



# **External Review Framework For Doctoral Programs**

Office of the Provost and Senior Vice President for  
Academic Affairs  
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## **I. Purpose**

The intent of an external program review is to be a transparent, collaborative and comprehensive process providing faculty and administration with information needed to support and guide a university process of continual program planning, quality improvement and resource allocation. This process supports the university's accreditation requirements for periodic assessment of program effectiveness of student learning opportunities and aligns with the RIT strategic plan.

Please note RIT's current doctoral programs do not require external specialized program accreditation.

The value of an external program review includes the opportunity to:

- Identify an academic program's strengths, determine opportunities for improvement, and progress as a foundation for making informed decisions about quality
- Assess the contributions of each program to the university's mission and strategic goals
- Understand the quality of the program and its unique contribution to RIT
- Review the financial profile to assess the vitality of the program and the degree to which it supports efficient university-wide budgeting and resource allocations

The process will provide accurate and appropriate information allowing the university to make an informed decision about program enhancement, restructure, consolidation, or discontinuance.

## **II. Elements of the Review Process**

### **A. Self-Study**

The first step entails preparation of a reflective self-study report that documents a program's accomplishments in relationship to specific criteria. The self-study articulates and is closely integrated with the assessment of program-level goals and student learning outcomes.

### **B. External Review**

1. The Office of the Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs will share reasonable expenses associated with the external review process including the cost of the three-person External Review Panel (ERP) visit (i.e. travel, lodging, meals, and modest honoraria). Prior to the visit, the Dean of the college will provide an estimated cost of the external review program to the Provost for approval.
2. The Dean of the college will solicit from the Ph.D. Program Director and program faculty the names of potential reviewers with relevant knowledge and expertise. An *External Review Panel (ERP) Reviewer Conflict of Interest Form* (see Appendix D) will be completed for each nominee, including curricula vitae, and forwarded to the Assistant Provost for Academic Affairs. The Assistant Provost

will verify that there is no conflict of interest and then forward the ERP materials to the Dean of the college(s) and the Associate Provost and Dean of Graduate Education for consideration.

3. The Dean of the college in consultation with the Associate Provost and Dean of Graduate Education will review nominations and appoint a three to four person ERP.

External reviewers will be selected based upon their discipline expertise related to the Ph.D. program under review. Potential reviewers should not have a conflict of interest with program leaders, program faculty or other key program stakeholders. For committees of three reviewers all must be faculty that meet one or more the following criteria:

- Recognition as a leader in research relevant to the program under review
- Leadership in the field (e.g. membership on editorial boards, journal editor, national associations, serving on NSF or NIH Boards, Ph.D. program director, innovation in graduate education)
- Expertise in diversity, equity, and inclusion in the PhD program field

An optional fourth reviewer could be a professional from communities of practice employed in or with relevance to the academic discipline. Depending on the discipline the third optional reviewer could be a representative from:

- Business
- Industry
- Government
- Not-for-profit sector

4. The external review panel should meet separately with the following groups during the on-site visit:

- Ph.D. Directors
- Assistant Professors
- Ph.D. Students
- Sr. or Core, Extended and Research Program Faculty
- Dean of the College
- VP of Research
- Associate Provost and Dean of Graduate Education
- Program Support Staff

In addition to meeting with select groups the ERP will have access to the associated program offices and research facilities for the Ph.D. program being evaluated.

## **C. External Review Report**

The ERP will review information from the self-study and campus visit to develop a comprehensive report, which will be submitted to the Dean of the college and the Ph.D. Program Director.

## **D. External Review Response**

The Ph.D. Program Director in consultation with program faculty and the Dean of the college will provide a written response to the external review report detailing an action plan for the Provost's review.

## **E. Provost Review and Action Plan Approval**

The Provost reviews, makes recommendations and approves the response to the external review report and subsequent action plan.

## **F. Implementation of Action Plan**

Following approval, the Ph.D. Director will work with program faculty to implement the action plan.

## **III. Procedures**

The Office of the Provost will initiate the external review process with the Dean. Oversight of the process within each college is coordinated and organized by the Dean (or designee).

Colleges should strategically plan for the designation of appropriate staffing (faculty and administrative) as well as resources to initiate the self-study and sustain the process throughout the review of its academic program.

