

Essay 2. Academic Senate Program Reviews and Educational Effectiveness

Introduction

UCLA's Academic Senate is responsible for periodic review of all academic programs. In 1920, the Regents endorsed a memorial giving the systemwide Academic Senate formal powers over educational policy concerning admission and degree programs and guaranteed consultation in University affairs. The UCLA Academic Senate's Program Review process is the mechanism by which our campus ensures the quality of its educational programs and supports their continuous improvement, within UCLA's long and successful tradition of shared governance. Shared governance at UCLA is especially robust; our Senate organization engages the largest number of faculty and is among the most effective in the UC system. Furthermore, the UCLA Academic Senate's Program Review process is likely the most comprehensive and thorough across the UC system.

This essay will focus on Academic Senate Program Reviews of degree-granting programs (hereafter "programs"). It will show how the Program Review process engages faculty and administrators in examining educational programs, improving their quality, and addressing serious problems that occasionally arise. It will describe typical outcomes of a review, which could range from minor recommendations to strengthen an already strong undergraduate degree program by engaging undergraduates in research, to a decision to suspend admissions due to significant problems with the quality of a curriculum. The essay will also delineate the extent to which our current process aligns with WASC's Core Commitment to Educational Effectiveness, and will describe the effort currently underway to sharpen our focus on the use of evidence in assessing achievement of educational goals.

The Academic Senate's Commitment to Program Reviews

Two standing committees of the Academic Senate, the Undergraduate Council and Graduate Council, focus on the faculty's responsibility for educational programs, principally through our Program Review process, which the Councils normally administer on an eight-year cycle. All departments and Interdepartmental Degree Programs (IDPs, see *Essay 7*) undergo Program Reviews, as do several non-degree granting programs such as UCLA's General Education curriculum and the Freshman Cluster Program (see *Essay 4*), the College Honors Program, the Academic Advancement Program (see *Essay 3*), and the Office of Instructional Development (see *Essay 6*). The Academic Senate's Council on Research carries out the Senate's role in the review of Organized Research Units (see *Essay 7*).

The Program Review process is the means by which the faculty exercises its responsibility for maintaining the quality of educational programs, and the Undergraduate and Graduate Councils are responsible for defining and making needed modifications to the process, as codified in [Appendix XVI](#)¹ of the *UCLA Academic Senate Manual*. It is a mature process, having been refined over a period of many years, beginning even before Appendix XVI was enacted in 1991. The process is managed and staffed by the Academic Senate office. In broad strokes, the process begins with the program preparing a self-review, and continues with a panel of reviewers (with external members from other universities and internal faculty members from the Councils) visiting the program under review and reporting its findings to the Councils. The panel's report makes recommendations to the program and relevant administrators; the Councils bear the responsibility of approving the report and monitoring follow-up. This is in contrast to the practice at many universities, where program reviews are managed by the administration, with the reviewers reporting directly to the administration.

Two examples of recent actions will serve to demonstrate the Senate's ownership of and attention to the Program Review process. In 2000, the Senate Chair appointed an ad hoc committee charged with

conducting a review of the Program Review process. The ad hoc Committee's [Report on Program Reviews](#)² made a variety of recommendations, such as improving the data gathered concerning undergraduate education and restructuring the follow-up phase to make it both more effective and less burdensome. In 2007, the Senate Chair and the EVC/Provost appointed a joint Senate-Administrative committee to better define procedures to be followed when the Program Review process uncovers serious problems. That committee's [recommendations](#)³ proposed changes to Appendix XVI of the *Academic Senate Manual* that delineate the conditions under which academic receivership would be recommended to the administration or under which the Senate would suspend admissions to the major (the latter action being under the purview of the Senate). The recommendations have been approved by the Councils (Spring 2007) and the Senate's Legislative Assembly (Fall 2007).

The Program Review Process

This section presents an overview of the Program Review process. It will show that the process has the following features:

- It is inclusive, involving the faculty in the program, external experts in the discipline, other UCLA faculty representing the Councils, students, and relevant administrators. The inclusion of academic administrators (deans; EVC/Provost) at all stages has been effective in ensuring that the process is taken seriously by the administration; nonetheless, the Program Review process is not always well articulated with the campus processes for academic strategic planning, largely governed by administrators (see *Essay I*).
- It draws on a variety of data sources, both quantitative and qualitative, such as the program's self review; interviews with faculty, students, and administrators; undergraduate and graduate student surveys; course syllabi; and information about faculty workload, student enrollment, degrees granted, and other performance indicators (also see *Essay I*).
- It encourages the faculty in a program to be reflective and make improvements.
- By its design, attention is paid to following up on the review recommendations. This aspect is perhaps the most challenging, but the process is continually being refined to improve this focus on implementation.

