



OFFICE OF ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

Academic Program Review: State of Affairs Report

**Fall 2020 – Spring 2021
22 July 2021**

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Executive Summary:

This report summarizes the activities and findings of the Academic Program Review (APR) process at the University of New Mexico during AY2020-2021. The APR process is managed by the Office of Assessment & APR and overseen by the Office of the Provost. In the past year, APR focused on the following major initiatives:

- Conducting online “e-APRs” to continue the APR cycle in the face of the online modality imposed by COVID-19;
- Providing information on distinct APR information/trends to senior leadership;
- Reconnecting with branch campuses on their new APR peer-review model;
- Crafting data package policies for programs undergoing APRs.

Conducting Online “e-APRs”

Due to COVID-19, APRs were not held in-person this year. All reviews were conducted through Zoom meetings. The process continued from the “e-APR” process established the previous Spring semester for the Anderson School of Management’s APR. Seven program reviews were conducted successfully with minimal hindrance to the process. Review teams reported they were well-supported for the online process and found the review meaningful despite the online modality (see Reviewer Feedback for more information). The online APR process will be maintained moving forward with programs able to utilize the process if reviewers are apprehensive about post-COVID travel, or are unable to travel to UNM for other circumstances. However, the OA/APR is expecting most Fall 2021 reviews to be held in-person.

APR Memos

Occasionally, the OA/APR is requested to generate institutional memos regarding emerging APR themes to Provost Office leadership. Two such memos were crafted this year: one on departmental climate stressors, and one on how information collected during the APR process can inform other offices on institution-wide academic facility usage/needs. The APR process is uniquely situated to give insight into trends like these. Information collected within APR documents can benefit other processes (construction, planning, grant applications, etc.), and the perspective of external review teams can illuminate systemic matters within academic units.

Memos were crafted using program reviews from 2017-present to highlight recent and relevant examples. Both memos were sent to senior leadership.

Reconnecting with Branch Campuses for Peer-Review Modeling System

As described in the previous State of APR, the OA/APR worked with Branch Campus Deans during AY19-20 to better connect APR processes across the entire UNM system. This resulted in a branch-wide APR Manual and a “peer review model” for branch campus APRs. Due to the emergence of COVID-19 and other priorities, this process was delayed. In Spring 2021, the OA/APR reconnected with Branch Campuses on this process. Valencia and Taos branch campuses began piloting program reviews under this process for their Liberal Arts and General Studies degrees. Gallup and Los Alamos are similarly discussing how to move forward together on this model. The office will use these pilot program reviews to better structure the process, to better understand needs related to branch campus APRs, and to identify support from the OA/APR.

APR Data Packages

To better support units undergoing a program review, the OA/APR has started to provide data packets for programs to use within Criterion 4 of the Self-Study. This criterion focuses on student metrics for both undergraduate and graduate students (enrollment, retention, graduation), and asks for breakdowns along both gender and race/ethnicity demographics. Data packets provided by the office seek to ease the difficulty in collating this information from centralized UNM sources, and allow programs to spend more time on the analysis of trends rather than finding the data. The office enacted a set of policies for these data packages in Spring 2021; what data is provided, where it is sourced from, and how to handle programs seeking additional data. The office is still allowing programs to supplement data packets with any internal recordkeeping, to provide reviewers with the most accurate unit-level data.

Main Campus Program Reviews: Trends

Three programs completed online site-visits in Fall 2020, and four programs conducted online site-visits in Spring 2021. The completed academic program reviews, in order of date, were:

- Department of Music
- Architecture Department
- Department of Political Science
- International Studies Institute
- Department of Earth & Planetary Sciences
- Department of Chemistry & Chemical Biology
- Department of Speech & Hearing Sciences

Program and institutional-level trends emerged from these seven reviews. These trends are summarized below:

Well-Designed, Comprehensive Curricula for Undergraduates and Graduates

Academic curricula at UNM were noted by all review teams as being strong and well-positioned to teach students effectively. Little mention was made of curricula issues due to the switch to online classes, perhaps showcasing well-preserved academics despite the circumstances imposed by COVID-19. Also, reviewers mentioned that departments are doing well to offer classes that serve as pre-requisites for majors outside their own programs, and that serve to fulfill general education requirements outlined by the New Mexico Higher Education Department.

Low Faculty & Staff Numbers

Review teams stressed the low number of faculty in departments as problematic. This has been a reoccurring trend in past APRs, though seem to be more heavily discussed by this year's review teams. Teams compared faculty numbers to both departments at other institutions, and generally the high number of responsibilities that faculty/staff are necessitated to take on for programs to continue. Many programs were noted as having lower faculty FTE than departments at comparable institutions. In cases where UNM departments have comparable PhD populations to other institutions, this lower faculty FTE ultimately results in a greater amount of advising per

faculty member.¹ Review teams noted the decrease of higher education funding during the pandemic, and that increases in FTE are not likely until state funding rebounds. Regardless, lack of certain specializations within existing faculty have caused concerns for accredited programs^{2,3} and nonaccredited alike. Issues persist within staff ranks as well, with minimal staffing leaving “little time for strategic planning, website updates, newsletters, etc”.⁴ Review teams also noted a case where recharacterization of staff led to a reduction in salary while also increasing job responsibilities.⁵ These added responsibilities/work were stressed by reviewers as inherently unsustainable for UNM programs and need to be addressed following the pandemic.

