

Report on the 5th Cycle of Program Review

Introduction

The University underwent a great deal of change during the nine year period of the 5th Cycle of Program Review. During the Cycle, there was one major budget crisis (resulting in serious efforts at program discontinuance and suspensions) and ongoing budget deficits. In addition, the University faced quite large numbers of faculty retirements and some colleges experienced complete generational turnovers. Other major changes were a growing emphasis in student learning outcomes assessment, meaningful program review and graduate programs, largely brought about by WASC initiatives and recommendations.

Statistics on the 5th Cycle of Program Review

The 5th Cycle of Program Review was begun in 1999 and is being concluded in 2007, after only eight years. This is an improvement in efficiency compared to the 12 years of the 4th cycle.

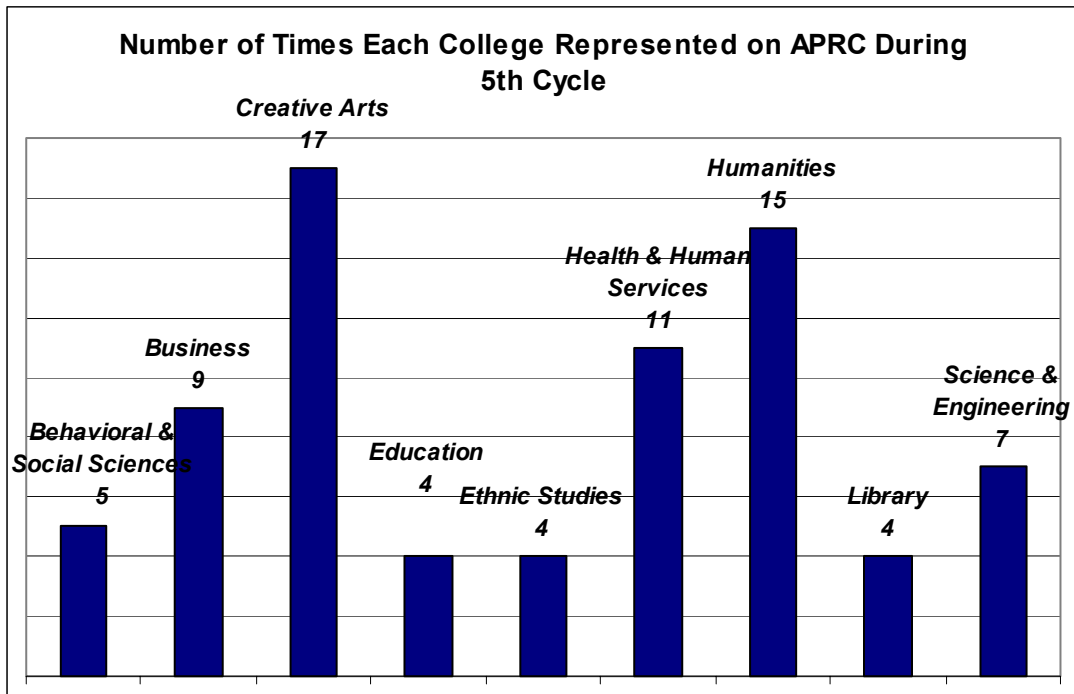
As with all program review cycles, there was broad faculty and administrative involvement. Thirty-nine faculty representing thirty-one different departments participated as peer reviewer / Committee members in Academic Program Review during the 5th Cycle. Of special note is Saul Steier, who served on APRC during five years of the 5th Cycle and four years in previous Cycles; his vast interdisciplinary knowledge of various fields and disciplines served an invaluable role in many program reviews over the Cycle.

APRC Chairs during the 5th Cycle included Jerry Duke (Music and Dance), Oswaldo Garcia (Geosciences) and Genie Stowers (Public Administration). Duke and Garcia each chaired the Committee during this period for three years and Stowers, for two years.

