

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	Status	REVIEWED
Category	1-Helping Students Learn	Updated	09-10-2012
Timeline		Reviewed	09-11-2012
Planned Project Kickoff	10-15-2010	Created	10-06-2010
Target Completion	11-15-2012	Last Modified	09-11-2012

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

A: This report documents the second year of a two-year project. 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 and documented in the last AQIP update report. Year 2 accomplished tasks, thus far, are:

1. Two pilot tests of the newly developed APR report template were conducted from August 2011-March 2012. Departments chosen for the pilot represented certificate, associate and baccalaureate programs; programs with external accreditations; diverse programs within one department. As planned, much of the data was provided by Institutional Research for the departments. The pilot self-study reports were received on schedule by November 2011.
2. During the winter of 2012, the process for the external review was tested as consultants came to campus for each of the two pilot tests. Their review reports were received in a timely manner. Both departments wrote responses to the external review, delivering them to the Educational Policy Committee.
3. Based upon feedback from the academic department heads running the two pilot tests, the Task Force discussed and revised sections of the APR report template that proved unclear or problematic and streamlined the APR timetable.
4. Based upon the external review process and reports, a template was created for the reviewers' reports to improve consistency and the reviewer itinerary template revised.
5. A seven year APR rotation schedule was created and distributed to academic department heads.
6. The first slate of academic departments to conduct their APR self-study commenced late summer 2012.

R: It is apparent that you are approaching the finish line on this Action Project. After reviewing your progress reports, congratulations are in order. You have methodically worked over the past two years to create an academic review process that is designed, after feedback from a piloted version, to provide valuable and timely information to academic programs while also allowing the university to collect systematic and standardized data across programs. This is no small endeavor yet you have been able to keep to your timetable and it appears that you will have developed not only the instrument but a process that provides consistency in evaluation of all academic programs. In the future the information that you gain through this highly integrated process will provide valuable input to drive institutional programmatic changes that will respond the the ever changing needs of your constituencies.

2: Institution Involvement

A: During 2011-12, the Action Project task force had seven members, co-chaired by an administrator and faculty member, all continued from Year 1. 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 monthly from September through June, with

additional subcommittees meetings.

The APR process draft and the self-study template were distributed to all academic department heads in August 2011 for comment. This was the second feedback solicitation – the first occurred during Year 1. No additional feedback was received.

During the summer of 2011, departments worked with the Associate VP of Institutional Research to obtain necessary data for the report. Departments worked internally to complete the research, data analysis and writing of the report's narrative.

The departments involved with the pilot arranged for external consultants to review their APR reports. The consultants met with faculty, staff, students and alumni in the respective programs, and university academic administrators.

Much of the Task Force discussion during Year 2 revolved around the strengths and weaknesses arising from the pilot -- the draft APR report template, external reviews—and subsequent revisions. While the approach in Year 1 was to use subcommittees, Year 2 almost always focused as a unit of the whole. Subcommittees were primarily used for editing drafts.

R: Once again, congratulations are in order. Not only have you been able to receive feedback throughout the process of developing the APR review process, but you have also effectively integrated faculty, staff, students, and alumni in the process. The timetable that you have devised allowed each area adequate time to compile and review data collected and prepare APR reports. The use of external consultants to review these reports has enabled the various constituency's involved in the self- study to obtain an outside perspective which will help build programs that are current and responsive to change. This is exactly what AQIP is all about.

3: Next Steps

A: The timetable for remainder of the Action Project includes:

- Conclusion of the pilot APR cycle. The Educational Policy Committee (EPC) will review three documents for each program review: the APR report, the external reviewer's report, the departmental response to the reviewer's report. EPC will draft a formal set of recommendations to send to the department heads and the Provost. The Provost will outline major concerns and issues for the department. The dean and department develop and send to the Provost a plan to implement recommendations and achieve goals; the Provost must sign-off on the plan.
- Assessment for the APR Action Project. Expected outcomes of the Project were operational APR templates, a process and a guidebook; these are being realized. Institutional oversight for APR is being assigned to a new staff position, the Director of Institutional Accreditation and Assessment. A final written assessment of the Action Project will be conducted by the Task Force prior to closing the project.

R: It is apparent that the university has thought very carefully about how to implement the process, review the results of the process, and how the information gathered from the APRs will be used as a catalyst for growth and change. The decision to create a new position, Director of Institutional Accreditation and Assessment definitely emphasizes the institution's commitment to assessment that results in quality improvement. The development of a guidebook, operational APR templates, and an established process will allow future Annual Program Reviews to be done in a standardized manner and the results will be comparative across various programs.

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 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.
- Interim presentations to academic department heads and deans kept everyone informed and permitted valuable feedback for revisions.
- Conducting two thorough pilots that well represented the program offerings at NMU helped to uncover and correct problems and streamline the process before releasing it to all departments.

R: Once again, it is apparent that the institution has a strong commitment to involving the community in the process. This commitment will provide the institution with an outside view that will be valuable as they review their programs and make adjustments. The establishment of a central place for all reports, minutes, agendas, relevant presentations, and other document drafts allowed stakeholders to be able to follow the process and continue to be informed throughout the process. The pilot studies were just another example of good planning. Pilots offered an opportunity to solicit feedback and develop ownership of the process. Congratulations are in order for all who participated in developing this highly inclusive process.

5: Project Challenges

A: The project is concluding on time in November 2012 and is achieving its outcomes.

R: This action project was by no means a small task, yet the University set a timeline and kept to it. This demonstrates the commitment this University and its leadership has to identifying and addressing areas where quality improvement is needed. This was not an easy task and the university set its target completion time optimistically and worked hard collectively to meet the deadline that was set. In the end, the results garnered by such a well thought-out process will allow the institution the ability to assess each program and respond to areas that need changed, strengthen areas that are weak, and build upon aspects that are determined to be strong.