Program Review Guide

Planning for the Next Program Review (Year 1)

External Review

In Year 1 your department will undergo an External Review. Taking place in the fall after you have submitted your six-year report, this consists of an expert from your discipline reading your report, visiting campus, and writing her or his own assessment of how you are doing. The department chair is responsible for identifying three-four qualified reviewers and submitting the External Reviewer Request and Authorization form to the Dean of Curriculum and Educational Effectiveness in the Spring semester prior to filing the six-year program review report. Read the External Review Guide as you are completing your Six-year Report to ensure that you complete the steps needed to perform the external review. Further details on this review and how to arrange it can be found here.

Review of Six-Year Report by the Program Review Committee

After careful reading of your report and discussion in committee, the PRC will write a response, which needs to be taken into consideration in the process of developing your Action Plan and Multi-Year Assessment Plan.

Conversation with the Provost and Dean of Curriculum and Educational Effectiveness

After the PRC reviews your report, you’ll meet with the Provost and the Dean of Curriculum and Educational Effectiveness to discuss what you learned. Hopefully by this stage, your department has already started to think about what’s next.

Identifying Key Questions for the Next Review Cycle, Action Plan, and Multi-Year Assessment Plan

Key Questions: In Year 1, your department will identify a series of key questions as it looks to the future. These will determine your program review work for the next five years.

“Key Questions” is a new concept. Simply put, these are the most important questions that your department wants answered during the next several years. They may be:

• Questions that emerge out of the Six-year Report, the external review, or the PRC’s response to your report.
• Questions that relate to aspects of your work that you have not assessed before.
• Questions that address areas where you know instinctively that your students could do better.
• Questions that address apparent obstacles to your department fulfilling its potential.

The goal is that your program review will be driven by what your department cares about most and needs to know most. At the beginning of the process, therefore, you should
discuss together what those things are. Some may be old, some new. But the core of your program review work will be finding answers to these questions.

A good number of Key Questions is two to four. Most of these will likely align with old or new learning outcomes (your Key Questions may require you to conceive of one or more new learning outcomes for your next review cycle). In addition, Key Questions may relate to any number of areas, including:

- The shape of your curriculum
- Your general education work
- Your students’ preparation for life after Westmont
- Teaching load distribution
- Student workload compared to other majors
- The financial basis of your program
- Diversity and your department
- Faith-learning in your program
- Are your current program learning outcomes the right outcomes for your program? Are they aligned with course learning outcomes and integrated into the curriculum map?

Remember that these Key Questions may overlap with your program learning outcomes. You might have a Key Question about how to help your students use digital resources well, for example. If so, craft a new learning outcome that reflects that and will be assessed in the next program review cycle. You may have an existing learning outcome about how your students gain knowledge in your field, as measured by national norms. That will probably be one of your Key Questions. The hope is that these Key Questions will encourage departments to think strategically about ways to improve their work.

To give an example: a department may decide that its key questions for the next several years are:

- a) How can we help students conduct better research?
- b) How can we help students to integrate their Christian faith with their study in the major?
- c) How might we adjust our curriculum in line with the changing demands of employers who hire our graduates?

The first two of these would require program-learning outcomes, which you might need to craft. The third would not unless your department has an experiential learning or internship requirement or component. For your review cycle, however, ideally you would want four learning outcomes. So you need two others, probably ones you have had before. Thus, in your next several years, you would work on the learning outcomes for a) and b), on answering and implementing c), and you would want to select two of your existing learning outcomes to continue assessing. Thus, key questions overlap with program learning outcomes, but are not synonymous with them.
As you come up with your Key Questions, remember that your program’s learning outcomes do not need to capture everything that your department believes to be important. They are simply a statement of what you wish to address in the coming years and serve as tools identifying what students will be able to demonstrate, produce or represent as a result of what and how they have learned in your program. Also, remember to check in with the Dean of Curriculum and Educational Effectiveness to see what the plan is for institutional assessment in the coming years: if you want to study your students’ writing, for example, it may be possible to line that up with college-wide assessment of that subject, and probably advantageous to do so.

Action Plan and Multi-Year Assessment Plan: By the end of this first year of the review cycle, your department will have identified approximately two to four Key Questions to investigate over the next several years. Most of these will relate to student learning, and you will want to plan carefully and make sure that you have appropriate learning outcomes to work with. You will then give your best shot at mapping out your program review work for the next five years: how you hope to address these Key Questions. This one- or two-page document, known as an Action Plan, will be examined by the Executive Team and the Academic Senate, who, along with the Provost, may ask you to address additional concerns.

If you wish, you may produce a second, one-page document: a Departmental Review Summary to be sent to the Executive Team and /or the Academic Senate. This will summarize:

- Your department’s chief accomplishments over the past several years.
- What you have learned from your assessment and program review.

This document will help the Executive Team know what academic departments are doing and what they need to do it better. Both the Departmental Review Summary and your Action Plan are due June 15. The Executive Team will review these documents in summer. You also need to produce a detailed Multi-Year Assessment Plan also due on June 15. This
documentation needs to be submitted to the Dean of Curriculum and Educational Effectiveness.