The division of Student Affairs was asked by the President’s Assessment Council (PAC) to examine the effectiveness of its assessment plans and to prepare oral and written reports on its findings and recommendations. The PAC outlined four review elements to use in the review:

- Element 1: The administrative structure, staffing, and budgetary allocations in support of assessment in the division;
- Element 2: The identification of the divisional and unit goals and their alignment with the University mission statement;
- Element 3: The development of measurable outcomes and assessment tools for divisional and unit goals;
- Element 4: The utilization of data and analysis to inform improvements in the division and within units.

This report outlines the division’s Comprehensive Program Review (CPR) Model, describes how it operates, and evaluates its performance under each of the four review elements.

The CPR Model has proven to be a very powerful and effective tool for assessing an organization’s programs. The strength of the model comes from the enormous amount of information generated through a comprehensive system of review phases. Under the CPR Model, a single program is repeatedly reviewed by independent review teams, and each team builds on the knowledge gained from the previous team.

The CPR—A Comprehensive, Thorough and Inclusive Model

There are countless assessment models available that perform multiple program reviews. But very few can claim to be as thorough and inclusive as the Division of Student Affairs’ Comprehensive Program Review Model. The CPR intentionally involves a wide range of constituents in its review process, including members of the Division of Student Affairs, campus faculty, staff, administrators, students, outside professional reviewers, and community representatives.

The four-phase model includes a Preparatory Phase, which focuses on planning and preparation, and three program review phases:

1) a Self-Study Phase, which involves members of the Division of Student Affairs, 2) a Site Review Phase, which includes faculty, staff and administrators, and 3) an Outside Professional Reviewer Phase, which draws on the expertise of an outside professional. Most importantly, the model stresses student involvement and feedback throughout each phase of the review process.

An examination of the CPR was conducted using the PAC’s four review elements. While the division and its units scored well on a number of component elements, several areas revealed a need for improvement, and recommendations are made below for correcting these deficiencies.


Element 1—the administrative structure, staffing, and budgetary allocations in support of assessment in the division

The division has developed an elaborate and well-organized administrative structure for carrying out its assessment plans. All assessment activities are directed through the Vice President’s Assessment Council. This body serves as the quality assurance arm of the division. It is chaired by the division Vice President and supported by a cadre of veteran administrators.

To coordinate these efforts, the Vice President created the position of Assistant Vice President for Assessment and Co-Curricular Education (ACE). This individual serves as the Chief Assessment Officer for the Division and works closely with the Vice President, Assistant Vice President, Area Deans, and Directors to define and clarify division administrative structures for assessment, and assures that staffing, training, and resources are sufficient to sustain assessment across all division units. He also represents the Division on the President’s Assessment Council.

A second component of Element 1 relates to division staffing. This area is particularly troublesome to the CPR process. Currently, nearly two-thirds of all division programs are one- to two-staff deep. The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) Self-Study, which undergirds the CPR, requires a team of reviewers to complete the often grueling 14 review components that are included in the Self-Study Phase. This produces an enormous challenge to these programs. To get around this, we have pulled staff from different areas to offset short staffing. We are also experimenting with prioritizing the 14 CAS components to see if lower priority elements can be addressed later in the review cycle. But these are only temporary fixes, at best. Looking ahead, this situation is unlikely to change in the near future, given the current and projected state budget situation. To be sure, more creative solutions must be found to address this problem.

The final component in Element 1 relates to budget allocations needed to complete a full CPR cycle. The division deserves high marks in this area. Despite the tough economic realities that we have faced over the last few years, the division has always made assessment a funding priority. In the final phase of the CPR cycle (32 months into the process), the division spends four to five thousand dollars to bring in an outside professional reviewer. This covers the costs for the reviewer’s flight, hotel, rental car, and a small stipend. This is money well spent, when we consider that this person must examine the entire CPR process across all four phases, provide an oral and written report of all findings, and make sound recommendations for improvements.

