

Overview of the Program Review Process

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The overall purpose of conducting a program review is to engage in a process of continual improvement to meet the needs of the learning community. Each academic unit systematically assesses its program quality, effectiveness, and rigor toward the improvement of student learning with program learning outcomes (PLOs), best practices demonstrated in each discipline, data-informed decision-making, delivery of services, establishing benchmarks, and measuring outcomes. Co-curricular programs assess student learning outcomes (SLOs) to show program value, improve future activities, promote faith formation, and connect out-of-classroom experiences to real-world job skills.

History of Program Review and Assessment at PLNU

Prior to 1990, the review process was not uniformly implemented throughout the PLNU community. Departments operated with best intentions, however, there was no definitive review cycle or process requiring the use of data to inform practice yet established. Under the direction of Dr. Ruth Heinrichs, PLNU's first Director for Institutional Effectiveness, the program review process found its inception. Still in its infancy, Dr. Heinrichs, developed a Department/Program Review Cycle 1 (Cycle 1) and Department/Program Review Cycle 2 (Cycle 2) in the 1995-1996 school year. It was established with the expectation that each academic unit would conduct a full program review during Cycle 1 with follow-up changes during Cycle 2 and repeat the full review process every 10 years thereafter.

In the fall of 2010, the PLNU faculty determined that a permanent faculty committee, the Program Assessment and Review Committee (PARC), should be formed to support the Academic Units, to oversee the review process, and to provide recommendations of their finding to the Provost. The faculty selected the first members of the committee along with a general description of the charter. The Program Review Committee initially met in spring 2011 with the purpose of updating the Program Review process and guidelines. The Program Review Guidelines document and the Program Review Self-Study Template were the products of the Committee's actions with the proficient skill and insight of Dr. Maggie Bailey, Vice Provost for Program Development and Accreditation, who served as PLNU's WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC) Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO).

Following Dr. Bailey's retirement in 2015, Dr. Kerry Fulcher, Provost and Chief Academic Officer at that time, assumed the responsibility as the ALO and, as the Administrator with Committee oversight, worked to develop the *PLNU Program Review Self-Study Report Template* Version 1.0 in October 2015. Dr. Karen Lee was hired as Vice Provost for Institutional Effectiveness in 2017 and took over the ALO role for three years. Beginning in 2020, Dr. April Cordero transitioned into the role of overseeing university assessment and program review, with Dr. Kerry Fulcher once again holding the ALO role until he became President in 2024. Dr. Maria Zack now holds the ALO role.

Due to Covid, program review was put on delay for two years while annual assessment still occurred (for the most part). During this same time, PLNU experienced a major restructuring of its traditional undergraduate co-curricular programs. Assessment for co-curricular programs restarted in 2024. Also in 2024, the program review Self-Study Template was revised to align with current best-practices for program review. We are fortunate to have an expert in program review and assessment here in San Diego, Dr. Carole Huston at the University of San Diego, with whom we consulted. After piloting the new self-study template in 2025, a modified version was created for externally accredited programs in 2026.

What the Program Review Is and Is Not

The program review is a means of measuring quality through the collection of evidence and benchmarking the best practices and comparable programs in the discipline. The analysis of the information presents an opportunity to reach conclusions about overall quality and recommendations for improvement. A systematic program review provides opportunity to strengthen and provide meaningful information to programs and the university as they seek to ensure quality learning experiences for their students.

The extent to which a university can justify its programs and student outcomes may determine its continued accreditation status and standing among its comparable institutions. The federal government may require accrediting agencies, such as WSCUC, to place a greater emphasis on student outcomes including employability, thereby creating a link between the estimated quality of the degree offered by a college or university and the purported transferability of skills to the workplace by the graduating student. This has great implications for the future of liberal arts institutions. By completing program reviews for each academic unit within the university, Point Loma will be in a better position to demonstrate that it has conscientiously and extensively examined its programs through the program review process, reifying our vision for students: “As part of a Christ-centered community committed to Christian discipleship, students will be shaped and empowered by their learning and growth at PLNU to become thoughtful and committed Christlike citizens who live out their calling in ways that transform their homes, churches, vocations, and communities.”

Completing a program review can seem onerous to faculty. For that reason, the Chair of the Program Review and Assessment Committee provides a one-on-one orientation session at the start of a program’s review cycle. During that explanatory conversation, a *Most Common Misconceptions About Program Review* fact sheet is shared with the faculty.

MOST COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT PROGRAM REVIEW

Misconception 1: Program Review is used to evaluate faculty performance.

The Program Review is designed to assess, evaluate, redesign, and improve the academic program, not the faculty. Faculty awareness, participation, engagement, and ownership are essential for a successful Program Review which is not to be used to judge or evaluate individual faculty performance.

Misconception 2: Our program is excellent, our students are learning, and we do not need to bother with a Program Review.

The primary purpose of a program review is to ensure continuous improvement, relevance of the program, and the quality of the educational program learning outcomes and student experience. Even if the faculty believes the quality is already excellent, there is always room for improvement and evaluation, as we do not live in a static society. Based on years of evidence, current trends and external review, the Program Review process is designed to inform the faculty about those areas that can be improved or strengthened.

