2023 Assessment Institute in Indianapolis

Program Review: Purposes, Perspectives, and Processes

Stephen P. Hundley and Associates

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Workshop Objectives

1. Identify the purposes and significance of program review

2. Describe various processes to program review

3. Recognize perspectives of various roles related to program review

4. Reflect on, plan for, and/or improve program review options in your own institutional context

Workshop Outline

1. Introductions and Context
2. Program Review: Purposes
3. Program Review: Processes
4. Preliminary Q&A
5. Break
6. Program Review: Perspectives
7. Action Planning and Conclusion
8. Discussion and Q&A

Introduction

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Quick Audience Introductions

How many colleagues are from 2-year institutions?
4-year institutions?

How many colleagues teach exclusively at the graduate or professional level?

How many colleagues are in programs that are accredited by a discipline-specific body?

How many colleagues have been working with program review for 5 or more years?
How many colleagues are new to program review?

Small Group Discussion and Report-Outs

In small groups, choose:

Timekeeper, Scribe, and Spokesperson

Answer the following questions:

What is your definition of program review?

Why is program review important?

What questions do you have concerning program review?

Program Review: Purposes

Program Review Purposes

- Improvement

- Accountability

- Though not mutually exclusive

- Overview of evaluation models: Input, Connoisseur, Goal-Based, and Hybrid (each explained on the following slides)

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Input

- Reputational

- Rankings

- Resources

- Disadvantage: doesn't look at impact of the institution on student learning

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Connoisseur

- Relies on an outside evaluator

- Possible disadvantage: could have missed opportunities to collaborate internally

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Goal-Based

- Goals clarified

- Indicators are defined

- Achievement data collected

- Results compared to pre-set criteria

- Disadvantage: used alone, can omit important unintended outcomes; the *appropriateness* of goals are not assessed

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Hybrid Approach

- Evaluates both goals and processes

- Leverages the benefits of prior models

We Know the <u>WHAT</u> But What About the …

When

- Reoccurring?
- Screening?

Why

- Formative?
- Summative?

Who

- Internal?
- External?
- Combination?

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When

- Reoccurring Model (Cycle)
  - All departments are put on a 5-, 7-, 9-year cycle

- Screening Model
  - Data is reviewed for all departments and based upon results departments are flagged for a comprehensive review
  - Indicators such as enrollment drops, lack of critical mass of faculty, loss of accreditation, and lack of evidence that goals are being accomplished trigger a review

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Why

- Formative
  - ▪ Improving programs, generally internal
- Summative
  - ▪ Accreditation, generally external

- Why not Both?
  - ▪ Coordinate mandatory summative reviews for accreditation with formative internal reviews

Who

- External peer reviewer

- Internal reviewers

- Again, why not both?
  - Look to your mission and strategic plan for the answer
  - How does the mission and strategic plan inform program review?

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Using Results from Program Review (some examples)

- Matching money from graduate school to fund public scholars

- Faculty encouraged to go up for promotion and/or tenure

- New deans review findings with department chairs to better understand the department and to clarify goals

- Program creation or expansion (or new tracks/specializations)

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Using Results from Program Review (some examples—continued)

- Reorganization of departments

- Reallocation of resources

- Dean of IT on a team took action based upon meeting with students

- Faculty member from another department discovered avenues of collaboration

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Important role of Peer Reviewers in Program Review

- Throughout 2022, the theme of Editors' Notes in *Assessment Update* was "Peer Review in Assessment and Improvement: Five Principles to Promote Effective Practice." (excerpt available in electronic handout packet for this workshop)

- Peer review has long been used in the higher education sector to serve a variety of purposes and meet the needs of several audiences.

- Activities supportive of assessment and improvement—such as Program Review–rely on peers to enhance cultures of evidence and learning

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Principle #1, Recognize the Purpose of the Peer Review Process in Higher Education Assessment and Improvement

- Defining peer review

- Identifying appropriate peers

- Understanding the strengths and challenges to peer review processes

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Principle #2, Value the Multitude of Perspectives, Contexts, and Methods Related to Assessment and Improvement

- Understanding perspectives

- Acknowledging contexts

- Employing appropriate methods

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Principle #3, Adopt a Consultative Approach to the Peer Review Process

- Determining how a consultant differs from other forms of peer review roles

- Engaging in the consultative process

- Recognizing considerations for consultants

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Principle #4, Make Effective Judgements Using Inclusive Sources and Credible Evidence

- Seeking inclusive sources for the review process

- Using credible evidence

- Attending to the purpose, scope, and context of the review

Principle #5, Provide Relevant Feedback to Stakeholders

- Identifying how and by whom feedback will be used

- Determining the timing and nature of feedback

- Developing action-oriented recommendations, observations, and considerations

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Program Review: Processes

Consider

1. **What is your institutional context?**

2. **What does Program Review look like at your institution?**
   - **What is the purpose?**
   - **What is the frequency?**
   - **Who is involved?**
   - **What steps are involved?**

IUPUI's Context

IUPUI is Indiana's **urban research** and **academic health sciences campus**.

IUPUI's mission is to advance the State of Indiana and the intellectual growth of its citizens to the highest levels nationally and internationally through **research and creative activity**, **teaching and learning**, and **civic engagement**.

