University Assessment Committee
Report on Study of Academic Program Review

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In fall 2014, this committee was charged with examining the Academic Program Review process. During that academic year, the committee administered a survey to department chairs, program directors and administrators that asked them to assess the current process. The data revealed general dissatisfaction with current program review approach and a desire for reform that would generate data that was useful to departments and administrators for planning and assessment purposes (see Appendix A, "Report of the USI Faculty Senate Assessment Subcommittee, April 24, 2015"). The committee made the following recommendations:

- Investigate whether it is feasible to identify HLC accreditation requirements that could be aligned with the academic program reviews and gathered at the department level.
- Investigate possible ways to align USI Academic Program Reviews with accreditation reviews.
- Work with programs to develop an understanding of how they contribute to the university mission and identify data that will help them assess it.
- In consultation with chairs/directors and administrators, create a uniform set of goals and outcomes for the academic program review process that can be measured AND rubrics to measure achievement of those goals.
- Identify ways to streamline the academic program review process to make it less onerous and more useful to individual departments.
- Identify types of data that all programs would use in an academic program review and work with OPRA to set up the means to collect and disseminate such data.
- Further explore the role of the academic program review's relationship with institutional planning, budgeting and decision-making. Determine whether some of it duplicates other efforts (e.g. annual budget process).

In the 2015-2016 academic year, the Assessment committee took up these recommendations in order to refine these into a viable plan of action. This report reviews the committee's deliberations and sets forth a proposal for revising the academic program review process to make it more responsive to the needs of departments, programs, and administrators at USI.

The committee believes that it is necessary to create a more flexible system that would focus on the particular aspects of each department or program that allows it to contribute to the university's mission. This revision would be a multi-year process and would need to take place under the strong leadership of an _**assessment coordinator**_ who could carry it through to completion. The following draft plan was presented to the Council of Program Chairs/Directors on January 27, 2016 to solicit input, after which the attendees at the meeting completed a questionnaire to assess their reactions to it; the following discussion includes references to these responses, which are quantitatively summarized in Tables 1 – 3. See Appendix B for a spreadsheet for the complete results of this questionnaire.

Table 1: Overall responses to the question "Do you think that a process similar to the one described would benefit your program more than the current process?"
(29 responses)

Response	Number
Yes	13
Maybe	10
No	4
None/no answer	2

Table 2: Responses by College/Unit to the question "Do you think that a process similar to the one described would benefit your program more than the current process?"
(29 responses)

College/Unit	Yes	Maybe	No	No Response	Total Responses
Liberal Arts	3	4	2	0	9
Nursing/Health Professions	3	2	0	1	6
Pott College	3	2	1	1	7
Romain College	1	1	1	0	3
UD/Other	2	1	0	0	3
No Unit identified	1	0	0	0	1

Table 3: Responses by accreditation status to the question "Do you think that a process similar to the one described would benefit your program more than the current process?"
(29 responses)

College/Unit	Yes	Maybe	No	No Response	Total Responses
Accredited programs	6	5	3	1	15
Non-accredited programs	6	5	1	1	13
Did not specify	1	0	0	0	1

This data shows that nearly half of the respondents believed that this proposed process would/might be more useful than the existing academic program review. The committee proposes that the following plan be enacted over a period of two years, with the first reviews taking place in the spring semester of the second year.

Proposed plan
Step 1: Identification of shared goals (all programs): At the beginning of the 2015-2016 academic year, the Assessment Committee members addressed the question of streamlining the program review process. Initially, we attempted to determine if it was possible to create a uniform set of goals for all programs across the university that would provide useful data to all stakeholders but which would avoid the repetitious and burdensome current process. Seeking guidance, we considered three sources: the HLC accreditation requirements, the national accreditation requirements for individual programs, and the University's Strategic Plan. The HLC requires that program review assessment be conducted on a regular basis, but there is little additional guidance for how or when such reviews should be conducted. The requirements individual programs meet when qualifying for national program accreditation have discipline-specific requirements, but there were shared requirements (e.g., creating and maintaining the quality and effectiveness of academic programs). The USI strategic plan (2010-2015) had clear objectives, but many programs and majors would find it difficult to align with all six of the goals spelled out under that plan. Since the strategic plan would conceivably change to a greater or lesser degree every five years, we questioned whether it was wise to align program review with goals that might change over time.

Ultimately, the committee realized that the effort to identify shared university goals would have to include more people than the six members of this committee. However, we also recognized that programs and departments simply make different contributions to the university. Thus, a detailed list of goals and metrics in a "one size fits all" concept seemed unlikely to produce the kind of data departments and programs need for planning and improvement. A rigid and uniform assessment process would also tend to make program review more burdensome to departments and programs. Nevertheless, we believe that as

members of an institution of higher education, we should be able to identify some overarching goals that all programs and departments try to achieve in their various and diverse ways.

Thus, *after an assessment coordinator has been selected*, the first step in the process of revising the academic program review would be to identify these broadly-based shared university goals that are appropriate for each and every program, e.g.
- Create and maintain quality and effective academic programs
- Contribute to the university's mission
- Engage in effective program planning and improvement

Chairs and program directors, administrators and faculty would all be part of the discussion to identify these shared goals.