Each program is typically reviewed on an eight-year cycle (see [schedule of reviews](#)⁴). Normally each review is conducted over a three-year period, and the sequence of events is listed below:

YEAR 1. Self-Review Report and Preparation for Site Visit

1. Notification letter to program & academic dean, *Fall previous to site visit*
2. Program submits top 10 programs list & external reviewer nominees, *Spring previous to site visit*
3. Council chairs select external reviewers, *Summer previous to site visit*
4. Program submits self-review, *by Summer/Fall of site visit year*
5. Councils appoint internal reviewers, *Summer/Fall of site visit year*

YEAR 2. Site Visit and Reporting

6. Site visit, *Fall or Winter (occasionally Spring)*
7. External reviewer reports due, *2 weeks after site visit*
8. Internal reviewer report due (incorporates external reviewer reports), *4 weeks after site visit*
9. Administrative Committee reviews draft report; report to program chair, *6 weeks after site visit*
10. Program chair prepares factual errors response to draft report, *within 1 week of receipt of draft*
11. Internal review team finalizes report, *Spring*
12. Councils approve Final Report & recommendations; report to program and dean, *Spring/Summer*

YEAR 3. Response, Progress Review, and Closure

13. Formal responses from program chair and dean, *11 months after receipt of Final Report*
14. Progress Review Meeting (waived if recommendations are minor), *after receipt of formal responses*
15. Internal Review after Unsatisfactory Progress (only when progress has been unsatisfactory)
16. Review closed with a written *Memorandum of Progress*

Year 1. The main activity during the first year is the program's analysis of its own educational and research programs and preparation of its self-review, culminating in a faculty vote on the document. Departments follow the [Guidelines for the Self-Review](#)⁵ that is written and updated by the collective efforts of the Undergraduate and Graduate Councils. With respect to educational programs, departments are asked to state their "goals, rationale, and structure" and to comment on what they do well; what areas need to be strengthened; and what their future plans are. The process of preparing the self-review can often be one of the most valuable aspects of the review process, as it affords faculty an opportunity to be reflective.

As explained in our essay on *Academic Strategic Planning (Essay 1)*, the program under review is provided with important performance indicators to assist the program in framing its self-review. These data typically include: student enrollments in each degree program, enrollments in courses, number of degrees granted, financial support data for graduate students, doctoral job placements, graduate student survey results, departmental data generated by the [College Senior Survey](#)⁶, and an issues statement from the Academic Senate's Council on Planning and Budget.

The other main activity preparatory to the site visit is to constitute the panel of reviewers. The external reviewers (typically two) are distinguished faculty in the field of the program under review, from other universities. They are selected by the Council chairs from a list provided by the program under review, in consultation with the corresponding dean. Members of the Councils serve as internal reviewers, usually with two participants from each Council.

Year 2. The site visit (one to three days) takes place in the second year of the cycle. As described in [Guidelines for the Site Visit](#)⁷, the schedule includes meetings with the program chair, the corresponding dean, faculty, students, and others as needed. An exit meeting is held at the close of the site visit, with the review panel, the program chair, the dean, the chairs of the Councils, the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education, the Dean of the Graduate Division, the EVC/Provost, and a representative from the Council on Planning and Budget. The review panel provides its initial assessment and recommends any immediate action that might be required before the report is issued.

Subsequent to the site visit, the external reviewers provide their own reports according to the [Guidelines for External Reviewers](#)⁸. The internal reviewers write a full review report (see [Guidelines for the Report of an Academic Program Review Team](#)⁹) that incorporates the external reviewers' input and makes recommendations to the program under review and the dean. This report is sent to the program chair for a review for factual errors, after which the internal reviewers finalize the report and submit it to Councils for review and approval, by the end of spring term.

Year 3. The final phase of the Program Review process is the response and progress review phase, which encompasses the third year and sometimes longer. After receipt of the Final Report, the department and dean have ten months to address the recommendations before preparing their formal responses, which should describe actions planned and already taken in response to the review. Allowing ten months before the review process is closed greatly improves the likelihood that recommendations will be implemented. After receipt of the responses, a [Progress Review Meeting](#)¹⁰ is scheduled between the program chair, dean, chairs of Councils, and other relevant parties as needed. Based on the Progress Review Meeting, the Council chairs produce a *Memorandum of Progress* that is included in the official record of the review. This memorandum includes the written responses of the program chair and dean, a summary of the issues discussed at the Progress Review Meeting, and a description of any further actions that Councils anticipate the unit will take before the next review.

