Academy for the Assessment of Student Learning
Results Forum Impact Report

During the Academy Roundtable in 2006, Missouri State University developed two projects. The first one consisted of the development of a program review process at MSU and the second one consisted of the development and implementation of a Living-Learning Community program.

Program Review Process
2006-2010

Executive Summary

Missouri State program reviews are structured to allow the program faculty and all levels of administration to regularly gauge the effectiveness and efficiency of its academic programs. The program review process proceeds from a strategic plan formulated by each educational unit. Progress and outcomes are identified in program-level annual reviews that culminate in a periodic, in-depth self-study report followed by the assessment of one or two external reviewers that work both from the self-study and a campus, on-site evaluation. Academic programs are reviewed by external evaluation on a staggered, five-year review cycle. Programs having an accreditation review process with similar goals as the MSU program review are given the opportunity to utilize the accreditation process as the major review. Reports from the external evaluator or accreditation evaluators are a primary basis for further deliberation by the department/program which then prepares a response. The written departmental response is an 'action plan' that also receives input and final agreement from the academic administration. This action plan details steps to be taken to adjust the strategic plan, academic program structure, program goals and intended outcomes. Approximately one year later, the action plan linked with a parallel progress report is presented to the Academic Affairs Subcommittee of the Board of Governors who may provide additional perspectives on the progress achieved. This action plan-progress report is a public document posted on the Provost's website section designated for the process and outcomes of academic program review. Subsequent departmental annual reports assess continued progress and document program adjustments that are made.

Missouri State Program Review

Purpose

The purpose of academic program review is to allow members of the department and administration to continuously judge the effectiveness and efficiency of its academic programs. In order to achieve this purpose, Missouri State uses a multi-faceted program review process. By systematically reviewing mission, goals, priorities, activities, and outcomes, the desired result is continuous improvements in the quality of teaching and learning, research, and public service.

Components of the Review Process

The program review process is comprised of three integrated components: (1) strategic planning; (2) annual reviews; (3) periodic extensive self-study and external review (Figure 1).

Within these foundation components, the process has internal feedback from the dean and provost. Input from all sources — dean, provost, self-study analyses, external reviewers — provides the basis for departmental evaluation and adjustments that are needed. At a process level, an action plan is formulated and adjustments are made. The result of integrating changes into programs may or may not change the strategic plan for the program, depending on the extensiveness of those changes (Figure 1).
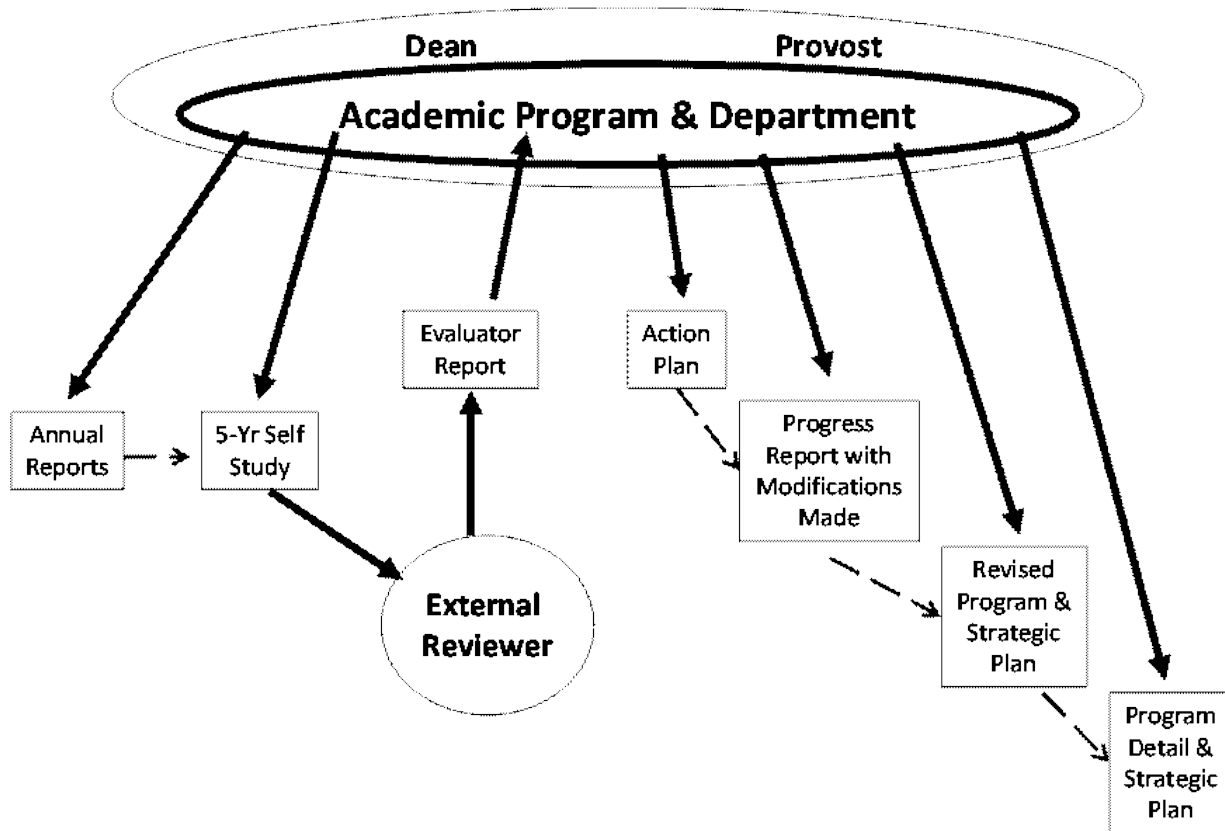

