What Accreditors Expect from College Program Review

by Barbara A. Beno, Executive Director

This Essay is intended to provide a *framework for thought* that institutions can use in designing and implementing program reviews. The term "program review" has been used in higher education to define a wide range of efforts to define and evaluate educational programs. Many colleges in the Western Region have asked the Accrediting Commission to clarify how it uses the idea of program review in the Accreditation Standards.

What is required?

The recently adopted Accreditation Standards that were provide much information that clarifies what the Commission means by program review, but the requirement that institutions engage in program review is a long standing one. The 1996 standards stated that institutions must have "clearly defined processes for establishing and evaluating all educational programs" and to insure "program evaluations are integrated into overall institutional evaluations and planning and are conducted on a regular basis." (Std. 4.D.1) Institutions are specifically required by Accreditation Standards to "assure the quality and improvement of all instructional courses and programs offered in the name of the institution" (Std. II.A.2) and evaluate all courses and programs through an "ongoing systematic review of their relevance, appropriateness, achievement of student learning outcomes, currency, and future needs and plans." (Std. II.A.2.e) While there are many other references to program review activities in the standards, these three statements give us a starting point for discussing the purpose and components of a good program review process.

What is program review?

Program review ought to be a "360-degree" review, or a review from all angles and over time, of the effectiveness of an "educational program". Fundamentally, program review requires an institution to ask important questions about itself and to do some good thinking about its own performance. The quality of questions asked, and the care with which answers to those questions are sought and then analyzed, determine whether a program review will lead to meaningful information that can be used to improve institutional effectiveness and student learning. (While this essay discusses the program review of educational programs, the principles used in program review can be used as well to assess the effectiveness of other institutional efforts that are not directly related to student learning.)

By "program" accreditors mean a certificate or degree program, a coherent educational experience such as a tutoring or orientation program, a co-curricular learning program, or even an academic discipline (e.g., the social science "program."). Institutions may differ in what they choose to define as a "program", but the program ought to be coherent enough that its goals and purposes can be defined, and its effectiveness evaluated.

A complete program review *cycle* involves several distinct conceptual steps: a precise and accurate *description* of things as they exist, *evaluation* of whether those things are sufficient or appropriate or "good enough" to satisfy the institution's pursuit of excellence, *planning* for needed improvement; *implementation* of of those plans, and *evaluation of the*

effectiveness of the actions taken in achieving the desired results.   Plans for improvement that result from program review should be integrated with or connected to overall institutional plans so that the regular institutional processes for setting directions and timelines, and providing resources for action, support the implementation of those plans that result from those plans. Ultimately, the actions taken to improve programs must themselves be evaluated for effectiveness, perhaps as part of the subsequent program review cycle. Through recurring cycles of program review, an institution can assess its progress in improving effectiveness over time. It can also identify the way in which student enrollment, student progress and student learning are changing over time, providing information important for planning future programmatic changes.

How should program review be conducted?

An institution can start by examining the stated mission, purpose, or goals of a program, and what a program is doing to achieve that mission.   Some questions one might ask about the stated mission or purpose of a program are:

- Is the mission or purpose of this program clear as we have defined it?
- Is the mission or purpose appropriate to our students' needs and our communities' needs?
- Is the mission or purpose "current" and relevant to present-day society, the current labor market, or other contemporary conditions of the society?
- Is the mission or purpose consistent with the overall mission and goals of our institution?
- What have we defined as "student success" in this program? Is it relevant to the students' future needs when they leave this institution? Is it a definition that our community shares or could agree with?
- What are the specific goals and learning outcomes of this program? Have we designed them carefully? Are we certain the array of learning experiences we have designed for this program allows participants to achieve the goals and outcomes we have said we want to achieve?
- What is the array of educational services used to meet the stated mission of the program?   How are those services offered? What are the class schedule, the kind of learning environment and pedagogy, the array of support services, and the marketing or promotion used to offer this program? Are these appropriate to the program's mission and purpose?

