys to Effective Audits and Improving Administrative Services

Effective audits require "structured conversation," both within the services area/department while preparing its self-study and then with the site-visit person or team. *Conversations* are important because that is how ideas become actions, and progress occurs, in academe. *Structure* is key because it focuses people's attention on the key areas that are important for improving quality.

These *Keys to Improving Administrative Services* should be kept in mind during the self-study (as during the regular annual assessment process):

1. Identify the underlying purpose of the services offered and determine the desired service outcomes.

What should a student or other user—faculty, staff, vendor, etc.—gain, learn, do, and/or become able to do as a result of using the services? How should users rate the services?

2. Consider the design and organization of the service processes as well as administrative procedures.

What services will be offered? What procedures and processes will staff employ to serve students? How will each of these contribute to the desired service outcomes? What information and materials will be provided and in what format? How will these materials/information relate to other administrative support services? What methods will staff use to introduce the material/information to the student or other user, to answer questions, and to provide interpretation? What new roles and responsibilities will faculty/staff members need to assume? What other resources will be required, and how will they be used?

3. Determine how best to assess service outcomes.

What will be the measures and indicators, and will they provide information on multiple dimensions of service outcomes? Will they compare performance at the beginning and end of the term to get the value-added dimension? How will the long-term outcomes of the services be determined? Will baseline and trend information be available? Who will be responsible for assessment and how will the results be used?

Good service-quality processes seek to improve assessment to further their own purposes, not to satisfy some external authority.

4. Determine whether staff are providing services as intended, are using the most appropriate procedures consistently, and are performing assessments and measuring results effectively.

At best, each administrative area/department will move to a "learning organization" in terms of service-quality processes with quality embedded in the departmental culture, and the idea of regular improvement in all key areas will be a well-accepted way of life.

All these steps require planning, diligence, and reinforcement. Most of all, staff need to resist competing demands on their time and the dulling effects of routine. They must be self-disciplined and actively collaborate with colleagues in the work team and department.

Seven Common-Sense Principles And Practices

Researchers at the National Center for Postsecondary Improvement at Stanford University have identified seven common-sense principles and practices that can help a department improve its processes. These principles can be applied to administrative support service areas as well.

The seven common-sense principles and practices are:

1. **Define quality in terms of outcomes.** The quality of student learning, not teaching per se, is what ultimately matters. Learning should pertain to what is or will become important for the students enrolled in the program -- not some "ideal" student. Exemplary departments determine their students' needs and then work to meet them.
2. **Base decisions on facts.** Departmental teams should collect data on student preparation, learning styles, and, where relevant, probable requirements for employment. Team members might obtain feedback from past students and their current employers. They should analyze the data carefully in light of disciplinary standards and their own professional experience, and then incorporate the findings in the design of curriculums, learning processes, and assessment methods.
3. **Focus on teaching, learning, service and assessment.** Programs /Departments should carefully analyze how professors teach, how students learn, how staff serve and how all approach assessment. Departments should consult the literature on pedagogy in their academic disciplines and collect data on what works and what doesn't. They should stress active learning, exploit information technology, and not hesitate to experiment with new teaching and learning methods. Colleagues should be quick to adopt successful innovations, which should become part of the department's modus operandi and form the baseline for future experimentation and improvement.
4. **Strive for coherence in curriculums and educational activities.** Departments should view learning through the lens of the student's entire educational experience. Courses should build upon one another to provide the desired depth and breadth. This also applies to the typical student's "portfolio" of class sizes and learning approaches. For example, a mix of large lectures and small seminars may produce better learning than a succession of medium-size classes that consume the same amount of time.
5. **Work collaboratively to achieve mutual involvement and support.** Professors should demonstrate collegiality in teaching, just as they do in research. Departments should encourage staff and faculty members to work together, hold one another accountable, and bring a broad array of talent to bear on difficult problems. Such teamwork can make the department a "learning organization" with respect not only to disciplinary content, but also to teaching and education.
6. **Identify and learn from best practices.** Audit reports should be shared widely to exchange information and motivate improvement. Departments should seek out examples of good practice and adapt the best to their own circumstances. They should compare good versus average or poor-performing methods and students, assess the causes of the differences, and seek ways to minimize the variation.

7. **Make continuous improvement a priority.** Departments should strive to improve the quality of teaching, learning and service on a regular basis. While most professors will continue to place strong emphasis on teaching and scholarship, faculty and staff should spend enough discretionary time on quality processes to keep the improvement ball rolling. Academic administrators and faculty review committees should make the results of such work, along with teaching and scholarly work, a criterion for promotion and tenure for faculty. While staff supervisors should include such work in criterion for promotion and merit salary increases for staff.

The postsecondary-improvement center's articulation of these principles and practices can help promote audits to improve quality in higher education. Audits can spur improvement and accountability in flexible and inexpensive ways. Faculty from multiple disciplines and staff from different service areas can discuss education/service-quality processes because audit conversations do not require expertise in any particular discipline/service area. Faculty/staff from all fields of study/work can learn and spread exemplary practices by serving on audit teams.

The faculty/staff members and administrators who participate in the audit, the institution, and, most importantly, the students all benefit.

Time-Line for Academic Program Self-Study Audits

Summer/Fall semester

- Prepare self-study (with recommended assistance of associate provost);
- Identify potential peer auditor(s)/reviewer(s)
- Confirm budget for audit with vice president
- Make tentative contact with peer reviewer(s)

By December 1

Submit self-study and proposed agenda/schedule for reviewer(s) to vice president for final review and approval to invite peer reviewer(s)

Early Spring semester (February-March)

Campus visit by reviewer(s) and report to campus

By May 31

- Prepare Departmental Improvement Plan.
- Prepare Administrative Department Self-Study Audit Report (due to vice president and associate provost by early fall semester along with regular assessment plans/reports)