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## ABSTRACT

The evaluation criteria and procedures described in this report were developed at the Community College of Philadelphia (CCP) for conducting audits of the college's programs, disciplines, and support services. Part I provides an introduction to the audit process, which involves the following steps: (1) identification of curricular areas to be audited; (2) creation of an audit team within the department or organizational unit responsible for the audit; (3) development of an audit plan through discussions with program faculty, meetings between the audit team and appropriate administrators, and review and approval of the plan; (4) completion of the audit; (5) presentation of the audit by the college staff; and (6) audit follow-up. This section also discusses the role of the audit steering committee, and the format of the evaluation report. Part II outlines the criteria to be used in conducting the audit, including curricular purposes and goals, instructional methodologies, enrollment and retention patterns, student outcomes, demand and need for the curriculum, and operating cost and efficiency. For each of the criteria, possible sources of data and examples of questions to be addressed by the audit are suggested. (EJV)

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CRITERIA AND PROCEDURES FOR CONDUCTING AN ACADEMIC AUDIT  
OF A PROGRAM OR DISCIPLINE

Community College of Philadelphia

Office of Institutional  
Research

July, 1986

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## PREFACE

The Audit Process at the Community College of Philadelphia was initiated by the Office of the Provost during the 1977-78 year. The impetus for undertaking the audit process came from several sources. The Offices of Academic Affairs and Institutional Research had been engaged in program-related research for a number of years and felt that the somewhat disparate research efforts should be pulled together into a more formal program assessment. The Academic Affairs Committee of the Board of Trustees endorsed these efforts, and formalized the process by requesting that the results of program audits be submitted to them on a schedule which would result in each program being audited every four years.

Also, in 1977 the State Board of Education adopted guidelines recommended by the Department of Education on program audits. These were incorporated into Chapter 35, "Regulations for Community Colleges" of the Board of Education regulations. These guidelines provide a broad set of general criteria to be addressed in a program audit and include the expectation that all programs will be audited every five years. The procedures, specific criteria and audit formats are left to the discretion of the individual colleges.

The audit process was expanded to include disciplines and support services in 1981 to insure a periodic review of disciplines, courses and services that are not evaluated through the College's program audits. As is the case for program audits, the results of discipline and service audits are reviewed by the Board of Trustees. The discipline and service audit process both satisfies the College's internal need for monitoring academic disciplines and provides institutional assessment data for the Middle States and other specialized accreditation procedures. The attached guidelines are to be used for the program and discipline audits. Separate audit procedures will be prepared during the Fall, 1986 term for Support Services.

The audit criteria and procedures which follow represent a major revision to earlier versions of the audit guidelines. They reflect one outcome of a project supported by the National Center of Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) and the Kellogg Foundation. This project was focused on strengthening the audit process technically. But, even more importantly, the project was directed toward integrating the audit process into academic department planning and decision making. Members of the NCHEMS/Kellogg Project Steering Committee were Tony Bruno, Corrinne Caldwell, Doug Fenwick, Joyce Garozzo, Peggy Grip, Jane Grosset, David Ishizaki, Susan Mogil, Sherry Rose-Bond, Don Slavin, Aram Terzian, and Doug Whyte. Without their support and suggestions, these guidelines and procedures could not have been developed.

Thomas R. Hawk  
July, 1986

## PART I

### INTRODUCTION TO THE AUDIT PROCESS

The academic audits at CCP serve two key purposes. The first is to provide a summative description of the program for members of the College community, including board members, faculty, and staff, who may not be familiar with the purposes and characteristics of the College curricula. Frequently the background materials used to establish a curricular offering are lost in College or department archives, and are not accessible to Board members or staff who become associated with the College after the program is established. As a result, the need for courses and programs and their goals and philosophy may not be known, or may be misunderstood, by many College constituents. The summative phase provides an opportunity to re-orient staff and Board members to the purposes of the program and the reasons for its existence. Critically, it also provides an opportunity for the faculty and administration to re-examine their beliefs and assumptions regarding the curriculum and to reaffirm or alter historical directions that were taken in establishing the curriculum.

The second purpose of the audit is to provide an opportunity for an in-depth look at critical issues which may be confronting an area of the College at the time of the audit. The audit allows circumstances such as changes in students' abilities or expectations, or broader environmental changes to be systematically examined for their implications for curricular change. The audit may also provide an opportunity for the assessment of instructional methodologies to see if improved student outcomes could occur through alterations to instructional content or methods.

