

Academic Program Review Visit Guide

Updated March 2026

The Academic Program Review team in the Office of the Provost collaborates with the Department Chair or Unit Head to organize and design the external reviewers' visit. The purpose of the visit is to provide the review team with the opportunity to meet with key stakeholders to gather input on the academic program review. This guide is intended to provide an overview of the visit schedule design, and associated best practices, and outline visit responsibilities for the Office of the Provost and the hosting Department or academic unit.

PART 1: Pre-Review Visit Items

- (1) Review Team:** The Department Chair will provide the Academic Program Review (APR) team with a list of proposed external reviewer names. These names will be shared with the Dean and the Provost and, based on their feedback, the APR team will issue invitations to the selected review team members. Review teams are comprised of 2-3 external reviewers, depending on the size of the unit under review, and 2 internal reviewers who all participate in the review visit.
- (2) Review Visit Dates:** Review visits are typically held in the fall quarter, in late September through early December. At the beginning of the review process, the Department will complete a "Calendar of Non-Availability" document to relay important dates to avoid when scheduling - i.e., conferences where a majority of the Department would be traveling, student admissions visits, etc. Once the external reviewers are confirmed, the APR team will select review visit dates based on Departmental availability and that of other relevant parties including the Provost and Dean.
- (3) Travel and Airfare:** External reviewers will arrange their own travel and will be reimbursed for these expenses after the review visit takes place. Northwestern reimburses external reviewers for Economy-level airfares and ground transport. Reviewers should utilize Uber/Lyft or a taxi to travel to and from the airport.
- (4) Hotel:** The Office of the Provost will book hotel accommodation for the external reviewers for the first and second nights of the review visit. Evanston-campus visits typically utilize the [Hyatt House Hotel in Evanston](#); Chicago campus visits typically utilize the [Hyatt Centric Chicago – Magnificent Mile](#). Any additional hotel dates beyond the review visit will be at the reviewer's expense.

PART 2: Review Visit Schedule Design and Logistics

Pre-Visit Preparations

The APR team will manage pre-visit communications to the review team members.

Visit Schedule Design

The design of the schedule is a collaborative effort between the APR team and the Department Chair or Unit head. Both parties should aim to design a visit schedule that allows the review team to provide feedback on the unit's identified Key Issues. The Department/Unit should feel ownership over the visit schedule.

Review visits typically take place over the course of three days, as detailed below:

- **Day 1:** Review team convenes in the late afternoon for briefing meeting with the APR team. Review team has dinner with the department Chair (or, if requested by the School, the Dean's Office) around 6:00-6:30 p.m. CST.
- **Day 2:** Review team has full day of meetings with faculty, staff, and students in unit, followed by a private working dinner in the evening.
- **Day 3:** Review team has half-day of meetings with the Department Chair/Unit Head, the Dean, and Office of the Provost leadership. Meetings ideally end by noon CST, and reviewers travel to the airport after a team lunch and debrief on next steps.

More details on specific responsibilities for each day, and best practices associated with each day's meetings, are listed below.

Day 1 Schedule: Arrival + Chair (and/or Dean) Dinner

- **Arrival Timing and Logistics:** External reviewers should arrive at Chicago O'Hare airport no later than 3 pm CST and arrange for Uber/Lyft or taxi to the hotel location. Internal Reviewers will go to the hotel lobby to meet the External Reviewers and the APR team around 5:45-6:00 pm. The APR team will hold a brief check-in for all members of the review team in the hotel lobby before the team departs together and walks to the dinner location at a nearby local restaurant. The Department Chair will meet the reviewers at the restaurant. Dinner is typically from ~ 6:00-8:00 p.m.
- **Dinner Location:** Will be at a quiet, formal restaurant in downtown Evanston/Chicago.
- **Dinner Bill:** One of the internal reviewers should pay the bill and save the itemized receipt for prompt reimbursement by the Office of the Provost.
- **Dinner Objectives:** 1) Welcome the external reviewers to Northwestern to kick-off the review visit, and 2) Provide opportunity for the reviewers to ask questions of the Chair before the next day's meetings. The Chair should view this dinner as

an opportunity to set the tone for the review and highlight the Key Issues on which to focus the team's work.

Day 2 Schedule: Full Day of Meetings + Working Dinner for Review Team

Day 2 is a full day of meetings for the review team and key department stakeholders. These meetings are intended to allow stakeholders to provide candid feedback to the review team on the department's strengths and opportunity areas. They will help inform the review team's report-out meetings on Day 3 and the preparation of the External Reviewers report.

Meeting logistics and hospitality for Day 2 (room bookings, catering order and setup, review team support) are the responsibility of the hosting department or unit. Meeting invitations and confirmations will be arranged by the APF team upon confirmation of the hosting details by the department. Costs for the catering order will be covered by the Office of the Provost.

A general outline of the Day 2 schedule follows. To engage as many stakeholders as possible, the review team is often split into two separate tracks for a portion of the day.

Note, all stakeholders may not have the opportunity to meet individually, or at all, with the review team. In large units, Departments should prioritize their core faculty, a representative sample of students, and staff leadership (e.g., the Department administrator). The APF team can consult with the Chair on determining which stakeholders are critical to meet with the review team.

