Academic Program Review Tutorial
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A Recursive Approach:
Periodic Review and Revision

Adapted from writings by Gary R. Hanson and Bridgett R. Price

Academic program review is a recursive process aimed at continual feedback and improvement. The institutional mission serves as the impetus for the development of goals and objectives for student inputs, intended educational process, and intended outcomes. The three stages of input, process, and outcome are used to assess and provide feedback that is used to effect change.

Strategy: First make sure you have a clear understanding of the five 'W's.

Who wants the information?
What kind of information do they want?
Whom do they want the information from?
Why is the information needed?
When should the data/information be collected?

10 Step Approach

NOTE: Although the process may appear linear, it is not. Steps overlap and are not orthogonal. A change in one part will almost always precipitate a change or some form of adaptation in another (or more).

Step 1) *Clarify expectations and develop an organizational strategy:*

What are you being asked to do? Do you need information on only outcome indicators, or do you need to provide information on student, faculty, and staff characteristics, process, workload, workflow, etc.?

Is the goal to focus on accountability, program improvement, or both?
Accountability—focus on student learning outcomes
Program Improvements—link assessment outcomes to specific program components

NOTE: You will need to determine how and to what extent the component produces the outcome.

Keep in mind who wants the data. Look beyond the obvious.

NOTE: Obvious—Dean, President, accrediting body

Not Obvious—Other departments with upcoming reviews; think of ways to include as many of your campus community as possible— build political bridges.

Step 2) *Identify organizational barriers and limitations:*

NOTE: There will be resistance from staff, faculty, etc. People may voice reasons for why the assessment should not be started at all. Realize that your efforts may not be recognized or rewarded by all.

Step 3) *What should be assessed:*

NOTE: How will you know when the department or program is accomplishing its goals and objectives? What evidence is necessary to demonstrate what students have learned and that the program is working well? Curriculum Mapping may help!

Before all else, you must have a set of clearly worded and targeted goals and a definition of the criteria by which the program will be evaluated!!

NOTE: This can be the toughest and most frustrating part of the process

This must evolve from in-depth discussion with all interested parties having a voice.

Start by looking at your University Strategic Plan or Mission statement. How do these relate to your specific program goals and objectives? Look at what others have done and use their work as models. Do not reinvent the wheel if you do not have to do so.

You do not have to do everything. Some categories of important review criteria for benchmarking:
- Program enrollments
- Program completion rates
- Faculty workload productivity
- Program costs
- Learning outcomes
- Market needs
- Student satisfaction
- Program autonomy
- Put yours here!

Step 4) *Select an appropriate unit of analysis for study:*

Will you need results at the individual student or faculty level?
Will you need results at the course or program level?
Should all faculty be included or only those of a certain rank?

If you are unsure about what level of analysis is appropriate, collect data at the lowest level you can. This will allow you to aggregate the data later if you can or need to. Let the questions to be answered and the prospective audiences drive this choice.

Step 5) *Who should be assessed and When:*

Timing is determined by why you are doing this, what kind of comparisons you would like to make, and what data collection methodology is being employed.

Examples:

Accountability and Generalization: Random sample of students and faculty (depending on size you could include all participants).

Improvement on a specific course type: Target only those courses

Faculty workload increase: Use institutional data on credit hours of instruction.

DATA COLLECTION

There are a variety of techniques available and, in a sense, no right or wrong method, only choices that allow for different results and conclusions.

NOTE: Not a right or wrong, but an inadequate or inefficient, choice can be made if there is a mismatch between method and desired information or expectation and type. Direct versus indirect.

First, be sure to exhaust any other sources of data that may have already been collected. Some university-wide reports may inform the evaluation. Information from similar or overlapping programs (see Item 1 above about inclusiveness) may be useful.

Step 6) *Select data collection methodologies:*

Keep an open mind.
Be aware that different methods will produce different answers.
Be sure that you keep in mind the difference between inputs and outputs when selecting measures.

Basic rule of thumb: always use multiple measures (both direct and indirect) for whatever you are measuring, if possible; especially important for assessing Student Learning outcomes.

Examples of Direct methods:

- Faculty (other-than-instructor) ratings of student work samples – graduate student committee model
- Qualitative and quantitative assessments of work samples
- Capstone experiences such as research projects, presentations, theses, dissertations, oral defenses, exhibitions, or performances.
- Employer ratings of recent graduates
- Student reflections on their values, attitudes, and beliefs
- Scores and pass rates on licensure exams
- Ratings of student skills by their field experience supervisors

Examples of Indirect Methods:

- Course grades
- Admissions rates into graduate programs
- Quality/reputation of graduate programs into which alumni are accepted
- Placement rates of graduates into appropriate career positions and starting salaries
- Questions on course evaluation forms that ask about the students' own learning
- Student/alumni satisfaction with their learning, collected through surveys, exit interviews, or focus groups
- Student participation rates in faculty research, publications, and conference presentations
- Honors, awards and scholarships earned by students and alumni

Considerable discussion is usually warranted in this selection. Keep in mind that one size does not fit all.

Methods picked will often dictate how the data is collected.
Make sure your selected measures are reliable and valid.

Note: A cost benefit analysis needs to be done here. A data base (relational if possible) is almost a necessity these days.

Assess the assessment methods!

Step 7) *Identify points of contact for data collection:*

This can be time-consuming for all parties so be selective to get the most bang for the buck.

Identify points where you have a willing and captive audience;

NOTE: piloting Exit survey, the MSC Academic initiative, and the Language study.

Common Contact Points:
Students:
Registration
Orientation
Drop off of required forms
First day of Class

Faculty:
Planned retreats
Faculty meetings

NOTE: Mandatory participation can increase numbers but have an adverse impact on results, CLA.

Programaitize the assessment process. It needs to appear as thought it is just like any other aspect of being part of the program. Set the expectation that as a member of the group participation is expected and valued.

Step 8) *How many people to include in the study:*

When determining how many students, faculty, or staff to contact, keep in mind the question(s) you are trying to answer.

If the total number of persons in the program is small, then include them all. If you have a large enough sampling pool, then some form of sampling method should be used.

There has to be a balance between getting a large enough sample to yield reliable results and cost; both monetary and person power should be considered.

Step 9) *Data analysis*

Again, this is driven by the questions or the need driving the evaluation, and the type of data collected. If possible, get expert input prior to and during planning, data collection, and analysis. Do not go fishing. Usually, there are three levels of analysis:

1) Summary descriptive: measures of central tendency and frequency distributions, percentages etc.

NOTE: What percentage of graduates passed a national accrediting exam?

2) Comparative statistics: t-tests, ANOVAS, etc.

NOTE: Do full professors generate significantly more instructional hours than assistant professors?

3) Relational statistics: Correlation, regression, ANCOVA

NOTE: What is the relationship between SATV score and graduation rate?

Step 10) *Interpretation and Communication*

Interpretation:
Keep an open mind; the data are the data no matter what is revealed
When interpreting your results, be sure to involve multiple perspectives: Rarely a one person job.
Do not overstep results with conclusions

Communication:
This must be flexible and dynamic.
Tailored to varying audiences
Make sure the loop is closed with those that provided the information

Broad Level Program Review Resources:

Barak, R. J., & Breier, B. E. (1990). Successful program review: A practical guide to evaluating programs in academic settings. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Astin, A. W. (1991). Assessment for excellence: The philosophy and practice of assessment and evaluation in higher education. New York: American Council on Education, Macmillan.