

Focus Group Report: Program Review Teams' Perceptions of the Program Review Process

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Context

Participants were members of teams who had submitted exemplary Program Review documents. They included the following programs: Biological Sciences, Technology, Rehabilitation Counseling, Philosophy, and Computer Science. Teams were invited to a “Program Retreat” to discuss issues related to Program Review in order to prepare for the upcoming WASC visit in October. The WASC team will be finishing the review of the Education Effectiveness Report. It was during this retreat that the focus group was conducted.

After a series of presentations by various administrators (Cheryl Ney, Wayne Tikkanen, Nalsey Tinberg [outside consultant]), and a brief working session to apply the rubric to their program’s Review Process (from 1 – 4 p.m.), the team members participated in a 45 minute focus group which was recorded. Present during the focus group were Wayne Tikkanen and Holly Menzies who facilitated the discussion. The participant teams were focused and engaged, and demonstrated a positive attitude toward the PR process.

Four overarching questions/statements were used to elicit the participants’ perceptions of the Program Review process. Participants were encouraged to deviate from the questions and address areas of concern or interest.

- a. Describe how the Program Review process unfolded in your department.
- b. How did faculty perceive the endeavor?
- c. Describe the most valuable type of data you used.
- d. If you were to give another department advice about the process, what would you say?

Findings

Several salient issues were evident throughout the Retreat and in the focus group discussion.

1. Program Review is an arduous, time consuming process for which there are limited benefits in return.
 - a. Faculty members are appreciative when other faculty members take on PR duties because it is “hard work.”
 - b. No release time or other resources appear to be available to support faculty when they participate in PR. Time is at a premium (for both departmental and individual faculty work) and it is difficult to engage the entire faculty in the process due to lack of time.
 - c. Department chairs may face road blocks from recalcitrant or uniformed faculty. Faculty may not be aware of how PR is a necessary process both

from an administrative standpoint as well as how it may improve their curriculum.

- d. Faculty does not see a clear linkage between PR and garnering resources that can improve their programs.
 - e. There is a strong perception that the University infrastructure does not provide reliable, accurate data sources.
2. Faculty members have limited familiarity with data sources that provide direct, measurable information on student achievement of the SLOs.
 - a. Program members frequently referenced survey data or GPA when discussing evidence, but did not discuss more direct forms of student outcome data.
 - b. Programs have not consistently instituted measures that assess learning at different points in the program (e.g. at entry and at end of program). Nor have they identified what constitutes acceptable performance at a level (e.g. 95% of students achieve the SLO at a 85% pass rate).
 3. Faculty members are unfamiliar with assessment vocabulary.
 - a. Although participants understood the assessment process, they did not know the relevant terms. For example, they were unfamiliar with the term curriculum mapping although they were immediately able to map the SLOs both to the curriculum and to the ILOs.
 4. There is confusion and discomfort about the WASC rubric element which suggests that a highly developed PR process would share findings with students and other stakeholders.
 - a. This appeared to be a new concept to the teams and they wanted guidance about how to share data as well as an opportunity to think about and discuss what they themselves think about the issue.

Recommendations

- The University should more clearly articulate the benefits of Program Review and how it links programs to the larger institution both in terms of a common mission and in providing programs with the resources it requires to provide a high quality education.
- Providing incentives and resources for faculty to participate in the Program Review process should be explored.
- Develop faculty competence in assessment practices including an understanding of terminology, creating direct assessment measures, and using analysis of student work to inform curricular changes.

- Explore issues related to dissemination of Program Review findings. Create a comprehensive policy to guide programs in how to sensitively and effectively share assessment information.