Recommendations

- It is recommended that funds be made available in the President’s Office to cover the travel expenses and stipend for the PAC Outside Professional Reviewer;
- It is recommended that the OPR at the division level be selected from within the CSU system as a way to defray costs;
- It is recommended that the scheduling of OPR visits be regulated to avoid prohibitive expenses in any given year.

Element 2—the identification of the divisional and unit goals and their alignment with the University mission statement

A primary principle embedded in the CPR is that the division unit’s mission and goals be consistent with that of the host institution’s mission and goals. In fact, mission alignment represents the first of fourteen components and standards developed in the CAS. An example of this is described in Housing and Residential Life Program Self-Assessment Guide, which states,
The Housing and Residential Life Program must operate as an integral part of the institution’s overall mission. The Housing and Residential Life Program must incorporate student learning and student development in its mission and enhance the overall educational experience. HRLP must develop, record, disseminate, implement, and regularly review its mission and goals. Mission and goals must be consistent with the mission and goals of the institution and with the standards in [the CAS].

This same emphasis on mission alignment is repeated for all functional areas covered under the CAS.

In the course of this review, the division goals and the university mission statement were examined for alignment. Each of the division’s four goals was found to be in direct alignment with the University’s Mission Statement.

Recommendations

- It is recommended that all unit staff undergo training that focuses on alignment of division goals with the University’s Mission and the alignment of unit and division goals;
- It is recommended that all unit staff be regularly assessed on their knowledge and practice of aligning of division goals with the University’s Mission.

Element 3—the development of measurable outcomes and assessment tools for divisional and unit goals

The CPR stresses the importance of developing measurable learning outcome throughout each phase of the review process. The CAS Self-Study Phase specifically states that all programs “must identify relevant and desirable student learning and development outcomes and provide programs and services that encourage the achievement of those outcomes...” Further, that all programs “must provide evidence of its impact on the achievement of student learning and development outcomes.”

A review of evidence of division units’ learning outcomes reveals that most are still in the process of developing outcomes for their units. Most staff members have a general understanding of program outcomes; fewer, though, understand how to write relevant, clear, and measurable learning outcomes. Part of the problem stems from the influx of new untrained staff, compounded by a loss of veteran staff to higher positions at other institutions.

A final component to Element 3 pertains to the development and use of assessment tools to evaluate outcome performance. The review found that a variety of assessment tools are used both at the program and learning outcome levels across division units. For instance, the CPR is considered an assessment tool at a macro level to evaluate overall program performance. It also includes tools for evaluating individual student learning outcome performance. Both methods were also used in tandem in the directors’ training seminar.

Recommendations

- It is recommended that all unit staff undergo training to develop measurable outcomes and effective tools to evaluate program and learning outcomes;
- It is recommended that all unit staff be regularly assessed on their knowledge and use of measurable outcomes and tools to evaluate program and learning outcomes.
- It is recommended that the entire division be trained on the new 7th edition of the CAS Professional Standards for Higher Education scheduled for release in summer of 2009.

Element 4—the utilization of data and analysis to inform improvements in the division and within units

One of the unique features of the CPR is that program improvement is embedded in the overall review process. This is particularly apparent in the “Implementation of Action Plan” section of the CAS Self-
Study that includes worksheets and instructions for completing action plans. Once these plans are completed, the CPR provides approximately six months after each phase to implement the phase-specific recommended action plans.

Recommendations

- It is recommended that all unit staff are regularly assessed on understanding and use of data and analysis to inform improvement in the division and within units;
- It is recommended that the division increase the ratio in which it uses direct assessment methods over indirect student satisfaction methods;
- It is recommended that the division explore effective ways of assessing student development.

Looking ahead, copies of the Self-Study Report, along with supplemental documentation, will be prepared and sent to the outside professional reviewer and the members of the PAC. Subsequent meetings are also scheduled with the division Vice President, the PAC, and the President to discuss the information covered in this report and to obtain their feedback on areas for improvement.