Overview of Program Review

1. Centrally-sponsored evaluation activity that is improvement-oriented

2. Focus is on the program

3. Pledge to Higher Learning Commission of our commitment to ongoing review

Program Review Process at IUPUI

Planning → Development → Site Visit → Reaction → Implementation

Phase 1: Planning

1. **Cohort kickoff meeting**

2. **Program identifies a list of potential reviewers**

3. **Reviewers are invited to participate**

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| Planning | Development | Site Visit | Reaction | Implementation |

Phase 1: Planning			
Ideal Timeframe	**Item/Action**	**Submit to**	**Who is Responsible/Involved**
12 months before visit	Schedule meeting to plan review for each Program Review "cohort" Share "Purpose and Process of Program Review" document at meeting	School Dean/Vice Chancellor (or designee) and Department Chair/Program Leader	Director of Institutional Improvement and Program Review Coordinator
12 months before visit	Send Program Review self-study elements and suggested reviewer list (including current roster of PRAC members) following kick-off/planning meeting Request dates to consider for the review and list of potential reviewers Offer to have Director of Institutional Improvement (co-)facilitate self-study brainstorming session with department/unit	Department Chair/Program Leader	Director of Institutional Improvement and Program Review Coordinator
12 months before visit	Schedule individual program-specific meeting to discuss timelines and expectations	Department Chair/Program Leader and Director of Institutional Improvement	Program Review Coordinator
12 months before visit	Review list of potential reviewers with Dean/Vice Chancellor (Dean/VC to appoint IUPUI internal reviewers); Dean/VC signs off on list of potential reviewers	Dean/Vice Chancellor (or designee)	Department Chair/Program Leader
12 months before visit	Send department description, list of potential reviewers, and potential dates for the review	Program Review Coordinator	Department Chair/Program Leader
12 months before visit	Invite reviewer participation by email	Potential Reviewers	Program Review Coordinator
12 months before visit	Send email confirmation to Review Team members	Review Team Members	Program Review Coordinator

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Phase 2: Development

1. **Self-study development**

2. **Development of schedule, in concert with program director**

Self-Study Development

- Self-Study Elements Documents

- Strategic Consultation from PAII

- Cross-campus collaboration and data gathering

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Phase 3: Site Visit

1. **Review team orientation**

2. **Review team conducts site visit**

3. **Review team sends final report**

IUPUI Program Review
Considerations in Developing Program Review Team Reports

Program reviews at IUPUI are periodic, improvement-oriented processes aimed at enhancing the program's effectiveness. We conduct such reviews of academic departments/programs, research centers/institutes, co-curricular/student affairs programs/services, and other campus support units. The process is both reflective and regenerative for the program; we do *not* take a "justify your existence" mentality with program reviews.

Each program has its own unique context, activities, outcomes, and stakeholders. As a result, we provide flexibility in developing the program reviewers' final report. Keep in mind the *primary audience* for the report is colleagues in the program, including program leadership. Please adopt a consultative, improvement-minded perspective and address the report to your peers. A *secondary audience* includes both leadership in the unit in which the program resides and IUPUI campus leadership. All audiences appreciate a succinct, well-written report to which all members of the review team contribute. Review team reports are due within one month of the site visit. The Program Review Coordinator will confirm the "due date" with the Review Team Chair following the conclusion of the site visit.

Executive Summary
Provide an executive summary to serve as cover material for the final report. In the executive summary, include the following:

- The top strengths (3–5) of the program, as evidenced by the program review process.

- The top challenges (3–5) of the program, as evidenced by the program review process.

- The top issues or opportunities (3–5) emerging from the program review.

- The review team's top recommendations for the program.

Review Team Final Report
Following are some general considerations that may be helpful in thinking about how to structure the report:

- Brief recap of the program review process, including highlights from the self-study, stakeholders consulted during the site visit, and supplemental materials reviewed.

- Responses to questions posed to the review team in the program's self-study.

- Priorities and recommendations for the program to consider adopting. These could be organized:
  - By *major themes*, including addressing either a situational analysis (internal strengths and weaknesses; external opportunities and threats) or as a summary of what is working well and areas for improvement;

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Phase 4: Reaction

1. **PAII has meeting with program to process report and engage in planning**

2. **Program creates an action plan**

3. **PAII provides assistance through the process**

IUPUI Program Review
Review Team Report Response Action Plan Worksheet

This document is designed to aid in identifying recommendations from the Review Team report to guide action planning. This action plan will identify department-level actions and goals to address the recommendations. Completing this worksheet will aid preparing for the IUPUI Program Review Response Report shared in advance of the Program Review follow-up meeting.

Complete the table below, adding additional rows as needed.

Program: **Date(s) of Review:**

Review Team Recommendation	Action(s) to Address Recommendation	Timeline	Responsible Individual(s)	How Progress Will be Measured or Assessed
#1				
#2				
#3				
#4				

Data Needs: List any data needed to respond to recommendations made in the report. Indicate the recommendation number, along with potential sources of data.

Additional Information: List and discuss any additional context, considerations, or necessary resources related to the recommendations made in the report.

