

University of Wisconsin System
Office of Academic Affairs

Academic Informational Series #4
(ACIS-4)

Summary
of
UWS ACADEMIC PROGRAM
AUDIT AND REVIEW

January, 1977

Summary
of
UWS ACADEMIC PROGRAM AUDIT AND REVIEW

Policies and Procedures

This paper is a summary of existing policies, assumptions, and procedures applying to the UW System processes of audit and review existing academic programs. As such, it consolidates the series of earlier administrative memoranda used to implement sections II.B, C, D and II.3. of Academic Planning Statement #1 (ACPS-1).

I. DEFINITION

A. Institutional Program Audit:

One of the means of identifying from the total spectrum of programs those which should receive thorough review by the faculty and institutions in a particular period of time. An audit is the examination of the condition of each academic program in terms of a limited number of readily quantifiable indicators. An audit does not create a presumption that the programs selected for intensive analysis are in fact in trouble or headed for trouble. The indicators used for audit purposes may suggest this, but more intensive analysis may lead to a quite different judgment.

B. Institutional Program Review:

A comprehensive and intensive reexamination of a particular academic program. Program review is a judgmental process which uses audit information as available and additional relevant information or analysis, to reach a judgment as to what changes, if any, should be taken relative to the program receiving review. The review, rather than the audit, would lead to recommendations that a program be changed in form and direction, reviewed again at a later time, continued, phased out, consolidated with other programs, or augmented.

C. System Lateral Program Audit:

A procedure by which the System Office of Academic Affairs can examine similar program using a limited number of quantifiable indicators. This activity may or may not lead to a more intensive, in-depth System lateral program review. (Example: Master's/Specialist Audit)

D. System Lateral Program Review:

A procedure for an intensive and comprehensive examination of like programs in several institutions where the possibility of excessive program replication, or excessive or insufficient program capacity, or quality exist, or where such problems might result from new program development. Lateral program reviews can be accomplished by System staff, interinstitutional faculty task forces, external disciplinary specialists, or combinations of these, in consultation with affected faculties. (Example, Medical Technology Review)

E. Systemwide Program Review:

Program review activity undertaken by the System for use in determining the allocation of resources for both new and existing baccalaureate and post-baccalaureate programs. This type of review is to promote, within available resources, the most harmonious adjustment to the opportunities sought by informed citizens and judgements concerning societal need. (Example: BFA/MFA Review)

F. Statewide Program Studies:

Special studies of selected programs or program areas to determine general state and System needs in these areas. Comprehensive studies of this type, which will involve other state and private institutions, systems and agencies, may lead to the modification, termination, or initiation of individual programs within the UW System. (Example: Nursing and Nursing Education)

II. PURPOSE

Faculty in American universities have traditionally accepted the responsibility of ongoing critical examination of university curricula, degree requirements, major fields of study, and related academic program elements. More recently, because of an austere fiscal environment and the possibility of enrollment declines, faculties have also found it necessary to engage in academic program evaluation to assist in determining how limited resources can be best directed to meet student interested and societal needs.

Given the need for a rational, systematic, and concerted effort to use resources wisely, the UW System has based its planning for undergraduate, graduate, and extension programs on a pattern of continuing audits and reviews of academic programs conducted at the System, cluster, and/or institutional level. These audit and reviews would seek to:

- (a) improve the quality of undergraduate and graduate instructional programs;
- (b) identify needs for structural changes in programs or administrative units;
- (c) become a means to set priorities for allocation of program resources within or among departments, colleges, or universities;
- (d) identify needs for additional study or planning;
- (e) become a means for administrators and other faculty to become sensitive to the needs and unique circumstances of certain programs;
- (f) identify nonfunctional or unnecessarily duplicative programs;
- (g) establish UW System minimum standards for program quality or differentiation of program mission;

- (h) provide for a review of state and/or System needs to enable informed response to institutional intentions for mounting new programs, expanding missions or seeking accreditation of existing, non-accredited programs.

