Academic Unit Review:
Identifying Key Issues

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What are "Key Issues"?

In addition to the core questions, the self-study addresses 2-3 specific issues raised by the unit under review, deans, and/or the university administration. The Key Issues are identified early on in the process in order to guide the focus of the review.

Some of the Key Issues may be explored at a broader level in other sections of the self-study, however, this section allows for a more focused and in-depth analysis of those priority areas. **It is important that the list of issues corresponds with the unit's and/or institution's strategic priorities.**

Guiding Questions for Faculty Discussion of Key Issues

The unit leader/department chair and Self-Study Team may want to share a list of guiding questions with faculty prior to any brainstorming sessions or requests for feedback on potential Key Issues. Sample questions the department might pose to faculty to support this idea generation are listed below.

Faculty:

- How has the makeup of our faculty changed since the last review?
- What are our upcoming hiring plans and how do they support the department's research priorities and goals?
- What faculty retirements and new hiring can be anticipated in the next five years? How will the department approach these opportunities?
- Which strategic hires would most increase federally funded research, doctoral mentorship, and national reputation in the next three to five years?
- How does our department mentor junior faculty? Are there any areas for improvement needed here?

- How does the department foster and promote intellectually-rewarding collaborations among faculty within the department?

Governance:

- Does the current governance structure support the department's goals? Are there any areas for improvement?
- Does the current committee structure represent the breadth of the department? Are the committees functioning effectively?
- Does the department do a good job of engaging faculty feedback on important decisions (i.e., faculty hiring, student admissions, etc.)?
- How are service assignments determined? Is the current approach equitable?

Research:

- What are the department's main areas of research strength? Where are the
- department's gaps?
- How has research in the department changed since the last review? Are there any new/emerging areas of research in the discipline that the department should prioritize in hiring?
- Relative to other top departments in the discipline, how does the department compare? What most impacts the department's relative position?
- Which research themes can reach national leadership and attract multi-investigator federal awards or centers within three to five years?
- What barriers are holding back growth in total research expenditures, high impact publications, and prestigious awards?

Teaching and Learning:

- Is the current curriculum meeting the needs of undergraduate and graduate students? Are any changes needed in the near future?
- Are student learning outcomes on par with intended outcomes? How are learning outcomes assessed in the department?
- What can the department take away from its teaching evaluations?
- How does the department recognize outstanding teaching?
- Outside of the classroom, how does the department support academic experiences like student research?

- What specific changes would raise student success and career placement to the level of AAU peers, especially for PhD programs?

Internal and External Collaborations:

- How does the department collaborate with other units across Texas Tech University? How could these relationships be improved? Are there any new units the department wants to collaborate with?
- Which cross institution partnerships could unlock competitive center grants, training grants, or shared core facilities?
- How is the department a leader in the field more broadly? How does the department collaborate with faculty at other institutions, through associations/organizations, etc.?
- How does the department engage with communities outside of Texas Tech University/academia?

Departmental Support:

- Is the current staff structure aptly supporting the academic operations of the
- department?
- Are there any potential issues related to faculty support in other areas (e.g., RAs, TAs, curriculum support staff, etc.)?

Facilities and Space:

- Are there any major facilities or space concerns that need to be flagged in the upcoming review? How do these issues impact the academic operations and success of the department?
- Which space, core facilities, or equipment gaps most limit federal grant competitiveness, and what is the plan to fix them?