Committees, comprised of college, school and department faculty and staff from the academic unit housing the academic program under review, will prepare a self-study report utilizing the outline provided in Appendix C. Committees have the option to include additional information (e.g. annual academic program improvement progress report, etc.) as they deem appropriate.

In addition to the outline, the self-study should include responses to the following questions, contained in Appendix A, *Self-Study Areas of Inquiry* (source: RIT Academic Blueprint). The questions will enable each program to highlight its accomplishments, unique role within the institution, and ways it intends to enhance its quality.

- Program Mission and Description – What we do and why?
- Program Selectivity – Is there continuing demand for the program?
- Program Quality and Accomplishments – How do we measure program quality and success to articulate the program goals?
- Program Vision – How do we improve program success and what is our vision for the future?

The self-study should also include a financial profile of the academic program, including program resources and associated financial information, the cost model, sponsored research and other relevant fiscal metrics.

#### **A. Self-Study Procedures**

The Dean within each college, department chair or head and the Ph.D. director will appoint a committee representative of college, school, and department faculty and staff from the academic unit housing the academic program under review.

1. The committee is charged with the preparation of a self-study document according to RIT's external review criteria, guidelines, and established timeline. Committee members will have access to a set of standard data, specific to their program, which will assist them in preparing the self-study (See Appendix B).
2. The self-study is submitted to the Dean of the college for review and discussion with the committee, department chair or head, Ph.D. director, program faculty and others, as deemed appropriate.

#### **B. External Review Procedures**

1. A three to four-person external review panel (ERP) will be appointed to review those programs without external accreditation. Reviewers will:
  - a. Receive the self-study and other relevant materials 4-6 weeks prior to their two-day on-site visit.
  - b. Conduct and participate in a two-day, on-site visit.
  - c. Receive a series of questions, criteria and metrics to guide the external review process and evaluate the academic program.
  - d. Submit a written report of findings and recommendations to the Provost and Dean no later than two weeks after the scheduled visit. The external review report should focus on the strengths, weaknesses, challenges and opportunities of the Ph.D. program. The ERP will be provided a [set of guiding questions for consideration \(see pages 19-21\)](#).
2. Written Report
  - a. The Dean of the College will share the ERP written report findings and recommendations with the committee, department chair or head, Ph.D. director and program faculty.

#### **C. External Review Response Procedures**

The department chair or head and Ph.D. director, in consultation with program faculty and the Dean, will provide a written response to the report detailing an action plan for the Provost's review.

## **D. Provost Review and Action Plan Approval**

The Provost, in consultation with the Dean, will use the self-study, financial profile information, and the program's proposed action plan to inform college planning, resource allocation, and budgeting decisions. Such actions could include the approval of the program's proposed action plan, program enhancement, restructure, consolidation, or discontinuance.

## **E. Implementation of Action Plan**

1. The Provost and the Dean of the college will determine the type of progress report and appropriate timetable needed in order to ensure that recommendations are successfully implemented.
2. In the event that results indicate greater program potential exists and/or the need for additional resources, the Provost will determine if incremental resources should be allocated.
3. If results of the review raises important concerns or questions with respect to the program's quality or current financial profile, the Provost may require further study or review.

## **IV. External Review Timeline**

RIT's Ph.D. programs will be reviewed on a seven to ten-year cycle. New Ph.D. programs will be initially reviewed after year five. The Office of Graduate Education will be responsible for tracking the review schedule.

This external review process will begin with the longest standing Ph.D. degree programs. The goal is to review two programs per year (one in fall and one in spring). Colleges will submit a proposed program review timeline to the Provost for approval.

Colleges should plan their program review cycles in advance to allow for the possible needed adjustment of resources, staffing and faculty work plans. Colleges have the option to choose from a fall or spring external review cycle. Each option requires approximately one-year to complete.

### **Fall Cycle**

#### **September 1<sup>st</sup>**

- The Office of the Provost notifies the Dean of the college, the department chair or head and the Ph.D. director of the pending review process (based on previously established and approved schedule). The Dean, department chair and Ph.D. director will select and establish an internal committee to begin the review process. A representative from the Office of the Provost will meet with the committee to review the process, deadlines and address any concerns.

### **Spring Cycle**

#### **January 1<sup>st</sup>**

**October – January**

- The committee and department chair or head will collect relevant institutional data, and identify and nominate external reviewers for consideration.
- ERP nominations due to the Dean of the college and Associate Provost and Dean Graduate Education for review.
- Self-Study review and report writing begins.

