An Introduction to the Six-year Report

The next project on your horizon is completing your six-year program review report. It is important to recognize, however, that the report is only one part of the review of your department.

In many colleges, what we call the six-year report is called a self-study. This is your analysis of your department’s work — are your students learning what you desire them to learn; is your curriculum appropriate for their development in the discipline; do you have the staff and other resources necessary for your work; etc. Even if these previous efforts have not been altogether helpful with respect to program improvement, at the very least they may capture what has not worked, and may help to frame current conversations. For example, how are the current efforts to recruit more majors similar to or different than similar efforts and discussions from the past? On a different note, have all the recommendations made by the PRC in the past been addressed? How so? Note that the PRC does not collect any additional data in the process of evaluating your program review progress. It is the report that should showcase your program’s quality and accomplishments.

You will already have done much for your six-year report in years 2-5. This is where you pull everything together and provide answers to the Key Questions with which you started.

In addition, the six-year report asks you to take an overall look at your program. To use an athletic analogy: if your Key Questions are akin to the specific concerns and goals you take to a personal trainer, other parts of this report are akin to the series of diagnostic tests performed as part of a medical exam. You might want to run up hills more quickly, and a trainer will help in targeted ways; but the tests performed in the medical exam could reveal important obstacles to cutting your times. Some of your six-year report may, like a medical exam, feel routine or mundane, but the advantage is that the report will likely raise concerns of which you were unaware as well as provide answers to questions that you came in with.

Producing the Six-Year Report

A six-year report is a document that has struck fear into the bravest of chairs, but the PRC has been working hard to make this report more meaningful and manageable.

In the past, the department chair has typically written the six-year report. The department chair will continue to oversee the process and will likely do much of the writing. However, the PRC suggests that the department as a whole produce the six-year report with regular discussion among all faculty members and some writing by each. To that end, the Dean of
Curriculum and Educational Effectiveness provides modest grants for departmental retreats in order to discuss the report and maybe even write parts of it. Departments will be given a small stipend to cover their retreat expenses (meal, renting cost, etc.), which they use at their discretion. The PRC suggests that ideally the department take at least two one-day retreats: one mid-way through the sixth year, to discuss progress on the Six-year Report, responsibilities, and perhaps even to do some of the writing; and one in the Fall of Year 1 as the department begins to formulate its Key questions for the next time around. In order to be reimbursed, the department needs to provide: a) meeting agenda, b) notes on decisions made, and c) fill in the retreat box in the Multi-Year Assessment Plan Template.

As you think about how to produce the Six-year Report please visit the six-year report preparation page, which has further suggestions on how to get it done.

A suggested page length is included after each section heading (additional material can be placed in an appendix).

There are three major parts to your report:

I. Answers to Key Questions and Follow-up on the PRC’s Recommendations
II. Findings
III. Looking Forward: Changes and Questions

I. Answers to Key Questions and Follow-up on the PRC’s Recommendations (2-4 pages)

The central point of the six-year report should be to provide answers to the questions with which you began this process five years ago. If you are coming to this part of the document after a review cycle that started with Key Questions, you should begin your Six-year Report by outlining those questions and summarizing the answers you found.

It is likely, however, that you will be reading this as a department that did not start with Key Questions five years ago. Don’t worry. The start of your report should be a summary of what you have found in the course of the program review cycle that you are just completing and how you have addressed the PRC’s recommendations.

In either case, this is your chance to construct a narrative of what is important to your department, and to flag the most important parts of what follows. These pages will help your readers understand your department’s values and vision, and its current state.

II. Findings (8-10 pages)

To return to an earlier analogy, if your Key Questions are your visits to your personal trainer, this Findings section is your medical exam. The two overlap substantially; nevertheless, this part of your six-year program review report includes a variety of standard ways of measuring what you are doing.

The PRC has selected the categories below from a longer list, wishing to require only those diagnostics that they feel are critical.

