

TEXAS WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY
QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

ACADEMIC PROGRAMS/DEPARTMENTAL
SELF-STUDY AUDIT
(Three - Four Year Cycle)

Table of Contents

Introduction and Background 2

The Academic Program Self-Study Audit Process 3

 1. Self-Study 3

 2. Audit 4

 3. Departmental Improvement Plan..... 4

 4. Academic Program Self-Study Audit Report..... 4

After the Audit: Closing the Loop 5

Keys to Effective Audits and Improving Academic Quality..... 6

Suggested Time-Line for Academic Program Self-Study Audits 9

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Introduction and Background

The goal of an Academic Program Self-Study Audit is to achieve high-quality educational programs at Texas Wesleyan University. If colleges and universities do not deliver high-quality education, resolving other important issues such as cost and access will make little difference. Moreover, programs designed to improve student assessment, institutional accountability, and performance measurement often fail to improve the quality of academic programs.

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

An academic program audit asks how faculty and/or staff organize their work and the kinds of data they use to make decisions, as well as how faculty/staff members can use the resources available to them and work collegially to do better. Good education/administrative-quality processes systematize a program or 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 faculty/staff colleagues on and off campus.

The Academic Program 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 Academic Program Self-Study Audit Report consisting of items 1 – 3, above

Each of the four components is described below.

1. Self-Study

The self-study should include:

- A.** An outline for each degree program offered by the department to include:
- i) Degree program objectives (expected outcomes)
 - ii) Associated course (student) learning objectives (expected outcomes)

This outline should be informed by the expected program and course outcomes outlined in the annual assessment plans.

- B.** A comprehensive statement of whether students are meeting each of the specified program objectives and course (student) learning goals.

The discussion around each program and course (student) learning objective 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 (To respond to: What are the actual program and learning outcomes? Are students learning what we expect them to learn? Are students doing what we expect them to do after completion of the degree?);
- ii) Interviews with students, alumni and employers as well as consultation between students and faculty/staff members that supplement what is done during annual assessment; and
- iii) Regular faculty meetings to discuss “what is working” and “what is not” as well as to build enthusiasm for experimenting with new teaching methods or service procedures.

The self-study should include evidence of items B(i) – (iii).

- C.** Most importantly, an improvement plan.

This improvement plan should outline the steps to be taken to improve the degree program in light of learning objectives and actual outcomes discussed in A & B, above.

In preparing the self-study, the department should review and address in the self-study the “Keys to Effective Audits and Improving Academic Quality” on page 5 in this document.

2. Audit

After completion and Provost Office approval 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 courses and program(s) and the "education-quality processes" –the key faculty/staff activities required to produce, assure, and regularly improve the quality of teaching and learning.

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 learning outcomes of the courses/programs 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 program(s), to evaluate the effectiveness of the program(s), 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 program(s) 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 courses, curricular requirements, teaching strategies, or other actions to reach expected student learning outcomes or in the departmental goals or student learning outcomes 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 Academic Program Self-Study Audit.

4. The Academic Program Self-Study Audit Report

The department will compile 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 dean who will then submit it to the associate provost. The report is to be submitted during the fall semester following the Academic Program Self-Study Audit as part of the regular assessment planning and reporting cycle.

After the Audit: Closing the Loop

After the Academic Program 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 educational programs (without having to spend more money).

Keys to Effective Audits and Improving Academic Quality

Effective audits require "structured conversation," both within the program/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 five key areas that are important for improving quality.

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

1. Identify the underlying purpose of the education offered and determine the desired learning outcomes

What should a student who successfully completes the course or program know and be able to do? How will the course or program build on the student's prior knowledge and capability? How will it contribute to the student's future employment opportunities, capacity to make social contributions, and quality of life?

2. Determine whether the curriculum achieves the education's purpose.

What will be taught, in what order, and from what perspective? How will it contribute to the desired learning outcomes? What course materials will be used? How will these materials relate to other parts of the student's program?

3. Consider the design and organization of the teaching and learning processes as well as administrative procedures.

What methods will professors use to introduce the material to the student, to answer questions and provide interpretation, to stimulate involvement, and to offer feedback on student work? What services will be offered? What procedures will staff employ to serve students? What new roles and responsibilities will faculty/staff members need to assume? What other resources will be required, and how will they be used?

Many professors think education quality revolves around simply getting the right course content. That certainly is necessary, but it is far from sufficient.

4. Determine how best to assess student learning/service outcomes.

What will be the measures and indicators, and will they provide information on multiple dimensions of student performance? 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 educational experience be determined? Will baseline and trend information be available? Who will be responsible for assessment and how will the results be used?

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

5. **Determine whether faculty members are delivering content and staff are providing services as intended, are using the most appropriate teaching methods or procedures consistently, and are performing assessments and measuring results effectively.**

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

All these steps require planning, diligence, and reinforcement. Most of all, faculty/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.

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.

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 dean
- Make tentative contact with peer reviewer(s)

By December 1

Submit self-study and proposed agenda/schedule for reviewer(s) to dean who will forward it to the associate provost 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 Academic Program Self-Study Audit Report (due to dean and associate provost by early fall semester along with regular assessment plans/reports)