III. MAJOR ASSUMPTIONS

1. That as a general principle, primary responsibility for the reexamination of academic programs has been delegated to the institutions by the Regents and should be carried out in the format most compatible with existing institutional academic planning mechanisms and within Regental guidelines.
2. That each institution will institute and maintain program audit and program review processes as an essential part of its academic planning responsibilities.
3. That as integral part of academic planning, each institution will institute and maintain procedures to implement recommendations as appropriate and to monitor and evaluate the results.
4. That each institution will establish methods for identifying from the total spectrum of programs those which should receive comprehensive and intensive program review by the faculty and the institution in a particular period of time.

Though the program audit will be the most common means of identifying programs for review, for a variety of judgmental reasons, administrators or planning committees also might ask for review of a program which had not been selected through the audit process. Examples of factors that may lead to such a program review would include: (a) an anticipated retirement or departure of key faculty members in a given program; (b) a regularly scheduled site visit by an accreditation team and resulting institutional preparations; (c) planning studies concerning the minimum staffing which should be maintained for the essential programs of an institution; and (d) recommendations from systemwide or institutional committees or task forces on curriculum changes.

5. That the institutional processes and procedures for reexamination of existing academic programs should take the form judged by the faculty and the administration as being the most effective way of integrating the audit and review process into institutional planning. Alternative models include: (a) integration of program reexamination on an annual or biennial basis as part of its long-range academic planning; (b) selective review annually of a set of programs identified through institutional audit procedures; (c) periodic in-depth reexamination of all programs rather than weak or marginal programs only; (d) review of those programs selected through a program audit of that fraction of the total spectrum of programs scheduled for an audit on a three-to-five year cycle.
6. That the agencies and procedures used for reexamination of academic programs should be specifically described in the policies of the institution and disseminated to all constituencies in the institution and shared with Central Administration, Office of Academic Affairs.

7. That Central Administration's involvement in the process of program audit and review will generally be limited to: (a) definition of broad guidelines; (b) verification that the processes and procedures undertaken by the institutions meet the guidelines; (c) the receiving of institutional reports; and (d) completion of a report to the Board of Regents to disseminate information on effective institutional practices to others.
8. That the Central Administration Office of Academic Affairs shall annually undertake a limited number of statewide or systemwide audits, reviews, or studies of selected academic programs or disciplinary areas. These review activities may be generated when: (a) problems of unnecessary program replication, program capacity, or program quality may exist; (b) programmatic change or consortial activity may modify mission definition; (c) it is necessary to determine state and System needs in a given program area; and (d) decisions have to be made on the desirability of modifying, terminating, or initiating individual programs.
9. That the most important single ingredient for the success of System level program audits and reviews is the credibility of the exercise as viewed by the faculties. There are certain constraints to the use of System audit and review processes; it is necessary to define the goals and objectives and identify an appropriate operative protocol which assures that the exercise will be cost effective, programmatically useful, and acceptable to the faculty and administration.

Faculty are responsible for shaping and evaluating curricula. They are subject to peer evaluation of their work and academic programs. Therefore, the identification and involvement of a peer group responsible for audit and review and acceptable to a faculty body needs to be accomplished carefully, with particular attention to disciplinary differences, levels of expertise, and experience. It is important to recognize that the credibility of the "peer group" performing an evaluation is crucial. For these reasons, the UW System employs alternate operational protocols in conducting System audits and reviews of academic programs. Included are:

- (a) program audit performed by Academic Affairs staff of UW System Central Administration (Example: Master's/Special audit);
- (b) program review conducted by a peer group selected from within the UW System (Example: forestry, dietetics);
- (c) program evaluation and recommendations by a consultant from outside the UW System (Example: criminal justice, fine arts);
- (d) analysis and recommendations by a panel of consultants from outside the UW System (Example: veterinary medicine);
- (e) analysis and recommendations by a UW System council--a peer group composed of individuals internal and external to the UW System (Example: medical technology).

10. That it is as important for the UW System and its institutions to evaluate its methods, processes, and purposes for program audits and reviews as it is to actually conduct the reexamination of academic programs.

