

COMPREHENSIVE PEER REVIEW GUIDE



**FINANCE AND SUPPORT SERVICES DIVISION
SOUTHWEST TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY**

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COMPREHENSIVE PEER REVIEW (CPR)

Purpose

The purpose of the Comprehensive Peer Review (CPR) is to provide a systematic evaluation process for Finance and Support Services department and to help each of them improve their departments and identify opportunities for future development. The goal of a CPR is to examine the quality of each department within a common framework, utilizing a self-study process followed by a peer review. CPRs assist in long-range planning and are valuable in setting priorities for the department, division and the university.

General Guidelines and Procedures

Each department in the Finance and Support Services Division will undergo a peer review every five years. The Vice President for Finance and Support Services (VPFSS) may waive the requirement for a peer review or adjust the schedule if:

- (a) the department has completed a comparable review process for other reasons,
- (b) the department has experienced organizational or personnel changes, or
- (c) there are other reasons determined by the VPFSS.

The CPR process consists of four phases: 1) advance planning, 2) self-study, 3) site visit, and 4) strategic planning response.

Active involvement by each department is integral to the CPR process. Each department has four central responsibilities in the CPR process. First, participation in selection of the Review Team. Second, and by far the greatest responsibility, development of the self-study. Third, active participation in the review team's campus visit. Finally, the department and its staff are given the opportunity (both as a matter of right and as a part of the CPR design) to respond to all evaluation and review comments prior to final review by the Vice President for Finance and Support Services.

Advance Planning – A department must identify funding for the fiscal year in which the peer review is conducted or solicit financial assistance from the VPFSS and develop a timeline for the review process before proceeding.

Funding – The source of funding for all CPR's anticipated for a fiscal year shall be identified prior to the start of that fiscal year. An estimate of the funding required for the upcoming fiscal year should be provided to the VPFSS, and adjustments if necessary, should be made in advance of any CPR for that fiscal year. Some of the direct costs to be included in the estimate are:

Honorarium and travel for external reviewer	\$1,000 plus travel
Food and refreshments for site visit	\$ 300
Duplicating and binding for self-study report	\$ 500
Miscellaneous	\$ 100

Suggested Time Line for Review Process – Once a department has been identified to undergo the CPR process, a series of events is expected to take place as follows:

Month 1	Appoint Self-Study Team (Director and VPFSS) Conduct departmental orientation to CPR (Director, Assistant VPFSS Planning-optional) Create table of contents for self-study report (Director/Self-Study Team Leader) Make assignments for preparation of report (Director/Self-Study Team Leader)
Month 2-6	Develop complete draft of the self-study (Self-Study Team)
Month 5	Identify and select external reviewer (Director and VPFSS) Identify the Peer Review Team and schedule site visit (Director) Prepare the site visit agenda and notify the Peer Review Team and Interviewees (Director/Self-Study Team Leader)
Month 7	Review/revise self-study based on supervisor feedback (Self-Study Team)
Month 8	Review/revise self-study based on Assistant VPFSS Planning feedback (Self-Study Team)
Month 9	Deliver Self-study to Peer Review Team Members (Self-Study Team Leader)
Month 10	Peer Review Team Site Visit (must include interview w/VPFSS) and Exit Interviews, 1-2 days (coordinated by Host)
Month 11	Peer Review Team develops report of recommendations (coordinated By External Reviewer)
Month 12	Department responds to Peer Review Team Report (Director) Department's response provided to VPFSS, VPFSS may share with the President and BSC (Director)

NOTE:

The total time from start to finish should be no longer than one year. The crucial date is the date of the Peer Review Team visit, since this determines when the self-study report is to be completed. One should work backwards from this date when scheduling CPR activities.

Self-Study – The department being reviewed shall appoint a Self-Study Team that will be responsible for organizing and preparing the self-study report in concert with the department director, who is ultimately responsible for the product and process.

Appointment of Self-Study Team – The size of the Self-Study Team depends on the size and complexity of the department.