If your department participated in the Institutional Learning Outcomes assessment, your students’ results are meaningful for your program. Please include them, your interpretation, and the actions taken or to be taken in your report.
A. Student Learning (3-4 pages)

In this section of the report, the department should reflect on their students’ learning over the preceding four years, especially as they relate to your Key Questions. The focus will be on the program learning outcomes selected for this period. This is an opportunity for you to discuss whether your students are achieving some of the knowledge, skills, and virtues that you believe they should through the major.

This discussion will focus on the assessment work you have done since the department’s last six-year report. It is advisable to collect both quantitative and qualitative data for your discussion. If you consider using student focus groups click here for some tips. If you plan to survey your students, click here for suggestions.

Reflect on the evidence you have collected. What are the most important things that you have learned about your students’ abilities? Are they performing at the level you would expect? (this is the place to examine benchmarks if you have them, or set some if you do not). Are your students meeting your program standards or benchmarks? As you answer these questions, it is helpful for people not in your discipline (such as PRC members and WASC team members) if you can put much of your data in charts.

Given that this section brings together your assessment work from the preceding four years documented in your annual reports, there is an opportunity here to highlight the changes you have already made in light of what you have learned. You should also talk about what changes you still wish to make.

You should also comment on how effective you felt your assessment work was. Did it allow you to measure student learning effectively? Did it provide you with the information you need to improve your work? Discuss possible ways to make assessment more useful for your department.

In a later section, you will be asked to lay out your plans for the future, many of which will likely emerge from your comments in this section.

Central questions for A. Student Learning:

a. Substance
   • What did you learn about your students’ learning?
   • How did this help you answer your Key Questions?
   • Did your students meet the standards or benchmarks you established (if appropriate)?
   • What changes have you made and/or do you plan to make to improve student learning?

b. Assessment methodology
   • Are your annual assessment results giving you useful information for improving your work?
   • How effective are your current methods for truly assessing student achievement?
   • What changes do you plan to make to improve your assessment work?

B. Alumni Reflections (1 page)
Surveying alumni has proved a useful way for many departments at Westmont to learn about how well they are accomplishing their goals. The process is easier than you might think, with the Director of Network and Services (John Rodkey) and Assistant Server and Network Administrator (Jon Taylor) able to help you get an electronic survey up and running. Click here for the alumni survey template. If you want to develop your own survey please consider the following tips. The Director of Advancement Services (Mary Dombek) can give you the data you need for contacting your alumni, as well as any information she has about their postgraduate education, employment information, etc.

As you craft your survey questions, think about how your alums might help you to answer your Key Questions. In general, questions should focus on your alumni’s experience of the major, how well they believe it prepared them for their various vocations, and what they are doing now. In the report, you should comment on what you learned from the survey, and discuss changes you may wish to implement to address any areas of concern. A conversation about how you as a department define success for your students would also be of interest.

For more information on how to complete this section of your report, visit the following page.

Central questions for B. Alumni Reflections

- How happy are your majors with your program and specific aspects of it?
- How well did the program prepare them for life after Westmont?
- What changes, if any, will you make in light of what you learned?
- What light did these discussions shed on your Key Questions?

C. Curriculum Review (2 pages)

This review provides an opportunity for the department to reexamine its curriculum to see if it is set up as well as possible for student success in the major and life beyond.

Curriculum should not be defined narrowly. Perhaps conversations with colleagues at other institution may be helpful with respect to the overall philosophical framing of the major and the implications of that framing for pedagogy, emphases within courses, advising and so forth. If direct conversations are not feasible than perhaps studying written materials such as the catalog would be helpful.

After looking at your existing curriculum, curriculum map and PLOs alignment chart, are you content with the courses currently offered by your department? Are there holes or ways that resources could be allocated more effectively to help students learn what they need to learn? Is the major structured well, so that students can progress from more rudimentary exposure to the key learning objectives to more advanced expressions? Do you PLOs cover multiple levels of mastery, including the highest cognitive levels (evaluating and creating)? Discuss whether you offer enough courses at each level of sophistication. Address your Key Questions as appropriate.

