



Academic Unit Diagnostic Tool (AUDiT) Manual

The Academic Unit Diagnostic Tool (AUDiT) provides a way to create a snapshot of the vibrancy and challenges of an academic unit. The tool is a one-sheet dashboard that lays out key factors present in vibrant units, warning signs, and in challenged units. The items in the dashboard were developed through extensive consultation with deans, provosts, and department heads, and through use and iterative development through use and feedback at colleges and universities. There are specialized versions of the AUDiT tailored to departments in research universities, in teaching-oriented colleges, in primarily professional units, and for use within research groups.

The tool is not a validated instrument. The primary purpose of the AUDiT is diagnostic, and it is aimed at supporting and catalyzing effective change. The dashboard contains a distillation of issues that are present in both vibrant and challenged academic units. Using the tool can help leaders identify particular areas of focus, stimulate discussions within a unit, and point the direction for possible paths to reinforce vibrancy within a unit. The numbers that result from use of the AUDiT are not meaningful as absolutes or as a “total” indication of how well a unit is doing; they can be an effective starting point to stimulate thinking and discussion about issues that affect daily life and interaction in the unit and between and among its members.

If the AUDiT surfaces significant issues, it can help leaders and/or unit members focus efforts on a plan to restore vibrancy. The Consortium for Challenges in Academic Units (CCAU) provides resources and tools for that process.

Many of the topics raised by individual cells in the diagnostic tool are addressed in NCPRE’s [Leadership Collection](#), a multi-media library of management and leadership materials curated for academic leaders. The Leadership Collection is updated regularly with new resources.

First Things First

Who will be using the tool? What is our goal? Are we prepared to stick with it?

It’s useful to consider these questions before using the AUDiT. The tool can be used by a leader of a unit, by leader/s up the chain to whom a unit reports, by a team assessing a unit, or with all the members of a unit when seeking to catalyze changes in group interactions and rules of engagement.

Individual leaders or teams seeking to understand a unit’s strengths and challenges may use the tool first as part of a process to identify and develop a strategy for unit reinvigoration or intervention. This use most frequently occurs early in a process, when indications of unit challenges come to attention as needing response. In conjunction with other tools and advice available through the CCAU, the AUDiT can be a starting point for identifying areas needing attention and helping to formulate the most constructive next steps, whether that is working within the unit with existing members or more serious steps, such as considering unit receivership or other external interventions.

CCAU members should refer to member resources and case studies if using the AUDiT for such purposes.





How to use the tool

Each user of the tool assigns a number to each cell. The higher the number, the more the statement applies to the unit as the individual experiences it. Thus, each person places 30 numbers on the sheet, one in each cell, on the indicated scale: 0-5 (green), 0-3 (yellow), 0-5 (red).

Each column is then totaled, and then totaled as follows: Start with the sum in the green column, then subtract the sum totals in the red and yellow columns to determine a final score.

$$\text{Total Score} = \text{Green} - \text{Yellow} - \text{Red}.$$

In group use, to stimulate effective conversations, we recommend calculating min, max, and average and sharing them with all participating in the discussion.

Facilitator Guide: Use with Members of a Department

When the path chosen is to engage all faculty in a unit, or all professional members of a unit, the AUDiT can be used to stimulate constructive discussion. Use with a department's faculty as a whole is most effective when 1) at least a significant portion of the group is open to discussions about how to strengthen their internal climate and culture; and 2) where there is a unit leader or team of leaders (department chair/dean or associate dean; department head/executive committee, etc) who are prepared to see a change management process through. It can be detrimental to start a process, engage unit members, and then drop the initiative or change leaders in mid-stream to ones unfamiliar with or uncommitted to follow-through. Experience suggests this can leave a unit in a worse situation than where it started.

First: Use in-person, in real time

In every case, we recommend that the AUDiT is used in "real time" unit members present, and not by distributing it in advance or implementing online. Experience has demonstrated that an in-person approach can short-circuit discussions that deflect off to other topics, including the validity of individual items. In-person, real-time use can help focus a discussion about unit culture and how unit members interact with each other, which is the goal in trying shift or establish new norms for a department.

Create a safe environment for engagement with tough issues

Successful use of the tool hinges on doing all that is possible for unit members to talk together constructively about things that the unit is doing well and the challenges that the unit is facing. The purpose of identifying those points is to facilitate a discussion engagement around expectations of how to interact with each other and about the professional environment the group as a whole wishes to create and maintain. Having an effective facilitator leading the discussion is important. It is also helpful for the facilitator to identify a few likely hot spots in the tool dashboard beforehand, and prepare some questions to stimulate conversation.





1. Anonymous, personal assessment

- (1) Distribute paper copies of the AUDiT, providing 5-10 minutes to fill it out. We recommend keeping responses remain anonymous. Providing index cards to each participant can reinforce anonymity and speed the tallying process after the tables have been filled out.
- (2) Provide instructions:
 - (a) “Assign a number to each cell on the indicated scale: 0-5, 0-3, 0-5, with numbers getting larger the more the statement applies to the unit.” Each member is filling out the table as *that person* experiences the unit culture. Thus, each places 30 numbers on the sheet, one in each cell.
 - (b) Put positive numbers in each column. (Yes, even though green reflects positive aspects and yellow and red reflect negative aspects of unit culture.)
 - (c) Total each column, and then sum the three resulting numbers to create an overall total. The green sum is a positive one, and the yellow and red sums are subtracted from the green for the total score, thus: $\text{Total Score} = \text{Green} - \text{Yellow} - \text{Red}$.
 - (d) Record four numbers on each index card, labeling each: Green #, Yellow #, Red #, Total #.
- (3) Collect either individual sheets or index cards and tally them.
 - (a) For each of the four aggregated numbers (Green, Yellow, Red, Total Score), compute the min, max, average score across all unit members and post them on a board or flip chart so all can see them.
 - (b) It can be helpful to have a spreadsheet prepared to input, compute, and summarize the data collected. Templates for such a spreadsheet are available from NCPRE.

2. Group assessment and discussion

Depending on the presenting symptoms and the degree of trust among unit members, there are various approaches to analyzing and discussing the results.

Whatever approach is used, it is most constructive for a unit to focus on identifying its strengths as well as areas that need to be improved. The first goal of a unit self-assessment is to help unit members define what they aspire to, collectively, as a place to work and learn. After that, the general process is to assist in developing rules of engagement to change interaction patterns to help get arrive at the desired culture and climate. T

- Analyze the similarities and differences in perceptions by collecting the individual anonymously scored sheets by specific group, for example, by rank (assistant, associate, full professor) or by subject area/disciplinary methodology, or by gender, and putting the four min, max, average scores for each group on a board to start the discussion. (This can be easier to do if you ask people to sit in designated groups while filling out the AUDiT, and keeping index cards or sheets separate for each group.)





- If you have collected the individual sheets from individuals, scan them to note outliers or specific cells in which many individuals scored the highest, in the green column (vibrancy) and in the yellow and red columns, then share the observations with the group to start the discussion. Do not use this method if trust is already low, as it may exacerbate anxiety and tensions in the group.
- Questions to start the discussion can include “What do you see here?” “How do we go about interpreting these scores?” “Are there any particular cells that you’d like to discuss?”, etc. If the atmosphere will support it, ask anyone willing to describe which they perceive as “hot” cells.
- Focus discussion on positive ways to approach addressing changing the unit environment.

Next Steps...

What happens next depends on the areas identified, the nature of the unit, and the choices made by the participants. There will be people involved who have an interest in resolving problems; it is key to keep these people informed and involved. If the unit has a capable leader, that leader can help provide reinforcement and accountability for a change process.

Some resources that might be of assistance include:

1. The Confronting Challenges in Academic Units (CCAU) Consortium

The CCAU Consortium offers support for institutions in dealing with units that are troubled or challenged in their ability to function effectively. Building on our experience in academic administration and leadership, NCPRE supports the Consortium in developing concepts, labels, tools, and approaches for dealing with challenges that are principled, pragmatic, and effective. CCAU member resources include case studies, guidance from experts, and more.

<https://ccau.csl.illinois.edu>

2. The NCPRE Leadership Collection

NCPRE’s Leadership Collection has a number of relevant resources. A multi-media library of management and leadership materials curated for academic leaders, it is updated regularly with new resources. It can be used on a “just in time” basis (“I need to know now!”) or as a platform for personal study and reflection.

<http://ethicscenter.csl.illinois.edu/leadership-collection-dashboard/>

The AUDiT was developed by C. K. Gunsalus, and enhanced through the comments and contributions of many others over time. It is distributed under license to the University of Illinois through the Confronting Challenges for Academic Units Consortium. The AUDiT manual was created by NCPRE for development and use by the Confronting Challenges for Academic Units Consortium.