Self-Study Team Leader – The Director of the department has the option to serve as the Self-Study Team Leader or appoint someone else for the role. Although one individual should be designated as Team Leader for purposes of providing contact during the various components of CPR, departmental review activities may be assigned to different people. It is the Self-Study Team Leader’s responsibility to do each of the following, or to make sure that each is done:

- a) recommend members for the Peer Review Team to VPFSS,
- b) examine the appropriateness of the Peer Review Team’s composition with VPFSS,
- c) produce a self-study report,
- d) provide a schedule for the Peer Review Team’s site visit,
- e) arrange for the needs of the Peer Review Team while they are on campus, including housing, transportation, workrooms and other resources as needed,
- f) ensure the Peer Review Team’s written report is provided to the department for review, and
- g) coordinate the response to the Peer Review Team’s report.

Host – Members of Extended Business Services Council are recommended for this role. During the site visit the Extended BSC member will serve as “host” to the Peer Review Team and facilitate introductions and discussions during meetings as requested by the department director or the Self-Study Team Leader. This person may also be involved in the development of the self-study report as an outside reader and editor.

Department staff – Staff members of the department are urged to be active participants in all phases of the CPR process. Specifically, they should (1) contribute to and be familiar with the department’s self-study report, (2) participate in the Peer Review Team’s site visit, and (3) provide the Self-Study Team Leader with responses to documents resulting from the CPR process.

Shortly after appointment, the Self-Study Team should meet to prepare for the self-study process. For this orientation, the Assistant VPFSS Planning may be invited to review the CPR process and respond to questions. The director will present to the Team the time line for the self-study approved by the VPFSS and a draft of the table of contents for the self-study or examples from other departments. The Self-Study Team should review the CPR Guide and develop a detailed time line for the various tasks to ensure the completion of the CPR within the approved schedule. In addition, the Team should begin to identify data to demonstrate the department’s productivity and effectiveness during the last five years.

NOTE: The first self-study may cover information beyond 5 years.

Self-Study Report – The self-study report should provide an accurate assessment and interpretation of the history, the resources of the department and the current status of the department based on its services, activities, and achievements over the last five years. The report is a vehicle for the department, in conjunction with the University, to plan for its future. The self-study report should include proposals to solve current and projected obstacles, build on existing strengths, and maximize opportunities that may develop in the future.

The director and departmental staff prepare the self-study, consisting of collecting the appropriate information, analyzing the data, and preparing the text. Since the department director is responsible for the content, accuracy and completeness of the self-study, the director should continually and actively oversee the preparation of the report.

CAUTION: An unduly self-serving document loses credibility! While resource needs are an important element of the self-study, the self-study report is NOT a budget request.

The report will have the most favorable impact when the department seizes the opportunity to think creatively about its future. The following guidelines should be adhered to in preparing a useful self-study report:

- a) Evaluative: This should be an evaluative report. A report that only describes the service or activities of the department is inadequate as a self-study.
- b) Documentation: The report should be data based. Any data presented should be interpreted and evaluated, NOT just inserted in the document. Valid internal and external comparisons are helpful. Simplistic, selective and out-of-context data summaries are not useful and may be counterproductive.
- c) Tone: The report should be constructive. Rather than dwelling on problems, it should focus on challenges, aspirations and goals. Avoid defensive, accusatory or lecturing styles.
- d) Objectiveness: The report should be appropriately candid, introspective and analytical. The department should present an honest review of its status and opportunities. The report must be credible to be useful.
- e) Perspective: The report should be forward-looking, consistent with departmental, divisional and university strategic plans; it should not be an unconstrained “wish list” nor an exercise in self-congratulation. Address needs comparatively, with appropriate attention to priorities and sequencing.
- f) Accuracy: Errors of fact should be avoided. The Self-Study Team must work in concert with the director to ensure the accuracy of the information contained in the document.