**February 1<sup>st</sup>**

- External (on-site) review Panel confirmed.

**May 1<sup>st</sup>**

- Self-study and other supporting materials due to the Dean of the college and Provost.

**May 15<sup>th</sup>**

- Reviewers receive self-study 4 weeks- 6 weeks before onsite visit

**June - July**

- On-site ERP review completed. Recommendations due two weeks after visit.

**August**

- ERP recommendations reviewed and action plan developed.
- Provost, Dean of the college and department chair or head and Ph.D. director meet to discuss report, recommendations, response to report and action plan.

**September 1<sup>st</sup>**

- Implementation of action plan

**February – May****June 1<sup>st</sup>****September 1<sup>st</sup>****October 15<sup>th</sup>****October - November****December****January 1<sup>st</sup>**



## **V. Appendices**

Appendix A – Self-Study Areas of Inquiry

Appendix B – Potential Data and Sources

Appendix C – Outline for RIT Self-Study

Appendix D – ERP Conflict of Interest Form

## Appendix A

### **Self-Study Areas of Inquiry**

<https://www.rit.edu/academicaffairs/academicprogrammngmnt/new-program-proposal-requirements/rit-academic-blueprint>

#### **I. Program Description - What we do and why?**

- a. Provide a description of the academic program, curricular overview, facilities, space and utilization of current resources
- b. Describe how the program supports:
  - the College's mission, vision and strategic plan
  - the University's mission, vision and strategic plan
- c. Describe the program's contribution to and relationship with:
  - the field, profession and/or industry (comment on brand recognition – regionally, nationally and internationally, if applicable)
  - RIT's Academic Program Profile Characteristics
  - other RIT degree programs, if applicable
  - student career preparation
- d. Highlight the program's distinctive features (auxiliary locations, flexibility, interdependence, joint programming and department synergies, shared resources, cross-disciplinary and cross-college collaborations)

#### **II. Program Selectivity - Is there continuing demand for the program?**

- a. Provide an overview of the academic program's selectivity including the three year trends related to:
  - admissions
    - student qualifications – Undergraduate and Masters (if applicable) GPA, GRE, GMAT
    - selectivity, program inquiries, applications, acceptance and yield rate
  - enrollment
  - job placement rates
  - future projected enrollment and demand for graduates in the marketplace

### **III. Program Quality and Accomplishments – How do we measure program quality and success to articulate the program goals?**

- a. Provide an overview of the academic program's accomplishments including:
  - a brief summary of prior external review reports if applicable
  - assessment of program-level student learning outcomes and program objectives; associated results and actions implemented as a result of findings
  - innovative, distinctive curricular features (such as curriculum currency, curriculum and delivery design, national/professional rankings, and/or awards)
  - distinctive student and alumnae accomplishments (such as awards, invited conference presentations and publications)
  - student retention and graduation rates
  - distinctive faculty accomplishments (degrees, certification, licenses, awards, research productivity and scholarship, publications, grants, contracts, # of proposals, grant funding \$\$)
  - recognition and feedback from alumni, CO-OP/internship supervisors and employers of graduates, as appropriate and applicable

### **IV. Program Vision - how do we improve program success and what is our vision for the future?**

- a. Provide a summary of opportunities for change, plans to enhance quality and competitiveness, plans for innovation and new initiatives, and how future progress and successes will be measured. Indicate which of these envisioned changes are within the control of the program and what changes require action at the Dean or Provost level.
- b. Provide a vision statement that describes what the department would like the program to be in five years and what actions and/or resources are needed to accomplish the vision.