Figure 1. *Elements and sequence of events for academic program review. Solid arrows and boxes show production of relevant documents. Broken arrows show supporting information flow.*

Earlier Phases of the Review Cycle

<u>Strategic Plans.</u> Each educational unit will have a strategic plan that typically has a mission statement, proposed program educational outcomes, priorities and objectives, and details of how the strategic plan is to be implemented. This strategic plan typically covers all the programs in the educational unit. In the program review process, those programs of an educational unit which are reasonably coherent, such as the bachelors and masters in the discipline, will be reviewed at the same time. However, when fairly dissimilar programs occur in a department, those unique programs will have separate reviewers.

<u>Annual Reviews.</u> The purpose of the annual review is to recognize the accomplishments of the unit, assess deficiencies, and have information upon which changes may be implemented. The

annual review prepared by the department contains considerable data. Missouri State provides guidelines and aids for obtaining program data from Institutional Research and other internal sources. Assessment of student learning outcomes, ranging from standardized exams to satisfaction surveys and career placement data are part of the analyses. Other data sources include departmental records of faculty grants, publication, faculty workload, and community outreach endeavors.

It is intended that annual reviews include an analysis of information and not just recording of data. These annual reviews include comments on fiscal resources, space allocation, equipment and technology needs and plans, comparisons to benchmark peer institutions, and other information that gives a perspective on the relative success of the program and educational unit. They include comments on fiscal resources, unit management, collegiality, workload distribution among members, and other evidences to help evaluate the success of the educational unit.

There will be an introspective look in the annual review at program numbers, including graduation numbers and graduation success. The dean reviews the department/program annual report and submits a summary to the provost. While low completion numbers in a program are a part of the analysis, they do not trigger an automatic outcome such as termination of a program.

Periodic Reviews – 5 year Review

Each academic program undergoes a 5-year self-study and an in-depth review. These program reviews are staggered so that approximately 20% of the academic programs are reviewed in any particular year. In programs where there is a regular accreditation review, and that review addresses similar questions to those in MSU periodic review, the accreditation review is substituted for the 5-year review. For example, this was done for business programs that were reviewed by the AACSB review process three years ago.

Self-Study. The program review cycle has a periodic, 5-year review that involves preparation of an extensive self-study document. This is developed from annual reviews, their analyses, and a culmination of evidences from all relevant sources. The purpose of the periodic review is to provide each unit the opportunity to (a) complete an in-depth self-analysis of the program and aspiration of the program, (b) receive input from an external evaluator or team, and (c) plan its response to the recommendations from the external review. The self-study is prepared in the year prior to use of the external evaluator. The self-study includes all of the elements previously named in the annual review. It is a more comprehensive look at the program over time, and includes an evaluation of the information from the department and dean perspective. Also, it includes projections which may/may not indicate new aspirations related to the program. For example, an educational unit that has a bachelor's degree in the discipline may ask questions about the feasibility of adding a master's degree.

External Evaluator. An external evaluator is selected to (a) review the self-study, (b) conduct a two-day on-campus review, and (c) provide a written report of findings. The intent is that this evaluator will have excellent credentials that include a record of accomplishments in an educational setting that is expected, at minimum, to be a benchmark institution. Departments and the dean make recommendations on the external evaluator, but the provost must approve the

selection. It is intended that no external evaluator will be used that has a direct history or connection to the program being reviewed.

The external evaluator provides a verbal summary of findings before leaving campus, and subsequently a written report is provided to the provost. That report is then distributed to the dean and the department.