While the audit conceptually has two components, the audit research effort will proceed in an integrated fashion with one overall data collection plan which will address both the critical issues and summative aspects of the audit. Much of the data required in the summative phase will have already been collected and compiled by the Office of Institutional Research in its Performance Indicators Reports (see Appendix I).

#### Audit Process

Successful audits do not require lengthy documents or an inordinate amount of staff time to complete. They do require careful planning and in-depth discussions prior to undertaking any data collection efforts to insure staff involved in the audit understand how to obtain needed data, and that the critical issues to be addressed have been fully described. To accomplish this, the following steps should be taken:

A. Identification of Curricular Areas to Be Audited

Prior to the beginning of each academic year, the Vice President for Academic Affairs, in consultation with his staff, will identify those programs, disciplines and related services which will be audited during the coming year. The selection process will be governed by Board expectations for periodic program audits and by the results of the Annual Performance Indicators review process which identifies curricular areas experiencing unusual change.

B. Creation of An Audit Team Within the Department or Organizational Unit Responsible for the Audit

The audit process should be a shared responsibility for faculty and professional staff within the curricular area being studied. Typically, the Department Head or Program Coordinator will assume a leadership role for insuring that the audit is completed. However, a representative group of the curriculum staff should be involved in the actual audit preparation. All curriculum staff should be involved in forming the critical questions and reviewing the results.

C. Development of an Audit Plan

Before any data collection begins, an audit plan must be prepared and agreed to by the appropriate Department Head, Division Dean and the Vice President for Academic Affairs. An Audit Planning Form is attached which should be used to facilitate the presentation of the audit plan.

The steps which should be taken to prepare the audit plan include:

1. In-depth discussion by the curricular faculty on past and present curricular mission and goals, and the identification of critical issues which the department believes should be addressed in the audit.
2. Meeting of departmental audit team with Division Dean, and other administrative staff if appropriate, to discuss possible institutional issues to be incorporated in the audit process.
3. Meeting of audit coordinator with Audit Steering Committee to discuss details on the completion of the audit plan including: sources of available information, clarification of proposed critical

questions, identification of appropriate research methodologies and clarification of college-wide audit criteria.

4. Presentation and Approval of Plan

The audit team should complete the audit plan based upon the above discussions. The Office of Institutional Research should review the data collection plan to insure feasibility given institutional resources. The plan should then be reviewed by curricular staff and the Academic Affairs Council. Once appropriate suggestions have been incorporated into the plan, the plan (including time table for completion) is approved by the Department Head, Division Dean, and Vice President for Academic Affairs.

D. Completion of the Audit

The departmental audit team is responsible for coordinating the collection of audit data, preparing the audit report and presenting it to the departmental staff for review and suggestions. During the audit preparation, the departmental audit team should meet intermittently with the representatives of the Audit Steering Committee and the Division Dean to insure that approaches followed are efficient and consistent with the audit plan. Once a rough draft of the audit is completed, it should be presented to both the Academic Affairs Council and the departmental faculty to get their reactions and suggestions for completing the audit.

E. Presentation of the Audit

Because the audit provides important information for institutional planning and budgeting purposes, it is important that the audit be broadly reviewed by College staff. The audit should be formally approved by the departmental faculty, the Academic Affairs Council, the Vice President for Academic Affairs, and the President before being presented to the Board of Trustees for their consideration.

F. Audit Follow-up

As a result of the audit, the faculty and administrators responsible for an area being audited will typically develop an action plan for strengthening the curricular area. If an improvement plan is appropriate, it will include, in addition to proposed curricular

modifications, a time-table, an identification of individuals responsible for actions to be taken, and an expected budget. The Office of Academic Affairs will assume a leadership role to insure appropriate changes are initiated and their effectiveness assessed during the intervening years before the next audit is undertaken.

### Role of the Audit Steering Committee

An Audit Steering Committee, working cooperatively with the Office of Institutional Research, exists to support the departmental audit team in the audit process. Members of the Steering Committee can meet with the faculty and appropriate Division Dean to assist faculty to develop an understanding of the audit process; can facilitate, if desired, a discussion of curricular goals and structure; and will suggest research methodologies to address the critical issues identified by the department. The Audit Steering Committee will assist with the completion of the audit plan. Representatives of the Audit Steering Committee will meet periodically with the departmental audit team to review drafts of the audit at various stages to assist with clarity and completeness of analysis, and to insure that the audit conforms with institutional standards. The Audit Steering Committee's role will be one of facilitation and not evaluation. The Steering Committee will not make judgements related to the quality of the program.