Connections to PRAC and Annual Strategic Plan Reports: Describe any potential connections between recommendations and activities described in the unit's Program Review and Assessment Committee (PRAC) and Annual Strategic Plan Reports. *Note:* A conversation with the unit's PRAC representative(s) is recommended.

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Phase 5: Implementation

1. **Program implements recommendations**

2. **Program reports on implementation of improvements**

3. **Program connects with Program Review and Assessment Committee (PRAC) representatives for inclusion of information in subsequent PRAC report**

4. **Program invited to participate in Program Review Panel at PRAC meetings**

IUPUI Program Review
Response Report Elements

Program leaders and colleagues will develop a follow-up report of approximately 3–6 pages (1,000–1,500 double-spaced words) to respond to the Program Review team report and provide updates on implementation of improvements. Links to websites, documents, and other resources may be embedded in the report, and appendices may provide additional relevant supporting materials as necessary.

A. Executive Summary*
1. 200–250-word description of the program review process, including an overview of findings and recommendations from the Review Team.

B. Report on Progress of Implementation of Improvements Toward Recommendations
1. Identify recommendations from the Review Team's report.
2. Describe the program's planned—and implemented—actions to address these recommendations, along with the associated timelines and responsible individuals.
3. Detail the measurement, evaluation, or assessment activities related to the implementation of these recommendations.
4. List and discuss any additional context, considerations, or necessary resources related to progress toward the recommendations made in the report.
5. Provide status updates on implementation activities.

C. Connections to Program IUPUI's Review and Assessment Committee (PRAC) and Annual Strategic Plan Reports
1. Briefly highlight connections between the implementation of improvement activities to address the Program Review team recommendations and activities described in the unit's Program Review and Assessment Committee (PRAC), and Annual Strategic Plan Reports, DEI Strategic Plans, and/or other unit-specific planning documents.

*_Note_: The Executive Summary should be written to be public-facing, as it will be used on the IUPUI Program Review website to summarize the Program Review.

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Consider

1. **What is your institutional context? How does your institutional context inform your Program Review process?**

2. **What does Program Review look like at your institution?**

Preliminary Questions and Break

- What questions do you have?

- What points of clarification are needed?

~BREAK~

Program Review: Perspectives

Perspectives

- **Concerns, challenges, and expectations perceived by:**
  - Faculty
  - Chairs
  - Deans and academic leaders
  - Campus administrators

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Program Review Panel

Panelist Introductions

Conversation

Audience Q&A / Discussion

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Action Planning and Conclusion

Small Group Discussions and Report-Outs

In small groups, choose:

– *Timekeeper, Scribe, and Spokesperson*

Think about Program Review in your own institutional context:

What are the present strengths? What are the present weaknesses?

What are the future opportunities? What are the future threats?

What actions emerge from SWOT Analysis?

What are the roadblocks to implementing program review at your institution?

What are possible next steps for implementing/adapting program review at your institution?

Discussion and Q&A

Discussion and Q&A

Questions or comments about Program Review?

What recommendations or suggestions do you have?

Program Review Resources

Visit:

planning.iupui.edu/assessment/index.html

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Program Review: Purposes, Perspectives, and Processes

Stephen P. Hundley and Associates

Throughout 2022, the theme of the Editor's Notes in *Assessment Update*, a bimonthly publication from Wiley with a national readership, was ***Peer Review in Assessment and Improvement: Five Principles to Promote Effective Practice***. Peer review has long been used in the higher education sector to serve a variety of purposes and meet the needs of several audiences. Activities supportive of assessment and improvement also increasingly rely on peers to offer credible subject matter expertise in respective contexts, provide judgments, develop recommendations for enhanced performance, and make contributions to creating and sustaining a culture of continuous improvement and innovation.

The five principles to promote effective practice in peer review for assessment and improvement are:
1. Recognize the purpose of the peer review process in higher education assessment and improvement.
2. Value the multitude of perspectives, contexts, and methods related to assessment and improvement.
3. Adopt a consultative approach to the peer review process.
4. Make effective judgements using inclusive sources and credible evidence.
5. Provide relevant feedback to stakeholders.

Principle #1: Recognize the Purpose of the Peer Review Process in Higher Education Assessment and Improvement

This involves defining peer review, identifying appropriate peers, and understanding the strengths and challenges to peer review processes.

Defining Peer Review

One enduring feature of the higher education ecosystem is its use of peers in processes to generate, evaluate, disseminate, and curate knowledge. Indeed, peer review is often a hallmark of academic work, where the breadth of its scope, responsibility for its activities, and respect for its results is widely recognized (Banta 2002; Hammann &Beljean 2017; Webb & McEnerney 1997). Peer review is often employed for a variety of important academic purposes, including:
- *scholarly*, where peers within a discipline or knowledge domain determine the appropriateness of topics, methods, analyses, and conclusions in the development of published works or comparable creative artifacts;
- *technical/professional*, where peers use specialized knowledge and expertise in providing consultation to or evaluation of work in each context; and

- *improvement-oriented*, where peers provide feedback to individuals, programs, services, or institutions for the purposes of strengthening educational goals, processes, and outcomes.