After defining and examining program purpose or mission and the array of educational services used to achieve that mission, the next step is to examine results, or program effectiveness. As Peter Ewell[1] has pointed out, effectiveness has two components. An effective program is one that achieves its goals, but the notion of efficiency is also inherent in the idea of effectiveness. Hence, an effective program also uses its resources as efficiently as possible – it doesn't waste them. Some questions one might ask about program effectiveness include:

- Who are the students enrolling in this program? What are their goals – what do they want to do with the knowledge gained from this program? What are their needs, including any special needs (scheduling, support services, etc.) that this program or the college should address in order to assure student success? Are we adequately addressing those needs?
- How well are students progressing through the program? What information do we have on their retention, course completion, persistence, and movement and success beyond college (e.g., graduation, transfer, job placement, etc.)? Is that student progress "good enough" in the institution's judgment? In the students' judgment? In the public's judgment? What can we do to improve student progress?
- Are students learning all the learning outcomes we've set for this program? In which areas are they learning more or less? Is this amount of learning "good enough" in the institution's judgment? In the students' judgment? In the public's judgment? What can we do to improve learning?
- Does this program have sufficient resources (human, physical, technological, time) to promote student progress and student learning? Does this program need additional or different resources to better accomplish its mission?
- Is this program using its resources efficiently? Are classes sufficiently full? Does the program have sufficient enrollments or student interest to keep running?

Here's where an institution should consider advice given by external groups. Ask such questions as:

- Did we consider changes made by the last accreditation team? By external program reviews conducted on our behalf? By program or institutional advisory committees?
- Did we consider recommendations we made to ourselves in our last self study?(planning agenda)

After evaluating program effectiveness, the next step is to develop and implement good plans to make needed improvements in a program. The institution should consider the following questions:

- What changes do we need to make the improvements we've identified for this program? What resources are needed to make improvements? Is there any required sequence of change? Do we need to do certain things before others? What are the timelines we need to set for making these programmatic changes?
- What short and long term plans does the institution need to make to implement changes? Do these plans require the involvement or assistance of other college programs or operations? How do we record these plans and keep them in our view so that we act on them? What individual or group should be responsible for follow-up?
- How can the plans necessary to improve program be incorporated into the institution's regular planning and resource allocation process so that the plans can be funded and implemented?

A last conceptual stage of any program review involves evaluating the impact of the changes that have been made to the program. At some point, whether it is after implementation of any stage of program change, or at the time of a next regularly scheduled review, the institution needs to specifically and carefully evaluate whether the changes made have resulted in improvements desired. The questions an institution might ask include the following:

- Did we make all of the changes we planned? If we did not, what were the impediments to making those changes? Do we still believe those changes would lead to improvements?
- How effective were the changes in improving program effectiveness? Have we improved student progress through the program, student learning, or other aspects of program quality such as efficiency?
- What have we learned by looking at the results of these change efforts that would inform future attempts to change and improve this program?

Conclusion

This article has tried to provide a framework for conceptualizing program review. The quality of questions asked, and the care with which answers to those questions are sought and then analyzed, determine whether a program review will lead to meaningful information that can be used to improve institutional effectiveness and student learning. Institutions seeking excellence benefit from program reviews that are shaped around well- framed questions that are of importance to the college and its staff. Ultimately, the shared interest of college staff and accreditors is in student success.

Thoughtful questions can only be answered with relevant and good information or data. The next edition of Accreditation Notes will include an article on good data.

[1] *Accreditation and Student Learning Outcomes: A Proposed Point of Departure* by Peter T. Ewell; A CHEA Occasional Paper, September, 2001.

January Commission Actions/Institutions

Reaffirmed Accreditation
College of the Canyons
Crafton Hills College
Cuesta College
Long Beach City College
Pasadena City College
San Bernardino Valley College
Santa Barbara City College
Santa Rosa Junior College

Accepted Midterm Report
City College of San Francisco
College of the Redwoods
Columbia College
De Anza College
Defense Language Institute
Foothill College
Fresno City College
Guam Community College
Lake Tahoe Community College
Los Angeles Harbor College
Modesto Junior College
Mt. San Jacinto College
Queen of the Holy Rosary College
Reedley College
Shasta College

Accepted Focused Midterm Report
Feather River College
Hawaii Tokai International College
Yuba College

Accepted Focused Midterm Report & Visit
Barstow College
Heald College
Los Angeles Southwest College
Santiago Canyon College
Solano Community College
West Los Angeles College

Accepted Interim Report
Coastline Community College
College of the Sequoias
Los Angeles Mission College
Marymount College
MTI College of Business and Technology
Riverside Community College
Cañada College
College of San Mateo
Skyline College
Hawaii Community College
Leeward Community College