### Format for Presenting the Audit

The audit report should have the tone of a concise research report beginning with an executive summary containing all of the major findings and recommendations. The structure for the audit should be:

- I. Executive Summary
- II. Detailed Audit Findings using the Outline presented in Part II
- III. Discussion of critical issues and audit findings related to the issues
- IV. Detailed recommendations for curricular change including proposed time table and expected budget implications.



## PART II

### OUTLINE OF CRITERIA TO BE USED IN CONDUCTING THE AUDIT

The audit should provide background information and data in each of the following areas:

- A. Purposes and Goals
- B. Instructional Methodologies
- C. Enrollment and Retention Patterns
- D. Student Outcomes
- E. Demand and Need for Curriculum
- F. Operating Cost and Efficiency

The sources of data and information for the audit will include:

- departmental records and discussions;
- Institutional Performance Indicator Data;
- data compiled by the Offices of Institutional Research and Academic Affairs, including student survey data;
- correspondence and records of meetings with employers, transfer institutions and advisory committees;
- institutional records, e.g., cost data available from the Controller's Office;
- special studies undertaken by the department for the audit.

While inevitably some special research initiatives will need to be undertaken for the audit, most of the effort should be focused on compiling and interpreting information which is already available. The Institutional Performance Indicators data provide an all-College frame of reference to use in examining the curricular area being audited.

The following outline explains the above criteria in more detail, suggests available institutional data and describes some examples of critical questions that might be addressed by the audit.



#### A. Curricular Purposes and Goals

The purpose of this section is to clarify the educational mission of the program or discipline being audited. Information contained in this section should include:

1. Brief history of the curriculum at CCP and description of current curriculum;
2. Current goals;
3. Relationship of the curriculum to the overall educational program of the College.

#### Sources of Information

- Departmental dialogues
- Departmental records
- Minutes of College-wide Curriculum Committee and General Education Task Forces
- Records of Instructional Development and Academic Affairs Offices

#### Examples of Critical Questions

1. Do the program or discipline offerings reflect a commitment to the College's general education goals and stated institutional values?
2. Is the College catalogue representative of the current thinking of departmental faculty about the appropriate nature of the curriculum?
3. Are course goals and objectives consistent for the various faculty members teaching a given course?

#### B. Instructional Methodologies

This section should describe the approaches used by the department to help students achieve curriculum goals. Departmental resources (e.g., laboratories, specialized teaching materials) should be described, as should faculty credentials and backgrounds.

The extent to which the curriculum supports or depends upon other areas of the College should be explained. Usage of external resources, e.g., clinical facilities, guest lecturers, work experiences, should be described.

## Sources of Information

- Departmental records
- Records of Instructional Development and Academic Affairs Offices

## Examples of Critical Questions

1. Are there alternative teaching strategies that might be employed to improve student performance?
2. Are students receiving a work experience in clinical settings that is consistent with curricular goals?
3. Is a laboratory experience essential to the accomplishment of course goals?
4. Should students receive more opportunities to apply computer techniques to the course content?
5. Do some faculty members appear to have greater success in accomplishing curricular goals? Why?

## C. Enrollment and Retention Patterns

The purpose of this section is to describe enrollment and retention patterns in the program and to highlight any changes which may have implications for the outcomes of the program. In order to understand trends, at least four years of data should be collected for this section.

Where appropriate, the data for the curricular area should be contrasted to institutional patterns. Unless specific critical issues require a special research effort, all of the data for this section will be available from standard institutional sources.

## Sources of Information

- Comparable Performance Indicator Reports  
(see Section A and B of Appendix I)
- Office of Institutional Research
- Scheduler's Office

## Examples of Critical Questions

1. Why are enrollments in the curriculum by race or sex not consistent with overall institutional enrollment patterns?
2. Why are enrollments in second-level courses declining?
3. Why is the program failing to achieve its new student quotas?
4. Why do students leave the program without graduating?
5. What are course-selection pattern implications of a growing number of part-time and evening students?
6. Do admission standards appear to discriminate against a particular age, race or sex group?

