

Muhlenberg College Board of Observers

Visiting Teams to Administrative Departments

Overarching Goals

Visiting Teams provide an opportunity for reflection and discussion aimed at strengthening our administrative programs. Departments will benefit from multiple perspectives and receive informed feedback about their particular operations and objectives. The Visiting Team process is very much a partnership between the department and the members of the committee.

The spirit of the visits should be lively and informal – a shared concern for the work of the department will animate the discussions and create a collaborative environment within which the visit can take place. Visiting Teams serve four primary purposes:

1. to provide a regular opportunity for self-assessment combined with the fresh perspective of an external review;
2. to examine the operation and objectives of the department and the department's effectiveness in meeting its objectives;
3. to help a department articulate its strengths and challenges; and
4. to provide a written report following the visit that includes recommendations for departmental development and progress.

Composition

Visiting Teams are usually composed of two to three members of the Board of Observers and an invited expert from another liberal arts college who serves as the Team Leader. The department should provide a list of at least four experts from other institutions who would serve capably as the Team Leader. Based on the first cycle of Observer Visits, those individuals from institutions with comparable resources and similar educational missions make the best Team Leaders.

The Campus Visit

The Team prepares for its visit by reviewing briefing materials prepared by the department in consultation with its Dean or Vice President. During the Team's visit to campus, Team members meet with the President, the department head and appropriate members of the department, as well as other administrators and/or faculty as appropriate. These meetings are intended to be collaborative and conversational in tone and format.

Typical Visit Schedule

Day One

- Dinner with the President, appropriate Dean or Vice President, and department head to discuss any questions or issues raised by the briefing materials.

Day Two

- Breakfast: Team meets to plan day; review questions
- Morning: meetings with department members; review additional materials
- Lunch: working lunch with student representatives
- Afternoon: meetings with faculty and other staff directly involved with the department
- Dinner: Informal dinner and discussion with department members

Day Three

- Team breakfast and working session to review and outline the committee's findings and recommendations. Drafting assignments are determined and the basic content and structure of the report are agreed upon.
- Lunch with Dean or Vice President, review of preliminary report

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After the visit concludes, the Team Leader, in cooperation with the other members of the Team, prepares a report addressing the questions described in the guidelines below. Normally this report is submitted to the President within three-four weeks of the visit. The President will share the report with the department head. The department head then has three weeks to prepare a brief response to the report.

The report and response are then submitted to the appropriate committee of the Board of Trustees for its comments. Copies are also sent to all Trustees. The Observers who were members of the Visiting Team and the department head may join the appropriate Board Committee for a discussion of the report.

Guidelines for Visiting Team Reports

The Visiting Team's report will normally address the following kinds of questions:

1. Are the department's mission and primary objectives appropriate, given the overall mission of the College?
2. What are the department's major operational strengths? Are there major operational challenges?
3. Do resources match needs? If there is underutilized space, equipment, or staff time, how might it be redeployed? If there is insufficient space, equipment, or staff time which resource needs are most pressing?
4. Is the department meeting its goals, achieving its targets, and generating appropriate results?
5. What goals should the department aim to achieve prior to the next visit?

Departmental Briefing Materials

The department should prepare a self-study report for the visiting team that will give them information to help it assess the effectiveness of the department in fulfilling its mission and to allow it to provide suggestions for departmental development. The department should feel free to include material that will highlight issues the department believes will be useful to discuss with the visiting committee.

Departments are urged to use or modify information from their previous self-study report as relevant for the current self-study.

Briefing materials should include:

1. A department self-study that includes:
 - The department's mission and objectives in the context of Muhlenberg's mission;
 - An introduction to the department, summarizing the recent history and noting any significant changes that have occurred since the first Observer Visit;
 - A specific description of results generated by the department, targets met, goals achieved, etc. (past five years);
 - A specific description of department operations, timelines, etc.;
 - A description of departmental strengths and challenges from the perspective of the department;
 - A review of the previous visiting committee report and a brief update addressing the status of recommendations in that report; and
 - A list of any special concerns or issues the department wants the Visiting Team to address.
2. A current résumé and job description for each department member
3. Other material the department wishes to include (e.g., departmental budget, departmental publications, project or event descriptions, etc.). Material that cannot fit into a binder can be made available to the Team when it arrives.