A self-study should be guided by questions and goals that are central to the department/program under review in terms of where it presently stands and what it aspires toward in the future. The process outlined below is intended to provide structure and support for department/program-level data-gathering, analysis, reflection, and planning around student learning, faculty development, faculty leadership, and resource management.

Timelines and other information related to reviews can be found on the Provost’s Office website.

Suggestions for engaging with the self-study documents:

This document contains three main sections, 1) Factors to consider when planning the agenda for a self-study, 2) Self-study content guide, and 3) Resources.

1. Departments/programs should typically begin the self-study process by determining an agenda for their study. The first section, “Factors to consider...,” lays out a set of questions that the department/program should be able to answer in an initial way before beginning work on the final self-study guidelines, typically during the first month. These answers serve as the driving agenda for the self-study, and will inform much of the content that appears in the final document. While the department/program may refine the agenda during the course of the self-study, reaching at least tentative answers to these questions before moving into the full self-study will help to focus subsequent efforts. After developing a tentative agenda for the self-study, the department/program meets with the provost and a representative from the IRAP office to discuss the agenda and any additional questions related to the self-study process.

2. The Self-study content guide contains both a single-page outline of the major elements of the self-study and a “closer look” guide that looks at each section and subsection in detail. These guidelines were developed based on feedback from departments/programs completing reviews in previous semesters, external reviewers, the provost, and the IRAP Office. The final self-study document need not follow the exact order suggested by the outline, although some departments/programs have found it helpful as a template. As noted in the guidelines, the form and function of some sections may vary significantly between departments/programs based on their self-study agenda. Some departments/programs may find it helpful to decide early on, based on the agenda of the self-study, which subsections can be best handled by individual faculty members and which require input from the entire department/program.

3. The final section, Resources, contains links to information intended to be of use to the department/program and the external reviewers, as well as offices and individuals departments/programs may wish to approach for support and guidance.
1. Factors to consider when planning the agenda for a self-study:

Who is the primary audience?

The primary audience of the self-study report are the current and future faculty of the department/program, the provost, external reviewers, and (for those sections with all-college connections) external accreditors. Elements of the self-study may also prove valuable for potential funding agencies for future grant applications; other Beloit college departments/programs; potential collaborators, and any others who may play a future role in department/program planning or activities may also benefit from its content.

What has been learned from previous annual reports, departmental/program assessment, or department-level planning since or including your last review?

Previous self-studies and reviews, biannual departmental/program reports, faculty members’ annual reports, surveys, and course evaluations can serve as rich department/program-level data sources that will allow department/program faculty and staff to focus their time on analysis of evidence rather than initial collection.

What are the documents at the department/program level guiding department/program inquiry?

Past practice has shown that external reviewers expect departments/programs to provide department/program mission statements, clear student learning outcomes, and the mapping of these outcomes onto the existing departmental/program curriculum. If these documents do not already exist or have not been closely re-examined in recent department/program history, time spent early in the review process drafting or reviewing them can prove incredibly helpful in focusing the self-study process. Providing these documents, even in very rough draft form, to external reviewers will allow them to provide specific feedback at the level of individual goals and outcomes that may assist the department/program in refining them.

What questions are most important to the department/program?

A core group of department/program questions related to current practice and future aspirations should guide the self-study process. These questions will often arise naturally from department/program biannual reports, departmental/program assessment, departmental/program planning, and revisiting of departmental/program guidance documents such as mission statements and learning goals. Discussion of those questions should be informed by evidence that will be valuable to the reviewers in their evaluation of, and recommendations for, the department/program. Thinking about key questions and core learning and programmatic objectives before deciding what information to gather helps insure against collecting unnecessary information, conserving effort and lending greater clarity to the self-study document.

How is the department/program contributing to the mission and priorities of the college?

The Beloit College Mission Statement and the new curriculum both articulate all-college outcomes intended for all graduates, regardless of major. In this context, it may also be helpful to consider the ways that the department/program engages with non-majors, other departments/programs, the campus, and the
community. Each year, the president and provost outline short and long-term academic priorities for the college. The department/program's contributions to, or goals in relation to, these priorities may be a useful part of its self-study. In questions they pose to departments and programs undergoing review, COA and ASP may also provide guidance regarding the engagement of all-college outcomes and institutional priorities.

Are there national trends to consider or evaluation resources to draw upon in the disciplines or professional fields served by your department/program?

Information about similar departments/programs at other undergraduate institutions, the expectations of relevant graduate institutions or programs, and trends both in academic and non-academic professions may have implications for department/program activities. Discipline- or profession-specific professional associations often publish reports, recommendations, position statements, or other documents on teaching, scholarship, and/or professional service and outreach. Guidance and resources for undergraduate departments/programs undergoing self-studies or refining learning goals are often available either on public websites or by request. Organizations with a broader focus on higher education, such as the Association of American Colleges and Universities and the American Council on Education, also provide useful resources for self-evaluation.

