

Toward an Acceptable Program and Services Review

1988
Research Committee

PREFACE

Resolution 14.2 at the Fall, 1987 Conference of the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges requested that a study be conducted with respect to the development of tools for assessing educational services. The Research Committee availed itself of a document developed by the Cosumnes River College Faculty Senate. Craig Baker coordinated an ad-hoc committee of the Senate to study Program Review. Janis Caston, the Faculty Senate President, was instrumental in facilitating the further development of a program review model in the 1987-1988 academic year. Bud Hannan, Roger Fryer, Harold House, Hortence Motte, Robert Palmer, and Jim Thomas were also members of the Faculty Senate Ad-Hoc Committee on Program Review. Their report was edited and adapted to the needs of the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges by Bud Hannan, the Chair of the Research Committee.

The study assumes that an acceptable review of programs and services must be adapted to the unique needs of a given institution. It also assumes a pro-active role for the local academic senate in the development of program and service review processes.

A copy of this document was forwarded to the Educational Policies Committee for their consideration. They will report a project, focused more precisely on a quantitative review of services, in the fall of 1988.

Program And Services Review Models

The Research Committee of The Academic Senate was appointed to assess Program Review Models for the examination and review of college curricular and support programs.

The Committee believes that a positive feed-back system for the improvement of programs and services can be accomplished by the open discussion of group goals, the delineation of steps needed to achieve these goals, and through institutional recognition of the effort. It assumes that the involvement of the local college academic senate is crucial to the successful conduct of such reviews. It also assumes an adequate level of institutional research support.

The Program Review Models, discussed in this report, will provide for a Framework from which local senate leadership can facilitate the development of a program review process unique to their institution.

The review process should not be divisive nor punitive. Department should not be set against department nor should there be a "survival of the fittest" mentality. Rather the local senate should address a process that will bring an integrated institutional view to college instructional and support systems.

The anticipated consequences of an appropriate program review are as follows:

- 1) It will revitalize the faculty involvement in curricular and support system planning as portrayed by the Commission for the Review of the Master Plan: “Substantial faculty participation strengthens the instructional program.....the formal policy recommending body for admission standards, degree requirements, curriculum development, academic planning [emphasis added]....” is the faculty (1986).
- 2) It will provide a method for deriving a clear delineation of the college’s attributes and goals. It will serve as a vehicle for substantiating the current condition and focusing shared decisions with respect to alternative futures.
- 3) It will contribute to a process of self-renewal and self-study. An honest and open appraisal of a needs and achievements can invigorate the search for educational excellence.

Literature Models

Many articles are available in the literature concerning data gathering, evaluation models and accountability in education. The methodologies and techniques employed vary in size, sophistication, and usefulness.

Effort is made to summarize some of the main procedures found in each model. Purpose, style and anticipated outcomes are discussed.

Research - Numerical Methods Models

This quantitative orientation concentrates on the collection of “hard” data. Those who utilize this methodology seek the following: measures of results, cause and effect, quantitative performance levels, system outcomes, etc. Modeled after scientific research, data gathering is utilized to make assessments in a reproducible, verifiable manner. The analysis phase looks for patterns, trends, and correlations. Modeling and hypothesis testing are used to support predictions and to establish the soundness of the research and the significance of the results.

“The focus of this approach is on data and the formalized instruments used to collect it” (Gardner, 1977). Equating evaluation with measurement permits an evaluator to focus on issues of reliability and objectivity (Feasley, 1980).

Practitioners of this methodology would like to know: why a trend has appeared, whether an effect has a cause and if a program is effective or not. They have been the driving force behind the use of questionnaires, cost analysis studies, market surveys and other numerical methods in educational research. Performance indicators such as student GPA distributions, faculty loads, attrition trends, etc. can be quickly gathered, but the problem of whether these measures are crucial to the explanation of why events occur is open to question. “Given that higher education abounds with joint inputs and multiple outputs,

and that the ultimate impact of many of its outcomes are long term and difficult to measure, one would wonder what determines which technique, of data gathering, and which is most appropriate to the purpose intended (Sizer, 1981)?”

The statistical approach can become an all too easy “Out of the data base with a keystroke” process at the expense of a more human narrative of what the program is worth, what value its activities have and how well it responds to student needs.

Peer Evaluation Professional Judgement Models

This “mini-accreditation” process usually calls for a task force of peer professionals to visit and examine a program's activities and needs. Various formats as to the make-up of the team are indicated:

1. Peers within college but not in department.
2. Professionals in same instructional area(s) but from another institution.
3. Commercial review consultants.
4. Some combination of the above.

The evaluating group is involved in personal observations, interviews, review of documentation, etc. This method emphasizes the role of the evaluator, He/she guides the evaluation, analyzes the situation and interprets the results of the investigation.

“Because of his training and background, the peer professional is by definition the individual best able to appreciate the subtleties and nuances of what he encounters (Conrad and Wilson, 1985).”

The delineation of a program's relative worth is derived from the informed opinion of the visiting expert. These descriptive studies can take varied forms: Anecdotal, ontological, record of interaction between critic and situation, case histories, etc. The evaluator lives within the program and reports impressions. For insight into a working mini-accreditation model see: American River College's Program Review model.]

The Univ. of Nebraska has created a campus wide,(faculty- dominated) Academic Planning Committee to oversee the review of all instructional programs on a 5-year cycle. This mini-accreditation self-study format starts with the setting of departmental goals and objectives followed by the visit of a review team. The typical review team includes a student from the department, a facilitator from the university's Office of Program Review, a UN faculty member from outside the department under review, and two external members (one to serve as chair) of the discipline under review. The review team is encouraged to provide a “vision of both what the department is, or seems to be, and what it could be, given its qualities and the constraints that will affect its future (Seagren and Bean, 1985).”

The Peer Evaluation Process is an excellent procedure for producing collegiate style documentation of academic quality. However it requires a high expenditure of staff time and energy. Integration with a traditional accreditation process is an attractive option [see, for example, Long Beach].

IMPROVEMENT - PROGRESS TOWARD GOALS MODELS

This process identifies and defines specific fundamental goals for the department being studied. Once an unambiguous set of objectives is established, the system is investigated in terms of the objectives and the degree to which they have been achieved.

“The effectiveness of an institution should be assessed using two basic, complementary strategies: (1) The relationship between goals and goal achievement and (2) how well the institution seems to function as an ongoing responsive, vital organization (Kells, 1981).”

“Evaluation models based on this definition assume that the most important decisions regarding the thing to be evaluated are contingent on its objectives and the criteria established for judging the relative attainment of those goals” The following elements are found in most of the models studied:

1. “identification of goals or objectives of the project, program, or thing to be evaluated;
2. clarification of the variables which affect performance;
3. identification of the criteria (standards) by which performance will be judged;
4. development or identification of tools, techniques, and procedures for collecting information regarding performance;
5. collection of data;
6. comparison of the information gathered with standards (resulting in a judgment of progress toward goals);
7. communication of the results of the comparison to appropriate audiences (Gardner, 1977).”

Broome Community College (in Binghamton, New York) has modified a goal forming plan originally developed at the Cornell Institute for Research. The RBE (Reality-Based Evaluation for Two-Year Occupational Programs) study concerns itself with three main processes.

1. An evaluation worksheet is developed to deal with aspects of enrollment patterns, needs assessment, program and departmental objectives, etc. If during this phase disputes over methodologies, content, or interpretations arise, a committee can be formed and called in to do an in-depth study. Otherwise, the second step begins.
2. A data collection phase is organized. Evidence is gathered from a variety of sources, but always is pointed towards determining goal-objective attainment.
3. Finally the interpretations of the findings and an analysis of the results is synthesized into a summary report.

“This report is concerned with program effectiveness, necessary modifications, findings of merit, and unanswered questions (Barak, 1982).” [Sacramento City College has a model similar to this.]

Issue Oriented Models

The Issue Oriented approach is a people-oriented qualitative reporting process which treats problems, solutions, successes and consequences as having the same status and importance. Interviewers query all

departmental staff for information and comments until they are able to fully list the program's concerns, activities and results. The Issue Oriented approach is a wide-ranging technique which pursues a judgment as to how faculty view the program's setting and situation.

“In this model, evaluation focuses more on program activities than on the program's stated goals and objectives and is organized around the “concerns and issues of stakeholding audiences (Guba and Lincoln, 1985).”

This process relies heavily on the ability of the investigators not just to look at the “usual” but to judge, without bias, the importance of all aspects of the program as expressed by the staff and students involved in the program.

Stake details a process for conducting a goal-free responsive evaluation (Feasley, 1980):

1. “Conferences are held with staff, students, etc to identify program scope, discover purposes and concerns, conceptualize problems and issues, and identify data needs.
2. Observers examine selected antecedents, transactions, and outcomes.
3. Summary portrayals and reports are written.”

This method is a very positive and humanistic format. The study can be open ended and relatively unstructured. Credibility and objectivity can be questioned in such approaches. Increasingly, such approaches are combined with more goal oriented, quantitative processes.

A college needs to choose a process for analyzing the outcomes of its instructional effort. In trying to balance time and energy, objectivity and informality, value and relevance, a combination of techniques will probably be needed to handle the college's unique requirements.

For example, the faculty of a small college with many one- person departments may serve on several college committees and in other professional and/or organizational activities. Realistically, then, their commitment to program review will have to reflect a different standard of efficiency than that of a large college where a greater division of labor exists. Thus, the design of a given program review will have to reflect the specific needs a given institution. It should be emphasized that a successful program review process will probably include a combination of the evaluation models discussed. The application of program review models to a local college environment cannot be imposed but must fit the unique requirements of the institution.

Issues and Concerns

I. Will the Faculty accept the Process?

The genesis of what is to be investigated must be developed from the bottom up. Faculty and staff are knowledgeable and sophisticated; they are the ones who should determine what is pertinent and what is peripheral.

The proposed program review model must recognize that the college faculty is an experienced and professional group whose first purpose is to provide a quality education for those who enroll at their institution. The Program Review Model will be accepted by the teaching faculty only if they have sufficient input into the design of the process to accept it as their own!

The evaluation process will be questioned and its application resisted if it is seen as contrived only to determine whether (or not) a program will be continued.

The fairness of the evaluation procedure must be established and accepted before proceeding.

“Evaluators should establish their credibility with the client and other users at the outset of the evaluation. If the confidence and trust of these audiences cannot be secured, the evaluators should seriously consider not proceeding (Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation, 1981).”

The perception of fairness includes questions such as: Must the way the evaluation process is organized and applied be consistent from program to program...? Is confidentiality an issue? Who will review the data and reports? Are some materials to be available only on a need to know basis? Are any provisions for rebuttal or minority reports being made? If the process evaluates the Instructional portion of the college, do we also want to evaluate the Service programs? Administration? Student Activities? Intercollegiate-sports? The Academic Senate? Committees? Etc.

II. Does the process create an unnecessary duplication of effort?

Is a given program review desirable, feasible and/or necessary? Does the college have a real commitment in time, manpower and resources to the review process? Are alternative methods available that produce the same outcomes with a smaller expenditure of effort?

These are some of the questions that a faculty senate must address in developing a program review model for its college.

III. Will conclusions produced by the review be acted on?

The group evaluated should review the report. Questions which arise should be answered. Recommendations must be responded to. Follow up and feed-back must be built into the review program. There must be some form of action after the report.

The responsibility for planning and executing remedial actions must not fall on just the department reviewed.

IV. How inclusive is the term “Evaluation of a Program?”

Parameters for length of review, cycle length, scope of study etc. need to be established. A realistic time table needs to be developed and adhered to. A college review process should be well delineated and to the point. One important trend is the integration of program review with the accreditation cycle See Rancho Santiago, for example.] This provides follow through and serves to avoid duplication of effort.

V. Does the model allow for the communication of all perceptions?

Human concerns, feelings, and values are just as important to the process as so called “objective” data. Narratives and qualitative data should be included in any summary report. The Joint committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation offers the following advice: “Do not abstain from reporting hunches, estimates, and interpretations that may not be home out of measurement...(1981)”

There are numerous other questions to be addressed: How are off campus sites and programs to be integrated with a proposed review process? To what extent can part-time and contractual faculty be included in the activities of program review? How can program review be Integrated with programs that are accredited by professional associations external to the college?

At some point, contending goals and needs statements need to be prioritized. How will goals which are in conflict be resolved? How will the goal statements, from the program and service areas, be organized into a meaningful “whole for the college? Another significant trend in this respect is towards the creation of institutional goals committees for strategic planning. The role of the academic senate is to assure that the process of institutional support and feed-back are complete. An active senate will hold both its faculty and administration accountable for follow through.

Summary

In response to a concern for the maintenance of program quality and the need for involvement of faculty in institutional governance; the college academic senate has a necessary role to play in the development of a Program Review process.

A self-study effort geared to documenting the needs of a particular program and the relevance and worth of that program is essential.

There are a variety of approaches to program review. The review process must contain examination and reporting procedures h will: establish a communication path for faculty concerns, stimulate staff participation in goal setting, encourage faculty involvement in planning and obligate the system to deal with issues which surface during the review. The evaluation process represents a “Feedback System” which will respond to change and allow for the improvement of instruction and service.

It is imperative that the college support the effort needed to accomplish the goals established during the Program Review process. The college's administration must be committed to the participation of all staff in planning for the future. The academic senate must be similarly committed. It should be viewed as the pro-active agent for a faculty institutional.

Conclusions

1. A review model should have three main components:

- a. A process of establishing a program mission statement. Group derived goals will form the basis for all discussions and
 - b. An assessment scheme is required for the gathering of information which can be organized into an information system.
 - c. Documentation of the components which relate to instructional quality and the learning environment: curriculum breadth, staff and student satisfaction, climate for learning, etc.
2. The major operational underpinnings for the implementation of a workable evaluation mechanism are:
- a. The acceptance by the faculty of the process as productive and of consequence. Shared responsibility for running aground, should allow for shared decision making as to which way to steer the ship!
 - b. A linkage to the decision-making process ... a commitment to capitalize on what is learned during the reviews must be in place and assured. The administration is obliged to communicate their concurrence in or rejection of the plan as it nears a stage of “draft proposal”. The academic senate has a similar responsibility.
 - c. The creation of a viable Campus Research Office as “hand- maiden” to the review process regarding:
 - i. Helping faculty members interested in understanding data and analyzing issues.
 - ii. Being the work-horse for the data gathering portion of the review.
 - iii. Becoming the long term repository for information necessary to “cyclic” review in which feedback is expected to occur.
3. Consequences which could arise with the implementation of the review model are:
- a. The process will reduce duplication of effort common to: justifying staffing needs, revising course outlines, the establishment of planning and curricular priorities, resolution of issues raised in accreditation, etc.
 - b. Each program and service area would be involved in an ongoing self- analysis, which would create a set of program goal statements and mechanisms for identifying what steps are needed to realize the goals.
 - c. A wholeness of purpose could be derived from the process and opportunities for personal and institutional development will be created.

Recommendations

The college academic senate should hold hearings concerning the direction that a program review model design should take and what its content should be. A combined meeting of the academic senate and the relevant committees and departments would help to communicate what impact the model may have on the college.

A thorough discussion of the model's underlying assumptions and their inherent implications should be conducted. The advantages and disadvantages of each component part of the model should be discussed and debated. The impact of program review on each campus constituency should be determined.

An institutional decision as to what to include and/or discard, how to proceed, and what responsibilities are to be assigned is a major implication of program review. The need for strategic planning in which play a strong role, is clearly necessitated by the challenge of a significant program review.

A “shake-down cruise,” involving volunteer departments and a “rough form” of the model, can be initiated. Reassigned time should be considered for appropriate faculty leadership. Initial “trials” should “evaluate the evaluation” ... find its weaknesses and strengths, modify it and seek to apply it in other programs or services.

A program for institutional research should be established. A minimal requirement should be the establishment of a Research office that is equally responsive to the data needs of the academic senate, programs, and services, and administrative demands. An information system will be required to provide storage and processing of college derived information and to provide access to community and state data bases.

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