

# INSTITUTIONAL DEPARTMENT PROGRAM REVIEW GUIDELINES

## WHY PROGRAM REVIEW

Program review is a necessary process whereby departments within Arizona Western College periodically undergo a check on quality assurance which includes taking a critical eye to what a department is doing and how well it is meeting its objectives. Program review is the foundation upon which all departments assess, maintain, and enhance program quality and vitality. As such, program review gives us the opportunity to reflect on the performance of a department/program, document what is being done well, identify areas where things need improvement, and plan for the future.

## WHAT CONSTITUTES A PROGRAM

A program can be defined in many ways depending on what activities within the institution are being reviewed. An operational definition of a program *is any activity or collection of activities of the institution that consumes resources (dollars, people, space, equipment, time)*. This can lead to several ways of defining programs; for example:

- Student support services that may enhance students' academic achievement
- Departments such as Advisement & Career Services or the Child Development Learning Laboratory
- Administrative services defined by administrative reporting structures
- Student service pathways that end in a specific outcome
- Facilities

## UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES OF PROGRAM REVIEW

When undergoing program review we think of how best departments should function. To this end, some common-sense principles and practices that can help a department improve its processes are as follows:

**Define quality in terms of outcomes.** Exemplary departments determine their students' needs and then work to meet them. Similarly, quality in terms of services provided by a department to clients should drive business practices. The service outcome needed by students, faculty, staff, and community partners, etc. should define what the department is seeking to deliver and should inform practice so that such services are well done.

**Base decisions on facts.** Administrative departments should collect evidence to guide decisions on staffing related to the volume of work needing to be accomplished, how best to deploy new technological solutions, identifying where synergy resulting in efficiencies exist, etc.

**Focus on assessment.** Administrative departments should promote a 'culture of inquiry' to provide continual improvement in how services are provided. Assessment should form the backbone of continual improvement efforts so that change is well-informed change based on knowledge of how well a department is achieving its outcomes.

**Strive for coherence in educational activities.** Student support services should be aligned with the goal of helping students learn how to learn. Administrative efforts should be geared toward student success. Efforts of all departments should be woven together in a seamless support structure aimed at learning and student success.

**Work collaboratively to achieve mutual involvement and support.** Departments should encourage staff members to work together, hold one another accountable, and bring a broad array of talent to bear on difficult problems. Such teamwork can make the department a “learning organization” as well as a provider of services to its clients.

**Identify and learn from best practices.** Departments should seek out examples of good practice and adapt the best to their own circumstances. Departments should compare good versus average or poor-performing methods, assess the causes of the differences, and seek ways to minimize the variation. Continual benchmarking against peers helps keep activities current and relevant to students, staff, community partners, etc. being served.

**Make continuous improvement a priority.** Departments should strive to improve the quality of services on a regular basis and seek ways to provide optimal services. All departments should embrace a ‘culture of inquiry’.

## **ADDRESSING QUALITY PRINCIPLES IN PROGRAM REVIEW**

Program reviews should be a meaningful process that contributes to the overall quality of the department and the college without creating unsustainable workload or data requirements. To do so is a bit of a balancing act in regard to the level of detail needed versus the effort required.

As part of program review, the department undergoing a self-reflection needs to consider the following:

### **What are we trying to do?**

Traditional thinking equates quality to inputs like staff size and qualifications – for example, “Quality improvement requires more and better staff.” But inputs are means to an end and it’s the end that ultimately matters. In services, the end pertains to students’ knowledge and skills, values, and quality of life. This leads to the principle: *Define quality in terms of outcomes.*

### **How are we doing it?**

Quality experts insist that all work is process. In short, to do something you must engage in some sort of process, even if it’s informal. It only makes sense that paying attention to processes can improve quality. This leads to the principle: *Focus on how things get done.*

### **Who is responsible for doing it?**

Tasks can be assigned to teams or left to individual initiative. Teams usually outperform individuals when it comes to sustaining and improving quality. Hence the principle: *Work collaboratively.*

### **How do we know we are succeeding?**

It’s hard to consistently produce quality without feedback on how well you are accomplishing your goal. The feedback should be based on evidence rather than on

anecdotes whenever possible, and evidence is important in applying the other quality principles. Consequently the principle: *Base decisions on evidence*.

**How can we do even better?**

Although focusing on outcomes, processes, responsibilities, and evidence gets the improvement ball rolling, the principles which hold everything together: *Learn from best practice and make continuous improvement a priority*.

These questions and the underlying quality principles form the foundation for pieces contained in a self-analysis program review done by a department.

**FRAMEWORK FOR PROGRAM REVIEW REPORTS**

The following report framework is to be utilized as a guide, aimed at getting a department to do an analysis of what it is aiming to accomplish and how successful it is in doing so.