Facilities

A targeted trend shared with Academic Affairs this year was facility concerns. This trend was widely evident across both Fall and Spring APRs. Music, Political Science, International Studies, and Earth & Planetary Science review teams all presented evidence of subpar facilities, and in some cases large safety issues that were causing systemic strain within departments. Some review teams made the case for stronger strategic planning *before* academic facilities become problematic,⁶ while others noted that subpar facilities needed critical attention now from senior leadership. Security issues were one such area needing prompt attention including departments finding “the lack of funding to address security issues... frustrating”, despite large equipment thefts.⁷ Some teams also stressed that filling open faculty positions will inevitably cause or complicate space issues.^{8,9}

Representative & Diverse Faculty

Review teams put an emphasis in this year’s APRs to acknowledge programs that have diverse and well-represented faculty bodies. Faculty diversity was seen across both gender and

¹ POLS 2020, Review Team Report, p. 13, https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/provost_acad_program_review/165/

² SHS 2021, Review Team Report, p. 9, https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/provost_acad_program_review/162/

³ MUSC 2020, Review Team Report, p. 3, 5, https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/provost_acad_program_review/160/

⁴ POLS 2020, Review Team Report, p. 14, https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/provost_acad_program_review/165/

⁵ ARCH 2020, Review Team Report, p. 15, https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/provost_acad_program_review/185/

⁶ EPS 2021, Review Team Report, p. 9, https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/provost_acad_program_review/161/

⁷ MUSC 2020, Self-Study Report, p. 10, https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/provost_acad_program_review/160/

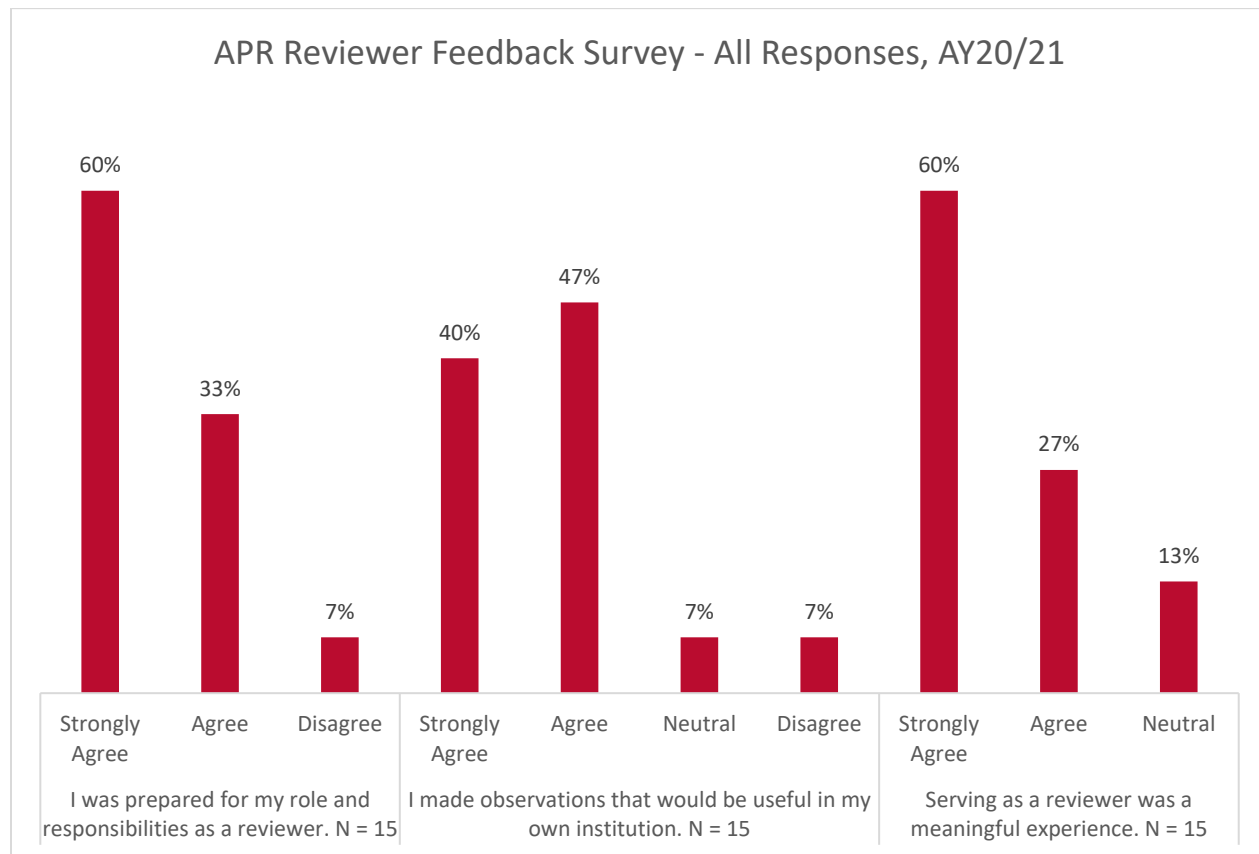
⁸ POLS 2020, Review Team Report, p. 15, https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/provost_acad_program_review/165/

