May 15, 2012

The Academic Program Review Council respectfully requests that Faculty Senate accept the revised Program Review Guideline and Template created by the ad hoc committee as a next step towards improving the cycle of planning and review of programs for UW-Superior. The Council also asks that it be allowed further time to develop a more appropriate and robust Program Review that maximizes program self-reflection while minimizing redundancy of reporting. Over the past two years, APRC has painfully discovered the limitations of the current template. The Council needs additional time to thoughtfully develop a tool that matches the needs of the campus and assures clear connection externally between all planning documents; and internally to the review, the connection between the questions and the data supplied for evaluation.

In fall 2011, an Ad Hoc Committee was appointed to rewrite the Self-Study for Continuous Improvement (the 'SSCI'). Their charge was to:

> "…revise the academic program review document to: 1. align the SCCI structure with the WEAVEOnline structure of strategic plan and annual report; 2. eliminate data redundancy and streamline data requirements; 3. include the timeline created by the Faculty Senate; and 4. revise wording for more clarity."

The ad hoc committee worked diligently through December, and fulfilled their charge, having improved the flow and timeline, broken out the guidelines from the template, and clarified some of the language.

The document then came to the APRC to complete that rewriting, making sure the questions were appropriate to the needs of the campus. The Council worked simultaneously at discussion of the submitted reviews and the development of a better program review, setting aside a portion of each meeting to consider the review questions in light of departmental answers to the SSCI. During this process, the APRC became aware that there were significant considerations deeper than the mere structure.

It became evident while examining the department responses that there were areas of considerable confusion in terms of how to answer the questions appropriately. It was also confusing for the Council to determine if the departments had completely answered in a way that was useful in determining the department's diligence towards fulfilling programmatic examination from a campus perspective. The Council was painfully aware of the frustration of the departments as they struggled to answer questions whose responses appeared to be redundant, or that seemed to have no value.

Since the original SSCI was heavily reliant on a clear understanding of the relationship between departmental strategic plans, annual reports, and its program review; and since the Budgetary Review Council recently reported that these understandings do not yet exist; and furthermore, that the CIPT has also identified the need for campus-wide, systematic instruction on 'strategic' planning; the original SSCI and its modified cousin continue to be poor instruments for Academic Program Review.

For those not currently or directly involved in the program review process, some explanation of the issues observed by the Council are in order. The first observation is that the questions are too heavily

tied to AQIP language, which is not fully understood by the campus as a whole. Developed by the Higher Learning Commission,

> The "Academic Quality Improvement Program [AQIP] infuses the principles and benefits of continuous improvement into the culture of colleges and universities by providing an alternative process through which an already-accredited institution can maintain its accreditation. An institution in AQIP demonstrates how it meets accreditation standards and expectations through a sequence of events that align with the ongoing activities of an institution striving to improve its performance.

> The Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) provides an alternative evaluation process for organizations already accredited by the Commission. AQIP is structured around quality improvement principles and processes and involves a structured set of goal-setting, networking, and accountability activities."

In reading this statement and subsequently reviewing the language regarding the AQIP Categories, one may observe that those categories are intended as a framework at an institutional level, rather than intended for direct evaluation of the performance of individual academic programs. Those originally charged with adapting the SSCI as a tool for program review at UW-Superior read heavily about AQIP and, having become immersed in its language, found the questions probed more deeply than the old program review's "Six Questions", and thus provided a higher standard of self-reflection and accountability. But in attempting to provide a tool that would allow programs to gain a deeper understanding of their own decision-making processes and how they align with the goals of the campus, they instead implemented a document, adopted from another campus, that valued outcomes data that was not yet developed or currently collected, nor matched to the institutions' unique configuration. In adopting the SSCI itself, it was also assumed that clear linkage between strategic planning, assessment, and program review would all be concurrently developed, making a tightly-knit whole between the multiple documents. Instead, uneven implementation of the planning documents has resulted in confusion over the purpose of each individually, as well as which activities are to take precedence within the seven year cycle. One has only to spell out SSCI (Self-study for Continuous Improvement) to realize we are still missing an essential component; we have implemented a new self-study process; we have not yet created a program review that reflects the findings of those self-studies.

The SSCI is intended as a forward-looking planning document. The old program review model reflected back, and looked too little to how departments and programs intended to move forward. However, the SSCI lacks a summative department and program history to provide outside readers a foundation for understanding the decisions made, and a context for understanding where programs differ across areas of self-evaluation or implementation of change. The opportunity to briefly review the past before discussing future plans allows the reviewers to understand the wider vision and scope of each program.

Understanding of AQIP use of language and definitions is still problematic. Each department that has attempted the SSCI has struggled with defining 'other stakeholders', and other such terminology. In numerous areas, the Council has been asked to provide explicit examples to assist the departments express what the Council may know is actually occurring but are left unexplained. In yet other sections,

the excessive number of questions elicits from programs a series of disconnected, short answers rather than a more reflective, global approach. Subtle differences in questions from section to section of the SSCI tend to be overlooked. Instead, the apparent repetition of questions already answered leads to a glazing over or copy/paste response that frustrates both the department and the Council.

There is still not a clear connection between the questions and the required supporting documents. Currently, most questions assume that the cycle of assessment and review has been implemented and been completed. Furthermore, the data needed to respond to the questions about students and 'other stakeholders' is not formally and consistently gathered by a single office on campus. Instead, each group may assume the other is performing surveys and asking the types of questions that would inform answers within the review. APRC has observed that some UW campuses provide survey tools that could be generalized for use by all programs; provide a consistent standard to compare responses across programs; and could also contain customized questions appropriate to the department or program, so that they would be truly valuable in writing program responses. The Council would use additional time to explore more efficient methods of such data collection for local use.

The current structure gives APRC no guidance on how to respond to reviews, leading to a sense that this is a judgmental process, rather than one of guided self-examination and growth for the programs. The process is still weak with regards to providing an understanding of what constitutes poor performance, and what the consequences may be. The Academic Program Review would like to create a section of the document for the Council itself that gives explicit guidance on how to perform their role in reviewing documents and provide a measurable structure for determining whether a program has achieved commendable or acceptable levels of performance, as well as how to address areas of weakness. APRC finds it needs to do further research to develop such a system, so that programs can understand clearly and immediately if they have met campus expectations in each section of the review, and how they might rectify any deficiency. While the academic program review is a peer review in terms of recommendations, those recommendations are ultimately guidance to administrative bodies for budgetary decisions and should be seriously regarded by the programs, but should contain clear division of the process between APRC's peer role and the resultant administrative decisions.

Finally, the APRC needs additional time to consider the feedback from departments who have completed a review cycle using the current SSCI in order to provide a better template that provides useful information while respecting the unique configuration and contributions of our departments. APRC needs to carefully examine both the data sets and the questions to ensure that they appropriately align with one another. Given that only one department is slated for review in 2012-13, and because the first round of campus-wide assessment will shortly be completed, the APRC feels this is the appropriate time to forge a better program review process.

Respectfully submitted by Academic Program Review Council (Xingbo Li; Wendy Kropid; Shevaun Stocker; Shin-ping Tucker; Laura Jacobs – Chair)