2. Self-Study Content Guide

The following outlines the major areas self-studies should address. Clearly these are not exhaustive, and they can be pursued through multiple modes and structures. A departmental/program self-study typically includes the following elements:

1 Mission, history, and institutional context
   a Department/program mission statement
   b Relevant department/program history
   c Institutional context

2 Resources
   a Budget
   b Physical resources
   c Grant funding

3 Student learning and development
   a Department/program goals and expectations, including intended learning outcomes
   b Instructional program – curriculum, enrollments, pedagogy, advising
c  Evidence of student learning from department/program-level assessment

d  Other evidence of instructional program quality

e  Evaluation of strengths and weaknesses

4 Faculty scholarly and artistic work

a  Department/program goals and expectations

b  Department/program accomplishments

c  Evaluation of strengths and weaknesses

5 Faculty service and leadership

a  Department/program goals and expectations

b  Department/program accomplishments

c  Evaluation of strengths and weaknesses

6 Future plans

a  Addressing needs and advancing department/program mission

b  Inviting feedback from external reviewers

A Closer Look at the Self-study Content

I.  Mission, history, and institutional context

a  Mission Statement

A department/program mission statement offers identity, coherence, and focus to the activities and outcomes of a department/program, perhaps particularly in the context of linking the department/program’s mission to the college mission as a whole. Some departments/programs may also choose to link their mission statements to mission statements or guiding language from relevant professional associations. Departments/programs that already have mission statements typically use the self-study as an opportunity to revisit and sometimes revise them. Other departments/programs develop a mission statement over the course of the self-study.

b  Institutional Context

It is helpful to the external reviewers to provide information about the larger context of the college and the role of the department/program in advancing its mission.
History of the department/program

Attention devoted to this aspect of the self-study varies by department/program. What’s included should be guided by the mission of the department/program and the key questions of the review. The aim here is to provide context for the reviewers that can help them in interpreting information provided in the following sections of the study. If the department/program has undergone review in the past, it may be helpful to note the goals set in the review and the progress or revisions made since.

II. Student learning and development

a Department/program goals and expectations, including intended learning outcomes

A department/program review provides an opportunity for reviewing, revising as needed, or drafting the department/program’s statement of intended learning outcomes. The department/program should detail the key learning outcomes for students taking courses in the department/program, with attention both to majors and non-majors. Some of these outcomes may reflect college-wide objectives and priorities, while others may be distinctive to more specialized study within the department/program. Attention should be paid to the ways in which these goals are pursued more specifically through courses, advising, and other activities offered by the department/program. While the department/program may wish to use broad “goal” language (e.g., noting what students should “know” or “understand”), this language should be accompanied by “outcome” language that clarifies the actions by which students demonstrate ability within those goals. (Example: Students will understand the influence of western philosophy on the French Revolution” vs “Students will be able to identify/analyze/evaluate/explain the influence of western philosophy in the French Revolution.” [note that different verbs imply different levels of complexity])

b Instructional program – curriculum, enrollments, pedagogy, advising

Most self-studies include a fairly extensive description of the instructional program. Different departments/programs organize this material in different ways, but most self-studies address the following in one way or another:

i. Structure of and rationale for major requirements
ii. Information about the students who major and minor in the department/program (including longitudinal counts, additional majors and minors, other activities students in the department/program tend to pursue, and other demographic characteristics relevant to the self-study agenda)
iii. Course offerings (typically including some longitudinal data on course enrollments; some departments/programs may find it helpful to include syllabi, assignments, and samples of student work when relevant to their self-study agenda, both to provide context for reviewers and to share ideas and accomplishments within the department/program)
iv. Contributions of the department/program to Beloit’s foundational learning requirements (including the Initiatives Program, Domains, Skills, the Liberal Arts in Practice Requirement and the Capstone Requirement)

v. The alignment of individual course objectives with departmental/program objectives

vi. Pedagogical practices (attention not just to what is taught but how it is taught, with attention to both long-standing and more recently-developed practices. Samples of course activities and assignments included in the department/program teaching portfolio are helpful here as well)

vii. Academic Advising (both for majors and other students)

viii. Other contributions to student learning and development. Many self-studies describe contributions to student organizations, alumni networks, and other opportunities for student development outside the classroom.

c Evidence of student learning from program-level assessment

For the assessment component of a self-study, departments/programs are asked to provide evidence on at least one of their intended learning outcomes, drawing wherever possible on evidence already available. This evidence should be based on direct assessment of actual student work (e.g., analysis of tests, projects, papers, presentations, portfolios), rather than indirect self-reports or surveys. Departments/programs should aim to give the bulk of their attention during the department/program review year to integrating, interpreting, and responding to their evidence, rather than to gathering and reporting it. Assessment evidence can be fruitfully combined with other indicators of department/program quality (see below) to help department/program faculty draw informed conclusions about the strengths and weaknesses of their instructional program and determine what to sustain and what to consider changing. Developing meaningful assessment is an incremental process, and part of the self-study itself may involve attention to practices that serve the purposes of a particular program or department. IRAP can offer guidance and resources for developing these kinds of assessment processes.

