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ABSTRACT

A survey was conducted of the literature pertaining to higher education program review. Many institutions of higher education have come under intense scrutiny and criticism, and have been required to respond to public pressure for accountability. Program review is one component of the assessment of institutional effectiveness. The following seven themes were identified as providing insight into contemporary program review processes: (1) purposes of program review; (2) different approaches to program review; (3) program review models; (4) common elements in successful evaluations; (5) criteria used in program review; (6) processes used in program review; and (7) utilization of results. Minor issues related to program review that were cited in the literature include common myths, political realities, the state's role in the process, and the links to accreditation. (Contains 53 references.) (SLD)

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# PROGRAM REVIEW AND EVALUATION: A SURVEY OF CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE



by

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# INTRODUCTION

> Within the last decade, the role of academic program review has emerged as one of the most prominent issues in American higher education. Many faculty, administrators, governing boards, and state higher education agencies have become deeply, if not sometimes passionately, involved in program review (Conrad and Wilson, 1985:1).

American higher education has been publicly criticized in recent years. Many institutions have come under intense scrutiny and criticism. They have been required to respond to public pressures for accountability by improving their programs to meet the educational needs of their constituents (Angel, 1990). The national accountability movement is not new; however, "only recently have colleges taken the initiative to assist in defining the criteria by which their effectiveness is assessed" (Rooney and Tucker, 1990:vii).

The term "institutional effectiveness" is considered an integrating concept for several interrelated issues, such as: quality control, accountability, assessment, and other measures of institutional vitality. "If institutional effectiveness is to be achieved, there must be some sense of what it is and what it would look like" (Kreider, 1990:iv). The assessment of an institution's effectiveness requires a systematic evaluation of its performance in relationship to its stated missions. Program review is a component of the assessment of institutional effectiveness.

> The ability to draw on a large number of soundly designed and executed studies adds great strength to the knowledge

> base when findings are consistent across different studies conducted by different analysts using different methods. No single study, no matter how good, can have this kind of power (U.S. General Accounting Office, 1983:1).

The survey of the literature pertaining to higher education program review and evaluation processes contained seven themes: purposes of program review; different approaches to program review; program review models; common elements in successful evaluations; criteria used in program review; processes used in program review; and utilization of results. Although program review is not considered to be an exact science, these seven themes provide insight into contemporary program review processes.

## Purposes of Program Review

Many purposes for implementing a program review process exist. One of these purposes is to assess the quality of the academic offerings of the institution (George, 1982; Caruso, 1985; Conrad and Wilson, 1985). Program review can "provide valuable insights into how programs are operating, the extent to which they are serving their intended beneficiaries, and their strengths and weaknesses" (Herman, Morris, and Fitz-Gibbon, 1987:11). George (1982:50-51) indicated that the assessment of program quality is a three-step process: (1) establish a set of goals for the program; (2) identify the resources, processes, and input variables germane to the established goals; and (3)

determine how to measure each of the relevant variables in the program.

Talmadge noted that a major purpose of evaluation, closely related to the assessment of program quality, was "to render judgement on the worth of the program" (1983:18). Guba and Lincoln (1981:45-46) indicated that worth, an intrinsic property of program review, is determined by comparing program outcomes to externally generated standards, thus legitimizing the program. House commented on this legitimization aspect of worth:

> The legitimization function of an evaluation is greatly neglected. The most important fact about a university evaluation plan may be that the university has one and that it is going about its business in a demonstrably deliberate and responsible manner. One must publicly justify what one is doing (House, 1982:6).

A well-designed program review process can improve management decisions by assisting decision-makers in the determination of whether or not the program is providing relevant educational experiences to its consumers (Talmadge, 1983; Larson, 1985; Wenrich, 1988; Conrad and Wilson, 1985). The effective use of a program review process can assist managers in (1) setting priorities, (2) providing guidelines for the allocation of resources, and (3) facilitating program improvement (Herman, Morris, and Fitz-Gibbon, 1987:11). A study commissioned by the American Council on Education reported that 91 percent of college administrators believe that the results of a program review process should be linked to instructional improvements (El-Khawas, 1986).

