The purpose of the MSU Academic Review Program (ARP), as proposed, is to generate actionable information that will support and guide MSU’s process of continuous regeneration and renewal to meet the needs of its ever changing multiple constituencies. It is essential that MSU respond to the increasing pace of change in its environment. In telecommunications, for example, significant technological change occurs faster than the tenure-review cycle. In Engineering, MSU must move rapidly to develop specialties for the future, as commodity engineering is increasingly outsourced to developing economies. MSU is facing increasing competition from private providers who are nimble and capable of employing new delivery systems for educational materials. When implemented, the proposed ARP will assist the faculty and the administration to manage changes that will be required to advance MSU’s capabilities and performance into the 21st Century.

Programs are taken to be academic departments, professional schools, and centers or institutes hereinafter called units.¹ The ARP will provide units with self- and externally-generated assessments that will provide them and college and university administrators with the performance criteria and feedback required for the effective

¹ There is considerable variability in unit definition and constitution across colleges. Units also vary over time. Our recommendation at this point is that the definition be fairly generic to allow flexibility in ARP applications. Our working definition of a unit is any administrative unit existing in a college and supervised by a dean. This definition captures the 215 units listed within each of the 14 colleges listed on pp 27-33 of the MSU 2005-2006 Faculty/Staff Directory and the MSU College of Law. In the case of small colleges such as James Madison, the MSU College of Law, and the College of Nursing, the unit may be taken to be the college itself.
management and change. By improving its programs and by identifying its many successful accomplishments, academic units at MSU will be able to stimulate excellence internally and document their contributions externally. By facilitating communication between students, faculty, administrators, and external reviewers, the ARP will function to provide broad-based constructive reviews and align all interests in the common goal of achieving and maintaining university-wide excellence.

The primary responsibility for the conduct of ARPs, as currently proposed, will reside at the unit level. There will be two deliverables: a unit self-study and an external reviewer report. Responsibility for initiating reviews and assisting units in their timely completion will reside at the college level, in the office of the college dean with the advice of the College Advisory Council (CAC). Where appropriate, ARPs for centers institutes and other units may, at the discretion of the dean, be folded into reviews of academic departments. Self-study and external reviews, along with dean’s and, where appropriate, CAC commentaries will be provided to the Provost, advised by a University Faculty Program Advisory Committee (UFPAC), selected annually by the Executive Committee of the Academic Council. All academic units at MSU, unless granted a waiver by the Provost at the request of the college dean, will go through the APR process at least once during any given ten year window.  

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2 In the case of units with multiple deans, the lead dean will assume the dean’s APR functions.

3 Many units at MSU are reviewed by external accrediting organizations. Others are reviewed by licensing or other agencies. In many cases, therefore, aspects of the APR process may be redundant with requirements already in place. In these cases, a dean, with approval of the Provost, may exempt a unit from APR or restrict the APR process to those aspects not already covered by other requirements. For example, accreditation reviews often may directed toward undergraduate or masters education but be relatively unconcerned with Ph.D. education and research. In such cases, the APR process may be restricted to a review of graduate education and research.
Features of the ARP

Different types of program review are required to address different problems and prospects facing units at MSU. Some units might be making significant progress with the resources at hand and require additional resources and greater national or international visibility. Other units may be making significant contributions to MSU in teaching, research or service but require conscious self-assessment and external guidance to realize their potential within the resource-constrained environment that must be anticipated for MSU for the foreseeable future. The proposed ARP therefore is designed to provide the flexibility called for by the diversity of unit needs, strategic options, and resource requirements. The overall process is depicted in Figure 1.

A unit APR will be initiated by the college dean on his/her initiative or upon the request of a unit chairperson. The dean will meet with unit personnel to outline procedures, expectations, and a schedule of milestones. The first stage in the APR process, a unit self-study, will generally take between 12-18 months to complete, but events may require extensions. In such cases, the burden for justifying an extension to both the college dean and the provost will rest with the unit. The self-study, once completed, will document the unit’s accomplishments and its shortcomings and generate an agreed-upon course of action for the future. Self-studies should provide answers to the following questions:

1. What do you do?
2. Why do you do it?

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4 Unit emeritus faculty might play an important role, both in the self-study and its subsequent review at both the college and university levels.
3. How well do you do it, and who thinks so?