Other evidence of instructional program quality

Many departments/programs conduct interviews, surveys, or focus groups with current students and alumni, asking for feedback on their experiences in the department/program – department/program strengths, weaknesses, suggestions for improvement, etc. Some have sought feedback from employers and from graduate and professional schools as well. Others have engaged in “curriculum mapping,” showing where and how students encounter the various department/program-level intended learning outcomes as they make their way through the requirements for a major or concentration. Additional guidance for designing and administering questionnaires is available on the IRAP website.

d Evaluation of strengths and weaknesses

What does the evidence – both direct and indirect – show about student learning and development in relation to the intended learning outcomes articulated by the
department/program? In view of these results, what is the department/program likely to sustain, and what might it consider changing, in its instructional program and pedagogical practices?

III. Faculty Professional Activity and Development

a Department/Program Goals and Expectations

As with student learning goals and department/program mission statements, departments/programs often take advantage of the self-study process to revisit, revise, or construct goals for professional development and faculty development at the level of either/both individual faculty and the collective faculty of the department/program.

b Department/Program Accomplishments

Self-studies typically use this section to set forth the principal areas of scholarly and/or artistic expertise represented by department/program faculty and summarize their professional activities and accomplishments (publications, performances and showings, grants, etc.) and may also note department/program-level activities related to faculty development. Copies of each faculty member’s CV are included in an appendix.

c Evaluation of strengths and weaknesses

In light of the goals and outcomes described above, what does the department/program see as the principal strengths and weaknesses of the department/program as related to faculty professional activities and development?

IV. Faculty Leadership and Service

a Department/Program Goals and Expectations

Establishing goals in this area can help departments/programs be more intentional in the nature and extent of their involvement in campus governance, service and leadership in the wider community, and other kinds of faculty work.

b Department/Program Accomplishments

Faculty members at Beloit commit significant time to leadership and service within and beyond the College, modeling the kind of engagement they seek to foster in their students. Giving attention to this aspect of faculty work recognizes the investments and accomplishments of department/program faculty and facilitates collective planning for the future.

c Evaluation of strengths and weaknesses

In view of the evidence, what does the department/program see as the principal strengths and weaknesses of the service and leadership contributions of the department/program as a whole?
V. Resources

a  Budget

It is common to provide non-compensation budget information, including endowed accounts, generally over a period of several years. The time frame should be selected with the self-study agenda in mind.

b  Physical resources

Many departments/programs describe an array of physical resources for the support of instruction: library holdings, technology, labs, special equipment, physical space, etc. Again, what's given attention should be guided by the agenda/questions of the specific department/program’s review.

c  Grant funding

Support received through external grants may be an important complement to internal college resources for both instruction and professional activity.

d  Strengths and weaknesses

Attention to funding and staffing levels, and how the department/program allocates those resources across functions and activities can offer important insight into programmatic priorities as reflected in practice. Attention to resources in comparison to similarly situated departments/programs at peer institutions also offers important context.

VI. Future Plans

a  Addressing needs and advancing program mission

By the end of the review process (i.e., after the reviewers have filed their report and the department/program has responded to it), departments/programs are expected to provide the provost a plan based on the major conclusions the department/program has drawn from the self-study process. As a result, most self-studies include some discussion of both near term (3-5 years) and longer-term (6-10 years) plans since this invites feedback from the reviewers that can be helpful in thinking about the future. Such plans always include reference to the instructional program; it's desirable for them to address faculty professional activity as well, and in some cases service and leadership. In thinking about the future, much of what has gone into the rest of the self-study itself applies – e.g., the identification of explicit objectives, specific strategies for achieving them, clear identification of existing and needed resources. Discussion of constraints and challenges – and creative thinking about how to address them – may be helpful. In their near and longer-term planning, departments/programs should consider anticipated changes and trends in their fields as reflected in similar programs at comparable institutions, the career
trajectories of alumni, as well as expectations of the graduate and professional schools to which department/program majors may apply.

b Inviting feedback from external reviewers

While the external reviewers are free to comment on any dimension of the self-study, most departments/programs have found it helpful to list specific questions or issues that the department/program would like the reviewers to address in their report; it can be helpful to include questions related to both short term and longer-term plans.

3. Resources

Departments and programs are encouraged to consult with others that have recently undergone review to discuss what they found most helpful and/or challenging in engaging in, and writing, a self-study. Examples of self-studies can be found on the IRAP website.

**Relevant college documents and data resources**

Links to college-wide documents typically included in a self-study to provide context for external evaluators can be found on the Moodle review sites. IRAP also offers on its website a list of institution-level resources, including survey results and institutional averages related to advising, majors, and other data departments may find relevant for their self-study.

**Department/program-specific data resources**

IRAP can provide individual departments with standardized reports related to staffing, course offerings, enrollments, student demographics, and budget to support the preparation of both biannual reports and department/program reviews.

*Please remember: The Provost’s Office and the Office of Institutional Research, Assessment, and Planning are available to consult with faculty at any point in the process of developing the self-study.*

Finally . . .

Although the preparation of a self-study involves a substantial amount of work, the opportunity it provides for clarification, feedback and planning through collaboration can be well worth the effort, benefiting not just the college but the department/program and the individuals within it. Thanks for your good work!