Another purpose of program review, closely related to the assessment of program quality, is program improvement (Borchers, 1986; Finley, 1988; Barak and Breier, 1990; Caruso, 1985; Conrad and Wilson, 1985). The Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), in its Criteria for Accreditation states the primary concern of accreditation is "the improvement of educational quality throughout the region" (1989:7). SACS places special emphasis on the relationship that exists between the assessment of institutional effectiveness and improvement of programs. Effective institutions use assessment information to improve their academic offerings (Resource Manual on Institutional Effectiveness, 1989). Accrediting bodies can stimulate program improvement via the requirement that the college conducts "periodic self-evaluation to identify what it does well, to determine where improvement is needed, and to develop plans to address those improvements" (Ellison and Smith, 1987:1).

Several authors listed the elimination of inefficient programs as a purpose of program review (Borchers, 1986; Barak and Breier, 1990; Larson, 1985; Caruso, 1985). For example, thirty-nine Illinois community college programs were discontinued in 1987 as a result of program review processes (Illinois Community College Board, 1987). A critic of this purpose of program review stated "the over-riding purpose of gathering data is to provide a basis for improving instruction, rather than keeping score or allocating blame" (Turnbull, 1985:25).

Finally, a purpose of program review is to demonstrate accountability to the program's significant publics. An institution that systematically evaluates it's programs can assure local and state legislators, federal officials, accrediting bodies, and students that it is proceeding on sound managerial principles (Borchers, 1986; Talmadge, 1983; Barak and Breier, 1990; Conrad and Wilson, 1985). "Institutions have an obligation to all constituents to evaluate effectiveness and to use the results in a broad-based, continuous planning and evaluation process" (Criteria for Accreditation, 1989-90:13).

## Different Approaches to Program Review

Conrad and Wilson (1985:17-18) listed three general approaches to evaluation that emphasize the role of those reviewing the program: internal, external, and multiple. Internal review, also known as self-review, is built on the assumption that the faculty of a program can best assess the strengths and limitations of their program. The external approach to program review allows reviewers to be chosen either from within the college (external to the program being evaluated) or from outside the college. The multiple review approach uses a combination of internal and external reviews conducted on a separate basis.

House (1982:6-12) emphasized four general approaches to evaluation: systems analysis, behavioral objectives, professional review, and case study. In the systems analysis

approach, a few appropriate outcome measures for the program are defined, with differences in programs being related to variations in the outcomes measures. To illustrate this approach, House provided the following example:

> One might reason that a purpose of programs in higher education is to maintain some minimum level of efficiency. A state board might collect and compare costs per student across various institutions and programs. Costs that are unusually high might be singled out for closer examination (1982:6).

The purpose of this approach is to determine if the expected program effects are being achieved. The major disadvantage in using this approach is that educational programs rarely "lend themselves to being measured by a few simple quantitative outcomes" (1982:8).

In the behavioral objectives approach to evaluation, a statement of objectives for the program are specified. Evaluation consists of determining whether or not the stated objectives have been achieved. House provided the example of the program objective to "graduate a particular percentage of the students enrolled, subject to certain constraints" (1982:8). This approach allows the program faculty to specify unique objectives on which the program will be evaluated. The major disadvantage in using this approach is that the objectives are often arbitrarily chosen, based on only a few of a program's objectives.

The professional review approach utilizes visits by accreditation teams affiliated with an academic field of study.

The case study approach involves the writing of a narrative of the program by an evaluator. The narrative is usually the result of interviews with faculty, students, and administrators associated with the program. In the professional review approach, the experience of the external evaluators is relied upon. In the case study approach, the experience of the program's participants is relied upon.

Barak and Breier (1990:28-32) have identified five basic approaches to program review: consultant-oriented, survey-oriented, data-oriented, self-study, and combination. The main characteristic of consultant-oriented reviews is evaluation is conducted by outside consultants. Success is dependent on the quality of the consultants and their ability to formulate practical recommendations.

The primary characteristic of the survey-oriented review is the use of questionnaires to discern perceptions of the program as indicated by the program's faculty, students, employers of students, and alumni. The data-oriented approach emphasizes the collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data. This approach is often used as a screening tool to identify programs needing more in-depth approaches, such as consultant-oriented or survey-oriented reviews

Self-study reviews are generally formative in nature, focusing on program improvement. The major feature of this approach is that the program faculty are primarily responsible for conducting the review of their own program. Combination

reviews tend to "mix and match one or more of the other types to meet the specific needs of the institution conducting the review" (1990: 32).