## Appendix B

### Potential Data and Sources

<b>Data</b>	<b>Data Sources</b>
Enrollment - # of applicants, fall headcount, fall headcount change, admission rate and yield	Graduate Admissions and Enrollment Management and Institutional Research <a href="https://www.rit.edu/admissions/graduate">https://www.rit.edu/admissions/graduate</a> <a href="https://www.rit.edu/fa/irda/dashboard">https://www.rit.edu/fa/irda/dashboard</a>
Program Learning Outcomes and Program Improvement	Office of Educational Effectiveness Assessment (EEA) <a href="https://www.rit.edu/academicaffairs/outcomes/">https://www.rit.edu/academicaffairs/outcomes/</a>
Student Success (retention, graduation rate, time to degree, degrees conferred and career outcomes)	Dashboard- Institutional Research <a href="https://www.rit.edu/fa/irda/dashboard">https://www.rit.edu/fa/irda/dashboard</a>
External Awards and Funding (Faculty grants and contracts)	Sponsored Research <a href="https://www.rit.edu/research/srs/">https://www.rit.edu/research/srs/</a>
Core Faculty Data (research productivity and scholarship, publications, degrees, certification, licenses, awards, etc.)	Faculty CVs Sponsored Research <a href="https://www.rit.edu/research/srs/">https://www.rit.edu/research/srs/</a> Core faculty definition <a href="https://www.rit.edu/academicaffairs/academicprogrammgmt/core-faculty-definition">https://www.rit.edu/academicaffairs/academicprogrammgmt/core-faculty-definition</a>
Ph.D. External Program Review Self-Study Reports and Associated Documentation	Office of the Provost
RIT Strategic Goals	RIT Strategic Plan 2018-2025 Greatness Through Difference <a href="https://www.rit.edu/strategicplan/">https://www.rit.edu/strategicplan/</a>

## APPENDIX C

### Outline for RIT Self-Study

#### **I. PhD Program Overview**

- a. Brief History, Vision and Mission
- b. Intellectual Life of PhD Programs
  - i. Strengths
  - ii. Challenges
- c. Synergy w/Strategic Plan, Mission and Vision
- d. List of Core Program Faculty
- e. Research Funding
- f. Collaborate w/other PhD Programs
- g. Facilities
- h. National Standing
- i. Faculty Teaching Loads
- j. Administrative & Organizational structure
  - i. Full List of Program Staff
  - ii. Integrations and Research Scientists and Visiting Scholars
  - iii. Organizational Structure
  - iv. Financial Management and Budget Allocation

#### **II. Faculty Information**

**For each core faculty member, the following should be provided:**

- a. CV
- b. Research Interests
- c. External Research Support
- d. Thesis & Dissertations Supervised
- e. Teaching Load
- f. Major Service

#### **III. Doctoral Program Elements**

- a. Program Mission
- b. Program Requirements
- c. Teaching Assistant/Research Assistant /Project Management Opportunities
- d. Advisement & Mentorship
- e. Statement of Expectations
- f. Community and Cohort Cohesion

1. Assessment of Climate Related to Diversity and Inclusion for Faculty, Staff and Students
2. Students Input & Concerns
3. Career and Professional Development Opportunities
4. External Activities
5. Student-proposed External Funding
6. University-wide Funding Opportunities
7. Attrition and Time to Degree
8. Graduate Alumni Interaction
9. Assessment and Program Effectiveness

#### **IV. Graduate Student Information**

- a. Admission and Enrolment
- b. Degree Conferred
- c. Completion Rates
- d. Median Time-to-Degree
- e. Current Career Outcomes
- f. Institutional Classifications of Graduates with Faculty Appointments
- g. Summary of Alumni Survey
- h. Participation in Professional Development
- i. Financial Support of Doctoral Students

#### **V. Appendices**

- A. Faculty Hire Proposals
- B. 2015-2025 RIT Strategic Plan
- C. Academic Analytics National Ranking
- D. PhD Program Budget Allocation Policy
- E. PhD Program Section of the RIT Graduate School Bulletin
- F. Preliminary Exam Guidelines
- G. PhD Student Program Handbook (if applicable)
- H. PhD Program Funding Allocation

## Appendix D

# RIT

### External Review Panel Reviewer Conflict of Interest Form

There must be no conflict of interest or appearance of a conflict of interest with the institution under review. There is a conflict of interest when the potential external review panelist:

1. is a present or former employee, student, member of the governing board, owner or shareholder of, or consultant to the institution where the program is under review;
2. is a spouse, parent, child, or sibling of an individual or persons listed in item 1 above;
3. has expressed an opinion for or against the proposed program under review;
4. is seeking or being sought for employment or other relationship of any kind with the institution where the program is under review;
5. has a personal or professional relationship with the program or institution where the program is under review that might compromise objectivity; and/or
6. has a competitive relationship with the institution that might compromise objectivity.

Printed name of external review panel nominee: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

The signed conflict of interest form and a current curriculum vita should be emailed to the Assistant Provost, Academic Affairs at: [agwvpa@rit.edu](mailto:agwvpa@rit.edu)