



## **Assessment of the Five-Year Program Review Process by the Academic Assessment Committee**

### Introduction:

The Program Review Process for academic departments was evaluated by the Academic Assessment Committee (AAC) in 2021, as documented in the committee’s Spring 2021 “Report to the Provost & Faculty Senate” (<https://www.utica.edu/academic/Assessment/aacc.cfm>). The committee concluded that Utica’s assessment processes and requirements for academic departments closely align with the recommendations outlined in the July 2020 paper “Program Review and Assessment for Continuous Improvement: Asking the Right Questions” by Tami Eggleston and published by the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment. One significant weakness, however, is that the program review process, as it is practiced at Utica University, does not link to planning or resource allocation beyond the department-level.

In early Spring 2022, the AAC, at the urging of the Vice President for Institutional Effectiveness/Dean of Assessment, decided to reconsider the program review process for a second year. This decision was fueled primarily by a concern regarding the declining quality of the self-study reports, a decline that could not be conveniently blamed on the pandemic. The committee hypothesized that the quality of the most recent reports reflected departments’ perception that the program review process was not useful.

### Methodology:

Ann Damiano and Jason Denman offered to take the lead on this assessment. Referencing research on program reviews (Harlan, 2012; Pham, 2020), they crafted a series of questions for department chairs/program directors to discuss as part of a focus group. Chairs/directors whose department had completed a five-year program review in 2018, 2019, 2020, and 2021 were invited to participate in this focus group. Those who were interested in participating but unavailable during the scheduled time submitted written responses to the set of questions and/or met one-on-one with Ann Damiano.

A total of eight chairs/directors were invited to share their thoughts on the process; six participated in the review.

Ann Damiano also interviewed the Provost prior to meeting with the faculty to get his perspective on the value of the five-year program review process.

The questions asked of faculty are appended to this report.

## Summary of Findings:

- The Provost was very much in favor of the 5-year program review. He stated that it gave him the opportunity to see where a department has been, where it is now, and where it wants to go or plans on going. Additionally, he supported the idea of having an external reviewer, selected by the department chair/program director *in consultation with the Provost and School Dean*, as part of the process and felt confident the University could commit the resources necessary for an external reviewer.
- The faculty voiced mixed responses to the question, “Were the requirements and procedures for the 5-year review clear?” Some noted that the institution’s assessment processes had been in flux, and faculty were given conflicting messages about what was required overall. Most, however, said the expectations were clear. One participant noted that the current self-study outline reduced the “fluff” that was required in previous years, making the process more useful and the requirements clearer. The outline identified what was required in the self-study report; the rubric clearly articulated the standards or expectations.
- In general, faculty did not regard the 5-year program review process as a tool to enhance student learning or the overall student experience. However, most concurred that the self-study forces a department to engage in dialogue and reflection about courses and larger curriculum issues. One chair observed, “Without this impetus, we would probably be very slow to prioritize thinking through changes to curriculum and [program learning goals].” Another said the self-study forced her department to have important conversations about courses and reflect on what they were doing and what they wanted to do.
- All participants agreed that the program review is an excellent tool for program planning. One chair described it as a “great resource for planning” and another called it a “suitable process” for planning. A third chair stated, “Assessment helps us with our planning” because it provides the opportunity to reflect before moving forward. A fourth participant said the “process crystalizes ideas.”
- While faculty chairs/program directors value assessment and the program review as essential to good planning, the majority indicated that the process, especially writing the self-study, adds to an already heavy workload for chairs. In some departments, the burden fell to a few faculty members. While faculty chairs/program directors value assessment and the program review as essential to good planning, the majority indicated that the process, especially writing the self-study, adds to an already heavy workload for chairs. In some departments, the burden fell to a few faculty members. There was some feedback that the University should consider a means of compensating chairs who are engaged in program reviews. However, there was concern that by compensating the chair, the process would not be collaborative as it should be.
- Participants agreed that the program review is useful for departmental planning, but some acknowledged uncertainty about how useful it was to the institution. One chair stated, “So we’re closing loops all over the place in our department . . . But I don’t have any idea if loops are being closed . . . at the institutional level.” Another questioned whether requests for resources supported by evidence in the self-study are even considered by

administration. These concerns resonate with what was said in previous evaluations of assessment processes.