- g) Utility: Comprehensive peer reviews are time-consuming; therefore, every effort should be made to ensure that the full benefit of the process would be derived. Avoid posturing or using the self-study to “leverage” the institution; these strategies detract from and thereby diminish the value of the review. A thorough, accurate, and neutral self-study provides the best guarantee that the university will understand and appreciate the needs of the department.
- h) Accreditation/National Standards - If the department is accredited, the self-study should incorporate the guidelines of the accrediting agency. If the department has membership with a local, state, or national organization, and they have standards to follow, the self-study should incorporate the standards.

It is critical for the success of the process that everyone within the department is involved in the self-study; this assures that all aspects of the current status and further developments of the department are considered. Towards the end of the process, a draft of the self-study report should be distributed or circulated to all members of the department for their comments and suggestions and this information should be used to revise the draft report.

While the writing and editing is a primary responsibility of the departmental members of the Self-Study Team, the “host” on the Self-Study Team could provide an outside perspective of information in this critical report if willing. Specifically, the “host” would raise questions whenever there is the lack of clarity in the textual information or presentation of information/data in the report. In addition, the “host” should carefully consider the adequacy and presentation of assessment information to support the text and recommendations of the report.

The draft self-study report should be completed and forwarded to the Assistant Vice President for Finance and Support Services Planning to review the content, completeness and accuracy of information. All comments are provided to the department for adjustments and/or revisions. The VPFSS must be provided a copy of the self-study report when it is distributed to the Peer Review Team. The VPFSS may develop a list of questions to provide the Peer Review Team to ask during interviews. The final report is presented to members of the Peer Review Team at least 3 weeks prior to the scheduled site visit.

Site Visit – A Peer Review Team will be appointed to consider the role of the department in the SWT environment and assess the quality of the department. The Peer Review Team integrates external peers with SWT staff and a member of BSC to provide the broad perspective required.

Appointment of Peer Review Team – The composition of the Peer Review Team (PRT) may vary from department to department due to the functions within each department and the number of liaisons within the university that are essential to the operations of the department. PRT members should be familiar with the purpose and role of Finance and Support Services and the primary roles and purposes of the department under review.

In general, the PRT should be comprised of a minimum of four persons and led by an external reviewer who serves as the chair of the Peer Review Team and is ultimately responsible for the PRT Report.

The external reviewer should not be a former mentor or close friend of the director or departmental staff or a former SWT employee. He/she should not be a person from an institution significantly different from SWT who might not understand the problems/special circumstances of a public, comprehensive university. The external reviewer must be able to evaluate, analyze, provide constructive feedback and recommend strategies to improve the quality of the programs and services within the department. The external reviewer is important in the review process to ensure the objectivity of the process and should be selected, confirmed and scheduled at least six months prior to the site of the Peer Review Team.

The names of two to three persons, recognized and respected in the profession under review, should be provided to the VPFSS. The persons should be knowledgeable of operations and resources of similar departments at comparable institutions. The VPFSS should receive a description of each person's current professional role, institutional affiliation and explanation for recommending the person. Some departments may require more than one external reviewer to provide adequate coverage of all major services. For example, the Facilities Department may need the perspective of an expert in the utility area as well as an expert in the maintenance field. In these cases, the VPFSS must approve the use of additional external reviewers and the director and VP must negotiate the costs of multiple external reviewers.

SWT representatives on the Peer Review Team are drawn from the university community. The director should determine that each individual is willing to serve before recommending the names to the VPFSS. The director submits recommendations for site visit team members, with consideration given to gender and ethnic diversity. Recommendations should include the following:

- Academic Administrator (minimum of 3 names) should be at the level of chair of an academic department or higher and represent a field or discipline related to the operations of the Finance and Support Services department under review.
- Finance and Support Services Representatives (minimum of 3 names) who has a working relationship with the department under review.
- Other University administrator (minimum of 3 names) who has a close working relationship with the department under review.
- Student representatives (OPTIONAL): Students should represent the undergraduate and graduate perspective, where appropriate, and cannot be employees of the department or an affiliate of the department under review.