As part of this process, the assessment coordinator would work with each department or program to identify a list of data sets that would be most useful for measuring their success in achieving these goals. This will then be used to create a ***uniform set of data*** that will be created annually by OPRA and forwarded to each program. Every program will have the same type of data (e.g. enrollment, number of graduates, etc.) provided to them. Both of the surveys administered by this committee to department chairs/program directors showed support for the creation and distribution of a uniform data set for assessment purposes.

Step 2: Identify Outcomes. It is important to recognize that while all programs share certain broad goals, each one is also unique in how it meets them. Thus, the outcomes that will measure success in meeting the university goals should be crafted to the individual program.

For programs that are NOT nationally accredited: Under the direction of the assessment coordinator, each non-accredited program/department would craft a statement of outcomes that meet these broad goals, basing these outcomes on the unique characteristics of the discipline and program when indicated. These outcomes must be measurable and appropriate for the program/discipline; the committee recommends that these be based on the best practices/standards of professional organizations within the discipline, or on the standards set by a national accreditation body for the discipline (even if the program itself is not accredited). The assessment coordinator will guide the departments through the kinds of metrics available so that they can consider what data would demonstrate that they are achieving these goals. Each department would also develop a plan of action on how they will achieve these outcomes during the assessment cycle.

For nationally accredited programs: In general, the accreditation review identifies goals and outcomes and provides substantial evidence to the reviewing body that these are being met. A program that has gone through such a review should not have to do a separate review for USI. Instead, the assessment coordinator will meet with each program to review their assessment document, and – *if necessary* – help them create a brief "executive summary" or a matrix based on their review that highlights the information that shows that the program meets USI's shared goals using the shared data sets.

Comments (see Appendix B) from leaders of currently accredited programs approved of creating a cycle that aligned the proposed assessment process with their accreditation reviews; they also supported using the report for the program reviews as the basis for USI's program assessment. Comments show that this view is shared by those who thought the proposed plan would be a welcome change and by the small number of those who did not.

Step 3: Create a review cycle. Each college would be tasked with creating a schedule of assessment for all programs in its college, working in concert with the assessment coordinator. Non-accredited programs will be reviewed once every seven years. Accredited programs will submit their reviews in the year

following their accreditation review. The assessment coordinator will create a master schedule of program reviews and distribute it to all program chairs/directors, deans, and the provost. All programs regardless of accreditation status will also submit a brief interim report between reviews (see below).

Step 4: The program review cycle

As this cycle begins, each program in turn will perform its self-evaluation. This should focus on the stated goals for the program and should be measured using the metrics the department created to measure attainment of those goals. The review report would individually address each item in the matrix; this should be brief, no more than 2 pages per item. It should refer to the uniform data sets provided by OPRA when necessary, and these would be attached as appendices. (Every year, each program would receive a set of uniform data from OPRA).

The program being reviewed will submit its report to a program assessment review committee composed of faculty members with at least five years full-time teaching experience. The committee will also include department chairs/program directors and deans/assistant deans. This committee could be a new creation, or it could be done by expanding the membership of the Faculty Senate's Assessment Subcommittee.

Several respondents (Appendix B) noted that the reviewer's feedback was one of the most valuable parts of the program review process, but the initial survey (Appendix A) revealed that some reviewers had little or no experience in the review process, Thus, the committee recommends that the assessment coordinator hold an annual session on best practices for program review assessment. This would not only prepare faculty to serve as reviewers, it would also share information and strategies for preparing program reviews.

Interim report: Three years into the cycle, each program would submit a *two to three page update* on their plan of action, goals and outcomes. They would base this on uniform data provided by OPRA. This provides an opportunity for each program to reflect on its goals and outcomes and its strategies for achieving them. This would allow each program to make adjustments as necessary before the next scheduled review. One respondent (Appendix B) comprehensively pointed out the advantages of the process:

> It is helpful to remind others that there are add'l potential uses for program assessment, including
> 1) Articulating student outcomes (that align with program mission & vision)
> 2) Identifying strategies (curriculum, activities, internships) to help students meet outcomes
> 3) Collect data - how are we doing?
> 4) Assessment (formative assessment) & reflection - what's going well, what are the gaps, are there trends; what mid-course changes can be made
> 5) Repeat back to (2). . . . I like the inclusion of the mid-cycle formative assessment. Assessment can be used to provide data for program improvements, changes/sunsetting, new directions (resources, faculty, etc.)

Finally, the committee recommends that the program review process itself be reviewed thoroughly after the completion of two full cycles, with an initial report made to the Faculty Senate every three years. These interim reports should be based on input from program directors/department chairs, deans, and other administrators involved in the review process. Each of these should complete a rubric that assesses the degree to which the process meets its goals:
- The process encourages meaningful review by individual programs
- The process produces usable data that indicates how each program/unit contributes to the university's mission
- The process provides strong guidance to programs, colleges and the university for strategic planning, program improvement

- The process does not place an undue burden on departments and programs that is out of proportion to its benefits.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the University Assessment Committee