- Participants noted that there was a lack of follow-up from the Provost with respect to the program review. One chair observed that the Provost was “friendly” and “kind” during the meeting with the department and that faculty felt well supported “in theory.” However, they never received any particulars with respect to the resource needs identified in the self-study, and they stated they were not sure how their needs were being considered or how resource decisions are being made. They indicated they “would appreciate transparency.”
- When asked if an external reviewer would make the program review process more useful, participants voiced ambivalence. Some noted that the AAC already functions as an external review team, ensuring a “peer reviewed” process. One chair felt an external reviewer was unnecessary for departments that are already doing exemplary work in assessment, and another said it depended on who the review was and what kind of institution he/she/they came from. She added that an external review would be helpful if the reviewer “saw our true failures for what they are, not what they think they are.” There was a feeling that involving an external reviewer might make the process even more labor intensive.

### Recommendations:

Based on the feedback from the Provost and the department chairs/program directors, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. AAC should clarify the purpose of the program review, and the Dean of Assessment should communicate this more clearly to departments.
2. The AAC should re-examine what is asked in the self-study and consider asking only those questions that are most useful to the department up for review. Questions that had been added for institutional purposes (e.g. the question on experiential learning) might be deleted from the outline. The AAC will streamline what is required in the self-study report at its planning summit in August 2022.
3. Very few departments are scheduled for program review in a given academic year. The AAC recommends that each department scheduled for program review have \$3,000 allocated to it. These funds may be used by the department to fund an improvement or improvements identified in the self-study report *that are well supported by evidence*. For example, if a department indicates that it has been unsuccessful retaining students of color, the \$3,000 might be used for faculty to attend a conference or webinar on retention strategies for diverse student populations.
4. Follow-up from the Provost or the School Dean, as described in the Program Review Procedures (*AAC Handbook*, page 5) must occur if the University wishes to lend legitimacy to the program-review process *and* demonstrate compliance with accreditation standards.

**UTICA UNIVERSITY**

**Academic Assessment Committee**

**FACULTY FOCUS GROUP: 5-YEAR PROGRAM REVIEW**

1. Were the requirements and procedures for the 5-year review clear?
2. How effectively does the current process serve as a tool to enhance student learning?
3. How effectively does the current process serve as a tool to enhance the overall student experience?
4. How effectively does the current process serve as a tool to support program and institutional planning?
5. What did you hope to achieve from completing the program review?
6. Did you achieve it?
7. Share your thoughts about various aspects of the process:
  - a. Writing the self-study (participatory? Relevant questions? Useful data?)
  - b. Meeting with the AAC
  - c. Meeting with the Provost
  - d. Follow-up with Provost and dean
8. How would you make the process more useful?

## References

- Eggleston, T. (2020, July). Program review and assessment for continuous improvement: Asking the right questions. (Occasional Paper No.48). Urbana, IL: University of Illinois And Indiana University. National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment.
- Hanover Research. (2012, June). Best practices in academic program review. Retrieved March 18, 2022 from [asanet.org/sites/default/files/hanverresearch\\_bestpractices\\_programreview](https://asanet.org/sites/default/files/hanverresearch_bestpractices_programreview).
- Harlan, B. (2012). Meta-review: Systematic assessment of program review. *US-China Education Review, A* 8, 740 – 754.
- Pham, N.T.T. (2020, February). Multiple meta-assessment measures of a quality process: Toward institutional effectiveness. *Quality Assurance in Education, 28* (2). 123 – 136.  
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