Most approaches to program review can be classified as either formative or summative. In formative evaluation, assessments are made during program operation for the purpose of improvement. Summative evaluation assesses the final worth of a program in terms of attainment of objectives for decisions pertaining to the program's future (Herman, Morris, and Fitz-Gibbon, 1987).

Clowes indicated that the preferred approach to community college program review should be formative, resulting in program improvement through the (1) identification of program needs, (2) appropriate application of resources, and (3) curricular and staff revisions. Summative evaluations designed to make life or death decisions about programs should not be used. Reviews using this approach tend to be counterproductive to the consensus style of management desired in the collegial setting of a college (Clowes, 1981:3-9).

Finally, a comprehensive approach to evaluation is recommended by accrediting agencies. This approach assesses an educational institution's processes and resources as well as the results of the education, including plans for the improvement of it's academic offerings (Criteria for Accreditation, 1989-90:13).

## Program Review Models

A model is a simplified illustration of reality. It is simplified because it never depicts the full complexity of reality (Daft, 1983:21). Models are useful to program reviewers in that they provide a conceptual construct for designing evaluation protocols. By way of a model, the following protocol attributes are explicitly stated or implied: the philosophy, the evaluative criteria, and the interrelationships among its elements (Borchers, 1986:30).

Program review, as an area of study, has been researched extensively over the last twenty years. Curriculum evaluation models of the late 1960's and early 1970's were developed to assist instructional designers in their efforts to conduct comparative summative evaluations. Such evaluations were utilized by federal policy-makers to substantiate accountability for the social reforms of that period. The models stressed quantitative measures of evaluation, and were considered by many to be insensitive to the "unique characteristics and processes within local settings and issues as perceived by the stakeholders" (Herman, Morris, and Fitz-Gibbon, 1987:9). Contemporary models have addressed the issue of being responsive to local variations in program implementation. These models emphasize qualitative methods to evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of programs.

Finley (1988:50-55) provides two general models used in evaluating two-year college programs: the quantitative measures model and the outcomes related model. The quantitative model, used to assess a program's cost effectiveness, is based on the systems analysis approach to evaluation previously mentioned. Example of evaluative criteria include: (1) program retention of students; (2) program FTE/headcount; (3) attraction of new students; (4) training-related placement; (5) number of degrees awarded; and (5) average unit cost of the prcgram. The outcomes related model, used to determine program effectiveness, is based on the behavioral objectives approach to evaluation previously mentioned. Finley concludes that a model should not be selected on the basis of ease of its implementation. Rather, the model selected should be based on the needs and resources of the college. Additionally, colleges should not attempt to adopt a model in its entirety. Depending on the needs of the college, components from several compatible models should be selected; in other words, adapt, not adopt (Finley, 1988:50-56).

The integrated feedback model is based on the survey-oriented approach to evaluation previously mentioned. Two variations of this model are using student input and using advisory committee input. Astin (1982:10-15), an advocate of using student input, implies that a student-oriented model of evaluation demonstrates that the college is aware of students' perceptions of the program's impact on their lives. Raulf and Ayers (1987) concur with Astin that the consumers of an

institution's programs are students, and that their opinions should be carefully considered. Garrity (1984:40) outlines a model of using advisory committee input as a component of program review. In this model, advisory committees ensure the relevance of the program by reviewing program objectives, course requirements, and course content.

Conrad and Wilson (1985:20-29) state that most institutions employ variations of one of the following models:

1. In the goal-based model, the major elements of the evaluation protocol are the identified goals, objectives, and criteria used to appraise relative success or failure.

2. The responsive model, the major components of the evaluation protocol focus more on program activities than on the program's stated goals and objectives. The model is organized around the interests of stakeholding audiences i.e., program information is collected, analyzed, and interpreted in light of the concerns of audiences that have a stake in the process.

3. The decision-making model is used for the purposes of decision-making and accountability. The prototypical decision-making model is Stufflebeam's Context-Input-Process-Product (CIPP) model. In this model, the variety of decisions that must be made require a variety of evaluation activities. Four types of evaluation were identified, each matching a category of decision: (1) context evaluation to assist decision-makers in establishing goals and objectives; (2) input evaluation to aid decision-makers in clarifying the methodology of achieving

program goals and objectives; (3) process evaluation to provide decision-makers with a feedback loop; and (4) product evaluation to provide decision-makers with information necessary to continue, modify, or terminate a program (Stufflebeam, 1971:20-26). The CIPP model is structured to meet managerial information needs via the provision of timely and relevant information.