Accepted Interim Report with Visit
Copper Mountain College
Don Bosco Technical Institute
Imperial Valley College
Los Angeles County College
   of Nursing and Allied Health
Los Angeles Valley College
Maui Community College
Western Career College
Windward Community College

Accepted Progress Report
Oxnard College
College of Micronesia-FSM

Accepted Progress Report & Visit
Hartnell College

Special Report not Accepted
Kern Community College District
Peralta Community College District

Placed on Warning
American Samoa Community College
Kauai Community College

Placed on Probation
College of the Marshall Islands

Progress Report not Accepted
Antelope Valley College

Accepted Substantive Change Report
American River College: approval for Sacramento Regional Public Safety Center and Ethan Way Center
Cosumnes River College: approval to separate Folsom Lake College Center; approval to offer certificate programs at Rancho Cordova Center
College of Oceaneering: approval to open campus in San Diego
Cypress College: approval to relocate culinary arts program
Heald College: approval to consolidate Santa Rosa campus
Sacramento City College: approval for West Sacramento Center
Western Career College: approved purchase by US Education Corporation
West Valley College: approval to offer on-line certificate in Administrative Management

Note: The Substantive Change Committee of the Commission meets regularly to assess Substantive Change Reports. Institutions considering substantive changes are encouraged to contact Commission staff if they have questions about changes.

Commission Policy Actions

Adoption

Commission Membership and Appointment Procedure

Revision of this policy had been circulated to member institutions and was adopted by the Commission as a second reading. Content changes from current policy include:

- announcement of anticipated vacancies at the January meeting;
- notification of vacancies to member institutions and other interested parties;
- process for filling of vacancies occurring after the meeting of the Selection Committee and before winter Commission meeting.

This policy will now be used in appointments to the Commission. The policy will be distributed to member institutions and posted on the Commission's web site.

Policy and Procedures on Public Disclosure

This policy had been adopted in 1999 and required editing to bring it in accord with other Commission policies as well as changes in the Higher Education Act. Revision of this policy had been circulated to member institutions and was adopted by the Commission as a second reading. Changes to this policy are primarily reinforcing statements on the Commission's expectations that team members maintain confidentiality and that the Commission retain the right to deal with public inquiries about an institution which has been warned, placed on probation, or issued a Show Cause order. This policy is now in effect and will be distributed to member institutions and posted on the Commission's web site.

First Reading

Policy on Commission Actions on Institutions

This policy consolidates and clarifies the many statements the Commission has about actions on institutions into a single policy. The policy covers actions on institutions applying for candidacy or extension of candidacy and actions on institutions that are applicants for initial accreditation. The policy also covers those actions that reaffirm accreditation—without conditions, with a request for a Focused Midterm Report (with or without a visit), and with a request for a Progress Report (with or without a visit).In addition the policy covers procedural actions as well as sanctions and termination of accreditation.

Sanctions include issuing a Warning, imposing Probation, and requiring Show Cause. Institutions may remain on sanction for a cumulative total of no more than two years.

If concerns are not resolved within this period, the Commission will take action to terminate accreditation.

The policy will be circulated to member institutions in spring 2003 for comment before final action by the Commission at its June 2003 meeting.

U.S. Department of Education Authorization

At its meeting of December 3, 2002 the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity voted to grant a full five-year authorization, with no conditions, to the ACCJC. The committee had reviewed the Commission's application developed by ACCJC staff led by Associate Director Gari Browning. The application takes the form of a self study of how the Commission meets US Department of Education criteria and covers every aspect of the ACCJC's activities. Executive Director Barbara Beno reports that the five-year authorization is the maximum allowable and that ACCJC was the only Commission under review that received this authorization with no conditions.

Council for Higher Education Accreditation Recognition (CHEA)

As a result of the hearings held by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation Committee on Recognition in late November, the ACCJC will receive a full five year recognition from CHEA. The committee applauded the ACCJC's efforts in developing standards that require institutions to develop and measure student learning outcomes. As with the US Department of Education application, Commission staff, under the direction of Associate Director Gari Browning, prepared lengthy and detailed materials as evidence of its activities. CHEA is a national organization that coordinates accreditation activity in the United States. CHEA represents more than 3,000 colleges and universities and 60 national, regional, and specialized accreditors.

