Institutional Effectiveness Committee

Annual Report 2017-2018

**IEC Evaluation of the 2017-2018 Process**

As noted in last year’s report, the most significant change for this cycle was the new timeline. Instead of beginning the process in the fall, as has been the case historically, we instead began four months earlier, in spring. Programs for the upcoming cycle were given an orientation in May, with the hope being that the additional time would result in improvements in the two areas that have been the most challenging for this committee: 1. Submission of incomplete reports and 2. Submission of late reports.

Part of our process for the 17-18 cycle included evaluating the effectiveness of the new timeline.

**Findings**:

The committee discovered that the new timeline did little to increase either of the issues that we identified. While there were some programs that seemed to take advantage of the extra time over the summer, the majority of programs didn’t start work on their reports until the fall semester. The fact that their orientation to the process had been completed four months prior to them beginning the process, coupled with the fact that leadership for several programs had changed in the intervening months, resulted in the need for additional orientations and training sessions, many of which had to be conducted individually. Even with these additional sessions conducted throughout the fall semester, the majority of submissions were still late and/or incomplete.

The committee identified several key issues that contributed to the late and incomplete submissions. We noted that many of the reports were delegated to part-time faculty, who generally were unfamiliar with the process, who often were unable to attend scheduled trainings, who received little or no guidance or support from their program, and who received little or no compensation for the work. This situation, while certainly not new, was exacerbated by the fact that most of the programs up for review this year were headed up by part timers, with no full-time faculty to rely on for advice or precedent. Support teams from the committee met with the part timers regularly, and that helped with the logistics of completing the forms. However, these meetings were no substitute for the guidance and support that needs to come internally, from colleagues and administrators inside the program, who have a better sense of that program’s history, strengths and challenges, and vision for the future. This point was illustrated most plainly in the CTE reports. JPA, whose program has no full-time representative here on campus, had an assigned mentor, retiree Susan Dodd, to help the author navigate the process. Their report was submitted on time (it was the first one submitted, in fact), and complete. Revision suggestions were minimal. When contrasted with several other reports, many of which were authored by adjuncts unfamiliar with the process, and which were submitted late and/or incomplete, we clearly saw the benefit of having such a dedicated resource. The difference was significant, and indicate the crucial need for department and/or division oversight throughout the process, especially for the reports written by adjuncts in the absence of a full-time faculty member to anchor the program.

Another key piece of the puzzle this past cycle is the approach to data collection. In the past, programs up for review were supplied all the data sets necessary to complete the form; they had only to interpret those data. Since the Office of Institutional Research expanded its scope a few years ago and became Research, Planning and Institutional Effectiveness (RPIE), the task of gathering relevant data and integrating it into the self-study form fell to the individual programs. This shift has been challenging for the authors of the self-studies. During the 2016-2017 cycle, support teams worked closely with the individual programs but we knew that would be a temporary solution, as it was prohibitively time-consuming. For the 2017-2018 cycle, we included a tutorial in the initial orientation on how to handle the data. The accompanying power point was published on the IEC website. However, when classes resumed in the fall and people started getting serious about the self-study, there was still a lot of confusion about (and resistance to) this particular task. We were asked by the Fine Arts department to supply the data, as we had in the past. We explained again that the sheer volume of programs undergoing review made it impossible for the committee to continue to supply the data for everyone, and we offered to conduct another training in how to locate and integrate the data. That training took place during the fall semester, and was well-attended. Additionally, RPIE created a video tutorial that was published online for those who couldn’t make the training or who needed a refresher. That video has never been viewed since its publication. We heard nothing more about the data, and so assumed that everyone was feeling confident enough to complete the form, including the data.

We were surprised then when a number of rough drafts were submitted without the necessary data. These incomplete drafts were not confined solely to Fine Arts, but it is noteworthy that none of the Fine Arts draft contained the necessary info – except, rather ironically, the draft from Philosophy, which is the only report in the Fine Arts department that was written by a part-time instructor. All the rest were written by full-time faculty. None of them contained the data info needed.

In our suggestions for revision, we emphasized to those authors the importance of the data to our recommendations. We again referred the authors to the published video tutorial, and offered the assistance of the support teams during the revision process. We received no response. When the revisions came in still without the data, we had no choice but to submit the reports as they stand, without an accompanying committee-written Executive Summary. This is the first time since I became chair of this committee that we have been unable to complete an Executive Summary for any program, let along the majority of programs within one department.

The other drafts that were either late or incomplete were able to include the necessary data in the revision, which in turn enabled us to complete their Executive Summary. The process was long and unnecessarily frustrating for the authors and the support teams, however. Clearly, providing training on the process wasn’t much more of a solution than having the support teams working 1-1 with the program authors.

These were the two main issues that the committee faced in the 2017-2018 cycle. Analyzing the situation reinforced what we already knew: that the program review process is not only burdensome and difficult, but also close to meaningless for many. It’s clear that the work of the IEC self-study is not seen as particularly relevant to the “real” day-to-day work of the programs that complete it. It is a box to be checked off every few years, with no real impact on the program’s operations, goals or aspirations for the future. None of the changes we’ve made in the last several years, it seems, including the inclusion of the IEC recommendation in the budget process, has managed to make the IEC process any more relevant.

**Solutions**:

To address the problem of IEC relevancy, the committee is in the process of making several fundamental changes, which will start to be implemented in Fall 2018.

First, the name of the committee will change from the Institutional Effectiveness Committee (IEC) to Planning and Integrated Program Review (PIPR). This change emphasizes the planning and integration aspects of the self-study, which have been overlooked in the past. Many have seen the IEC program review only as a look back at the last few years of a program, with no real bearing on their goals for the future, and no integration with the larger institutional goals. The name change reflects a change in the core purpose of program review, from looking back on past performance to looking ahead to future goals, and a close look at how those goals integrate with the college as a whole.

Second, we overhauled the timeline and the principle actors in the process. Instead of having only a few months to complete their self-studies, which have historically been done rather hurriedly, in isolation and often by people who are remote from the larger integrated discussions, the new timeline would give them over a year. During that time, much of the preliminary work for the self-study would be completed first: the discussions of the larger issues facing the program, how it integrates into the other college planning committees, what resources they might need, etc. In this model, the self-study becomes a natural extension of the current Program Plans, which are completed every year and which generate budget requests, among other things. With this new process, programs under review would recruit a team of writers and evaluators from their area and other related areas, to conduct those discussions and decide how the writing of the report will be divvied up. By the time the draft of the self-study would be due, all the discussions germane to any attempts at planning would be already complete. This change will not only give programs more time to work on the report; it will also infuse the process with a sense of purpose that has been lacking up to this point.

Thirdly, we revamped the rotation schedule, putting all programs on a four-year cycle, in close proximity with other programs that share important resources, facilities, goals, personnel, etc.

Lastly, we streamlined the forms, making all the questions more relevant to planning and integration than before, and making it much easier to find and incorporate the data that has proven to be so pesky to so many in the past.

All these proposed changes are still in the pipeline, and the details are still being worked out through the various shared governance channels. Once we have the new protocol in place, we will conduct a series of evaluations to determine what’s working and what changes still need to be made. We are hopeful that these changes will do than any we’ve attempted in the past to address the problems that have bedeviled this committee so consistently.