4. The connoissuership model is designed in harmony with the expectations of those served by the program review.

> The connoisseur alone guides the evaluation. Operating with few restraints, the evaluator is initially a processor of information, collecting data in whatever way he prefers. At the same time, however, he is constantly judging the program under review in much the same way that the art critic judges a work of art. The final report is based on the subjective judgement emanating from the connoisseur's own though processes, on his own construction of reality (Conrad and Wilson, 1985:28-29).

The Illinois Community College Board (1987) recognizes four basic models of community college program review:

1. The screening model begins with an annual screening of statistical data available on all instructional programs. The results of this process are used to select programs requiring either a more focused review of programmatic problems or a comprehensive review.

2. In the proportional model, colleges preselect 20 percent of their programs for an annual comprehensive review. The unit under review conducts a detailed self-study. The self-study is then evaluated by either a college-wide committee or an external review team, which makes recommendations for action to the board of trustees.

3. The divisional model is similar to the porportional model in that a detailed self-study is conducted by the unit under review, which is then examined by individuals external to the program. However, rather than preselecting 20 percent of its programs for review, the college selects a particular organizational division within the institution to review each year.

4. The combination model integrates both the screening and proportional models of evaluation. While 20 percent of the institution's programs are reviewed annually, some programs are reviewed comprehensively, others receive a focused review.

Program review is a complicated undertaking. No single model will provide a complete evaluation. No ideal model of program review exits. Successful program reviews are useful to their intended audiences, practical to implement, and technically accurate (Herman, Morris, and Fitz-Gibbon, 1987; Resource Manual on Institutional Effectiveness, 1989).

## Common Elements In Successful Evaluations

Several commonalities among successful program evaluations have been noted in the review of the related literature. Arns and Poland (1980) observed the following:

1. No fixed protocol exists. Successful reviews recognize that no two programs are identical.

2. The evaluation process includes both individuals within the program and persons accountable for the program.

3. Successful protocols include a self-study component, peer coordination, external review, and open, honest, and direct communication.

One researcher found the following elements common in successful evaluations, regardless of the approach taken: (1) clear goals; (2) congruent activities; (3) satisfactory horizontal and vertical mobility for student transfer; (4) a thread of unity--cultural, social, or economic; (5) the effective use of personnel, including adjunct faculty; and (6) cost effectiveness (Clowes, 1981:3-9). Other researchers classified successful elements as aspects of the program to be evaluated, such as context characteristics, participant characteristics, processes in program implementation, program outcomes, and program costs (Herman, Morris, and Fitz-Gibbon, 1987:22).

Larson (1985:106) listed operating characteristics of successful program review protocols. Successful protocols: (1) assess the quality of program results; (2) compare program objectives with program results; (3) provide information for revision of program goals and/or content, planning and budgeting, and the reallocation of resources to oversubscribed programs; and (4) are formally approved by the faculty.

According to Barak and Breier (1990:5), the following factors have been shown to be crucial in conducting a successful review: fairness, comprehensiveness, timeliness, good communication, objectivity, credibility, and utility. Evaluation systems must be perceived as being fair. To facilitate

fairness, a program review protocol should include particular features:

> It should have an explicated set of procedures. These procedures should be publicly known. These procedures and rules should be consistently applied. There should be provisions for confidentiality of information, and these should be understood by all from the beginning. There should be restrictions on the use of informal information, that is, considerations not included in the evaluation reports. There should be avenues for recourse and redress. Strong administrative support is necessary if these procedures are to be carried out equally with all parties (House, 1982).

Accrediting bodies have published several principles found in successful program review efforts. It is essential to involve those individuals who will be affected by and/or responsible for the evaluation. It is important to determine the appropriate level of analysis. Program review protocols must relate to the level or unit responsible for implementing recommendations. Another principle concerns the inclusion of comparative data. In the absence of absolute standards for judging the worth of a program, the use of comparative data becomes critical. Finally, colleges must take proactive measures to assist the faculty and other constituents to become more fully committed to the program review process. This is accomplished when (1) college administrators expect departments to support program review recommendations and (2) resources are allocated on the basis of strategic plans and budgets justified by the evaluation (Resource Manual on Institutional Effectiveness, 1989:17).

