TBR Office of Academic Affairs: ACADEMIC AUDIT FAQ'S

A. The Self Study Process

1. When should the self study process begin so that it can be thoroughly accomplished by the end of January?

a. Programs undergoing the Academic Audit process should be informed during the spring term prior to the start of the year in which the audit will take place. A self study team leader should be identified as soon as feasible especially for large programs that benefit from preparation during the summer. The self study process should start at the beginning of the academic year. See the General Timeline provided in the *Handbook*.

2. What are the time demands for the self study process?

a. Time demands will vary depending upon the scope and scale of a program. Independent of size of the program, the Self Study Team will need to meet initially two or three times for one to two hours per session to plan the self study strategy, devise questionnaires, set up web-based communication tools, etc. During the fall semester, expect to hold two or more faculty meetings to engage in conversations about the focal areas. Also plan to hold at least one conversation session each with students and other stakeholders (for example, an advisory committee). Writing the self study report will take two to three hours per section. Additional hours – perhaps 5 to 7 – will be required for collating, editing, and preparing the final report. Finally, 2 to 8 hours are needed to identify and collect materials for the Appendices. Note that this should be a team effort – not all of these tasks should be done by one person!

3. How does a program with only one or two faculty accomplish all the tasks of a self study?

a. Many excellent self studies have been performed by disciplines with one or two full time faculty. These programs have the benefit of knowing the landscape of the program extremely well and knowing all the stakeholders. The task of performing the self study will be primarily on those one or two faculty members, but assistance should be sought early and often from the Campus Coordinator of the Academic Audit as well as from the appropriate Department Head or Dean. Engage key adjunct faculty and/or advisory committee members in the process, too.

4. If two or more certificate programs share the same faculty, adjunct faculty, advisory committee, etc., can one combined self study be done?

a. Yes. Please note, however, that if the Academic Audit is being performed for Performance Funding consideration, a combined study must be approved at the TBR and THEC levels beforehand. A separate Summary Sheet will be required for each certificate.

5. What critical information should be explored first to begin the planning/writing process of the self study?

a. First, become as familiar as possible with the Academic Audit process: read the *Handbook*; discuss the process with your campus coordinator and leaders of other programs on your campus that have gone through the process; and review the Summary Sheet, which provides a summation of expectations. Next, reflect on your program's current status in terms of the focal areas. While these five categories may seem new to you, they provide an excellent framework for analysis – many self study participants remark that they haven't had conversations about such things as learning objectives or learning strategies in a long while!

6. How do you involve the following in this process?

a. Adjunct faculty

a) Invite adjuncts to regular faculty meetings at which conversations will be held about the focal areas. Hold a gathering in the evening or at a remote site to capture those voices. Provide electronic access via email, a D2L class, or an interactive web page.

b. Online faculty who live in other regions, states, or nations

a) As with other adjuncts, provide electronic access via email, a D2L class, or an interactive web page. It may be feasible to hold a teleconference or a web-based meeting with online faculty.

c. Other Stakeholders

a) Other stakeholders such as advisory committee members, faculty in "client disciplines" (those areas that benefit from the skills and knowledge your students obtain), potential employers, faculty from universities to which your students articulate, etc. can be involved through meetings, telephone conversations, surveys, or electronic media.

Engaging these vested parties will provide a richer portrait of your program's quality and effectiveness.

d. Students

a) While college-wide student survey data and student evaluation reports provide a measure of quantitative data, conversations with your students are also warranted. Some programs have used a pizza lunch to establish a relaxed setting where students can share their experiences, feelings, and suggestions about the program. Include representation from a cross section of the students your program serves: majors and non-majors; non-traditional students; students from outlying sites; and other relevant student groups if at all possible.

7. What relative weight should be given to student input versus faculty input?

a. While students may not be the most helpful resource in certain focal areas such as learning objectives or curricula design, their input on such points as co-curricular activities, how best they learn, and overall satisfaction with their experience in the program should be given consideration. Taking part in conversations with students during the self study process is too often a novel activity for faculty in an academic unit. Such a process may establish a precedent for further student engagement.