The 5th cycle continued during the tenures of three different Associate Vice Presidents with responsibility for program review: Gail Whitaker, Richard Giardina and Linda Buckley. Faculty Program Review Coordinators included Jim Bebee (Design and Industry), Jerry Duke (Music and Dance), Miriam Smith (BECA), and Oswaldo Garcia (Geosciences).

Figure 1 presents a visual representation of the number of times each college was represented on the Committee during the 5th cycle.

Figure 1: Number of Times Each College Was Represented on APRC



All eligible degree programs within the University were reviewed with the exception of Philosophy and Labor Studies. During each review, each Program wrote a self-study and then hosted external reviewers, who in turn wrote their own report and responded to departmental recommendations. For each program reviewed during the Fifth Cycle, the APRC examined all materials and interviewed the Department Chair and Dean to resolve remaining questions. Based upon all of this information, the APRC wrote a report for each program and made recommendations. This report then formed the basis for the MOU, drafted by the Associate Vice President, which was signed by the department chair, the dean, and the Provost.

Observations From the 5th Cycle

The changes in the University environment and faculty created the backdrop for these observations on the 5th Cycle of Program Review.

- As the program review cycles continued over time, the APRC culture changed from one of routine, non-critical reviews to one with more discerning views. Within this new culture, there has been room for high praise of some departments and for difficult honesty with others, with emphasis placed on realistic recommendations aimed at improvement of programs within the context of available resources. The current APRC believes that this new culture better serves the University and the departments under review. To the degree that this change has been known on campus, this shift has also gradually led to an APRC

with more credibility on campus. The APRC believes that this shift is crucial for the continued development of quality programs at San Francisco State University.

- The self-study process in a program review is intended to be a period of serious self-reflection that involves all constituencies in the department and a consideration of all aspects of the department. Departments who benefited most from the 5th cycle were the ones that fearlessly faced their most difficult issues in spite of the controversy that might arise.
- The less successful reviews were ones in which departments attempted to display only the very positive things about their programs, sometimes even to the point where statements and conclusions were not accurate. Although the reticence to self-critique is understandable, this strategy leaves any criticism to be made to external reviewers or APRC. A better strategy would be for departments to highlight their own views of their challenges and then focus their recommendations on those challenges.
- In addition, some department self-studies were written entirely by department chairs under time pressure and without sufficient input from the faculty, students and staff. CVs were sometimes outdated, requested information was missing or the reports were poorly written. This resulted in a program review process where the initial impressions of the department were negative and led to recommendations that were based on incomplete or outdated information.
- Often, the external reviewers and their reports were the key to a successful program review. A good report was one that balanced positive commendations with meaningful recommendations on how departments could meet challenges as well as provide useful ideas for changes. However, External Reviewers Reports were often too general or did not address the recommendations.
- Too often, external reviewers (who were nominated by the department being reviewed) lacked the critical assessment needed for effective program review. This resulted in inconsistent, overly positive reviews and "cheerleading" for departments and their programs. The process was further compromised when departments occasionally sought to work with external reviewers to obtain unquestioning support for their own desired recommendations, rather than taking advantage of the opportunity to get an unbiased view of how the department could be improved.
- There was a lingering attitude by departments that all programmatic problems were the result of administrative under-funding and that the Administration should restore departments to earlier funding levels. This often backfired, leading external reviewers to suggest that the department was trying to do too much with its limited resources. These strategies distracted from the honest self analysis which should drive the review process. Over the years, APRC began to take a

critical eye towards recommendations that focused upon more money and more faculty. APRC would like to see departments take this process seriously and think about what could be done with limited resources. Not all problems, issues or solutions are money-related.

- The role of the deans was inconsistent and needs definition: (a) There was a lack of clarity that the dean's signature on the self study meant that it was ready for external review, not necessarily that the dean approved of its recommendations. (b) The deans were inconsistent in responding to the external review report. (c) The deans were inconsistent in even attending the departmental meetings with APRC.
- There remains an ongoing tension between program review and program revision. Occasionally, departments introduced significant revisions for Senate approval even as self studies were over-due or external reviews were nearing. This frustrates APRC, which felt that such revisions should follow if not emerge from program review. Whenever possible, revisions should follow reviews.