In summary, program review protocols should be custom-designed to the specifications of the particular college.

Program participants, including faculty, students, and administrators, should participate in the process. Table One provides a listing of the common elements in successful evaluations.

Table One

Common Elements in Successful Evaluations

| |
|---|
| Fairness |
| Timeliness |
| Clear goals |
| Objectivity |
| Credibility |
| Comprehensiveness |
| Cost effectiveness |
| Congruent activities |
| Utilization of results |
| Effective use of staff |
| Use of comparative data |
| Approved by the faculty |
| Provides information for decision-making |
| Relates to the unit responsible for implementation |

## Criteria Used in Program Review

"Criteria are the dimensions in terms of which the program is to be judged" (Petrie, 1982:22). Most colleges involved in academic program review use evaluative criteria to some degree (Barak, 1982). Institutions can employ one or more of the following techniques to define criteria used in program review: small group discussion, large group discussion, delphi surveys, copying from others, outside consultant, and administrative decision (Barak and Breier, 1990). While no set rules for

establishing criteria used in program review exist, several issues must be considered, such as the kind of criteria to be used, the type of criteria to be used, and criteria relating to institutional effectiveness (Wallhuas, 1982; Caruso, 1985; Resource Manual on Institutional Effectiveness, 1989).

Four major kinds of criteria are cited in the professional literature: mission/centrality, quality, cost, and demand (Caruso, 1985; Mortimer, 1982; Dougherty, 1980); Barak and Engdahl, 1978). Table Two provides examples for each kind of criteria.

Table Two

Examples of Kinds of Criteria

| Kind | Examples |
|---|---|
| mission/centrality | The program is consistent with college goals and mission. |
| quality | Of faculty; students; curriculum; facilities; equipment; library holdings; administration. |
| cost | Cost/revenue relationship; benefits to the students, the college, and society; faculty; facilities; equipment; enrollment. |
| demand | Past, present, and projected future enrollment; demand for graduates; job opportunities for graduates; student interest; justification of need; comparative advantage to other similar programs offered in the service area; benefit to society. |

Two major types of criteria cited in the professional literature are quantitative and qualitative (Barak and Breier, 1990; Caruso, 1985; Mingle, 1981; and Dougherty, 1980). Quantitative criteria are descriptive in nature and are concerned with program effects such as degree productivity, student credit-hours (numbers and cost per), and faculty workloads. Qualitative criteria are less specific, assessing the quality of students, faculty, administration, curriculum, facilities, and equipment. Regardless of the type and kind of used, the criteria should be developed to meet the college's needs and the data available to program reviewers.

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) provides a list of student outcomes frequently employed as evaluative criteria in the assessment of institutional effectiveness:

> retention and completion rates; student achievement in general education; student achievement in their major field; student perceptions of their development toward educational objectives; student affective development; opinions of program quality given by students, alumni, employers, and drop-outs; job placement rates; performance after transfer from two-year to four-year institutions; external recognition of achievements of students and graduates (Resource Manual on Institutional Effectiveness, 1989:10).

Other indicators of institutional effectiveness include:

> an adequate enrollment to support the organization; sound fiscal health; a positive public image; an attraction for, and ability to hold, a strong management team; prudent use of human and material resources; effective coordination of various programs and activities with a minimum of duplication, with strong mutual support, and a minimum of nonproductive internal conflict; application of the institution's management talent to high-priority opportunities and problems; and assists administrators in applying their highest skills to opportunities in their

areas of responsibility for the largest portion of their time (Haag-Mutter, Holzapfel, and Jones, 1988:101).

Barak and Breier indicate that individuals conducting their first program review usual y collect too much information. Such reviewers find themselves "incapable of effectively analyzing the information because of its quantity" (1990:27). In general, three to six good criteria supported by data are sufficient for most applications.

## Processes Used in Program Review

Three major issues emerge from the writings of others concerning the processes used in program review. The first issue relates to determinations that must be made in designing the program review protocol. According to Wallhaus, these decisions characterize the evaluation process and determine its acceptance and effectiveness. During this design phase, institutions must determine: (1) the purposes and objectives of evaluation; (2) the scope and focus of evaluation; (3) the scheduling and timing of evaluations; (4) the criteria used in evaluation; (5) the roles and responsibilities of participants in the process; and (6) the use of evaluation results (Wallhaus, 1982:75). The second issue emerging from the writings of others concerning program review processes relates to the actual steps in designing the evaluation. Seitz provided the following steps to facilitate a program review process:

1. Define the scope.

2. Specify inputs, activities, and outputs.
3. Determine the types of data to be compiled.
4. Identify the support services and personnel to be involved in the evaluation.
5. Schedule, carefully and consistently.
6. Co'lect and compile data.
7. Compare, critique, and analyze.
8. Draw conclusions (Seitz, 1981:57).