8. Are there surveys available that have already been created to obtain input from faculty, students, or other stakeholders?

a. Surveys have been created by several programs during their respective self study process to address the particular needs of a program. It is of great value to generate responses to what you need to know about your particular program versus using a standardized format. The guiding questions in the *Handbook* are excellent starting points for questionnaires but most importantly for conversations. Use these as a starting point then develop your own questions that address particular concerns of your program.

9. Regarding learning objectives (focal area number 1), if we do not have them for a particular course, should we create them or make writing objectives an initiative?

a. Most likely, you have learning objectives but they may not be explicit or standardized. A meaningful *Initiative* would be to develop a process by which learning objectives are discussed, written, accepted, and shared throughout the program.

10. Regarding Student Learning Assessment (focal area 4), what are examples of evidence that can be used to support successful student outcomes?

a. The *Handbook* provides a list of such indicators. Importantly, final grades or scores on tests are not exclusively the indicators of student learning. One suggestion as you craft this section of the self study is to reference back to the learning objectives (focal area 1) and reflect upon all the ways that you can identify that students have achieved those objectives.

11. Regarding "Quality Assurance" (focal area number 5), should the focus be on college-wide activities, program-specific activities, or both?

a. Both. For example, a program may have an intrinsic adjunct mentoring process that is not college-wide. Equally, the college may have a "teaching improvement center" that benefits all faculty. Both are indicators of quality assurance processes that apply to the program undergoing self study.

12. Question: What advice can a self study team follow to form an effective "improvement initiative" (Part 5 of the Self Study)?

a. While improvement initiatives will be dependent upon the dynamics and perceived needs of each program undergoing self study, it may be helpful to apply the "S.M.A.R.T." goal-setting acronym to the improvement initiative development process. While there are variations in the meaning of each letter in the acronym, generally SMART stands for the following in terms of what makes a good goal:

a) Specific

b) Measurable

c) Attainable

d) Relevant

e) Time-bound

In some models, the "A" is interpreted as "agreed upon", which is important to the success of an initiative in a collegial setting. Also, the "R" is sometimes interpreted as "realistic" meaning doable. Using this acronym and its related meanings may be an effective way to both stimulate discussion as well as gauge the appropriateness of an improvement initiative.

13. What materials should be considered for inclusion in the Appendices?

a. The appendices should include relevant material that provides evidence of processes cited in the report. They are not designed to be a vault of voluminous documentation but rather salient samples of exemplary activities and practices.

14. Is there a list of persons who could help us write the self study?

a. A cadre of resource personnel has been developed to assist programs with the self study process. First, there is a small, highly experienced group now known as the Academic Audit Fellows who are available to consult with you on the self study process. Each institution also has an Academic Audit Campus Coordinator that acts as a go-between between the TBR and the programs on each campus undergoing the academic audit process.

15. Will a template for the self study document be available on the TBR website?

a. The outline for the self study document is provided in the *Handbook*.

16. What should be the role of the Academic Audit Summary Sheet in designing the self study process and writing the self study document?

a. The Summary Sheet provides useful guidance for both conducting the self study and writing the report. The report should be written so that the answers to the evaluative statements on the Summary Sheet are readily apparent to the peer reviewers as they read each section.

B. **The Academic Auditor Team Review Process**

1. How are members of the Academic Auditor Team selected?

a. Each Academic Auditor Team is assembled by the TBR Academic Audit coordinator. The Academic Auditor Team consists of a team leader and usually two team members. For some small programs, a two person team is appointed; for a few very large programs or ones that issue degrees at more than one level, a four person team is formed. The team leader is selected from a pool of experienced, trained auditors. Up to two team members may be nominated by the program undergoing review. These nominees need NOT have previously served as members of an academic audit site review team. Training will be provided to all members of Academic Auditor Teams. If nominations are not made or if a

nominee is unable to serve, the TBR Academic Audit Coordinator will identify team members from a pool of trained auditors.

2. *Question: Who will appoint the Academic Auditor Team chair?*

   a. Answer: The TBR Office of Academic Affairs is responsible for assigning the team leader (chair) for each auditor team; however, each program can nominate two candidates for service on its auditor team. These candidates must be approved by the TBR Office of Academic Affairs, and they must attend training for service on an Academic Auditor Team.