4. What difference does it make whether you do it or not?

5. How do you intend to change to reach your (evolving) future given where you are now?

6. How will you evaluate your progress and ultimate success?

The self-study will be reviewed by the college dean, who, with the advice of the college CAC, will select and solicit the participation of appropriate external reviewers. It is anticipated that the unit will recommend reviewers. The responsibility for selecting reviewers, however, will reside with the dean, and the dean may select reviewers other than those on the unit’s list. The external reviewers will consult with unit faculty and staff, students and appropriate unit constituencies within and external to MSU, evaluate the unit and its self-study, and report directly to the unit and to the college dean. The unit will respond to the external review, forwarding its response to the dean. The dean and the unit chair then will review the self-study and the external review with the CAC. Recognizing that securing candid external reviews may require pledges of some confidentiality, the unit and the dean may choose to provide the CAC with an overview of the APR but restrict the CAC’s access to either the external review, the self-study, or

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5 Reviews of units that represent a discipline will need review committees composed of experts in the discipline who are not affiliated with MSU. Other units have little of their foundation in a discipline but link or offer service to other MSU units. These units will need reviewers from outside the unit or even the college, but who understand the unit’s interdependencies with other units at MSU. The particular combination of external reviewers from outside or inside MSU therefore will vary by college and by unit. Discretion for composing external review teams therefore should reside with the Dean, advised by the college advisory council.

6 Some have expressed concern that external reviewers who know their evaluations will be given to unit personnel may be less than candid. It is difficult to see, however, how a unit can generate and adhere to a realistic development plan unless it is informed about both is strengths and weaknesses by those it deems worthy to provide this information. There also may be benefit to advice tempered by the knowledge that it will be disseminated to those who will be most directly affected.
both. Upon college-level receipt of the unit self study, the external review, the unit’s response to the external review, and a review of the report to the college CAC, the review materials will be forwarded, along with the dean’s comments, and, where appropriate, CAC reaction, to the Provost.

The APR, as currently proposed, includes a process for unit and college-level feedback and follow-up. The Provost will provide feedback to the unit, either directly or through the college dean, outlining the administrative options he/she has chosen either to support or redirect the unit’s assessments and future plans. The relationship between resources to be allocated and current or future accomplishments should be clearly and explicitly specified.\(^7\) Guided by the schedule of milestones identified by the unit or respecified by the Provost through the college dean, the unit will, within 24 months of the completion of its self-study and action plan, submit a report documenting and explaining its successes and failures, recommending support and, where appropriate, changes in its action plan. These changes and requests for support will be reviewed by the college dean with the advice of the CAC and forwarded, with the dean’s comments and recommendations, to the Provost. As in the case of the original self-study, the Provost, either directly or through the college dean, will explicitly support or respecify the unit’s conclusions and recommendations. This feedback process will be repeated at 24 month intervals until a new APR is initiated.

\(^7\) Explicit feedback linked to the allocation of resources not only will clarify mutual expectations and commitments but will communicate the importance of the APR process in ways that will attract committed participants.
It will take time to ramp up the APR process. A significant number of units, however, notably all those in the colleges of Social Science and Arts and Letters, are already on a review rotation. APR also has been accomplished in whole or in part through accreditation reviews in the colleges of Human Medicine, Osteopathic Medicine, Nursing, Veterinary Medicine, Communication, Education, Engineering and Business. Some units in the College of Natural Science fall within the accreditation domains of other colleges and have participated in reviews in that capacity. In the past six years, the Graduate School has facilitated program reviews an a variety of units in Engineering, Natural Science, Human Medicine, Osteopathic Medicine, Veterinary Medicine, Nursing, Arts and Letters, Education, Social Science, and Communication. The Office of the Vice President for Research and Graduate Studies is continuing a systematic process of reviewing research centers, institutes, and laboratories that was initiated in the Spring of 2002. These have involved the Colleges of Agriculture and natural Resources, Arts and Letters, Business, Communication, Education, Engineering, Human Medicine, Natural Science, Nursing, Osteopathic Medicine, Social Science, and Veterinary Medicine.

The proposed APR should leverage these efforts and avoid redundancy. We therefore recommend that unit APRs be prioritized in proportion to the amount of time that has passed since the most recent previous review and that priority be given to those aspects of an APR that have received less attention from accreditation procedures, licensing, the Graduate School, the Vice President for Research or other forms of review. Discretion for how to ramp up the APR process, however, should reside with the unit heads (by initiating a review) and the college deans, advised by their college advisory committees, based on college and unit level priorities and concerns. When fully
implemented, a maximum of 20-22 units at current count will participate in or be excused from an APR during any given academic year, a number that should not be overly burdensome, given the potential benefits to the unit, the college, and the university.8

8 Several commentators have raised the issue of funding for the APR process. Proposals have ranged from having the process supported entirely by unit resources, complemented in some cases by deans and the Graduate School, to the establishment of an Academic Program Review Office administered by the Provost. We view this feature of the APR as essentially an administrative issue and therefore outside the purview of the mandate of the taskforce. Support sufficient to implement APR is essential. How that support is administered, however, should be determined administratively rather than specified through Academic Governance.
Academic Program Review Flowchart

Figure 1