Barak and Breier identified two phases in designing a program review protocol. The first phase involves the conducting of a needs assessment which is used to determine the purposes, objectives, and needs with respect to program review. The needs assessment can be conducted by committee, an administrative team, or extrainstitutional consultants (1990:13-15).

The second phase involves the conceptualization of the protocol which determines who will be involved in the process, what their role will be, when the review will occur, and how the review is to be conducted. During this phase, the criteria for evaluation are developed, as well as the format for the final report (1990:20). The typical final report consists of the following sections:

1. The description of the reviewed program;
2. An explanation of the process used, i.e., the who, what, where, when, and how of the review process;
3. The results of the review process, including all supporting documentation; and
4. Recommendation for program improvement and a schedule for implementation of recommendations (1990:55).

Caruso stated that the design phase of a program review process is important to its credibility, legitimacy, and success. He developed the following steps of a program review process: (1) define the purpose; (2) develop the methodology; (3) develop the criteria to be used; (4) develop guidelines and procedures for conducting the review; (5) conduct the review; (6) formulate recommendation based on the findings of the review; and (7) implement the recommendations (Caruso, 1985:185-186).

The final issue emerging from the writings of others concerning program review processes relates to the roles and responsibilities of participants. The delegation of duties and responsibilities is necessary to avoid confusion and chaos in the process. A survey of college presidents indicated that the process used in their institutions was perceived as being both a formative and a summative process (Borchers, 1986).

Barak and Breier (1990) have identified typical responsibilities of faculty and administrators involved in a program review process. If a formative approach to program evaluation is used, the faculty design the review; conduct the self study; collect the data; survey students, employers, and alumni; analyze the data; write the report; and implement recommendations. Administrators are simply interviewed. If a summative approach is used, faculty in the program under review recommend consultants; conduct the self-study; and assist in the collection of data. Faculty outside of the program serve on the review committee; collect and analyze the data; survey student,

employers of students, and alumni; write the final report and make recommendations. Line administrators hire the consultants; appoint the review committee; design the protocol; review the recommendations and develop a plans for implementation. Staff administrators assist in collecting and analyzing the data (Barak and Breier, 1990:36).

## Utilization of Results

The major issue concerning the utilization of the results of program review is that institutions have an obligation to their constituents to use such results in a systematic planning and evaluation process (Criteria for Accreditation, 1989-90). House (1982) urges decision-makers to ensure that something happens as a result of program review. Perhaps the most devastating outcome of a program review process is inaction. The intended effects of participation in a program review process are program change, innovation, or improvement; otherwise, the process has not been used (Barak and Breier, 1990). SACS states:

> In the absence of commitment to use evaluation results, all previous steps in the planning and evaluation process would become little more than futile exercises which institutions can ill afford, and the institution's evaluation process could not be considered adequate (Resource Manual on Institutional Effectiveness, 1989:11).

The most common reason for failure in a program review process is "the well-founded perception of the faculty that the whole effort has been a waste of time, since nothing has happened as a result" (House, 1982:53). Borchers (1986) provides several motives of low use of program review results: lack of

dissemination of the report; insufficient financial resources and staff dedicated to the process; fear of economic loss by participants; job security; and poor design of the program review process. Conrad and Wilson concur, offering four general reasons for the non-use of program review results: organizational inertia; inadequate process design; lack of consensus regarding the need for some reviews; and the "multiple sources of information competing for the attention of decision-makers" (Conrad and Wilson, 1985:57).

Using the results of a program review process brings a sense of closure to participants. As previously mentioned, recommendations are made, namely, to continue, modify, or discontinue the program. These recommendations are based on the assessment of program quality. However, another benefit accrues to institutions that utilize the results of evaluation: enhanced communication. Larson (1985) proposed that program faculty were educated by this enhanced communication, implying that had not a review process occurred, the need for change would not be acknowledged. He offers the following examples to describe this effect:

> Making faculty aware of the difficulty of fair evaluation; better communication about realities of program costs and outcomes; faculty awareness of the need to "look at what we do at the college"; consideration by faculty of "what they are doing and where they are going"; a forced inspection of instructional programs by faculty (Larson, 1985:109).