Peer review processes typically involve a "triggering event" for a review, such as an editor of a publication receiving a new manuscript for consideration, a program director desirous of seeking initial specialized accreditation for their program, or a faculty member preparing to advance in academic rank. Decision makers then select peers to review appropriate artifacts and make judgments in accordance with the goals of the peer review process. These peers may come solely from a narrowly defined discipline, field, professional identity, or area of specialization; alternatively, they may represent interdisciplinary, cross-functional, or boundary-spanning perspectives. Feedback is provided by peers and used by decision makers to determine next steps in each context (e.g., to publish a manuscript, to accredit a program, to grant tenure or promotion to a colleague). To ensure information from peer review yields optimal utility, it is important for decision makers involved in orchestrating peer review processes to exercise care and attention in identifying appropriate peers.

Identifying Appropriate Peers

Peers are often individuals who are regarded as subject matter experts in a particular domain, and they usually have educational and professional preparation and experiences comparable to those desirous of and reliant on the peer's perspectives, judgment, and feedback. Depending on the purpose of the peer review process, peers may be local in nature (e.g., within the institution), represent a valued external constituency (e.g., community members, employers, or alumni), have an "arms-length" distance from the activity under review (e.g., colleagues from the discipline or profession working in other institutional settings), or a peer review team may be comprised of a blend of these roles.

The type of review informs which peers are appropriate to engage, and such peers have the potential to contribute to a variety of worthwhile activities. These activities include reviewing faculty teaching; evaluating faculty members for tenure and promotion purposes; making judgements about the significance and quality of scholarly contributions; participating in periodic, internally oriented program review processes; serving on accreditation teams; and facilitating assessment and improvement activities taking place within learning experiences in a variety of contexts.

Decision makers involved in peer review processes can seek peers from a variety of potential sources. In highly structured processes—such as those related to accreditation or publication activities—an existing roster of pre-determined or -selected peers may exist. For other ad hoc activities—such as those related to periodic internal program review or evaluation of colleagues for potential advancement in rank—decision makers may seek recommendations from colleagues locally or elsewhere, leverage existing groups within professional associations or disciplinary societies, or identify individuals from peer or aspirant programs or institutions from which potential reviewers may be invited to participate in the peer review process. Regardless of the source from which peers are drawn, it is necessary to understand the strengths and challenges associated with peer review processes.

Understanding the Strengths and Challenges to Peer Review Processes

Those reliant on peer review outcomes often do so with the realization there are inherent strengths and challenges to such processes. *Strengths* of peer review include the engagement of credible experts who can provide an objective, critical, and often external view of a particular activity. Ideally, such peers will provide feedback to decision makers that is actionable for ongoing improvements. Finally, peer reviews allow an opportunity for reflection and renewal by those stakeholders benefitting from the process.

Challenges associated with peer reviews are the resources—including time and finances—needed to effectively engage peers in the process. Relatedly, it may also be difficult to identify and seek commitment from appropriate peers to participate in peer review activities. Feedback received from peers may not fully appreciate the goals of the review or the context in which work occurs. For example, recommendations may be too resource dependent or range from being either too friendly or too judgmental. Finally, without proper alignment to and integration of peer review with other activities or valuing of the process by those stakeholders reliant on its outcomes, peer reviews may be perceived as having little value or merely as a bureaucratic imposition.

The potential for peer review to make important contributions to assessment and improvement activities is significant. Indeed, as Banta (2002) reminded us, such reviews "can encompass all aspects of the life of an academic department—from the credentials and research interests of faculty members to the methods they use to demonstrate student learning—and the collective judgment of peers is the form of departmental assessment most universally accepted by faculty" (p. 183). Defining peer review, identifying appropriate peers, and understanding the strengths and challenges to peer review processes are important first steps. Concurrently, it is also necessary to *value the multitude of perspectives, contexts, and methods related to assessment and improvement*.

Principle #2: Value the Multitude of Perspectives, Contexts, and Methods Related to Assessment and Improvement

This involves understanding the various perspectives of constituents in the peer review process, acknowledging the various contexts informing peer review, and employing appropriate methods to facilitate the associated peer review activities.

Understanding Perspectives

Perspectives in peer review include those various viewpoints of reviewers, stakeholders, and decision-makers. If, as Hamman and Beljean (2017) suggested, "the primary form of recognition that counts in the world of academia is peer recognition" (p. 6), then the value of peer review is often maximized by *leveraging and incorporating feedback from multiple peer reviewers*, including internal colleagues, external subject matter experts, community members, and other important constituents of the activity undergoing review. These multiple peer reviewers can bring to bear their various disciplinary backgrounds, subject-matter-expertise, and

experience engaging with the program, unit, or service under review. For example, internal colleagues may be able to provide contextual knowledge based upon their own internal understanding of the organization, often with an "arm's length" perspective. Similarly, external reviewers may provide a disciplinary perspective informed by their own work and engagement with national or international professional organizations. Likewise, community members can provide important insights, whether through sustained activity with the unit under review or through perceptions of how the unit engages with the embedded and surrounding communities, however defined.

Stakeholders include *administrators*, who may sponsor the peer review process or contribute to financial budgeting and allocation at the institution; *faculty and staff* of the activities involved in the peer review process; *students and alumni* who are often direct beneficiaries of learning activities and interventions; and *partners*—including those on-campus, in the local community, or elsewhere—who make specific learning contributions or receive the benefits of the activities under examination through the peer review process. *Decision-makers* are individuals at various levels who lead and champion the work being peer reviewed and are often able to affect change as an outcome of feedback received from reviewers. Such decision-makers are most often those faculty or staff members who receive feedback from peer reviewers and are tasked with implementing the ongoing improvement-oriented activities recommended through the review process.

Acknowledging Contexts

Contexts for peer review in assessment and improvement include both the type and scope of activity undergoing peer review and its placement in the activity lifecycle, along with the institutional culture for assessment and improvement, the motivations for peer review, and how outcomes from peer review processes are used. The *type and scope of activity undergoing peer review* may vary. The type of activity may include a single assignment, course, program, process, experience, scholarship, or even a person, team, or unit. Alternatively, the activity under review may be comprised of a collection of connected units of analysis from the preceding list. Accordingly, the scope of the review may exist within a single organizational unit, such as a program or department, or may exist in a larger organizational structure, such as an academic unit or other division within the institution.

The *placement in the activity lifecycle* similarly merits consideration. It is important to acknowledge and understand in what phase the activity under review exists: start-up, growth, maturation, declination, retrenchment, or discontinuation. Each of these phases have important implications for the reviewers—both in understanding the activity under review, as well as in how they might prioritize and provide feedback to respective decision-makers. The *institutional culture* is another significant consideration. The peer review process will feel different at an institution where assessment and improvement are viewed positively—perhaps even enthusiastically—than it will in a setting where these activities are perceived as burdensome, onerous, or as a waste of time. Similarly, the *motivation for review* is important; an internally motivated, improvement-oriented process will differ significantly from that of an externally mandated process, through which activities are held up to a minimum set of outside standards.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge and understand the *outcomes of the peer review process*, including when and how results and feedback will be used, how the process aligns and integrates with other valued or strategic activities at the institution, and potential benefits and consequences of the peer review activities. In planning the peer review process, it is imperative to consider the appropriate contexts on which to focus, thus enabling decision-makers benefitting from the review to be enabled and empowered to implement appropriate improvements based upon feedback provided through the review.

Employing Appropriate Methods

The methods employed in the peer review process are often informed by the goals and scope of the activities being reviewed. Such *methods* may include a blend of direct, indirect, quantitative, and qualitative approaches to data gathering; use in-person, virtual, hybrid, or independent review of artifacts; involve observations, interviews, focus groups, and document analysis; rely on individual or team judgements; and range from highly prescribed or structured to highly emergent or semi-structured review processes. When considering methods to utilize during the peer review process, it is important to *consider and value disciplinary norms and traditions* coupled with general best—or promising—practices in higher education. The discipline and institutional setting can provide context and explanation for operations and activities, but cannot be an excuse for poor behavior, performance, or outcomes. As Sowcik et al. (2013) observed, "program critique and feedback should be based on triangulation of data versus a single source and based on the mission, outcomes, and goals of the specific program under evaluation" (p. 69). As such, peer reviewers must deliberately consider the suitable methods to employ during the review, while balancing them with the appropriate perspectives and contexts inherent in the respective review process. To address these concerns, it is necessary for reviewers to *adopt a consultative approach to the peer review process*.

Principle #3, Adopt a Consultative Approach to the Peer Review Process

This involves determining how a consultant differs from other forms of peer review roles, engaging in the consultative process, and recognizing considerations for consultants.

Determining How a Consultant Differs from Other Forms of Peer Review Roles

In the context of assessment and improvement activities, effective peer reviewers often adopt a consultative approach to their work. This involves reviewing information, querying stakeholders, evaluating evidence, making judgements, and generating recommendations. Such a consultative approach entails having the peer reviewer serve as a "critical friend" to the program, entity, or context undergoing review, along with understanding desired roles, behaviors, and expectations of a consultant.

A consultant differs from other peer review roles, such as evaluator or accreditor, although there are not always sharp distinctions between these roles. An *evaluator*, for example, makes rational judgments about an entity or activity being reviewed, often maintaining neutrality and objectivity during the process. An *accreditor* typically uses agreed upon standards to determine the extent to which programs meet minimal compliance to those standards, usually for

the purposes of making assurances to an external body—the accreditor. While a *consultant* would be expected to make rational judgments and use any agreed upon standards in performing their work, the role is best conceived of being similar that of a coach to the principals involved in the review process. As such, a consultant examines the strengths and opportunities for improvement, along with making recommendations that consider the context and culture in which the individual, program, or unit works. They do so through constant engagement with the principals involved in the review process—not from an "arm's length" distance that tends to characterize other forms of peer review (Halonen & Dunn, 2017; Lubinescu et al., 2001; Luo, 2010).

Engaging in the Consultative Process

To be effective, those involved in a consultative process of peer review for assessment and improvement need to embrace the approach as one that has merit and can produce results that improve both processes and outcomes (Schein, 1997). For consultants, such a process typically involves several stages: preparation, entry, engagement, analysis, feedback, and exit.

- *Preparation:* recognizing the purpose of the review process, making a commitment to serve as a peer reviewer, and reviewing relevant background materials (self-study, course portfolios, student learning artifacts, etc.).

- *Entry:* becoming familiar with the review context, making introductions to the principals involved in the review process, setting ground rules for the engagement, and understanding of the intended uses of the review process.

- *Engagement:* following the agreed upon schedule and framework for the review, displaying appropriate behaviors (e.g., courtesy, respect, dignity, professionalism), asking appropriate questions, and seeking additional information to augment emerging findings and impressions.

- *Analysis:* reviewing information and artifacts uncovered during the review process, synthesizing and summarizing notes from meetings/interactions/observations with stakeholders involved in the process, making judgments about sources of strength and opportunities to improve, and developing recommendations appropriate to the review's purpose and context.

- *Feedback:* framing recommendations informed by the review process, organizing recommendations so they have utility and meaning for the entity or activity undergoing review, linking recommendations to external standards or promising practices in the discipline or profession, and offering recommendations that are typically not overly reliant on one singular resource or action for their effective implementation.

- *Exit:* returning or destroying any confidential materials used during the review process, agreeing not to disclose aspects of the review to others, providing feedback on the review process, and, if appropriate, being available for follow-up queries from program principals.

Recognizing Considerations for Consultants

Throughout the consultative process stages, there are considerations consultants need to keep in mind as they engage in peer review for assessment and improvement purposes. Among other actions, these include bringing subject matter expertise to bear, evaluating the currency of the entity undergoing review, and avoiding certain reviewer tendencies.

- *Bringing subject matter expertise to bear:* A consultative approach may include bringing content knowledge and professional expertise to the review process. This may include perspectives on curriculum and sequencing, disciplinary standards and norms, interaction with and contribution to scholarship, industry engagement (as appropriate), etc.

- *Evaluating the currency of the entity being reviewed:* A consultative approach necessitates that peer reviewers determine the contemporary relevance of the entity undergoing review. This involves making comparisons to trends in the discipline or profession, examining the composition and qualifications of program principals relative to external norms or standards, and recognizing how various stakeholders of the entity undergoing review have their needs and expectations met.

- *Avoiding certain reviewer tendencies:* A consultative approach is best served with reviewers avoid making comparisons to the reviewer's own institution, instead making comparisons to "industry" norms/expectations/best practices, to include "peer" units or programs identified by the entity under review. Reviewers also need to maintain appropriate boundaries and avoid "going native" by becoming too involved in the individuals, programs, or units they are reviewing, thus taking on too much of an advocate role rather than that of consultant (O'Reilly, 2009).

Such a process produces actional recommendations for the principals involved in, and other beneficiaries of, the entity being reviewed. To develop these recommendations, it is necessary for reviewers to *make effective judgments using inclusive sources and credible evidence*.

Principle #4, Make Effective Judgements Using Inclusive Sources and Credible Evidence

This principle underscores a principal role of peer reviewers in their assessment and improvement work—determining who are "inclusive sources" and what counts as "credible evidence" in reviewing the program, unit, service, or activity. The goal is to invite and promote a multiplicity of sources to inform themes. To this end, "program critique and feedback should be based on triangulation of data versus a single source and based on the mission, outcomes, and goals of the specific program under evaluation" (Sowcik et al. 2013, p. 69). Coupled with efforts to triangulate data and information from various sources, are the need for recognition of the context and environment in which the program, unit, service, or activity under review exits and acknowledgement of the scope of the request of the review. Taken together, these concepts and activities allow peer reviewers to make effective judgments about the state of the entity under review.

Seeking Inclusive Sources for the Review Process

Making effective judgements relies on peer reviewers ensuring all necessary stakeholder and other perspectives are included in the review process of the entity or activity undergoing review. Depending on the context, such perspectives might include a combination of the following:

- Students
- Faculty and staff members
- Administrators
- Alumni
- Internal partners (including those in co-curricular, research, global learning, community engagement, and professional development contexts)
- External partners (including those in experiential, community, and international contexts, along with other institutions in partnership or consortia arrangements)
- Disciplinary and professional associations and accreditors
- Program and institutional peer or aspirant benchmarks
- Best/promising practices as reflected in a review of the higher education professional literature and discipline-based educational research literature

Ideally, reviewers will have the opportunity to interact with as many stakeholders as possible to collect the perspective from several "inclusive sources." Reviewers should be attentive to those stakeholders with whom they interact or otherwise receive information. In addition to those stakeholder groups who are represented in interactions, reviewers should also note those groups *without* representation during the review process. This may require inquiring how stakeholder groups were identified and solicited, selected, or invited for participation.

As peer reviewers engage in their analysis of feedback from stakeholders, it is also necessary for them to endeavor to identify and contextualize isolated incidents, patterns of behavior, and systemic issues. Appropriately identifying in which category stakeholder experiences belong is as much art as it is science and should draw upon the reviewers' experience and judgement. Nonetheless, the act of considering stakeholder feedback and its frequency or pervasiveness should yield information about what is working well, what are areas for improvement, and what are specific recommendations or observations to provide the entity under review.