IV. GENERAL CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING PROGRAMS

The UW System's general program review/approval criteria which are fundamental to all System program decisions, are published in detail in ACIS-1. In summary, they can be grouped in six categories:

- (1) relations of the program to the System, cluster, and institutional missions;
- (2) relation of the program to System and institutional priorities and to other institutional programs;
- (3) quality of the program;
- (4) societal need and student demand for the program;
- (5) outputs and benefits of the program; and
- (6) cost and financing of the program.

Institutional criteria used in the audit and review of existing academic programs follows the System's general program review criteria and also incorporates any special System criteria related to a particular program(s). However, each institution is free to expand the criteria to be used.

V. RELATION OF AUDIT AND REVIEW TO EXTERNAL ACCREDITATION ACTIVITY

As a means of attesting that their educational quality has met a certain standard, institutions and, in some instances, programs have voluntarily sought evaluation by an accreditation agency or professional association. Accreditation is a means of assuring the educational community, general public, and other agencies or organizations that the accredited institution or program has clearly defined appropriate educational objectives, has established conditions suitable to their achievement, appears to be accomplishing them, and is so organized and supported that it can be expected to continue the performance. The North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, the several professional associations, certain state examining or accrediting boards, and various foundations and funding agencies which produce these periodic qualitative assessments provide important external perspectives on institutions and academic programs. These evaluations foster excellence through the identification of criteria and guidelines for an institution to use in assessing educational effectiveness and to encourage improvement of its academic programs. Where possible, institutions coordinate internal audit and review of academic programs with the external review processes.

Qualitative reports on academic programs by agencies and associations external to the System are additional instruments for providing information at the System level during the program review process. The UW System has formalized the relationship of Central Administration and the Regents to these accreditation and other qualitative reviews, visits and reports in General Administrative Policy Paper #24. Every effort should be made to maintain liaison between central Administration and each institution as these external reviews take place. The best interests of the institution and the System will be served by appropriate involvement of the President's staff and members of the Board of Regents in major reviews and follow-up.

VI. REPORTING AND FOLLOW-UP EVALUATION

Each institution reports annually (by June 1) its plans for academic program audit and review to the Office of Academic Affairs. Reports include a statement of the criteria used in the audit, the process to be followed in selecting programs for review, a description of the "ongoing process of audit and review," and the procedures which follow program reexamination.

The Office of Academic Affairs will abstract these reports and submit an annual report to the Board of Regents on the progress and results of institutional and System academic program audit and review efforts. Any Board of Regent recommendations emanating from this report will be recorded in the Office of Academic Affairs and reported to the appropriate institution. This notification will include any corrective actions required and the time frame within which it is to be accomplished.

In accordance with Assumption #3, page 3 of this paper, the institutions are responsible for determining which audit and review recommendations are implementable and for the implementation and follow-through on those recommendations. Central Administration will monitor this process through periodic informal consultations with institutional administrators as well as more formalized campus site visits--the purpose being to assure that institutional procedures are in place and operative relative to the implementation of program review recommendations and decisions.

REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

1. University of Wisconsin System Planning Principles, Academic Planning Statement No. 1 (ACPS-1), University of Wisconsin System Board of Regents, February, 1975.
2. Donald K. Smith Memorandum on UW System Policy on Academic Program Review, Education Committee, UW Board of Regents, November 25, 1974.
3. Academic Informational Series (ACIS-1) Revision No. 4, University of Wisconsin System, Office of Academic Affairs, February, 1977.
4. President's Report in Response to the Governor's Request on Reducing the Scope of the University of Wisconsin System, April 18, 1975.
5. Donald K. Smith, Program Audit and Review: Progress to Date and Plans for the Future, Education Committee, UW Board of Regents, August 1, 1975.
6. Donald K. Smith, Academic Program Audit and Review as a Means of Resource Reallocations, prepared for the E.C.S. Seminar on "Making Decision in a Time of Fiscal Exigency," Denver, Colorado, December 16, 1975.
7. Donald K. Smith, UW System 1975-76 Report on Academic Program Evaluation (Audit and Review), Education Committee, Board of Regents.
8. University of Wisconsin System General Administrative Policy Paper #24: Accreditation visits and Report, March 30, 1976.

g:\vpacad\acis-4