Outside sources can be helpful in answering these questions. Some departments have found that alumni surveys have highlighted gaps in their majors. Consult materials produced by professional or disciplinary organizations, which may provide a sense of
national trends for your major. You should also compare your department’s program with those of several peer institutions.

If GE courses constitute a significant part of your curriculum you need to report on student learning outcomes in those areas as well as curriculum related issues there.

**Central questions for C. Curriculum Review**

- How well does your program provide opportunities for students to learn disciplinary knowledge, skills etc.?
- Are there ways you could structure your major more effectively?
- Is more effective sequencing of courses possible?
- Do you offer an appropriate range of courses each year?
- What changes do you wish to make? Or should some aspect of your curriculum be one of your next set of Key Questions?
- Is your curriculum comparable to curricula of similar departments at our peer institutions?

**D. Program Sustainability (1 page)**

The basic question that needs to be addressed here is whether your department is likely to be around in ten years’ time! There are two parts to this, which may or may not relate to your main Key Questions.

First, is your department attracting and graduating an appropriate number of students? There are departments that do not produce many majors but provide education to other majors. You may also consider the number of minors offered by your department.

As part of this discussion, take a look at the gender and ethnicity of your graduates, and compare the percentages to those for the college as a whole. Bill Wright, Associate Provost, can provide you with all the data you need for this section. If your answers to any of these questions aren’t what you would have hoped, discuss how you can address these issues. They may become one of your next Key Questions.

Second, how does your major serve society or contribute to Westmont’s education? Is your program well-adapted to survive and thrive in a rapidly-changing higher education environment? This may be a wide-ranging discussion in which you examine the state of the various professions that your students gravitate toward as well as the transferable skills they acquire. Information from your alumni survey will likely be relevant here. In addition, your discipline’s professional organization may provide information on the employability of students with degrees in your field. Are there any changes to courses or curriculum you need to make in light of your findings here?

There may be something to be gained from talking about sustainability issues with comparable small departments around the country. Are other departments of 4-5 relying more on part-time adjunct faculty? Are they sharing faculty with other departments of the college?
Third, provide an analysis of the trends and projections for enrollment in the program’s including majors, minors, and General Education courses if applicable, and respond to challenges and opportunities of your program.

Central questions for Section D. Program Sustainability

- Is your program attracting and graduating a good number and a good mix of students?
- How does your program meet current and potential needs in society and in relevant professions?
- How is your department serving other programs?
- How does your program contribute to Westmont’s educational experience?
- How does your department respond to existing challenges and opportunities?
- Are there changes you should consider in response to this section?

E. Additional Analysis

There may well be other questions that you need to ask, other information that you need to gather, in order to answer the questions at the heart of your six-year report. If so, this is the place to put your findings and your conclusions of your work on these additional fronts. Below is a list of items that might fit into this section, but there are many more possibilities. Remember that if you are requesting significant additional resources for your department you need to complete an analysis of your finances and include the analysis in your report.

1. General Education – especially if your department GE offerings constitute a significant part of your curriculum. No assessment of student learning outcomes is required.
2. Finances
3. Faculty Quality
4. Advising
5. Student Survey
6. Employers’/Internship Supervisors’ Survey
7. Facilities
8. Interaction with Other Departments
9. Faith-Learning in Your Program
10. Collaboration with the departmental Library Liaison

When you finish your data analysis complete the Inventory of Educational Effectiveness for your program. This document helps your program to demonstrate how faculty expectations for student learning are aligned with student performance. This exhibit can also assist you in determining whether you have a reliable assessment system in place, and what additional components or processes you may need to develop. The college will draw upon or reference this document in preparing its institutional reports.
It is also important that you 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.

III. Looking Forward: Changes and Questions (1-2 pages)

This section asks you to take what you have learned from your work of assessment and program review and look to the future.