⁹ SHS 2021, Review Team Report, p. 16, https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/provost_acad_program_review/162/

race/ethnicity, with UNM departments often having greater faculty diversity than their respective fields as a whole.¹⁰ Programs have also been expanding curricula to better “increase the focus on critical contemporary issues... sustainability, climate change, social justice, regionalism, and a focus on local cultural identity.”¹¹ However, review teams stated that there are still representative issues in departmental leadership, and that faculty can always better represent the diverse student body at UNM. Open faculty positions were stressed by the review teams as opportunities to address both critical hiring needs and diversity/inclusion/representation concerns.¹²

Reviewer Feedback: Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 e-Visits

Following low submission rates for the Reviewer Feedback survey in AY19-20, we instituted a new policy that all reviewers must submit a survey before their honorarium is released. Surveys completed the previous year was 5; this year is 15.



¹⁰ POLS 2020, Review Team Report, p. 10, https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/provost_acad_program_review/165/

¹¹ ARCH 2020, Review Team Report, p. 4, https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/provost_acad_program_review/185/

¹² EPS 2021, Review Team Report p. 2, 6, https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/provost_acad_program_review/161/

This year, 93% of reviewers agreed that they were **properly prepared** for their role as a reviewer. Reviewers stated:

“I appreciated the information provided by Sam Hatch (APR Office) and the program director well ahead of the visit. The historical background for the department was particularly strong in providing facts that allowed the team to view change over time.”

“Before doing the review, I wasn't convinced that having an internal reviewer (me) was useful, but during the review it did seem like having a member of the review team who's familiar with UNM does help the outside reviewers.”

87% of reviewers agreed that the APR visits and process, despite the online modality, were **beneficial for their own home departments and institutions**. Reviewer stated:

“It is always a good exercise to review another program because it helps bring clarity to how your own program can improve, be reviewed, and thrive.”

“Learning details about any program is always helpful. Observations of the department chair's thoughtfulness toward each constituency was inspiring.”

Finally, 87% of reviewers agreed that the reviewer experience was **meaningful**. Reviewers stated:

“I had recently gone through the training as an [omitted] reviewer, but had yet to do my first review... I learned much from this experience.”

“I appreciated working with colleagues from other institutions, seeing how other schools administer and develop their programs. The experience introduced me to faculty that I would potentially reach out to in the future.”

Following these questions, reviewers were able to provide comments/recommendation on the APR online modality. Reviewers stressed a greater need for moderation within Zoom meetings to help them end in a timely manner, as well as more small breaks to address Zoom fatigue. Reviewers also mentioned meeting with the unit chair/director once more, as the final meeting prior to the Exit Meeting. We have addressed these concerns by emphasizing the need for recurring small breaks after each Zoom meeting (in addition to the larger breaks already used during visits), as well as more closely working with DAs and staff to be sure someone is involved in wrapping up each Zoom meeting. Itineraries have started to include a wrap-up/clarification meeting with the unit chair, prior to the scheduled Exit Meeting preparation.

While not mentioned in the survey data, Spring 2021 reviewers noted in follow-up communication with the OA/APR that they were pleased to have met with the Vice President for Research during their visits. This is an office that future APRs will continue to involve during visits, increasing the role of Academic Affairs leadership in academic program reviews.

Upcoming Main Campus Program Reviews

During the Fall 2021 semester, five programs will undergo an APR e-visit. They are:

- Department of Communication & Journalism
- Department of Economics
- Department of Special Education
- Health, Exercise, and Sports Sciences
- Optical Sciences & Engineering

During the Spring 2022 semester, five programs will undergo an APR visit. They are:

- BA/MD
- Liberal Arts & Integrative Studies
- Nanoscience & Microsystems
- Teacher Education, Educational Leadership & Policy
- Theatre & Dance

These units are currently crafting their self-studies in preparation for their site-visits.

Appendix A – Reviewer E-Visit Survey

Fall 2020 / Spring 2021 Reviewer Survey

Please take 5 minutes to answer the following questions. These responses will be used to improve the APR process for reviewers & units.

1. Which unit/department did you serve as a reviewer for?
2. I made observations that would be useful in my own institution, college, and/or department/program. (Likert) Please provide a rationale for your rating.
3. Serving as a reviewer was a meaningful experience. (Likert) Please provide a rationale for your rating.
4. I was prepared for my role and responsibilities as a reviewer. (Likert) Please provide a rationale for your rating.
5. Since this APR transitioned from a traditional face to face visit to an e-visit, please provide any suggestions/comments regarding the new modality of being virtual. What worked well and what can be improved?
6. Please provide any additional thoughts and feedback: