Suggested Approaches to Evaluating Program Review on Educational Effectiveness Review Visits

WASC has placed a great deal of emphasis on program review as a key element of institutional quality assurance and improvement and a vehicle for assessing achievement of institutional and program learning outcomes. Beginning fall 2009, all institutions are required to include in their EER reports an analysis of the effectiveness of their program review process. As stated in the *Handbook of Accreditation*:

> Institutions are expected to analyze the effectiveness of the program review process, including its emphasis on the achievement of the program's learning outcomes. The process should be sufficiently embedded for the institution and the team to sample current program review reports (self-studies and external review reports) in order to assess the impact of the program review process and its alignment with the institution's quality improvement efforts and academic planning and budgeting. (Also see CFRs 2.7 and 4.4.)

In response to this institutional expectation, all EER teams are expected to include an analysis of the program review process in their reports. The following approach has been developed to guide teams in this area. It provides for a common and systematic method but should be adapted by the team as needed to maximize its value and effectiveness during the visit.

The approach suggests a systematic way to:

1) review a sample of recent program reviews. The number of program reviews may vary according to the size of the institution and number of programs it has. For example, in a small institution with two programs, the team may examine both reviews. In a large institution with many programs, the team may select three to five recent programs in a variety of areas.

2) evaluate the effectiveness of the program review process under the relevant CFRs (2.7, 4.4), using applicable WASC rubrics for guidance on good practice.

3) study one or two program reviews in depth, including meeting with faculty and appropriate administrators from the program(s) to learn more about how program review worked, what was learned, and how follow up was undertaken.

4) To learn how program review results were incorporated into planning and the institution's quality assurance system.

The team, working with Commission staff, should discuss ways to implement this process along with the themes that institution has studied in its EER review.

SUGGESTED PROCEDURES

Prior to the visit

1: On team **pre-visit conference call**:

- Identify a sample of programs for review by the team. Using the ***Inventory of Educational Effectiveness Indicators***, identify programs that have recently undergone program reviews. The number of program reviews will vary by institutional size and number of programs offered and recently reviewed. In smaller institutions, one or two may be adequate; in larger institutions, a sampling of three to five is suggested.
    - In selecting the program reviews, consider the size and importance of the programs within the institution. Avoid selecting only programs that have specialized/programmatic accreditation. Select disciplines from different schools or colleges if the institution is large enough to have this kind of structure.
- Select one or two programs for an in-depth analysis by the team. Each program reviewed in depth will include a meeting with program faculty (described below).
- Assign at least two team members to the program review work, with one team member assigned primary responsibility for writing about the findings from the process described below and one with secondary responsibility.
- Decide on the method to be used in the meeting with faculty and relevant administrators. A fishbowl exercise[°], described in the footnote, is one approach.

2: **Following the pre-visit team conference call**:

- The Assistant Chair arranges logistics with the ALO.
    - Request that program review documents for each selected program be provided in advance of the visit or in the team room (if they are too voluminous to send in advance in electronic or hard copy format). These materials would typically include the program's self-review, appendices with supporting documents, external evaluators' reports, and follow-up agreements and memoranda.
    - Ask that relevant assessment plans be included with the program review(s) (if they are not integrated into the program reviews or included in the institutional report or data portfolio).

[°] An effective method of evaluating faculty work in assessment is through a fishbowl exercise in which faculty members are asked to discuss the results of the program review and/or program-level assessment results among themselves while the team observes. Another effective way to learn about assessment practices and findings through the fishbowl is to ask the faculty to assess some samples of actual student work using a faculty-developed rubric. The team usually follows this exercise with questions about what they observed and prepared lines of inquiry created from the rubrics and Expectations for Two Reviews.

  - Ask the ALO to schedule a meeting with program faculty and leadership of the selected program(s). Provide information to the ALO about any special technique to be used at this meeting, such as a fishbowl, so that the faculty can prepare. Depending on the size of the program or department, a broad representative sample might be selected.

- Assigned team members prepare questions/lines of inquiry for the faculty and program leadership and plan for use of special techniques such as a fishbowl.

3: On the visit

Early on the **first day of the visit**, the assigned team members examine the program reviews for the programs identified in advance of the visit, using the following process. Where program reviews are provided in advance, the team members can spend this time conferring on their findings.

- Identify the program learning outcomes for the program. Consider the quality of the outcomes using the ***Rubric for Assessing the Quality of PLOs.***

- Read the program review. Assess how well assessment is covered in the program review using the ***Rubric for Assessing the Integration of Student Learning Assessment into Program Review.***

- Examine the assessment plan. Ask questions to learn about the plan:
  - Have standards of performance been established by the faculty?
  - Does the assessment process include:
    - multiple methods of assessment?
    - direct and indirect assessment?
    - summative and formative assessment, e.g., focusing on a piece of culminating student work?
  - Are the assessments done at regular intervals?
  - Who does the assessment and how? Are collaboratively developed tools or rubrics used?
  - Who keeps the data collected? How are data analyzed and utilized?
  - What mechanisms are in place to ensure/support use of findings for improvement?
  - What incentives are available to faculty who carry out assessment?

(CFRs 1.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 2.7, 3.3, 4.3-4.8)

- If the assessment plan includes the use of CAPSTONES or PORTFOLIOS, use the relevant rubrics to evaluate good practice: ***Rubric for Assessing the Use of Portfolios for Assessing Program Learning Outcomes*** and ***Rubric for Assessing the Use of Capstones for Assessing Program Learning Outcomes***

- If other methods of conducting program-level assessment are utilized, what are they? What kinds of data about student achievement do they produce? Are the data used in meaningful ways?

(CFRs 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 2.7, 4.3, 4.4)

- Examine the findings of program-level assessment of student learning that are reported and discussed in the program review and ascertain:
    - What do the latest findings show? Are students achieving at expected levels?
    - What is done with the results?
    - What is being done to address any gaps in student achievement?

(CFRs 2.6, 4.3, 4.7)

- Determine what was done with the program review.
    - What did the faculty do to address findings?
    - Was the program review provided to the top academic leadership? What was done at that level?
    - Were the results of the program review linked to planning and budgeting? What evidence is there that changes or improvements were made as a result of the program review?

(CFRs 2.7, 4.3, 4.4, 4.6, 4.7)

4: On the **first or second day of the visit**, the assigned team members hold a meeting with program faculty and administrators of the selected program. Team members should consider questions such as those listed above and on page two of WASC's ***Expectations for Two Reviews***.

5: On the **second or third day of the visit**, the assigned team members share observations and findings with the team, and use the evidence from this process to help the team determine where the institution falls on the ***Educational Effectiveness Framework*** as part of the team's submission with the confidential recommendation.

6: By the **last day of the visit**, the assigned team members complete their sections of the draft EER report, including a section that contains their assessment of the program review process, and submit them to the Assistant Chair for inclusion into the team report.

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