First, identify the changes you have made or plan to make as a department in light of what you have learned. These could include modest changes, such as adjustments to courses or curriculum, as well as bigger dreams that would require substantial institutional support. It would be ideal to have a list of changes that includes items that span this range. Departments should be aware that, given limited resources, applying for significant additional resources from the institution is akin to applying for a grant. Strong proposals will be grounded in thorough analysis of the program, its budget, and clear evidence for the need. As with grants, however, you may receive what you asked for or you may not. Your vision for the future and the changes you plan to make should not be largely dependent on hitting the jackpot.

As part of this first section, you should also look at your department’s mission and vision statements. In light of what you have found through your program review, are they still what you need and want them to be?

Use your findings and reflections for drafting your Action Plan and Multi-Year Assessment Plan. This section also includes a first draft of Key Questions for your next review cycle.

Follow-up to the Six-year Report

Hopefully it’s clear that once a department has completed its Six-year Report they return to the first year of the cycle, which includes an external review, a response from the PRC, discussions with the Provost and the Dean of Curriculum and Educational Effectiveness, a report to the Senate on Key Questions, review of the new Key Questions, an Action Plan, a Multi-Year Assessment Plan and an optional Executive Summary for the Executive Team. The department chair may be invited to the Academic Senate to discuss the departmental Action Plan and Multi-Year Assessment Plan. Hopefully, by the time you get to this point, you will have seen results from the work in the previous cycle, and will be ready to go back to the work of improving your program. Following your June 15 submission, the department will receive the Provost’s response with the input of the E-Team and the Senate.

Required Appendices for Six-Year Report

Below is a list of basic materials (data/evidence) that should be referenced in your Six-Year Report. You are not limited to this list. If you have additional evidence that supports your report, include it in the appendices.

Required Appendices and Filled-In Templates

1. Program mission, vision, goals and program learning outcomes for the current six-year cycle or the link to the documents posted on the departmental website
2. Summary of assessment results for every PLO (preferably in the form of a table or a chart)
3. Rubrics and assessment instruments for every PLO
4. Reports on closing the loop activities for every PLO (may be included in the Appendix 2)
5. Relevant syllabi for major changes in the curriculum such as a new capstone course, senior seminar, internship requirement, experiential learning course, etc.
6. Curriculum Map and the PLOs Alignment Chart or the link to the document
7. Alumni Survey
8. Peer institution comparison (can be incorporated in the body of the report)
9. Full-time faculty CVs
10. Core faculty instructional and advising loads
11. Faculty race/ethnicity and gender breakdown
12. Adjunct faculty profiles
13. Student race/ethnicity and gender breakdown
14. Student graduation rates
15. Review of library holding (to be developed in collaboration with the departmental library liaison)
16. Internships report (if applicable)
17. Budget
18. Inventory of Educational Effectiveness Indicators
19. Draft of Action Plan
20. Draft of the Multi-Year Assessment Plan
21. External Reviewer Request and Authorization Form (for to be submitted in the spring semester prior to submitting the six-year program review report by departments not accredited by external agencies)

Recommended Worksheets and Templates
1. Timeline for Six-year Report planning
2. Site Visit Schedule template

Report Writing Tips and Tools
1. Responsibility for the Program Review
2. Six-year Report Preparation Tips
3. Focus Group Tips
4. Survey Development Tips
5. Who Can Help Your Department with the Six-Year report?
6. Program Adaptability Template
7. Full Time Faculty Work Load
8. Adjunct Faculty Teaching Load
9. Overview of proposed changes

Required Program Review Documents to be filed by Departments

1. Six-year Report with Appendices
2. An External Reviewer’s report and Reviewer Summary Sheet (if your program is not accredited by an external accrediting agency).
3. The PRC’s response
4. Action Plan Detailed Multi-Year Assessment Plan with Key Questions for the next cycle

Optional Documents

1. Departmental Review Summary/ Executive Summary
2. Letter to the E-Team or the Academic Senate

Glossary

Teaching and Assessment Glossary

Teaching and Online Dictionary of Student Outcome Assessment developed at James Madison University allows you to search for assessment and program review-related terminology.