ACADEMIC PROGRAM AND RESOURCE PLANNING

IN THE CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY AND COLLEGES

Program Review Policy

July 1980

REVIEW OF EXISTING PROGRAMS

In 1971, The California State University and Colleges Board of Trustees called for the establishment of program performance review procedures for all existing undergraduate and graduate programs, and since then the Trustees have annually resolved "that a formal review of existing degree curricula continue to be conducted annually by the campuses as a part of the overall academic planning process." Each campus was requested to develop its own review procedures within minimal systemwide guidelines.

Purposes of the Ongoing Reviews of Existing Programs

The major purpose of current program performance reviews is to maintain and strengthen the quality of academic offerings on the 19 campuses. The review process should be closely linked with academic master planning and resource allocation procedures. Where this is the case, program reviews can provide information valuable to the evaluation of proposals for new programs and lead to informed decisions concerning augmentation, maintenance, consolidation or discontinuation of existing programs. Program review also can seek to (1) identify needs for structural changes in administrative units, (2) become sensitive to the unique situations of some programs, (3) identify nonfunctional or unnecessarily duplicative programs and (4) assess needs for additional study and planning.

Of increasing importance is the relationship of the resource allocation process to program review. The May 1979 *Report of the Project Team on Academic Programs* stated that "in a sense, it is through the program review process that campuses are best able to respond to the increasingly severe constraints on resources while attempting to maintain and even enhance program quality." Program reviews can provide a substantive basis to make responsible decisions about resources. The Project Team recommended that the resource allocation process be combined with the program review process and that ways be designed to specifically relate program review findings to resource allocation questions.

The California Postsecondary Education Commission, in its February 1980 report entitled *Annual Summary of Program Review Activities, 1978-79,* also noted the relation of program review to resource decisions, particularly if resource losses are contemplated. Under such circumstances, "a well-established review process promises to provide the best safeguard against arbitrary and indiscriminate programmatic decisions." The Commission report also cited the role of program review in serving the public interest "as an important indication of responsible management," noting that "...the public is entitled to the assurance that departments and programs in public colleges and universities are being evaluated with a reasonable degree of rigor and objectivity."

Major Assumptions

The following assumptions underlie the process of performance review of existing programs.

1. Program review involves the comprehensive and intensive reexamination of a particular academic program. The review is a judgmental process which uses both quantitative and qualitative data to evaluate the academic offering.

2. Quality cannot be easily defined or simplistically evaluated. It emerges from honest professional discourse about the standards that should be applied, changes in knowledge, the relationship of programs to each other, student learning needs, and society's educational preferences.

3. The most important single factor influencing the success of program review activities is the credibility of the activity as viewed by faculty. Faculty on each campus must therefore have a central role in conducting the reviews.

4. Program review is an essential part of the academic planning process on each campus and should take a form judged by faculty and administration as being an effective way of integrating the review process with campus planning.

Since formalized and systematic program review is relatively new to higher education, considerable time and effor⁺ are required to develop and refine successful review procedures. It has only been in recent years that a literature the viability of different program review models has begun to emerge. It is not surprising, then, that within th. CSUC there is variability with regard to both the form and effectiveness of the program review process. To some extent, the sharing of successful procedures among system campuses has assisted materially in refinement.

Currently, each campus has defined for its own purpose the scope of its program reviews within the general guideline that each program be reviewed qualitatively and quantitatively at least every five years. Some campuses have chosen to review specific degeee programs while others structure the review around individual departments, examining all departmental offerings. Program reviews for any year may be clustered around schools or spread across the campus' many offerings. On most campuses, approximately one-fifth of the programs are reviewed each year, but there are and have been variations on this pattern. In any given year there may be campuses which are not reviewing individual programs but rather conducting comprehensive studies of institutional goals and priorities.

While each campus has developed its own review procedures, as shown in Table 1, there are several review mechanisms which are being employed on most campuses. Most reviews begin with a departmental self-study, which is generally submitted to the appropriate dean for review and comment and then forwarded to a campus committee for its consideration. Often the committee will conduct its own evaluation of the area under review. Some campuses conduct studies of their students and alumni and survey employers and agencies who utilize program graduates. On a few campuses, the program review process is tied with either discipline or institutional accreditation reviews, the latter by special arrangement with WASC.

Most campuses also seek input from individuals and agencies external to the campus. Individuals selected to serve as outside evaluators are usually faculty from other institutions whose expertise relates to the program under review. Generally, when external reviewers are used, the focus is primarily on the qualitative component; resources tend to be noted (frequently) in terms of the lack of laboratory facilities and equipment. While the review itself may not appear to address thoroughly some questions of efficiency and economy, the qualitative review may nevertheless influence later campus decisions on resource priorities. At a time when campuses cannot afford to offer courses which fall below enrollment limits, resource reviews are conducted continuously on a campuswide basis. The existence of the qualitative reviews helps to insure that when resource decisions are made, the departments are better prepared to make adjustments which do the least harm to the curriculm. On the other hand, many reviews have revealed resource lacks of a sufficiently serious nature to warrant an adjustment in campus allocations.

Even though the criteria used to evaluate the programs reflect the unique characteristics of each campus, the Project Team on Academic Programs suggested that a meaningful academic program review will usually include full consideration of the purposes and goals of the program, of its curricular content, of its human and material resources, of past and current accomplishments, of program graduates and of its general and specific strengths and weaknesses.

In addition, one of the systemwide criteria for program review involves the minimal data to be used, as follows:

1. Average FTE per section, by discipline and level of instruction, in order to measure course proliferation within a discipline;

2. Number and percent of sections in each discipline which fall below minimum class size standards used for budgetary purposes, thus identifying the incidence of low-enrollment courses within a discipline;

3. Frequency distribution in each discipline, of section sizes within each staffing formula category, as a measure of efficiency, thus identifying the incidence of courses in a discipline which may meet class size minima but do not meet optimal standards;