Appendix C: Sample E-Mails

This appendix includes several sample e-mails/letters that can be modified to fit your needs as you correspond with an institution. Included are emails requesting materials related to the review as well as general correspondence throughout the review process. These are also available for download at the PRC page on the ASA website.
Sometimes your initial contact with an institution contains little or no information. Other times it is very detailed. What you need to request from a department may be modified considerably by what they have already provided.

These e-mails letters were developed by Ed Kain. He notes: “With some department chairs, I send separate e-mails about visit arrangements, itinerary and materials that I need. In other cases, I combine it all into one e-mail. I can typically tell from the style of the chair’s initial e-mail whether she or he prefers one longer correspondence, or a series of shorter ones.”

**Example of an early e-mail with a sociology department chair clarifying details of the visit**

Dear (Contact Person’s Name):

(Date suggested for the visit) is perfect. I’ve already included it on my schedule. In this e-mail I have a series of questions to continue moving the process forward.

Before I send you a more detailed e-mail with information about things that should be included in my itinerary and the materials I’ll need to read before my visit, I had a few general questions about the review in (month of review).

First, what is the broad purpose of the review? Is this part of a regular cycle of external reviews for all programs on campus? Are there any particular issues that your department/program would like addressed?

Second, is there a particular format or set of issues that need to be addressed in the final written report? I often find it very helpful if one of the first documents I see is the written college/university policy for external reviews and the associated final reports.

Third, am I reviewing the program as a single reviewer, or am I part of a team of reviewers? If I am part of a team, please provide me with the contact information for other members of the review team so that I may begin working with them before coming to campus.

Fourth, to whom does the report ultimately go? On most campuses, this goes to a Dean, Provost, or Vice President. In any event, I always ask the department to look at it first before I send the final version to a Provost or Dean. My goal in serving as an external reviewer is to be an advocate for the department by providing guidance to help it be as strong a program as they can be.

Once I’ve heard back from you, I’ll send an e-mail with more specific details about things to include in the itinerary and materials that I’ll want to read before my arrival. I look forward to hearing from you.

Cheers,

Ed
Example of an early e-mail with a joint department chair clarifying details of the visit

Dear (Contact Person’s Name):

(Dates suggested for the visit) is perfect. I've already included it on my schedule. In this e-mail I have a series of questions to continue moving the process forward.

Before I send you a more detailed e-mail with information about things that should be included in my itinerary and the materials I’ll need to read before my visit, I had a few general questions about the review in (month of review).

First, what is the broad purpose of the review? Is this part of a regular cycle of external reviews for all programs on campus? Are there any particular issues that your department/program would like addressed?

Second, is there a particular format or set of issues that need to be addressed in the final written report? I often find it very helpful if one of the first documents I see is the written college/university policy for external reviews and the associated final reports.

Third, to whom does the report ultimately go? On most campuses, this goes to a Dean, Provost, or Vice President. In any event, I always ask the department to look at it first before I send the final version to a Provost or Dean. My goal in serving as an external reviewer is to be an advocate for the department by providing guidance to help them be as strong a program as they can be.

Fourth, am I reviewing only the sociology program? When I’ve visited joint departments there have been a wide range of situations. Sometimes it is truly a joint program, and I’ve been asked to review both anthropology and sociology. Sometimes it is a joint program and I’ve been paired with an anthropologist (or anthropologists) who has/have also flown in for the review. Sometimes it is a joint department but not really a joint program, and I’ve only reviewed the sociology program. Will I be serving as the sole reviewer, or am I part of a review team? If the latter is the case, please send me contact information for any other reviewers so that we can begin to coordinate our work before coming to campus.

I am a sociologist, and thus much less qualified to make recommendations about anthropology. I can, however, reflect on what I know about joint departments/programs. When I do a review, I use a set of national guidelines for the major from the American Sociological Association updated most recently in 2017. These were first developed in 1990 as part of a national project of the American Association of Colleges (now the AAC&U). They worked with a dozen national professional organizations, including the ASA, to develop statements on strong undergraduate majors in a variety of disciplines. Unfortunately, the AAA was not part of this project, and there is no anthropology document providing similar guidelines. On every review team where I’ve been paired with anthropologists, however, they have found the structure of that report very helpful in reflecting upon the anthropology curricula in those departments.

