

## The Higher Learning Commission Action Project Directory

### Northern Michigan University: Analyze and Update the University-wide Academic Program Review Process

#### Project Details

**Title** Analyze and Update the University-wide Academic Program Review Process  
**Category** 1-Helping Students Learn  
**Timeline**  
**Planned Project Kickoff** 10-15-2010  
**Target Completion** 11-15-2012

**Status** REVIEWED  
**Updated** 07-11-2011  
**Reviewed** 09-17-2011  
**Created** 10-06-2010  
**Last Modified** 09-17-2011

#### 1: Project Accomplishments and Status

**A:** At its initial meeting, the Task Force adopted a project charter with a two-year timetable to develop an Academic Program Review (APR) Process. This document is available on the public Action Project webpage < <http://webb.nmu.edu/aqip/SiteSections/ActionProjects/AnalyzeUpgradeProgramReviewProcess/AcademicProgramReview.shtml> >

Year 1 tasks were successfully completed on time. They were:

1. Identified current practices at Northern Michigan University for college and departmental procedures, including external accreditation requirements.
2. Identified, discussed and analyzed other schools' practices for APR. A matrix of eight institutions and 16 review components was developed and a literature review conducted. Summaries of these documents are available on the Action Project website.
3. Using previous Northern Michigan University Educational Policy Committee (EPC) recommendations, practices at other schools and newly identified needs, the Task Force drafted an Academic Program Review Process and Timetable, a Self-Study Report Template, and a Glossary. These documents are available on the Action Project website.
4. Arranged internal sourcing from Institutional Research and IT for required data sets, allowing departments to focus on data interpretation rather than manual data collection.
5. Developed a pilot test implementation plan, selecting two units for a pilot test during the second year of the Action Project.
6. Prepared final draft distribution to the academic department heads for feedback.

**R:** Northern Michigan University (NMU) undertook a 2 year project involving (Category 1) Helping Student Learn which was studying current processes for academic program review conducted by its academic departments and colleges. This organization has made "reasonable progress" toward their goals and have moved on to achieving year two objectives. The development of a pilot test implementation plan should provide the institution the necessary tool to obtain data needed to help complete this project. They continue to address and challenge themselves to meet objectives and find solutions to the project objectives. However, NMU may want to maintain specific measuring points to ascertain that they are getting the necessary data to meet their objectives.

#### 2: Institution Involvement

**A:** During 2010-11, the Action Project task force had nine members, co-chaired by an administrator and faculty member. Member roster criteria were: a variety of academic disciplines, colleges, and degree levels; representative of upper administration, and faculty and academic department heads; approval of both AAUP governance and Academic Affairs. The task force met bi-weekly from project launch through June. At its initial meetings, getting consensus on project scope, timetable, and procedure was the focus.

During the fall and early winter semester, each member researched practices at other institutions, made a presentation to the group, contributed to a comparison matrix built to identify common practices, and helped analyze the relevance to NMU. A literature review revealed several meta studies on APR that were discussed at meetings.

Subsequently, two subcommittees were charged with a) developing an APR process and b) drafting an APR self-study template. The template formation started with the July 2010 recommendations by the EPC as a base. The responsibilities of the EPC include advising the Provost and the AAUP governance on matters directly related to program review:

- on mission statements,
- on short- and long-term academic program planning for the University,
- on financial considerations attendant to implementation of new programs such as majors and minors,
- on enrollment patterns and projections,
- on the allocation of budget for the support of academic programs,
- on the generation of credit hours within colleges and academic departments,
- and on staffing requirements within colleges and academic departments.

Bi-weekly meetings through the winter allowed subcommittees time to present their work to the full task force. Several iterations of both the APR process and the template were discussed and edited by the task force. Institutional Research was consulted regarding data already available, and data that could be obtained. The goal is to provide academic departments with required data sets so the self-study writers can concentrate on interpretation and planning narratives.

The selection of two departments for the pilot test of the new process and template began with solicitation of suggestions from college deans and the EPC. The task force considered those suggestions and chose the Department of Communications and Performing Arts and the Department of Engineering Technologies.