ACCJC and the US General Accounting Office

A Congressional Committee chaired by Senator Smith from New Hampshire is currently investigating the degree to which accreditors review the quality of distance learning programs and can provide quality assurance on such programs. On behalf of the committee the US General Accounting Office (GAO) is collecting information from all regional accreditors. The ACCJC recently mailed information and documents to the GAO, detailing how member institutions use Commission standards and policies to assess distance learning programs and how they report activities to the Commission. GAO staff visited the Commission in the March to collect information on policies and practices regarding distance learning.

Review of 2001-2002 Annual Reports

The Commission requires member institutions to submit an Annual Report which contains information on a number of issues including potential substantive changes, fiscal health, distance learning, and student loan default rates. Always at the heart of the annual report are issues that require substantive change reports. In recent years, the report has also required information on courses offered through distance learning. A number of colleges have requested an interactive version of the annual report be available on our website to ease reporting. We will be considering that possibility as we update our web capabilities. To date, 138 of the 140 member colleges have filed reports for 2001-02.

Offerings at new locations Twenty colleges reported having new sites or campuses at which students can complete at least 50% of the credits for a degree or certificate program. These programs are working their way through the substantive change process.

New programs The Commission does not require approval of individual program changes within a comprehensive institution unless the change represents a significant departure from current offerings, but colleges are asked to report program additions and deletions in the annual report. Seventy-two colleges reported having added programs, up from sixty-four last year. The overwhelming majority of additions once again were concentrated in computer-related degrees and certificates, many focusing on graphic and digital art. Business degrees and certificates are also proliferating, with several colleges offering specializations in international business.

Other areas receiving noticeable attention include environmental studies, biotechnology, culinary arts, human services, allied health, and physical fitness. Teaching-related programs are also appearing at several colleges. Other more unusual programs offered for the first time at some colleges are substance abuse, viticulture, gerontology, and casino management.

Distance learning programs Eighteen colleges reported having degree or certificate programs in which 50% or more of the credits required are available through distance modes. This year 110 colleges reported offering two-way internet courses, compared to 98 for last year and 92 the year before. Enrollment in distance learning courses shows steady increase over the last three years.

Programs offered abroad for non-US nationals Four colleges have started new programs for non-US nationals, down sharply from last year when 24 of the one hundred colleges reporting described new programs for non-U.S. national students.

Fiscal issues Most colleges, 120 of 138, reported operating surpluses for the 2000-01 fiscal year. Fifty-eight colleges reported audit exceptions, most involving procedural problems rather than material issues of noncompliance.

Financial aid participation and student loan default Of the 138 colleges submitting annual reports, 130 or 94% are participants in federal financial aid programs, representing a significant increase in participation from a few years ago. The student loan default rates for our institutions continued to drop. Only 2 colleges reported student loan default rates that exceeded 20%, and one of those colleges had only one student in loan payback, yielding a misleadingly inflated default rate of 100%.

New Commissioner Seated

As reported in the June edition of Accreditation Notes, the Commission acted to appoint a new Commissioner as a public member. **Dr. Carter Doran** was seated at the January meeting. **Dr. Doran,** who begins a three-year term, has a long history of community involvement, including board service and volunteer work. A retired community college educator, Dr. Doran served as Assistant Superintendent/Vice President of Instruction and Student Services at College of the Canyons and Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs for the Rancho Santiago Community College District. He has also taught speech and drama at Mt. San Antonio College.

Dr. Doran's accreditation experience includes service as an accreditation liaison officer for both College of the Canyons and the Rancho Santiago Community College District and participation in site visits to seven public and private two-year colleges. He served as chair on three of those visits and will be chairing a team in March. Dr. Doran has served as editor for the revised ACCJC standards. Dr. Doran is a resident of city of Upland.

Commission Positions to be Available

The term of current Commission Public Member Chuck Ayala will end June 30, 2003 and Public Member James Cunningham has resigned. As such, there will be two positions open for public members whose terms will begin on July 1, 2003. In addition, Commissioner Michael Widener, Professor of History at Compton College is retiring. In accordance with Commission process, applications for these positions (two members of the public and a

faculty member) will be reviewed in April 2003 by a Selection Committee. Applications will be accepted beginning in late February; application forms are available from the Commission office.