In addition, in 2006, with Theodore C. Wagenaar and Carla B. Howery I co-authored “Models and Best Practices for Joint Sociology-Anthropology Departments”. This was published by the ASA, and can be downloaded from the Department Leaders Toolbox on their website at http://www.asanet.org/teaching-learning/department-leaders/department-leaders-toolbox. When
we developed this document, we interviewed both anthropologists and sociologists from a variety of joint departments across the country.

Once I’ve heard back from you, I’ll send an e-mail with more specific details about things to include in the itinerary and materials that I’ll want to read before my arrival. I look forward to hearing from you.

Cheers,

Ed

**Example of an e-mail setting up the itinerary for the visit**

Dear (Contact Person’s Name):

Thanks again for all of your hard work in preparation for this review. Having served as a department chair during multiple program reviews, I know how much work falls in the hands of the chair.

This e-mail focuses upon the itinerary for the visit. Your campus policies may require some other meetings as well, but here I’ll outline the meetings I’d like to have while I am on campus.

1. Ideally, it is good to have an opening/orienting session with the full department. This can orient everyone to the purpose of the visit. The most common structures for this are an opening dinner the evening before the review begins, or an early session on the first full day of the campus visit.

2. Early in the visit it is always good to meet with the Provost and/or Dean. It is also good if I can meet with you before the opening session as well as at the beginning of the second day. You can walk me through the itinerary and talk about any issues about which I should be aware. Through the lens of your role as department chair you can also talk with me about your goals for the external review, and highlight any issues about which you’d like me to pay particular attention.

3. Ideally, I’d like to meet with each faculty member in the department in an individual interview, including adjunct or part-time faculty.

4. *If this includes a review of graduate programs, you’ll want to request a separate interview with the Director of Graduate Studies.*

5. Similarly, I would like to interview chairs of any other departments/programs related to sociology through cross-listed courses, service courses, interdisciplinary majors, or minors. This can be a group meeting if you think that is appropriate.

6. A meeting with students is very important—my previous experience has indicated that meetings with students (particularly undergraduates) work well over lunch, though sometimes turnout can be limited. Another possibility would be for me to attend one of the courses required for majors, like theory or methods, and to interview students in that setting. That would take away, however, from whatever the professor has planned for that day.

7. *If this includes a graduate program review, then there needs to be a separate meeting with graduate students.*

8. I always want to interview someone from the library (ideally the department liaison, if you have one) as well as someone from the computer center/ITS.
9. I’d also like to interview department support staff/administrative assistants. Often these staff members are shared with other departments. They can sometimes provide important insights about a department/program.
10. The ideal schedule includes an exit interview with you, and another with appropriate members of the administration (such as the Provost or Dean). Ideally, it also includes a debriefing session with the full department.
11. Although it may seem impossible given all of these requests, it would be good to have a bit of open time built into the schedule so that I can walk around campus and do a bit of fieldwork. For example, I typically go to the library and do several searches to get a sense of the collection.

Thanks again for all of your work on this! In a few days, I’ll send you another note with an e-mail I’d like you to send to your colleagues shortly before the visit.

Sincerely,

Ed

Example of an e-mail requesting materials needed during the review

Dear (Contact Person’s Name):

As we move closer to your department review, I wanted to firm up some more of the details related to the campus visit. As I said in my response to your ___(Date)___ e-mail, I am already very impressed with ___(Name of Institution)____. [if possible, include a comment on any immediately positive element of the program/department].

Over the next few days I’ll be sending you several e-mails asking for materials that I’ll need for the review, outlining some things that need to be included in my itinerary while I’m on campus, and some information I’d like to obtain from everyone in the department. In this e-mail I’ll focus upon the first of those--the materials I would like you to send me as soon as they are available.

In preparation for the review, I would like copies of all of the following materials. If these are available electronically, that is ideal. In many cases it is good to have a hard copy available while I’m on campus, but I don’t need a hard copy for my preparation in advance or while I’m working on the written report. If I have any questions or comments about any of the items, I’ve noted that in bold print below.