Misconception 3: The Chair/Dean assigns one single faculty member to conduct the Program Review in order to expedite the process and avoid conflict.

A team of faculty from the program should work together to complete the program review. Program Review is only effective when it is a collaborative effort based on the evidence, reflection, synthesis, and analysis of all of the Academic Unit faculty (full time, part time and adjunct) and staff. Each person brings a different perspective and skill set to the table that contributes to the improvement of the program(s). Without everyone's involvement it is difficult to receive "buy-in" and ownership of the action plan for improvement.

Misconception 4: Assessment is a waste of time and does not benefit the students.

Assessment is the process by which the Academic Unit (1) identifies the important learning outcomes that it values, (2) aligns the program to the Institutional mission and outcomes, (3) identifies best practices in the discipline, and (4) the university links future resource planning to program improvements. Anything that enhances and improves the student learning outcomes and experience is an immense value to the student, the Academic Unit, and University

Misconception 5: Program Review sounds like a great idea but it is too time consuming, costly and complex.

Program Review is designed to build on the Academic Unit's annual assessment plans. The Program Review is a shared responsibility of all the Academic Unit personnel aided by the Office of Educational Effectiveness, the area dean and the Program Assessment and Review Committee. A successful Program Review engages the faculty, staff, students and alumni, and while it does take time and require work, it is well worth the individual contributions made by each member of the team.

The program review is a joint venture of all members of the academic unit under the guidance of the area Dean. The program review is intended to be a one-year process to be reviewed every six years. Toward that end, a *Step-by-Step* agenda below has been added to guide participants.

Program Review Step-by-Step Overview

*Note: The language in this document of “AUL” and “Dean” reflects the department/college academic structure. For schools, the School Dean occupies the “Dean” role in this document. The “AUL” role in this document would be occupied by the Program Coordinator or Associate Dean, depending on the program and school.

Step 1: Preparation for Program Review

- A. The Chair of the Program Assessment and Review Committee (PARC) informs the Dean that a program review cycle has begun for a specific program(s) under their purview.
- B. The Dean notifies the AUL(s) of the program(s).
- C. The Chair of PARC meets with the Dean and AUL of each review to discuss:
 - 1. Setting a timeline for completing the program review in a timely manner
 - 2. Providing guidance to the AULs on how best to successfully complete the program review process
 - 3. Introducing the team to the Institutional Research office and relevant data sources.

Step 2: Program Review Self-Study

- A. Program review team members complete the self-study template
- B. Program review team members draft an action plan based on the findings from the self-study
- C. The Dean provides advice and guidance to the program review team members that will enable them to complete the self-study and draft action plan in a timely manner
- D. The AUL submits the completed self-study and draft action plan to the Dean for review.

Step 3: External Review

- A. The Dean meets with the Chair of PARC to identify an external reviewer.
- B. The Chair of PARC provides the external reviewer(s) with the program self-study, draft action plan, and an external reviewer report template, and facilitates any needed communications between the external reviewer and the program stakeholders.
- C. The Chair of PARC assists the external reviewer(s) in such a way to ensure that the external reviewer report is completed and submitted to the Dean in a timely fashion
- D. The Chair of PARC provides the Dean and AUL with the external reviewer’s report
- E. The program members review the external reviewer’s report and, if they deem necessary, revise the self-study and/or draft action plan

- F. The program review team members, if they so desire, may draft a response to the external reviewer report(s) that comments on any recommendations not incorporated in the revised action plan and/or on any factual errors made in the external reviewer report(s)
- G. The AUL submits to the Dean any revisions of the self-study and/or the draft action plan and, if applicable, the response to the external reviewer report(s)
- H. The Dean compiles all of the relevant documents and submits them to the Chair of PARC.

Step 4: Program Assessment and Review Committee Findings and Recommendation

- A. The PARC reviews the program review documentation and writes a Findings and Recommendations Report
- B. The Chair of PARC provides the Dean and AUL with the Findings and Recommendations Report
- C. The program review team members, if they so desire, may draft a response to the Findings and Recommendations Report, which gets submitted to the Chair of PARC
- D. The PARC reviews the program's response and, if it deems necessary, revises the Findings and Recommendations Report
- E. The PARC submits the final Findings and Recommendations Report, along with all of the program review documentation, to the Provost.

Step 5: Memorandum of Understanding

- A. The Provost and the Dean meet with the AUL:
 - 1. to review the Findings and Recommendation Report;
 - 2. to discuss key elements of what should be included in the Memorandum of Understanding;
 - 3. to discuss the program review process
- B. Based on this discussion, the Dean and AUL draft a Memorandum of Understanding to addresses the needs of both the program and the University
- C. When the Dean and Provost each agree that the Memorandum of Understanding is complete, the Provost signs the Memorandum of Understanding

Step 6: Program Review Implementation and Follow-Up

- A. The Chair of PARC seeks feedback on the program review process, the results of which will be provided to the PARC
- B. The AUL develops APC/GSC proposals for academic and program revisions based on the findings of the program review
- C. The Dean submits an annual report on progress made to implement the Memorandum of Understanding to the Chair of PARC and the Provost. The annual report is no longer necessary once the Provost determines the main elements of the Memorandum of Understanding have been implemented.