**R:** A 9 member task force committee was developed by the University that included stakeholders from various stakeholder groups. Recommendations were used as a baseline measurement for the project to help drive and formulate the APR process. Two subcommittees were formed to drive this project during this time and its main objectives were to develop an APR process and drafting an APR self-study template. The University has successfully addressed and obtained involvement by key stakeholders and demonstrates the necessary commitment and support of the institution. A follow up should be made with internal departments to address the feelings about not being selected for the pilot test. This will provide necessary data for future projects on potential starting points for future projects but may also provide insight into the selection process.

#### 3: Next Steps

The timetable for the second year of the Action Project includes:

- The APR process draft and the self-study template distribution to all academic department heads in summer 2011 for comment.
- The pilot commences in late summer 2011 with the release of the template and provision of data sets by Institutional Research.
- The pilot self-study reports due by late November 2011.
- During the winter and spring of 2012, the task force considers feedback from the academic department heads and the result of the pilots. Revisions will ensue. Adoption and publication by summer 2012 of the baseline process by which all departments will be expected to regularly review and revise, as needed, their academic programs. A key component in the process must be finalized is the administrative location of the operation, i.e., Who is going to oversee this process?
- Stakeholders informed and updates done of all relevant procedural pages within the NMU website.
- The first slate of academic departments to conduct their APR self-study commences late summer 2012.
- Assessment for the APR Action Project. Concluding with a working APR process is an outcome, but specific assessment of the Action Project's value to the institution should also be addressed.

**R:** NMU faces a couple of critical challenges over the next year as the pilot program is implemented. It was discovered that there are two key areas that need to be addressed: 1) who will oversee the process and 2) determining the value of the Action Project to the institution. The University should note that the assignment or delegation of overseeing this process should be directed to someone with a vested interest and will commit to the proper oversight of the project. Furthermore, the assessment of the APR Project should be developed now so key measuring points can be administered over the remaining project timeline. This portion supports AQIP Categories 7) Measuring Effectiveness and Category 8) Planning Continuous Improvement. A key element is to choose a person that has the power and authority to make decisions and drive the project for proven results. The ideal candidate will have the respect of others and the knowledge of the process to continue to gain support of all stakeholders while eliminating negative opinions. Finally, a solid communication plan needs to be included for the benefit of all stakeholders.

#### **4: Resulting Effective Practices**

**A:** The Task Force operated quite effectively during the first year of the Action Project. Contributing factors were:

- Careful selection of respected membership, approved by both administration and faculty, provided credibility and commitment.
- Consensus on the scope of the project kept the task force focused.
- Use of technology – both intranet and cloud computing tools, i.e. Google docs – as a repository for collected data, presentations and reports, meeting agendas and minutes and drafts of new documents kept all members informed and prevented loss of files.
- Inclusion of prior work and recommendations by other Northern Michigan University committees recognized their contributions and minimized resistance.

**R:** The first year's activities and future goals reflect effective and inclusive communications which support the AQIP Categories of 4) Valuing People and 5) Leading and Communicating. The institution should commend itself on the careful involvement and minimizing resistance as it offers the institution an opportunity to further develop itself in the academic review process.

#### **5: Project Challenges**

**A:** An identified challenge is academic units' acceptance of the APR process developed by the Task Force. Thus far, acceptance of the Action Project's goals has occurred. The lack of a uniform Academic Program Review process was noted in several Systems Appraisal and is acknowledged by our faculty and leadership. Strategies to address resistance that might be encountered include:

- a representative task force and use of existing recommendations and best practices,
- planned circulation of the APR process and Self-Study Report template drafts for comment,
- pilot test,
- presentations to faculty and revisions based upon feedback.

**R:** The continued efforts of the University of open communication and stakeholder inclusion in this process has allowed for continued progress for the project. NMU has achieved an "exceptional accomplishment" as it continues to move forward into year two of their action project. The self identification of barriers to success will allow the institution to continue to monitor and delegate important key components to various stakeholder groups. It should be noted that continued support of faculty and the inclusion of their feedback will provide a more positive outlook and participation for future projects. The use of best practices and consideration of existing recommendations will demonstrate to all parties of the willingness to learn from past suggestions and coordinate potential use of this information for future projects. Continued research into strategies to overcome resistance would be recommended.