I have looked at the College Catalog online, as well as your institution’s mission statement and description at the website. I have also looked at your department webpage and the information that it provides. In addition, please send me:

- your current self-study. If you have previous self-evaluations or self-studies, as well as copies of previous external reviews, I would like copies of those. This helps me see change and growth in the department and majors over time.
- Curriculum vitae of personnel. If you have any visiting/adjunct/part-time faculty members, I’d also like to see their c.v.’s.
- your annual plan for assessing student learning. It would be good to have several years of this plan, with the assessment results. With that information, I can get a sense of how
information gathered through your assessment process is used to evaluate and strengthen the program.

- course syllabi As with the c.v’s, ideally I’d like these for all courses, including those taught by visiting/adjunct/part-time faculty members. Before the visit, I particularly want to see syllabi for all core/required courses for both majors—the major in sociology/anthropology with emphasis in anthropology and with emphasis in sociology. I can look at remaining syllabi when I arrive on campus. Because I’m coming in on Saturday I’ll have time to look at the full range upon my arrival.
- recent enrollment data. Don’t create extra work, but if the data are available for the time period since the last external review, that would be ideal. That will give me a sense of the regularity of course offerings and course enrollments.
- the number of majors and minors for the past 5-7 years.
- data on your use of contingent faculty.
- any available documentation on efforts to address issues of diversity and gender equity in the department (both for students and among faculty)/relevant policy goals.
- any documentation on efforts to engage in community-based/community-outreach programming (both for students and among faculty)/relevant policy.
- department budgets for the last 3-5 years.
- library journal holdings and evaluation of the book collection. If your department has a library liaison, s/he may be able to prepare this for you.

In addition, if the following documents are available (and apply to your program) they would be useful:

- A copy of the department handbook. (If this is online, the web address is perfect; indeed, these days very few departments have a separate handbook—it has morphed into their webpage.)
- Minutes from department meetings of significance.
- Department/Program Newsletters.
- Information on student clubs and honorary societies, including Lambda Alpha and Alpha Kappa Delta
- Department bylaws and information on committee structure.
- Collective bargaining agreements.
- Results of any studies on topics such as faculty, student or alumni satisfaction with the program.
- Other data collected for assessing student learning

If this review includes graduate programs, you will also want to request

- documents that contain goals for the program (statement of purpose);
- who is training for what;
- program requirements;
- number of students;
Thanks. If you have any questions about any of these materials, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Ed

**Example of an e-mail requesting information from department members**

Dear (Contact Person’s Name):

As I’ve mentioned in our earlier conversations, I’d like to get a sense of any particular issues the department would like me to address in my review, as well as concerns of each individual in the department. It would be helpful if, as chair, you could provide me with a list of particular questions or concerns you would like me to address. These questions and concerns will help guide me as I do the site visit. In addition, it will be useful to have some brief statements from each of the faculty members in your department.

In the past, I have found it very useful for the department chair to send an e-mail to all department faculty members several weeks before the site visit. This e-mail should do two things: 1) briefly outline the purpose of the upcoming visit, and 2) ask each faculty member to send me a brief e-mail. One possible format would be:

Please reflect briefly (one or two sentences each) on: 1) what you see as the greatest strengths and achievements of the department/program, and 2) what you see as the areas needing the most attention. In addition, please feel free to indicate any personal concerns/issues you think I need to consider while doing the review.

Thanks for your help in putting these materials together. I know that preparing for the visit takes a great deal of time and energy. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Cheers,

Ed

**Example of an e-mail to be sent shortly after the ASA sends a questionnaire asking for feedback on the program review:**

Dear (Contact Person’s Name):

Recently you received a questionnaire from the ASA asking for your feedback on the external visit I did as part of your program review. Your feedback is important. I want my work to be as useful as possible as part of strengthening sociology programs. The ASA wants to insure that program reviews are the highest quality possible. Members of the PRC have annual training at the ASA meetings, and feedback from reviews are one source of information about how we can improve what we do in service to sociology departments/programs.
If you feel more comfortable talking directly with someone about your feedback, in addition to (or instead of) completing the survey, please feel free to contact the Director of Research, Professional Development, and Academic Affairs at the ASA. The number is 202.247.9840. The email address is rpa@asanet.org.

Thanks, in advance, for providing feedback that can be useful in strengthening the ASA’s program review process.

Sincerely,

Ed