## D. Student Outcomes .

This part of the audit is the most time-consuming, and in many respects, the most important part of the audit. Two types of information will typically be included in this section: statistical data detailing student academic performance while at the College and after in employment and transfer experiences, and qualitative assessment data compiled by asking former or current students to assess the effectiveness of the College in helping them to achieve their educational goals. In addition, a wide range of specialized research initiatives are possible to measure cognitive and non-cognitive gains in either major or general education courses.

Examples of some standard statistical measures that may be reported in this section include:

- Student overall academic performance in program courses
- Student performance on standardized and certifying exams
- Grade distributions
- Number graduating in each of the last (four) years
- Number leaving program in good academic standing without graduating in the last four years, broken into the following categories (if possible):
  1. Number accomplishing educational goals at CCP
  2. Number changing educational goals, e.g., transfer to another program
  3. Number leaving within accomplishing educational goals

- Number of students dismissed from program and dropped from CCP for poor scholarship or poor progress in each of the last four years
- Post-CCP activities reported separately for graduates and non-graduates in each of the last four years in the following areas:
  1. Estimated number employed full-time
  2. Estimated number transferring
  3. Estimated number unemployed and looking for work
- Average credits lost when transferring
- Percentage of students expressing satisfaction with transfer preparation, employment skills preparation, etc.

#### Sources of Information

- Office of Institutional Research
- Graduating and Non-Returning Student Surveys
- Grade Distribution Reports
- Comparable Performance Indicator Data (Appendix I, Sections B and C)
- Research studies focused on specialized outcomes issues

#### Examples of Critical Questions

1. Are students adequately prepared to do an effective job search in their field of study?
2. Are students having difficulty in upper-level major courses after transferring from CCP?
3. Could students' successes in transferring or finding employment be enhanced by restructuring the curricular requirements?
4. Are students consistently being prepared in first-level courses to meet the expectations of second-level courses?
5. What are the characteristics of students who withdraw or fail from the curriculum? Can these withdrawals or failures be prevented?

## E. Demand and Need for the Curriculum

This section is intended to describe the continuing need for the curriculum based upon student interest, employment opportunities, employer attitudes toward the program, and transfer opportunities. Information collected for this section may be derived from published manpower studies as well as from institutional data and institutional surveys.

Student interest in the curricular area can be demonstrated by highlighting data related to enrollments provided in Part C. Employment opportunity can be explained in part by the employment outcomes of former students including related salary data. Advisory Committee members may help to establish employment opportunities for specific firms or industries. Frequently, professional organizations will have published studies documenting opportunities in a particular employment field. Formal and informal transfer agreements can serve as evidence of the desire for four-year schools to enroll former CCP students. Special scholarship opportunities may also help document transfer institution interest. The extent to which other competing colleges are providing similar training to meet documented employment openings can help to explain need for a program.

### Sources of Information

- Academic Affairs Office files
- Student and employer surveys
- Library literature searches
- Office of Institutional Research
- Departmental records (prior needs surveys)

### Examples of Critical Questions

1. Will there continue to be sufficient labor market openings to justify operation of the program at the current level of enrollments?
2. Do graduates have appropriate skills to compete successfully in the job market?
3. Are lack of employment or transfer opportunities a reason for high course/program withdrawals?
4. What adjustments to the program requirements would facilitate student transfer?

## **F. Operating Costs and Efficiencies**

The purpose of this section is to show how well the department uses available resources to produce the student outcomes described earlier in the audit. The key issue for this section is whether the same level of outcomes could have been obtained with a smaller commitment of institutional resources, or conversely could a higher level of outcomes been obtained with the same commitment of institutional resources.

Most or all of the information needed for this section is available from standard institutional reports. Staff responsible for curricular areas having relatively high unit costs and low productivity, as measured by faculty teaching loads and class sizes, should explain, where appropriate, constraints such as clinical arrangements and accreditation requirements which produce the higher costs associated with the curriculum.

### **Sources of Information**

- Office of Controller - Cost Studies
- Office of the Scheduler
- Performance Indicator Reports (see Part E, Appendix I)

### **Examples of Critical Questions**

1. Can average class sizes be increased without impairing needed student curricular options?
2. Are there ways that operating costs can be reduced without impairing student outcomes?