Using Credible Evidence

In addition to incorporating stakeholder and other perspectives in the peer review process, it is necessary for reviewers to insist on and use credible evidence in making judgements (Banta & Palomba, 2015; Ludvik, 2018). Based on the purpose of the entity being reviewed, evidence may be sought from one or more of these contexts: individual; course or program; support service, function, or initiative; or institutional.

- *Individual:* Evidence here may include a review of teaching philosophies; curricula vitae; instructional materials, such as syllabi and assignments; scholarly artifacts,

including publications, presentations, or grants awarded; assessment findings and their uses; professional development experiences undertaken; contributions to important initiatives, such as diversity and inclusion, retention, student success, and mentoring activities; and other reviews, including peer reviews of teaching or formal performance evaluations.

- *Course or Program:* Evidence here may include a review of course goals, including student learning outcomes; curricular maps and assessment plans/reports; direct evidence of learning, including assignments, student ePortfolios, tests or exams, performance in capstones or in applied settings, and other relevant measures (e.g., licensure or professional certification); indirect evidence of learning, including feedback through course evaluations, surveys, focus groups, and exit interviews; GPA and retention data; post-graduation information (e.g., job placement and advanced education plans/experiences); the resource base to support the course or program; and, increasingly, disaggregated data to uncover equity gaps and opportunities for improvement in courses and programs.

- *Support Service, Function, or Initiative:* Evidence here may include a review of the goals or mission of the entity being reviews; the resources allocated to support the work; progress and outcome reports on the effectiveness of goal attainment; feedback from stakeholders; and elements of professional practice identified from appropriate external sources (e.g., functional area standards from the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education).

- *Institutional:* Evidence here may include a review of institutional mission, vision, and values statements; strategic and academic plans; the fiscal health of the institution; productivity measures and cost analyses; rankings and reputational studies; feedback from accreditation reports; internal systems, processes, policies, and procedures to govern/manage the institution; and alumni, philanthropic, and community engagement activities.

Attending to the Purpose, Scope, and Context of the Review

As peer reviewers make effective judgements, they need to recognize the broader environmental contexts in which the program, unit, service, or activity under review exists and operates. This recognition entails placing the activity in its proper setting for comparison. Several factors—environment, personnel, resources—may exert their influence on outcomes and performance. As such, peer reviewers need an understanding of satisficing vs. maximizing— accepting an outcome or result as good enough as opposed to the best, or optimal, result—related to the activity being reviewed, with an appreciation of the activity's resources, contexts, and priorities. Although there may be an ideal scenario or outcome of the program under review, no activity exists in a vacuum and a variety of mediating factors may impact the ultimate result or product of the entity under review. Peer reviewers need to be able to recognize these factors or influences and understand the scope and magnitude of their influence, using this knowledge to inform not only their judgement through the review process, but also their recommended priorities and actions.

Peer reviewers also need to keep in mind the scope of the review and remind themselves—and others involved in or benefitting from the peer review process—of the type of information the reviewer is being asked to provide. This includes understanding the intended audience(s) of the review and culminating recommendations, along with the areas of focus of the review. Often in a request for peer review, there may explicit areas about which the entity under review would like insights, feedback, and recommendations. Although it is often not necessary to solely limit perspective-taking during the review process to a single focus, it is incumbent upon the reviewers to ensure there is emphasis on the topic or area about which they are being asked to provide perspectives. For example, in a program review for an academic department, it is important for reviewers to understand if they are being asked to focus on the curriculum, staffing structure, resource allocation, student profile, community engagement, or some combination thereof. Additionally, it is important to understand and acknowledge if recommendations might include seeking additional resources or if reviewers are being asked to offer creative recommendations or opportunities for how programs can maximize existing resources.

Ultimately, effective peer review processes yield outcomes that can make a positive difference to enhance the performance of individuals, learning environments, programs, and institutions. This requires peer reviewers to *provide relevant feedback to stakeholders*.

Principle #5, Provide Relevant Feedback to Stakeholders

This principle highlights that effective peer review processes yield outcomes that can make a positive difference to enhance the performance of individuals, learning environments, programs, and institutions. To do so, peer reviewers must identify how and by whom feedback will be used; determine the timing and nature of feedback; and develop recommendations and observations.

Identifying How and By Whom Feedback Will be Used

Each instance in which a peer reviewer is engaged in lending their expertise to assessment and improvement activities has its own unique context, activities, outcomes, and stakeholders. This requires peer reviewers to provide relevant feedback to the respective stakeholders of the review in which they are engaging. In the case of an external program review, for example, Sowcik et al. (2013) noted, "Outcomes of an external review include greater awareness of the program's strengths and weaknesses, in addition to the opportunity to identify threats and areas of growth for program enhancement" (p. 69). To align these outcomes with the priorities of the peer review process, there should be an understanding of the format in which feedback is expected and the intended audiences and uses for feedback.