Per ACCJC By-laws, the Commission Selection Committee consists of seven members, including at least two administrators, two faculty members, and two representatives of the public interest. Three of these members are appointed by the Commission Chair, two from the Commission and one from the private institutions it accredits with one to be designated as chair of the committee. One member is appointed by the Pacific Postsecondary Education Council. The Academic Senate for the California Community Colleges, the California Chief Executive Officers, the California Community College Trustees, and the Hawaii Community College Academic Senate Chairs appoint whatever additional faculty, administrative, and representatives of the public are required to complete the composition of the committee. The Executive Director serves as nonvoting secretary to the committee.

Commissioners are appointed for staggered three-year terms and are limited to two three-year terms unless the person is elected an officer for a term which extends beyond a sixth year, in which case an additional three-year term may be served.

Comprehensive Visits   2003-2004

Under current U.S. Department of Education regulations, ACCJC must provide opportunity for third-party comment regarding institutional qualifications for accreditation. The institutions noted below are scheduled to undergo a comprehensive visit in fall 2003 and spring 2004. Review by the Commission will occur at its January and June 2004 meetings. Third-party comment on these institutions should be made to Executive Director Barbara A. Beno at 10 Commercial Boulevard, Suite 204, Novato, CA 94949. For consideration, such comment must be submitted in writing, signed, accompanied by return address and telephone number, and received no later than five weeks before the scheduled Commission meeting.

Fall 2003

American River College
Citrus College
College of Oceaneering
Cosumnes River College
Folsom Lake College
Napa Valley College
Sacramento City College

Spring 2004

Allan Hancock College, Brooks College, Chaffey College, College of Micronesia-FSM, College of the Siskiyous, D-Q University, Glendale Community College, MiraCosta College, Monterey Peninsula College, Palau Community College, Santa Monica College, West Hills Lemoore College*
*Initial Visit

Update from the Pacific

Following are highlights from the Pacific presented at the January Commission meeting by Commissioner Susan Moses who represents the colleges of the western Pacific:

American Samoa College

The college has launched its first distance learning courses as part of a federally funded initiative called "Project 2000." Courses included general education courses and courses in the Samoan language; they were offered to off-campus students as well as students living on the outer islands of Manu'a.

College of Micronesia-FSM

Enrollments at the five campuses of the college are up by 3.2% over fall 2001; college officials expect the growth trend to continue. The college is designing a B.Ed degree in Education as well as vocational programs in electronics and telecommunications.

Northern Marianas College

In August 2002, Dr. Kenneth E. Wright became the college's third president.

Palau Community College

The college's relationship with the government of Japan has brought a new language lab and a building to house the musical instruments donated by the Japanese. The college was also notified by the USDOE that funding for the college's proposal for a Minority Science Improvement Grant has been approved. A Talent Search Grant was also approved for funding.

WGU Accredited

On Feb. 13, 2003, Western Governors University became the first and only university to receive regional accreditation from four regional accrediting commissions at the same time. ACCJC is among these Commissions.

WGU's competency-based system has met the same educational standards for performance, integrity, and quality met by more traditional universities. WGU conducted extensive university-wide evaluations and prepared multiple self-evaluation reports for a committee representing each of the four regional associations. A team of national evaluators representing each association made on-site visits to the university to review WGU's operations.

Comprehensive Visits
Spring 2003

Under current U.S. Department of Education regulations, ACCJC must provide opportunity for third-party comment regarding institutional qualifications for accreditation. The institutions noted below are scheduled to undergo a comprehensive visit in spring 2003 and a review by the Commission at its June 2003 meeting. Third-party comment on these institutions should be made to Executive Director Barbara A. Beno at 10 Commercial Boulevard, Suite 204, Novato, CA 94949. For consideration, such comment must be submitted in writing, signed, accompanied by return address and telephone number, and received no later than five weeks before the scheduled Commission meeting.

- American Academy Dramatic Arts/West
- Butte College
- Chabot College
- College of Alameda
- College of the Marshall Islands
- East Los Angeles College
- Laney College
- Las Positas College
- Los Angeles City College
- Los Angeles Trade/Technical College
- Merritt College
- Palomar College
- Southwestern College
- Taft College
- Vista Community College

Commission Staff

Barbara A. Beno
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Gari Browning
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

Darlene Pacheco
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

Barbara Dunham
EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT

Thomas Lane
ADMIN/MIS