Students enrolled in graduate programs in related disciplines could receive credit for extensive participation and support of the PRT.

The Director will send a letter of appreciation to each member of the PRT for their willingness to serve. Letters of appointment should include a copy of the current CPR Guide for orientation and university division organizational charts.

Peer Review Visit – The Self-Study Team will coordinate the travel arrangements with the external reviewer, calendar targeted persons to be interviewed during the site visit, order food services and schedule rooms for the interviews.

At one of the first interviews scheduled, the PRT should meet with the VPFSS. The VPFSS will ask the Team to keep the following questions in mind while conducting interviews. The VPFSS may also add questions of interest to him to give the Team.

- a) Who are the department's current customers? Are there potential audiences in the community who may be appropriate targets for future services and products?
- b) Based on your knowledge of the profession and/or the university environment, are the services/products of the department current/ up-to-date?
- c) Are the products, services, or activities within the department appropriate given the human and physical resources, and do these activities address institutional, community, and state/regional/national needs?
- d) Does the department have adequate processes in place to evaluate the effectiveness of its programs (i.e., assessments)?
- e) How does the department compare with those at peer institutions? What changes are needed to elevate the program to the next higher level?
- f) What are the major limiting factors in the quality and future growth and development of the department?
- g) If the department has an accredited program, does the program meet accreditation standards at the present time? If not, what is needed to bring the program into conformity with accreditation standards? Does the documentation clearly address accreditation standards?

The Peer Review Team will:

- a) identify interview questions, formulate a plan for conducting the interviews and strategies for processing the information obtained during the site visit;
- b) visit with the director for an orientation to the department and any general introductory questions that the team has about the self-study;

- c) tour the facility and any special facilities relevant to the department;
- d) conduct individual interviews with each major administrative person within the department to discuss the findings of the self-study and questions identified by the PRT (without the director in attendance in order to encourage open dialogue);
- e) conduct group interviews with professional staff, classified staff and student employees of the department;
- f) conduct group interviews with student users, academic representatives, and major users or departments (NOTE: The schedule of these meetings should be provided to these representatives at least two weeks to one month prior to the review to minimize scheduling conflicts.);
- g) process, identify and discuss major findings and individual assignments and strategies for finalizing the PRT written report; and
- h) participate in an exit interview with (1) the department and (2) the Vice President for Finance and Support Services.

Peer review teams are guests of the department. Every effort should be made to make their experience comfortable. The “host” from the Self-Study Team will escort them to their meetings each day and provide general assistance throughout the process. The Peer Review Team has a very busy scheduling during one or two days on campus and will probably appreciate a few hours of unstructured time. At the beginning of each meeting, the “host” should introduce the members of the team and state the purpose of the meeting. The “host” should leave the meeting so that students, as well as other staff and faculty feel free to discuss issues that they or the PRT members consider important in the evaluation of the department, its products and services (unless the PRT specifically asks the host to stay).

Exit Interviews – Prior to leaving campus, the Peer Review Team holds two exit interviews. One of the interviews is with the departmental administrative staff. This review is designed to allow a frank assessment of goals, plans, staffing, resources, as well as existing and potential strengths/areas needing improvements. The second exit interview provides the VPFSS with a preliminary review and evaluation of the department. These interviews may be combined.

Peer Review Team Report – Shortly after the campus visit, the Peer Review Team submits a written review and evaluation of the department. The report should provide an overall evaluation of the department, an assessment of the self-study document and suggestions on possible departmental improvements based upon the reviewers’ expertise in the area.

There are no format requirements for the Peer Review Team Report. The content and length may vary, depending up on the nature and size of the department and on personal preferences of the authors. From an organizational standpoint, it is useful to begin the report with an overview of the department and to conclude with recommendations and a summary. The report should address issues such as the:

- a) effectiveness and productivity of products, services and activities;
- b) level of professional development, research and/or creative activity of the staff;
- c) opportunities for development and weakness or deficiencies in the department or its resources; and
- d) appropriateness of short-and-long-term goals and objectives within the strategic plan as well as the prospects for achieving the objectives.