Finally, most researchers conclude that program review is beneficial. However, since only a few studies have

systematically analyzed the effects of program review, the basis for this conclusion is weak. Additionally, some studies indicate that program reviews do not achieve their desired results (Barak and Breier, 1990).

## Additional Comments

Several minor issues relating to program review were cited in the professional literature. The more prominent were: common myths, political realities, the state role in the process, and the link to accreditation.

### Common Myths

Barak (1986) indicated several common myths which developed during the past decade. The first myth is that academic program review is not necessary if the program is either regionally accredited or accredited by a recognized specialized agency. Attainment of accreditation is considered only one outcome of a successful program review process. Another myth is that there is only one correct method to conduct an evaluation study. In reality, there are as many ways to conduct program reviews as there are program reviewers. Another myth is that program review will produce spectacular results. Most program review processes result in minor change that take several years to implement.

### Political Realities

Stevenson (1985) investigated a self-study program review process of a public community college. One aspect of the study focused on the political realities of the process as perceived by

faculty and instructional administrative stakeholders. The following is a summary of conclusions concerning faculty stakeholders:

> Conclusions derived from the data indicate that the majority of faculty stakeholders view the instructional review process as a part of their professional responsibility. Consequently, most elected to actively participate in the process. The underlying motivation was, however, to monitor and to control the process. All faculty stakeholders viewed the process as a threat to their professional expertise and territory. Most faculty efforts to guide the process and outcomes were proactive. There was, however, a small group of faculty stakeholders who were dissident and tried to subvert the process. All efforts by faculty stakeholders, both proactive and dissident, were directed toward influencing decision outcomes that either maintained the status quo or reflected their emerging interests (Stevenson, 1985:166).

The following is a summary of conclusions concerning administrative stakeholders:

> Division administrators, academic middle managers, effected wide-spread decision outcomes. They had access to multiple resources in order to bring about change. In general, the desired outcomes were achieved through influencing the faculty stakeholders. In those instances when the desired outcomes were not forth- coming, coalitions formed with upper level management or selected faculty stakeholders. Decision outcomes that emerged from the review process influenced by the division administrator were moderate to extensive.
>
> When significant program changes were necessary, the division administrators provided the impetus and the oversight for the changes. Faculty stakeholders, on the other hand, attempted to maintain the status quo throughout the process (Stevenson, 1985:167).

Stakeholders who understood the political structure of the college used that knowledge for their benefit.

State Role in Assessment

A report published by the Education Commission of the States (1986) recognizes the role of the state in program evaluation as

the mover and shaker, with the role of the college being process design and implementation. In other words, the state is responsible to stimulate program review action and ensure that the process is carried out. A key issue here is for institutional and state-level interests to converge so that a single review process can achieve the goals of both. Such cooperative endeavors are called shared reviews (Floyd, 1983).

Link to Accreditation

Accreditation, granted to a college that meets or exceeds stated criteria for educational quality, has two basic purposes: to assure quality and to assist in improvement. The accrediting body encourages improvement by requiring institutions to conduct periodic self-studies to identify strengths, weaknesses, and develop strategic plans to ameliorate the identified weaknesses (Ellison and Smith, 1987). Program review is a component of such a strategic plan. According to SACS (1989-90:9):

> The effectiveness of self-regulatory accreditation depends upon an institution's acceptance of certain responsibilities, including institutional involvement in and commitment to the accreditation process. This process assumes that each member institution has the responsibility to participate in and to accept an honest and forthright assessment of institutional strengths and weaknesses.

As previously stated, accrediting associations emphasize that quality is assessed by the degree of conformance between an institution's goals and actions. The basis for this statement lies in the assumption that many colleges with diverse programs exist, "and not all of them ought to behave in exactly the same way, given their varied purposes" (George, 1982:47).

In conclusion, the survey of literature relating to academic program evaluation processes contained seven themes: purposes of program review; different approaches to program review; program review models; common elements in successful evaluations; criteria used in program review; processes used in program review; and utilization of results. Although program review is not considered to be an exact science, these seven themes provide insight into contemporary program review processes.

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