3. *What criteria should be considered in nominating peer review team members?*

   a. Academic Auditor team members should be recognized as exemplary faculty by the nominating program. They may be subject matter experts whose discernment is highly valued; or they may be learning leaders who are prized for their insights into quality teaching and learning processes. Regional/distance considerations should not be the most important criterion for selecting team members. Partnerships and previous associations would more valuable as long as objectivity is not compromised. Nominees for an Academic Auditor Team should be willing and able to make a commitment to this important process.

4. *What happens when there is no trained auditor from a particular discipline?*

   a. Every effort is made to identify a qualified auditor from the discipline or from a closely related discipline for each program undergoing the audit process. Identifying such an Academic Auditor Team candidate is an important option for each program undergoing the Academic Audit process. As the focus of the academic audit process is on the processes in place and planned to continuously improve the quality of teaching and learning, interdisciplinary participation is of great value. As educators, we share the common challenge of reaching, evaluating, and fostering our students as they aspire to attain their educational goals. A precept of the academic audit process is that such a challenge is not discipline specific and that we can all learn from our colleagues who demonstrate the very best practices of teaching and learning in higher education.

5. What guidelines should be used on recruiting faculty (full time and part time) for meeting with the Academic Auditor Team?

a. Conversations between the Academic Auditor Team and the faculty are of primary importance during the site visit and usually involve two sessions of 50 to 75 minutes each. Thus, involving all full time faculty for small to mid-sized programs is attainable. If the size of the faculty exceeds 20, invite a cross-section of faculty to include all ranges of experience and rank. Regarding adjunct faculty, try to include three or four who are representative of the part-time teaching corps. It is often a challenge to bring in faculty who teach at night or at remote sites, but experience with this process has demonstrated that some will go out of their way to be involved in the conversations with the Academic Auditor Team.

6. During the site visit, will faculty members be interviewed separately or as a group?

a. As a group.

7. What guidelines should be used on recruiting students for the meeting with the Academic Auditor Team?

a. As the Academic Auditor team's session with students will last no more than 75 minutes, it is advisable to limit the number of students to 10. You may wish to invite 12 to guard against last minute absentees. If all 12 come, that would not pose a problem. These students should represent a cross-section of the students served by the program. In many cases, this includes majors and non-majors; freshmen and upper classmen; traditional and non-traditional students; and both high and marginal performers. You may not be able to include all of the varied characteristics of the students your program serves with ten students, but a varied mix is preferable than all honors majors in the discipline.

8. What is the schedule for an Academic Auditor Team site visit?

a. A suggested site visit schedule is provided in the *Handbook*. This schedule can be adjusted to meet the needs of the Academic Auditor Team and the program participants. Importantly, the Exit Section must take place on the day of the site visit and the documentation listed must be left prior to the team's departure.

9. What expenses for the site visit does the host campus incur?

a. The host campus pays for any on-campus services provided to the auditors (meals, snacks, etc.), but the travel expense for each auditor (lodging, mileage), while initially paid by the college to the auditor, is reimbursed to the college by the TBR. No stipend is paid to the auditor as indicated in the Handbook ("Auditors are volunteers (primarily faculty) who receive training on education quality processes…").

10. What are the consequences if a criterion on the Academic Audit Summary Sheet is "Not met"?

a. If the program is performing the academic audit to meet performance funding requirements, a "not met" will result in a lower score in the computation of points for Standard 1C. If the program is performing the academic audit as part of its institutional effectiveness program, there is no specific consequence of a "not met" mark. However, a "not met" may be interpreted as an indicator of an opportunity for improvement in the self-study process that could be corrected in the future.

11. How are new faculty members to be brought up to date on academic audit initiatives from prior years?

a. The ultimate goal of the academic audit process is that continuous quality improvement in teaching and learning becomes integral and vital to the culture of the program and institution. New faculty should certainly be apprised of the initiatives early on perhaps even during new faculty orientation. Initiatives should be ongoing and engaging, thus new faculty should become involved in the realization of those initiatives. For example, some programs encourage faculty to reference academic audit initiatives when formulating their personal annual goals. A program that consciously adheres to processes by which all faculty are involved in implementing initiatives, sharing best practices, and stimulating ways by which quality improvement is ongoing has approached maturity in the academic quality work endeavor.