External Review

Each program or set of programs undergoing review will obtain feedback from one or more external reviewers. For accredited programs, the external review conducted by the accrediting body will constitute this feedback. For non-accredited programs, the selection of the external reviewer is one of the first actions that should be taken in the program review process, although the actual visit by the reviewer does not take place until after the completion of the self-study. The external reviewer will be selected by the dean from a list of three or more qualified individuals provided by the department. A model reviewer contract is provided on the program review website and can be adapted to include additional stipulations the dean and department wish to include.¹

Picking a knowledgeable and respected external reviewer who will provide candid, helpful feedback is one of the best ways to strengthen the program review and promote constructive follow-up actions. Reviewers should be recognized leaders in the discipline with recent experience in higher education institutions, possibly from CMU’s benchmarking institutions, or if more appropriate, from strong programs at other institutions.² Typically, individuals with CMU degrees, a real or potential conflict of interest, or who have close professional or personal relationships with CMU personnel or students are not appropriate external reviewers. A CV for the reviewer should be included as an appendix to the self-study.

The external reviewer should receive general information about the institution, department, and programs such as that provided on university websites. Also, a set of focus questions, a copy of the self-study, and supporting materials should be provided after they have been vetted by the program faculty and dean. The reviewer will provide an in-depth review of the self-study, travel to campus to conduct interviews with program faculty, students, dean and other stakeholders, and prepare a final report. The report should address the basic criteria of the self-study including program quality and processes supporting quality, program size, resources, and future opportunities for the program. A major purpose of the external review is to provide external comparators of quality. This review should be addressed directly in the external reviewer’s report.

The dates of the visit and submission of the final report should be included in the contract developed by the dean. It is highly recommended that the reviewer be expected to submit a written report within two weeks of an on-campus visit and payment be made contingent upon a timely submission of a written evaluation which satisfactorily addresses the conditions laid out in the contract. The provost will cover the reasonable expenses and an honorarium for an external reviewer up to $2,000. Typically, there will be just one reviewer. In some instances, given the complexity of the program (e.g., some interdisciplinary programs), challenges facing the program (e.g., seeking major reorientation), or a program review of multiple programs, more than one external reviewer may be used. Permission for multiple reviewers and responsibilities for covering all costs should be determined prior to inviting the reviewers and having reviewers sign any contracts.

¹ https://centrallink.cmich.edu/administration/provosts_office/AcademicAffairs/Program_Review/Documents/IndependentContractProgramReviewTemplate.pdf
² https://centrallink.cmich.edu/services/libraries_research/institutional_research/Reports/Documents/peers_methodology.pdf