- I. Overview**
- II. Mission / Program Purpose**
- III. Quality Assurance**
  - A. Focus on the Department Program(s)
  - B. Focus on Assessment
  - C. Focus on Students
  - D. Focus on Faculty and Staff
  - E. Focus on Support
  - F. Focus on Community
- IV. Summary of Significant Developments Since Last Program Review**
- V. Guide for the Future**
- VI. Action Plan**
- VII. Appendices with Supporting Data / Evidence**

Below is additional information for each section of the framework.

***I. Overview***

The purpose of the overview is to *briefly* describe the program to individuals who may be unfamiliar with the program. This section may also serve to describe the process used to conduct the review and the internal and external context within which the program operates.

***II. Mission / Program Purpose***

To help frame the discussion on what the department does, the mission or purpose of the program(s) offered by the department should be indicated. The relationship of the department purpose to overall college mission and goals or any principles of the profession or business practice should be indicated.

***III. Quality Assurance***

Address the key questions:

What are we trying to do?

How are we doing it?  
Who is responsible for doing it?  
How do we know we are succeeding?  
How can we do even better?

It is helpful to use a lens that focuses on various areas pertaining to how the department knows whether or not what it is doing is working well; i.e., whether it is succeeding in meeting its objectives.

#### **A. Focus on the Department Program(s)**

In this section the department should reflect on the various activities that it provides.

##### Services

###### *Service Department Outcomes*

In non-academic areas, the objectives or outcomes of what the department is trying to accomplish. *Service department outcomes* arise from answering questions such as: What staff, students, community partners, etc. will have access to, be served with, be provided, be able to do, etc. ...; or, what they will understand, experience, or obtain as a result of a specific service.

###### *Trends in service provided*

As part of the need to benchmark against others to ensure optimal service is provided, there is a need to monitor how business functionality has evolved, how changes due to technology have led to improvements, how changing student demographics necessitate changed business practices, etc.

###### *Use of assessment information*

In reviewing how well service department outcomes are being achieved, the department needs to indicate how assessment information has been used in making changes for improvement in services provided to clients.

##### Finances

###### *Revenues and expenditures*

An indication of whether the costs of the program are aligned with the budgeted resources and, if appropriate, what revenues are generated through program activities. If comparative data are available, benchmarking against others to indicate whether resources seem appropriate given the program size and duties. Trends in budgeted resources and the impact on the department should be addressed.

#### **B. Focus On Assessment**

In this section the department or program should reflect on how well it has ascertained whether it is accomplishing its mission and achieving its goals and objectives.

###### *Approach to assessment*

Documented outcomes, results of assessments, what has been learned from assessments, what has changed as a result of assessments, what plans are there for changes in the future,

whether appropriate feedback loops to improve student services exist, etc. should be discussed.

*Administrative assessment*

The objectives of the department and how success in achieving them is measured should be indicated. Whether assessment information has provided evidence for you to conclude that you see needs and demands for services that your department cannot currently meet should be discussed. Whether technology is being used appropriately or whether improvement can be pursued should be addressed. Whether opportunities exist for greater collaboration and team approaches in the delivery of services, whether personnel levels adequately support the services being provided, and how the department compares with similar departments at other institutions should be covered.

*Culture of Inquiry*

While use of assessment information is addressed within each of the focal areas, an overall discussion of how a culture of inquiry aimed at evidence-based decision making is working within the department should be presented.

**C. Focus On Students**

In this section, departments should reflect on how well the program is meeting student needs.

*Demographics*

Analysis or examination of the demographics of the students served, special populations being served or not being served, trends and patterns of students served, comparisons to other Arizona colleges or national trends, etc. should be discussed.

*Student satisfaction*

Surveys of students receiving services should be carried out and discussed. Results of qualitative measures aimed at looking at how best the department is providing services for students or supporting students should be presented. Use of focus groups or interviews should be considered.

*Use of assessment information*

How the department has used assessment information in making changes for improved student services should be addressed.

**D. Focus On Staff**

In this section, programs should reflect on the staff in the program and the degree to which their needs are met, in order for them to in turn be successful in providing student services.

*Organizational chart*

An indication of the responsibilities of personnel in key functional areas and how the structure of the department has changed over time should be indicated. How the staffing, as reflected in the organizational structure, meets the department needs should be indicated.

*Demographics*

Information on full- and part-time staff including coordinators, secretarial/clerical support, technicians, other support positions, etc. and how the personnel within the department have changed over time.

*Staff development*

How the department goes about hiring, coordinating duties, providing support leading to effective services, communicating on department issues, etc. should be addressed. Efforts to improve personnel skills and abilities aimed at enhanced performance or services should be described.

*Professional activities*

Information on staff who have pursued special projects, had reassigned time, are active in professional organizations, sought grants, collaborated with others in partnerships, have publications, have made presentations, or other contributions.

*Use of assessment information*

How assessment information, such as staff appraisals, employee evaluations, opinion surveys, etc. have been used in making changes for improvement.