Action Plans. It is the responsibility of the department to review the external report and develop an action plan to address the findings of that report. This action plan will address the most salient points made by the external evaluator. The department may agree with the findings and propose appropriate adjustments. In some cases the department may disagree with certain aspects of the report. Relevant to the low-completion concept, these external reports have been the stimulus in some cases for closing or consolidating programs, but in other instances they have resulted in program expansion or even the creation of a new department. Action plans take a variety of directions, according to the specific need for adjustments or the reinforcement given to current operations. Action plans are approved by the dean and then by the provost.

Action Plan Progress Reports. In the year following the development of an action plan in the program review cycle, a progress report is made relative to each goal of the action plan. This progress report has the deans input and approval and is then provided to the provost. MSU now has a two year history of the unit dean presenting these action-plan progress reports to the Academic Affairs Subcommittee of the Board of Governors. These reports also are posted on the provost's website for open review.

Program Revisions. Changes in the program and new goals for program outcomes result from the sequence of steps from the self-study through the action plans. The action plan-progress report identifies program changes that have been made and those that are still to be implemented. These changes go hand in hand with revising the strategic plan for the educational unit and setting new or revised program goals and intended program outcomes.

Challenges

Selecting the most appropriate external evaluator has been perceived as a challenge throughout the implementation of this process. Selecting only one external evaluator for the campus visit provides the programs with only one perspective. Some external evaluators have been perceived as more helpful than others, partly because the work load on the external evaluator is large. In addition, as the process has evolved the instructions provided to the external evaluators have slightly changed.

The Next Cycle and Next Steps

As illustrated in Figure 1, the program review process includes both annual events and a cycle of five-year events. Once the program has been through the full cycle, decisions will have been made and either the present operations will be reinforced or the implementation of changes will be occurring. Hence, the program review cycle is now in its next phase. As stated previously, MSU programs are reviewed on a staggered sequence spread over approximately five years.

That cycle, the program review guidelines, annual report guidelines, and the action plan-progress reports of the last two years can be found on the provost's website: http://www.missouristate.edu/provost/compschedreviews.htm

In addition, and related to Program Review, Missouri State University recently began the process of revising the General Education Program. The Task Force on General Education Revision has been created and its charge is to "recommend goals for a general education program which reflect the character of the University and prepare our students to be successful and effective in their future roles in the 21st Century" (from the MSU Office of the Provost's website http://www.missouristate.edu/provost/genedreview)

Throughout this process, the task force will work to reach out to the university community (faculty and students), solicit a broad range of ideas and views, communicate the committee's process and progress, and build support for the task force's recommendations (from the MSU Office of the Provost's website http://www.missouristate.edu/provost/genedreview)

Impact on Student Learning Outcomes

The program review process also prepared the institution to think about and implement a more streamlined program assessment cycle and process. A new Assessment Research Coordinator was hired in September 2010 and a more streamlined process was put in place. The coordinator supports and works with programs as they identify and define specific disciplinary learning outcomes and public affairs learning outcomes for students in their programs. The program review process and the development of specific program assessment plans are contributing to change the culture of assessment on campus. These processes are providing the structure to help us focus on specific student learning outcomes and indications of where to invest our time and financial resources. We lead with the following questions: What do we want our students to learn? How do we know that they are achieving those learning outcomes?

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Living-Learning Communities
2007-2010

Executive Summary

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Purpose

In fall 2006 we began creating the first living-learning communities (LLC) at Missouri State University. The focus was on first-year students and helping them become successful in college. The intent was not on remedial issues and topics; rather, we wanted students to become as prepared as possible to do well academically.

Components of the LLC Program

To meet this goal, we based our programmatic endeavors on Arthur Chickering's Theory of Identity Development. A program model was created that included specific programs to be

planned and implemented each month. Some of the programs were planned for a specific floor whereas others were ones that all LLC students could attend.

We began with a plan to create six LLC floors (four female and two male). As we started assigning students to housing space based on their interest, we realized we would not fill all the floors. We decreased the number to four (three female and one male). For assessment purposes, we used the other two floors as pseudo-LLCs (students participated in the programs and had faculty members working with the students but were not considered LLCs as we filled the spaces with students that we assigned).

Resident Assistants (RAs) were selected specifically for these floors based on their previous experience as RAs and their interest in the position. They received an extra $2,000 per year compensation in addition to room and board as other RAs received. The LLC RAs had to complete the LLC programs in addition to assisting with the assessment project so we believed the compensation was adequate.