- **Morning (9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.): *Tenure-line and other key faculty in the department***
 - o Begin with department leadership meetings, e.g. the Associate Chair, Program Directors, DGS, DUS, etc. and then consider splitting into two tracks for small group meetings with other core faculty members.
- **Lunch (12:00 - 1:30 p.m.): *Student meetings***
 - o Typically split up into two concurrent lunches - one with undergraduates, if applicable, and the second with graduate students.
 - o Faculty should not be present for these meetings.
 - o For departments with a large student population, these meetings may extend into the afternoon if necessary.
 - o Include representation across student years, disciplines, etc.
- **Afternoon (1:30 - 4:00 p.m.): *Continued meetings with faculty not covered in the morning + staff leadership + collaborators***
 - o Collaborators could be faculty with joint appointments in other units; central office leadership (e.g., Office for Research); or Chairs from collaborating units. The APF team is able to consult as needed on possible collaborators.

- **Late Afternoon (4:00 - 5:00 p.m.): Space Tour**
 - o If relevant to the unit's Key Issues and review visit goals, a tour of lab spaces or instructional spaces may be scheduled at the conclusion of the day's meetings. Tours are often held on the way to dinner and should be limited to no more than 1 hour in length. The department should secure a faculty member to guide the review team on any tours.
- **Break/Walk to Dinner (5:00 – 6:00 p.m.).** Review team should either walk or arrange for Uber/Lyft transportation to and from the restaurant.
- **Review Team Dinner (6:00 – 8:00 p.m.):** The day will end with a private review team dinner at a local restaurant. The APR team will communicate the reservation details to the review team. One of the internal reviewers should pay the bill and keep an itemized receipt for prompt reimbursement by the Office of the Provost.

Best Practices for Department Scheduling

The following are best practices to consider when designing the above Day 2 meetings.

- Faculty participating in the review visit should be considered core and actively involved in the department's instruction, research, and operations. This includes both tenure-line and non-tenure-line faculty as determined by the Department Chair. Emeriti faculty are generally not included in the review visit. Faculty with joint appointments or courtesy appointments, if deemed critical to include, may be included in a single group meeting towards the end of the day.
- Faculty meetings should be grouped by rank and/or research or teaching area, in order to promote cohesiveness of conversations.
- Participants are expected to meet with the review team in-person. Zoom participation is strongly discouraged except for extraordinary circumstances.
- The first meeting of the day should start no later than 9 a.m.
- The main meeting room should accommodate catering and beverages to be set inside, or just outside of the room.
- It is critical to schedule 5-minute breaks after each meeting, and a 15-30 minute break after 3 consecutive meetings. We also recommend a longer break (e.g., 30 minutes) in the mid afternoon with a coffee/beverage refresh.
- Minimize meeting room transitions, especially when the review team is split into two separate tracks. If possible, book the two rooms close to one another and designate a staff person to help guide any room transitions.
- Prioritize small group faculty meetings over meetings of individual faculty with the review team.
- If possible, host the student lunch meetings in a different room from the morning meetings. This will allow sufficient time for the room setup and cleanup and also provides a welcome brief walk for the review team.
- Reviewers consistently place a high value on hearing directly from students, so prioritize active follow-up and outreach to encourage participation in these meetings. Given typical attrition rates, it is advisable to generate a large list of

potential student participants and invite more than you need. If the goal is 8-10 students in each meeting, you should aim to invite at least 12-15 individuals.

Department Checklist for Day 2

With the above schedule outline and best practices in mind, **the list below summarizes the Department's responsibilities for Day 2 of the review visit.**

- Attend Schedule Development Meeting with APR team and provide input on visit schedule. Determine faculty/staff/student participants and select reviewer pairings. Be sure to identify enough student participants to account for typical attrition.
- Reserve space for meetings: typically, two conference rooms for faculty/staff meetings, and two conference rooms for lunch-time student meetings.
- Order and set-up catering. Typically consists of coffee + light breakfast snacks in the morning; lunch for reviewers + students; and coffee/snacks/dessert in the afternoon. Note, the Office of the Provost will cover these catering costs and will provide you with the correct chartstring to use for these orders.
- If absolutely needed, set up any Zoom links and ensure tech set-up works in the conference room.
- Manage meetings day-of while reviewers are on-site; ensure meetings proceed in a timely manner and that the review team departs on time for their scheduled dinner; alert APR team to any issues.

Day 3: Review Team Debrief Meetings with Senior Leadership

The final day consists of a series of report-out meetings with senior leadership – this includes separate debrief meetings for the Department Chair/Unit Head, the Dean, and leadership in the Office of the Provost. During these debrief meetings, the review team will provide leadership with preliminary findings from their conversations and highlight themes emerging from their visit. Reviewers are asked to share feedback on the unit's Key Issues and any other high-level takeaways on the strengths and opportunity areas for the unit. A typical outline for meetings on this day is noted below. The APF team will communicate with all parties and coordinate logistics for all meetings on this date. The Unit Head/Chair's only obligation is to attend their debrief meeting. Note, the below schedule applies to a typical Evanston campus visit; Chicago campus visits will follow a slightly different schedule, and the Program Review team will work with the unit head to coordinate this.

- 8:15 a.m. – 8:45 a.m.: Private review team breakfast at the hotel
- 8:45 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.: APR team arrives at the hotel to walk external reviewers to the Rebecca Crown Center for day's meetings (3 blocks away from the Evanston hotel). Internal reviewers are welcome to meet the group directly at the Crown Center.
- 9:00 a.m. – 9:45 a.m.: Chair Debrief Meeting

- 9:45 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.: Break
- 10:00 a.m. – 10:45 a.m.: Dean Debrief Meeting
- 10:45 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.: Break
- 11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. Office of the Provost Leadership Debrief Meeting
- 12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m.: Review Team Lunch and Depart for the Airport

The APR team will send a follow-up email to the reviewers after the visit concludes, thanking them for their participation and relaying expectations on the report format and timing; reports are generally received 2-3 weeks after the review visit. The APR team will share the report with the Unit Head/Chair once available, and relay details on the next steps for the Action Plan process.