Ordinarily, the Councils vote to close the Program Review process on the basis of the *Memorandum of Progress*. Occasionally, the Councils may determine that there has been unsatisfactory progress and recommend an Internal Review before the next regular Program Review. The Internal Review is an

abbreviated version of a site visit, without external reviewers, targeted to the remaining problematic issues, and culminating with a report describing any further actions the program should take prior to the next scheduled review.

Occasionally, a Program Review will uncover such serious problems that the Councils will take one of two strong actions. If the program is unable to deliver its educational programs in a responsible manner, or shows disregard for student welfare, the Councils may decide to suspend admissions to some or all of the degree programs. The other strong measure available to Councils is to recommend academic receivership, that is, the appointment of an individual external to the program, who will be vested with sufficient administrative authority to oversee implementation of the Councils' recommendations. Receivership may be recommended when a program is not governing itself in accordance with the principles of shared governance, is failing to fulfill its teaching mission, or displays disregard for student or faculty welfare. The decision to implement receivership falls under the purview of the relevant dean.

Outcomes of the Program Review Process

The Program Reviews provide valuable recommendations that guide departments and administrators in improving programs and in taking corrective actions as needed. This section summarizes the nature of the recommendations offered during the past five years, from 2002-03 to 2006-07. During this period, the Academic Senate reviewed 40 programs: 26 in the College (18 departments and 8 IDPs) and 14 Professional School departments from General Campus (excludes the Medical/Health Sciences departments). Of the 40 reviews, 27 (68%) were concluded with no additional actions needed, and the next review was scheduled at the regular eight-year interval, and ten programs (25%) required an additional Internal Review to address one or more of the issues raised, while three programs (7%) were placed in academic receivership for more serious issues.

On average, each Final Report had ten recommendations. As indicated by the data summary below, most recommendations could be classified in one of four major categories. Recommendations relating to “Student Issues” and “Curriculum and Program Goals” directly address educational programs, and were found in 60% and 78% of Final Reports, respectively. “Program Resources” and “Self-Governance & Communication” also significantly influence the ability of the program to deliver its curricula effectively; these were addressed in 88% and 53% of reports.

Categories of Recommendations in the Final Reports	Recommendations in the Category		Reports including the Category	
	# of Recom.	% of Total	# of Reports	% of Total
Program Resources	133	33%	35	88%
Self-Governance & Communication	104	26%	21	53%
Student Issues	75	19%	24	60%
Curriculum and Program Goals	70	18%	31	78%
Miscellaneous	14	3%	10	25%
	396	100%		

1) Program Resources. Resource recommendations centered on the need for: a) faculty replacements and allocations for more faculty in specific areas, to enhance academic programs, b) space improvements and new allocations of research and office space, c) graduate student fellowships and more allocations for teaching assistants, and d) staff and budget for specific items and core facilities. Typically these recommendations were addressed to the relevant dean and/or program chair. Resource recommendations are advisory and may or may not be addressed in the department’s strategic plan (often articulated in the Self-Review Report) or in the dean’s strategic plan, which takes into account

the needs of many units (see *Essay 1*). The Academic Senate's Council on Planning and Budget attends the exit meetings and focuses on resource matters.

2) Self-Governance and Communications. Recommendations regarding issues of self-governance focused largely on the need for clearly articulating policies such as Teaching Workload or bylaws such as those governing voting privileges on academic merits and promotions. The absence of bylaws was so common to the eight IDPs recently reviewed that the Councils enacted a requirement for IDPs to adopt bylaws, and developed a template to assist them in this task. It is also important to note that uncertainty about governance issues in departments and IDPs sometimes led to low faculty morale, and in some cases to non-collegial behaviors and festering conflicts. Of the 40 programs reviewed, 21 (53%) had recommendations regarding governance issues and/or communication problems that needed to be addressed. In two cases, the situation was considered to be of sufficient concern that academic receivership was recommended and established. In addition to the lack of effective intradepartmental communication, suggestions regarding the need for more interdepartmental communication were common, with the reviewers urging ten programs (25% of those reviewed) to make stronger links with allied units. These recommendations appear to herald a growing attention to interdisciplinary education, a topic addressed in *Essay 7*.

3) Student Issues. There were several recurring issues related to the quality of the undergraduate and graduate student experience. The most common was a concern about the availability and commitment to academic advising and mentoring. Additionally, several programs were urged to monitor graduate student progress to facilitate a shorter time-to-degree. In other cases, the creation of student associations was suggested as a way of enhancing engagement and building a greater sense of community among students and between faculty and students. Student-related recommendations also included enrollment management issues, such as the need to increase or decrease the number of students majoring in various fields, and the need to address graduate student admissions and recruitment issues. In nine of the reviews, programs were urged to create more opportunities for undergraduate students to participate in advanced seminars and independent study; these recommendations are consistent with UCLA's interest in fostering capstone experiences (see *Essay 5*).