Peer reviewers must be familiar with and appreciate the audiences for the feedback provided as an outcome of the peer review process. This understanding may be closely aligned with understanding and attending to the purpose, scope, and context of the review—as discussed in Volume 34, Number 5. For example, in a program review for a cocurricular department, reviewers ought to understand the primary and secondary audiences for the feedback. In some instances, the primary audience for the feedback may be the staff and practitioners in the

department under review, with the secondary audience comprising leadership within the division and other campus administrators. As another example, peer reviewers engaging in a review of materials for the purposes of evaluating the performance or outcomes of an individual faculty member in a promotion and tenure process may direct feedback to review committees and administrators involved in the decision-making process—often by placing the faculty member's work in its larger disciplinary context.

Finally, it is imperative for peer reviewers to understand how feedback will likely be used. Will such feedback be considered as part of the evaluation process for an individual or program? Is feedback intended to jump-start processes such as curriculum revision or strategic planning? Will it be used to inform resource prioritization or (re)allocation, including implications for physical, technological, fiscal, and human resources? Or is the feedback to provide for stakeholders a holistic understanding of the quality and viability of the program, unit, service, or activity under review?

Determining the Timing and Nature of Feedback

The timing of feedback—*formative*, to make improvements vs. *summative*, to provide evaluations—also needs to be understood and used to inform peer review processes. Similarly, the nature of feedback from peer reviewers is most useful when reviewers embody the consultative approach, or that of a "critical friend"—as discussed in Volume 34, Number 3. Peer reviewers should strive to provide responses that neither serve as "champion" nor "detractor" of the activity under review, but instead provide feedback related to strengths, opportunities for improvement, and additional factors reliant on the peer reviewer's role or vantage point. Feedback that considers the specific context in which the individual, program, or unit works—instead of the reviewers' own context, for example—can signal to recipients that the reviewer understands and appreciates the unique aspects of the activity undergoing review.

Feedback from peers often involves specific recommendations. Thus, care and attention are necessary to prioritize actions, including identifying sequential or interdependent actions and the time or resource implications associated with recommendations. In some instances, it may be necessary for the recipients of feedback to grapple with differing perspectives held by multiple peer reviewers—either from reviewers as part of a multi-reviewer team or from feedback received by multiple individual reviewers. Recipients of feedback must also situate the information they receive within their respective context, including linking the findings from the peer review process with other related processes (e.g., planning, budgeting, merit reviews).

Developing Recommendations and Observations

Peer reviewers are often asked to develop recommendations as a result of their engagement in a review process. Depending on the scope of the review, such recommendations may be organized in varying ways, including:
- By *major themes*, including a synthesis of information uncovered as part of the review or through addressing any questions posed to the reviewer at the outset of the process.
- By *stakeholder groups consulted*, including students, faculty, administrators, alumni, or campus and campus partners.

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- By *recommendation audience*, including individual faculty or staff recipients of feedback, program leaders, colleagues in areas supporting the activity under review, or unit/division/campus leadership.
- By *time/cost horizon*, ranging from immediate and low-cost to longer-term and high-cost implementation.
- Any *combination of the above* that emerges based on how the review process unfolds.

Peer reviewers ought to be judicious in making recommendations solely contingent on resource (re)allocations. For example, in the case of a program review, all programs could likely benefit from an infusion of resources, including personnel, money, and space. Whenever possible, reviewers should endeavor to offer creative recommendations or opportunities for how programs can maximize existing resources or pursue alternative revenue streams in advancing their missions and ensuring their continued quality and vitality.

Not all feedback takes the form of a specific recommendation. Indeed, reviewers may be in the position to offer *observations* to the recipients of their feedback. As an example, a reviewer may observe how interpersonal dynamics unfolded within a particular setting—such as a senior faculty member's comments having a seemingly chilling effect on their junior colleagues' willingness to engage in further discussion. When reporting observations, it is often helpful for reviewers to identify what was observed and the significance or implication of the observation, while avoiding the temptation to make a value judgement or develop specific recommendations. Such observations made by reviewers may help decision-makers understand the contextual factors associated with the activity under review, including corroborating prior experiences or impressions held by stakeholders.

The use of peer review for assessment and improvement provides third-party perspectives on a range of activities—from individual assignments, courses, and instructors to broader program, service, and institutional resources and interventions. For optimal results, stakeholders involved in the activity under review need to respond to feedback, adopt recommendations, and institutionalize components of the peer review process. Doing so requires a commitment by leaders—at all levels—to appreciate the role peers can play in providing useful feedback and leverage the peer review process as one vital component in assuring and strengthening quality in higher education.

Summary

We began our discussion with a broad view of peer review—a hallmark of the higher education sector to serve a variety of purposes and meet the needs of several audiences—and worked through five principles of effective peer review practice. These principles are intended to guide, support, and enable peers to offer credible subject matter expertise in relevant contexts, provide judgments, develop recommendations for enhanced performance, and make contributions to creating and sustaining a culture of continuous improvement and innovation. We wish you success in incorporating these principles in your specific settings and contexts, whether these include reviews of teaching; evaluations of academicians for tenure and promotion purposes; making judgements about the significance and quality of scholarly contributions; as part of periodic, internally oriented program review processes; as colleagues serving on

accreditation teams; or part of assessment and improvement activities taking place within learning experiences at the course, program, and institutional levels.

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