We created our own assessment tool based on one we found on Iowa State University's website. We modified it so the questions were targeted toward our goals and intended outcomes. The assessment tool was given in hard copy format with identification numbers being assigned to residents. The students completed the pre-test in August right after they moved in and completed the post-test in April before they completed the semester.

Faculty members were recruited to serve as Faculty Fellows for each LLC. The faculty members were invited to participate based on the recommendation of students. Each faculty member received $200 to spend on programming activities. They had to present one program during the academic year, attend two social events and two educational programs each semester, and they could spend as much time with residents on the floor as they chose. We were fortunate to have 19 faculty members for the first year.

Program Revisions and Challenges

We were pleased with the initial results of the assessment data. The students in the LLCs appeared to have improved and oftentimes surpassed the control floors on many of the items we identified. The GPAs of students in the LLCs were not as high as we would have hoped. We believe that the type of student who signed up for the LLCs may have had an impact on the GPA data.

Due to the fact that we decided to implement LLCs late in 2006, our marketing materials for the 2007-2008 academic year had already been printed and mailed to students. We opted to mail a separate marketing piece to all incoming students inviting them to participate in this new housing option. Some students wanted this new option, but the majority of our LLC students selected this option in July rather than be assigned to overflow housing. Based on historical perspective, the students who decided to attend MSU and sign up for housing in July are not the most successful students, and this fact may have contributed to the lower than anticipated GPAs.

In the spring of 2008, we advertised a position for the Coordinator of Residential Academic Programs. We wanted this person to coordinate our LLC floors. A woman was hired, and she began working in June of 2008. One of her first projects was to help us fill the LLC floors for 2008-2009. Utilizing student staff members, phone calls were made to incoming students who needed housing, and arrangements were made to move them, and their roommates if they chose, into the LLCs. This process was very successful, and the majority of the spaces were filled.

In the fall of 2008, we had 6 LLCs (two male and four female). We did not change much of the programming model. We recruited 12 faculty members to serve as Faculty Fellows. Since this was only the second year of having LLCs on our campus, we concentrated on perfecting what we had utilized the previous year while the Coordinator learned the details of her new role.

During the 2008-2009 academic year, the Coordinator recommended adding student positions, in addition to the RAs, to the LLC floors. These students, called residential programming assistants (RPAs), would manage the programming emphasis of the LLCs. We continued to have a RA on each LLC floor, but he/she would complete the traditional duties assigned to that position. This recommendation was approved, and seven RPAs were hired for the 2009-2010 academic year.

In addition to implementing the RPA program, the director of our department wanted us to create a sophomore-year experience LLC. The coordinator created a programming model that expanded upon the model used on first-year experience floors. Two LLC floors, one all-female and one co-educational, were created.

Finally, a faculty member from the College of Health and Human Services (HHS) was interested in having students within this college live together in a LLC. The dean of the college agreed to the proposed plan, so two floors for the HHS College, one male and one female, were also added.

The three varieties of LLC environments worked quite well. Students appeared to enjoy their communities, and the addition of the RPAs proved to be successful as well. Fifteen faculty members volunteered to work with our students. The decision was made to continue with these environments for the 2010-2011 academic year.

Over the years we realized that we needed to increase our marketing materials and get the information out to incoming students earlier. We achieved that goal in 2010-2011 when we were able to fill our floors with students who were interested in the emphasis to the LLC. The GPA data for the fall semester is much better than we have seen in past years, and we have seen more involvement on campus and in our residence halls from these students.

Future Action Plan and Next Steps

The coordinator added a training session for faculty members (20 of them) in the fall of 2010, and we spent more time incorporating the RPAs into the departmental and residence hall training sessions, so staff members at all levels throughout the department could work together and understand the responsibilities of each position. Plans for the 2011-2012 academic year include the addition of two LLCs for students who have not declared a major. These students will be

placed into four Introduction to University Life classes to assist them in their academic success and to hopefully retain them to the University. More program revisions are anticipated following the examination of the data that is currently collected on the impact of the LLCs.

Impact on Student Learning Outcomes

Data from this project is noted below:

Retention Numbers for LLC Floors

Fall 2007-Fall 2008	Fall 2008-Fall 2009	Fall 2009-Fall 2010
65.38%	73.83%	75.78%

Number of Students in LLCs

2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012
180	228	262	262	352
Four floors	Six floors	Seven floors	Seven floors	Nine floors

Grade Point Averages

The GPA chart includes the highest and lowest floor GPAs from the first semester we implemented LLCs until the past semester. During Fall 2010, four of the seven LLC floors had GPAs greater than the building GPA, and one floor obtained the highest floor GPA in the building.

Fall 2007	Fall 2010
2.61-2.96	2.67-3.31
Four floors	Seven floors