4) Curriculum and Program Goals. Recommendations in this category ranged from the need to reduce requirements or ensure a progressive series of courses to the need to redesign core courses (to ensure quality) or add new courses that provide greater depth or breadth. At the heart of many of these suggestions was an overarching concern about the inability of the program to clearly articulate the goals and expectations of their educational programs. Statements such as: "The Department needs to develop more clearly articulated mission statements for their undergraduate and graduate programs to minimize the current disconnect between the faculty vision for the Department and the expectations of the students" appeared in some form in ten (25%) of the programs reviewed. Recommendations about improving curriculum and articulating program goals proved to be serious and contributed significantly to academic receivership for one program and additional Internal Reviews for eight.

Next Steps: Emphasizing Educational Effectiveness in Program Reviews

The many recommendations that departments and IDPs clearly articulate their goals and expectations resonate with WASC's expectation that all degree programs have educational objectives. The WASC *Inventory of Educational Effectiveness Indicators* is one way of cataloging our progress in ensuring that degree programs have formal learning outcomes that are published and assessed. In preparation for our *Institutional Proposal*, we considered how we might complete the *Inventory* for UCLA's more than 300 degree programs in a manner that would involve programs more seriously than simply requiring them to fill out yet another form. We also decided that the WASC inventory expectations should be integrated into UCLA's existing Program Review process. In this section, we describe our efforts and accomplishments relating to this goal, and our future plans toward this end.

Prior to writing our *Institutional Proposal*, we formed a small committee whose members had experience on the Undergraduate or Graduate Council or had served as department chairs. After considering their own programs' records on articulating, publishing, and assessing educational goals, the members began development of a process that would enable each program to clearly and publicly identify student learning goals and to develop assessment approaches. This committee also produced the first *Inventory* (Appendix D, Table 6 of the *Institutional Proposal*), which has since been updated and included as an online [table](#)¹¹ as part of this capacity report.

In preparation for this reflective essay, a workgroup was formed to advance the goal of integrating WASC's assessment and inventory expectations into the Program Review process. That workgroup began by identifying the extent to which our current review process aligns with WASC's core commitment to educational effectiveness. The review *Guidelines* require programs to articulate their educational goals and how they are currently being implemented, but do not require educational goals to be published; this is easily remedied. Further, the current process draws on a variety of data, consistent with WASC's emphasis on the use of evidence in assessing achievement of educational goals; however, the workgroup felt that there was a need for more explicit attention to the assessment component. Given the size, diversity, and complexity of the UCLA campus, this must be done in a way that allows flexibility and engages faculty in each program in developing assessment approaches that are meaningful to them.

With these observations in mind, the workgroup instituted a pilot program with Undergraduate Council (see [letter to Chair of Undergraduate Council](#)¹²), applicable to the programs that began their review cycle in 2006-07 and will have site visits in 2007-08. The pilot program began with a [letter to program chairs](#)¹³ asking them to: a) fill out a survey relating to educational goals and assessment, b) state and publish their educational goals if they had not already done so, and c) make progress on assessment of educational goals by the time of the site visit. All ten programs undergoing review returned the survey and their responses have been entered into the *Inventory*. Their responses reveal some meaningful trends. First, all but one program stated their educational goals and all but two indicated that they are published. In some cases, however, the "educational goals" are not a focused statement relating to expectations for students' learning, but may be a description of the major and/or a list of requirements. Second, every program indicated that they had used various forms of evidence in the past to assess the degree to which students are fulfilling the program's educational goals, and would be interested in using additional forms of evidence in the future.

The results of this pilot have been informative and indicate that in the future the *Guidelines* must clearly define educational goals and provide helpful examples. The next step will be for Undergraduate and Graduate Councils to modify the current Program Review guidelines to sharpen the focus on articulation, publication, and evidence-based assessment of educational objectives, as well as cataloging those achievements in the aforementioned *Inventory*. It is likely that educational outcomes for undergraduates will be tied specifically to the proposed UCLA Capstone Program, since capstone courses and projects are thought by many educators to be a good vehicle for a summative assessment of program success (see *Essay 5* for more details). We will report our progress in defining and assessing achievement of educational objectives in our report for the WASC *Educational Effectiveness Review*, scheduled for completion by the end of 2008.

Closing Statement. UCLA's Academic Senate Program Review process is a strong and effective mechanism for monitoring and improving the quality of our educational programs and for taking action as needed to correct problems. The Program Review process aligns in many ways with WASC's Core Commitment to Educational Effectiveness. Our plans to modify the Program Review process will lead to enhancements in articulation, publication, and evidence-based assessment of educational effectiveness, in a manner appropriate to a large and complex research university.