**E. Focus On Support**

In this section, programs should reflect on the support issues related to this department – to what degree are they met, where are there kudos to be given, changes that have taken place, improvements to be made, etc.

*Technology*

Hardware and software, technical issues and/or support, instructional issues and/or support, training for staff, etc. can be addressed.

*Facilities and equipment*

Cycles for replacement or refurbishment of equipment, furniture, or other infrastructure components should be indicated. Any connection to technology or facility planning should be discussed.

*Learning resources*

Collection of books, databases, journals, videos and whether they are adequate to provide proper support should be indicated. Learning assistance or tutoring connected to the program educational outcomes could be discussed. How resources are made available across campus locations should be considered.

*Marketing and public relations*

Brochures, print materials, website, special events, recruitment efforts, etc. aimed at helping the department provide its services, attract clients, etc. and whether such efforts are successful can be addressed.

*Support services*

Advisement, assessment, testing, job placement, etc. – whether part of what the department does or whether something provided externally to the department but is aimed at the success of the department in meeting its objectives – should be discussed. How services are delivered across campuses and how departments rely on such distributed services should be addressed.

*Resources*

How resources – staffing, operating and capital budgets, grants, etc. – allow the department to meet its objectives or whether there is a lack of suitable resources to meet the aspirations of the department should be addressed.

*Use of assessment information*

How assessment information is used in making changes for improved use of technology, facilities, etc. should be discussed.

#### **F. Focus On Community**

In this section, programs should reflect on the degree to which regular input from outside of the college—the community—is sought and how this information is used to help guide the department.

##### *Community groups*

High school connections, community agency connections, and other forms of community involvement which pertain to the mission of the department should be indicated.

##### *External requirements or considerations*

Information on certifications, accreditations, licensures, professional organization status or involvement which impact what the department does should be addressed.

##### *Community issues*

How well the department is meeting its community-based objectives can be discussed.

##### *Use of assessment information*

How assessment information has been used in making changes to allow the department to meet the changing needs of the community should be indicated.

#### **IV. Summary of significant developments since the last program review**

This portion of the self-analysis should provide a summary of significant developments since the last program review, with particular emphasis on challenges identified during the previous review, accomplishments relating to the action plans, any work yet to be done.

Information on how the department pursued action plan items in the previous program review and how successful the department was in carrying out the action plan should be discussed. Annual assessment of student learning outcomes, or ongoing assessment of how well a department is providing services, should be summarized in this section to help explain how the department has evolved since the last program review took place.

#### **V. Guide for the future**

The purpose of this section is to describe what is planned as a result of what was learned during this program review. Recommendations for specific actions to improve or sustain quality and to address weaknesses should be clearly stated and focus on what the program itself can do, not on what other departments might do for the program. At the same time, there should be a discussion on any areas where departments outside the one being reviewed can be better utilized to help the program sustain quality.

Challenges confronting the program at the present time should be discussed in context with where the program would like to be in the future. Commdepartmenty and compliance influences by external factors (e.g., state laws, external accreditation requirements, changing commdepartmenty demographics) which will impact the department’s ability to achieve future goals should be discussed.

Projecting where the program will be in five years should also be included in this section. For those programs whose lifecycle has reached its end, a plan for how best to “sunset” the activity should be indicated.

## **VI. Action Plan**

Culminating the program review effort should be a plan of action aimed at accomplishing the objectives that have been identified as part of the look forward to the future. The action plan can be specific when such issues are identified; e.g., goal, objective, timeframe, responsible Party(ies), resource Implications. A yearly monitoring of progress on the Action Plan – as shown by evidence – should occur.

## **VII. Appendices**

Information that helps explain the discussion in the self-analysis report, such as data from Institutional Research, student survey data, success of students in terms of retention and graduation, etc. should be provided.

### **A. Program Data/Supporting Evidence**

The specific data that a program needs to help it in doing a self-analysis will vary depending on which particular department is undergoing program review. Nevertheless, the data supporting the analysis should be meaningful and useful rather than data that is voluminous but tells little that would allow a program to learn about itself to the point of making informed decisions for improvement.

Assessment of administrative department outcomes may rely upon a variety of measurement methods. Some may be tracked by a department; e.g., # of transactions processed, # of reports completed, or # of clients served. For many service departments, however, assessment efforts may provide some of the supporting evidence.

Some performance indicators to consider as supporting evidence include the following:

*STAFF (over a five -year period, by year/term)*

- Number of staff within the department

*FINANCIAL (over a five -year period, by year/term)*

- Expenditures by type

**PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

- Student satisfaction surveys
- Focus groups
- Facilities Improvement Plans
- Technology Improvement Plans
- Number and type of complaints
- Comparison to peer institutions
- Alignment with professional organization best practices
- Tracking the use of a survey
- Tracking complaints and how they are resolved
- Benchmarks set by national, state, or peer organizations