

Contact: Diana Gonzalez

REVIEW OF ACADEMIC PROGRAM REVIEW PROCEDURE CHANGES
UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

Action Requested: Receive the report on academic program review procedure changes resulting from the academic program review audit at the University of Iowa.

Executive Summary: This report includes the University of Iowa's follow-up report on the comments, suggestions, and recommendations that resulted from the audit of academic program review and student outcomes assessment procedures conducted by the Board Office in 2004. Some of the changes implemented by SUI following the audit include:

1. Creation of a new position, Vice Provost, with primary responsibility for program and unit reviews, dean reviews, and for reviewing and revising existing policies.
2. Development of a proposed university-wide policy on review of academic programs which addresses many issues identified during the audit.
3. Meetings between the vice provost and representatives from each college to discuss collegiate practices and review written policies.
4. Discussion of best practices regarding program reviews with a focus on the role of external reviewers at deans' retreat in August 2005.
5. Discussion of best practices regarding student outcomes assessments in the program review process, with a focus on identifying and assessing student learning outcomes at deans' meeting in December 2005.
6. Completion of internal review by the provost's office regarding collegiate practices in academic program reviews.

The University of Iowa responded to the individual recommendations and the suggestions contained in the September 2004 audit report. At the University of Iowa, academic program reviews and student outcomes assessments are necessary to ensure continued programmatic excellence. Academic program reviews provide an opportunity for ongoing dialogue regarding program strengths, areas of improvement, student feedback, and strategic planning and initiatives.

A copy of the September 2004 audit report is available on the Board of Regents website.

◆ **Details of SUI's follow-up report.**

SUIs academic program review and student outcomes assessment processes focus on furthering the university's mission by enhancing undergraduate, graduate and professional education. The primary purpose of academic program review is to assess student learning outcomes and identify strengths and weaknesses of the reviewed program, as well as its centrality to the university's mission. SUI responded to all of the audit recommendations:

1. The university should consider improvements in its policy that academic program reviews should address how a program fits within the overall university mission and goals (centrality) to make the concept better understood by those doing the reviews.

SUI's current procedures in the Operations Manual for academic program review identify quality and centrality as the two primary criteria for review. However, because the specific measures of centrality and quality are not included in the Operations Manual, the proposed policy revisions include the specific minimum criteria for a program review and define centrality.

2. The university should consider ways to provide more emphasis on the fact that the focus of recommendations should be on program improvement within the context of existing resources to avoid unrealistic recommendations.

The focus on program improvement within existing resources must be communicated to both the self-study committee and the review committee. A review of collegiate self-studies is currently underway by the vice provost to ensure that the reviews do not focus too heavily on requests for additional faculty or space, when there are insufficient funds to accommodate those requests. In the future, instructions, especially by deans, to review committees will also emphasize this consideration.

3. The university should consider a review of its overall academic program review policies and how they relate to the individual college policies, and, where necessary, articulate the need for college-specific differences. This should result in making the purposes and procedures clearer and more consistent and eliminate misunderstanding. The university should also consider procedures for periodically updating policies.

Proposed policy revisions address this concern. In the future, the Program Review Committee will periodically review the policy.

4. The university should consider policies and procedures to develop follow-up action plans that facilitate using the results of the academic program reviews for decision-making and program improvement.

Proposed policy revisions address this concern. The provost's office will solicit an action plan from the dean at the conclusion of the unit review; a progress report will be solicited at the end of the first and third years.

5. The university should consider ways to ensure all programs assess student outcomes and that the results are used to improve student learning and teaching.

As part of the accreditation process, all programs will be asked to identify desirable student outcomes and mechanisms for assessment. The proposed policy revisions provide procedures that ensure more focus on student outcomes in future reviews.

6. The university should consider a university-level policy that describes critical and/or minimum parameters to be covered in the academic program review.

Proposed policy revisions address this concern.

7. The university should re-consider its use of external evaluators. Unique to the Regent universities, SUI's procedures call for a team of non-unit campus reviewers with one external reviewer in an advisory or consultant role. The university should consider reversing these relative roles where possible; i.e., the external review would be conducted by at least two external evaluators, with assistance from one or more non-unit campus faculty acting as advisors. At a minimum, it would seem that the external evaluators should be more active participants in the external review process.

Current practice in most colleges is to rely more heavily on external reviewers than is suggested by the written policy. In that regard, those reviews do not follow the current rules stated in the operations manual. Proposed policy revisions state the current understanding of how external evaluators actually participate in program reviews.