Comments from the PRT and the external reviewer on how effectively the program is being administered and impressions of the morale and commitment of the staff are welcomed. However, references to specific individuals or groups viewed as “troublesome” should NOT be included in the report. If the latter type of information is believed to be critical to the evaluation, this should be communicated via a confidential letter to the VPFSS.

Within four weeks after completing the site visit, the external reviewer will provide a draft report that evaluates the self-study, provides the findings of the Peer Review Team and recommends actions for future improvements of the services and activities.

The PRT is encouraged to use electronic mail for compilation and editing of the report. The draft report is sent to the members of the Peer Review Team for final edits and comments. A copy is also provided to the director to review for any inaccuracies. All editorial comments are returned to the external reviewer. The external reviewer will incorporate the comments and provide the final PRT report to the director and the VPFSS.

Strategic Planning Response – Staff members of the reviewed department are required to provide the Vice President for Finance and Support Services written responses to the Peer Review Team’s report. Their responses should include a list of specific actions they plan to take in light of the recommendations of the Peer Review Team.

Response to Peer Review Team’s Report – Responses should include steps to be taken to correct deficiencies, build upon strengths in the program, and incorporate various recommendations into the future plans of the department. If there are any specific recommendations they do not agree with, they should explain why they disagree with them and why they would prefer not to carry them out.

The response to the Peer Review Team’s Report should include the following items:

- The proposed action, expected outcome, cost/resource implications, source of funds/resources, and benchmark and timeline for each strength, weakness and opportunity listed (e.g. recommendations involving future changes in staff responsibilities in the department).

- Discuss any major findings that will not be addressed in the revision of the current strategic plan and the reason for not including.

The VPFSS may elect to forward to the President the department's self-study, the Peer Review Team's report and the department's responses to the Peer Review Team's report, along with his/her recommendations. The VPFSS may also elect to share any of these reports with Business Services Council.

SELF-STUDY REPORT OUTLINE

I. Introduction

Briefly introduce the goals and components of the Comprehensive Peer Review and the purpose of the Self-study. (1-2 pages)

II. History of Department

Provide a brief history of the department and how it currently fits into the organization of the Finance and Support Services Division. Include:

- major changes in the department's organizational structure and organizational relationships within the division, (e.g., changes in reporting lines);
- orientation or focus of services and activities;
- major new services and activities that have been added or deleted; and
- primary changes in services and activities within the department, (e.g. loss of personnel due to university budget cuts).

III. Findings and Recommendations Made From Previous Reviews

Specify the types and years of the latest: a) Comprehensive Peer Review, b) accreditation by a national professional organization; c) reviews using national guidelines or standards; d) accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools; e) internal audit reviews, or f) other reviews. Indicate even if no recommendations related to the department were made during the SACS accreditation.

Summarize the major findings and recommendations from each of these reviews or none, is applicable. Did the director and staff of the department agree with the recommendations? Describe the changes in the department made to date and any planned changes incorporated into the strategic plan of the department. What major changes, if any, have been implemented to strengthen the department, that were NOT specific recommendations from a review?

IV. Description of the Department

A. Mission and Goals

Describe the department's mission and its major goals. In an appendix, provide the most recent version of the department's strategic plan.

B. Services and Activities

List each major service and/or activity (core process) of the department and provide the following information:

- Description of the Service or activity – a brief description of the service or activity including the elements of the services/activities and two or three major statistics that reflect the scope of the service/activity, (e.g., numbers of students served). Tables or charts that clearly summarize the scope of services are useful.
- Target Audiences – describes the primary target audience for the service or activity and any secondary or tertiary audiences served.
- Delivery and Marketing – describe how services and activities are provided (e.g., on-site, outreach, individual, group activities). Include information about the primary methods used to make SWTexans aware of this service or program.
- Collaborative Relationships – describe the major collaborative relationships with other departments or units within the university or with external agencies. Describe how these collaborative efforts serve to increase efficiency and quality of the programs and services. Indicate maintenance efforts and methods used to facilitate smooth and team-oriented efforts within these working relationships.
- Obstacles – describe the PRIMARY problems and/or obstacles experienced in providing general or specific programs and services, (e.g., loss of facilities space, conflicting programs, university calendar). For each primary obstacle, provide a viable solution(s) that should be considered for overcoming the obstacle in the near future.
- Evaluation – describe the evaluation methods used to determine the quality and effectiveness of the services and activities. Identify significant changes in the service/activity that have resulted from the evaluation. Copies of evaluation instruments should be included in the appendices.
- Future Opportunities – Describe if there are opportunities in your unit capable of seizing, given availability of appropriate resources? How would these opportunities affect the unit itself and those parts of the institution served by the unit?

C. Resources

Charts are useful to provide overviews of the staffing, budget, funding source, assignable or gross square feet, equipment, and student employment for each service or activity within the department. Budget summaries may be included in the appendices of the Self-Study Report or detailed data may be provided in separate binders for reference during the site visit.

- Personnel – summarize the personnel resources and provide a chart that lists each person with responsibility for program delivery. All administration and professional staff should be listed with the person's departmental title, and brief description of current job responsibilities and duties. Basic demographic information including years in present position, highest degree earned, institution granting the degree and

ethnic origin may be included. Information on classified staff should include the number of individuals per job title. For graduate and undergraduates in supervisory roles, provide similar information and include current SWT academic major and class level. Indicate the number of students employed in the department as well.

- Funding and Budgets – Describe the source of funds available to the department and indicate amounts budgeted for salaries, wages and operations. In addition, identify income generating accounts if applicable and how the funds are generated and expected.
- Equipment – Identify the major pieces of capital equipment or inventory that contribute to the success of the department. Briefly describe the status of these resources and replacement plans for the equipment.
- Facilities – Describe all facilities, (i.e., the buildings, office space, and property devoted to the service or activity), and any renovations or new facilities approved for future use. If available, floor plans may be provided in the appendices.
- Other Resources – Describe community resources, grants, joint programs, affiliated centers, cooperating institutions, etc. that contribute to the department’s programs and services.

D. Assessment

Briefly describe each major assessment and evaluation activity within the department, report the major findings and indicate any changes that have been implemented based on assessment activities. Include a list of assessment strategies planned for the department over the next three years in the following categories:

- Customer satisfaction
- Assessment of the needs for service and activities
- Peer or benchmark studies with other organizations

E. Staff Development, Research and Creative Activity

This section focuses on the efforts of the department to develop its staff. For current administrative and professional staff, include all activities (see list below) during the last three years, regardless of the place of employment at the time of the activity.

- Publications or Funded Projects – List contributions to professional publications, editorial work, or major funded projects with funding agency, dates and amounts for citations.

- Professional Leadership – List all state, regional or national conferences or organization in which staff have served in a leadership role; including person’s name and their activity, such as planning/hosting, presenting, keynoting or serving as an officer.
- Honors and Awards – List all state, regional or national recognition, awards or honors received by the staff during the last three years.
- Teaching – Identify all academic courses taught by departmental staff.
- Other evidence of staff productivity important to the department: provide a statement regarding efforts made to develop non-administrative, non-professional staff.

F. Outreach and Community Service

Summarize the department’s – not individual staff member’s – major outreach and community service activities conducted over the past three years specific to the work of the department. Include outreach services to target populations, presentations and consultations to nonprofit groups, partnership programs with community groups or organizations, and other outreach activities to the general public.

NOTE: Some departments may not have any major outreach and community service activities.

V. Findings and Recommendations

The department should summarize the major findings of the self-study and provide recommendations to:

- Build on or use its strengths
- Address areas of weakness or deficiency

VI. Appendix

Include any material that would assist the PRT in understanding the responsibilities of the department.