APRC 5th Cycle Recommendations

Many of the observations noted above were utilized by the 6th Cycle Task Force, chaired by Oswaldo Garcia, in developing the guidelines for the 6th Cycle of Program Review and in the subsequent approval of those guidelines by the current APRC and the Academic Senate. Subsequent changes involve the role and nature of APRC itself, the role of the dean, the time-table of the process, the role of assessment and planning within the process, and the importance of program review on campus.

However, other changes can be made by the new APRC and by departments. Some recommendations for these changes are listed here.

Recommendations for APRC

- To ensure widespread participation, there is a need for APRC to constantly re-emphasize an atmosphere of positive and supportive change.
- In fact, the culture around program review needs to be explicitly changed to one focused upon continuous improvement of programs.

Recommendations for Departments

- Departments should strive to write a professional, complete and thorough Self-Study. They should involve all stakeholders (especially faculty and staff) in the preparation and writing of the self-study.
- Departments should include thoughtful and meaningful recommendations.

- Departments should be more self-critical and not leave all criticism to external reviewers. A good strategy for departments is to highlight their own views of their challenges and then focus their recommendations there—don't leave this process to the external reviewers and APRC.
- Departments should not limit their recommendations to requests for more funding and more faculty. There are many strategies and projects that can be done with existing resources.
- External reviewers are more valuable to the process if they are not solely advocates for the department; departments should avoid hidden agendas throughout the program review process. The department's agenda and recommendations should be clearly presented in the Self-Study.
- Extensive program revision should ideally emerge from program reviews. If that is not possible, the two processes should at least be well coordinated.

Recommendations for Program Review Administration

- In order to be taken seriously, the time lag between the Departmental Self-Study and subsequent APRC action needs to be drastically reduced.
- As suggested in the 6th Cycle revisions, the Dean should play a more active role in the entire process.
- To ensure widespread participation in program review, the Administration also needs to support a culture of positive, continuous improvement of programs.

Trends in Recommendations Raised by Departments In the 5th Cycle

Clear trends exist in the issues raised by the various departments and programs involved in the 5th cycle—and these issues will not be surprising to anyone. These issues include:

- Lack of space for the department or program
- Lack of financial resources
- Need to retain new faculty and the need for resources and programs to do so
- The importance of graduate student fee waivers and assistantships to attract graduate students and assist faculty in research
- The need for assistance in tracking program alumni.
- The need for attention to student writing across the disciplines

Trends in Recommendations from External Review Teams in the 5th cycle

There were also trends in the observations and recommendations made by external review teams. These included:

- Lack of program assessment of student learning
- Lack of communication within departments
- Insufficient student advising

The 5th Cycle APRC would like to take a last opportunity to make these recommendations:

1. A comprehensive space review is critical to ensuring that existing space is being used effectively. Everyone seems to know of some examples of space that is not being used effectively. “Grandfathering in” existing uses will just ensure continued and worsening space needs. A “zero-based” process needs to be conducted, starting from the beginning, with colleges and departments justifying space needs based upon existing and new faculty and their needs.
2. Faculty retention is crucial. We cannot continue to hire outstanding new faculty and expect to retain them with the same numbers of professional development, assigned time and Presidential awards. Additional resources need to be devoted to faculty retention.
3. Faculty need graduate assistants to work with them on their teaching and research. There is a critical need for this University to start providing fee waivers to graduate assistants as part of a package for teaching and research assistant positions.
4. Departments need help in tracking and working with their alumni and should be encouraged to reach out to the community. We understand that initial efforts are being made to support college-level alumni activities but these must be expanded alumni tracking at the department level.

Conclusions

Overall, the Program Review process has been a positive one for many departments in that important insights and recommendations were made available to them. As the 5th Cycle of Program Review comes to a close, we hope that faculty and administrators take seriously both the program level recommendations in their reviews and the recommendations seen here in this Report.