Background and Guidelines for Departments Preparing for the Five-Year Comprehensive Review

Comprehensive assessment reviews begin and end with the department offering the program under review. The process starts when the staff of the department prepares a Comprehensive Program Assessment Report and ends with the department staff implementing improvements derived through the review process in conjunction with relevant college agencies. The review is comprehensive in that it evaluates program effectiveness on each of the program's objectives. It seeks to understand the whole of the program's efforts in an integrated way. The review process supports assessment and improvement efforts in that it is focused on student outcomes, principally student learning outcomes as measured by data collected through assessment processes.

The goals of this activity are 1) to permit departments to reflect on objectives and possibilities for innovations in a comprehensive manner and 2) to focus the attention of college planning agencies on specific programs and the totality of their activities and needs. Relevant planning agencies include the Curriculum Committee, the budget group (FIDC and the President's Council), the Long Range Facilities Planning Committee, and the President's Council among others. We expect comprehensive reviews to provide substantial attention to individual programs such that college-wide resources can be brought to bear on program improvement beyond what is possible through annual incremental changes. Principal responsibility for pursuing recommendations that come from the comprehensive review remain with the department (or program staff) that operates the program. The Vice President for Academic Affairs (or other member of the President's Council as appropriate) has secondary responsibility for pursuing the recommendations and monitoring their implementation.

The role of the Assessment Committee in the review cycle is threefold. First, the committee serves to facilitate reviews, helping programs to gain the knowledge and resources necessary to conduct an assessment that is useful to the program and to the college. Second, the committee meets with program staff to reflect on the assessment report and its implications. This reflective process is not one in which the Assessment Committee evaluates the program under review or seeks to substitute its judgment for that of program staff. Monmouth College is committed to the idea that professionals in the disciplines are best qualified to make evaluations of program quality and are the most committed to making improvements. The committee's role in the reflective process is to insure that the review is comprehensive, fundamentally based on data reflecting outcomes, especially student learning outcomes, and linked clearly to program objectives and college purposes. Third, the committee has responsibility for distributing the results of comprehensive assessments to the appropriated groups and individuals on the campus.
The Comprehensive Review Report

This comprehensive review process begins with the preparation of a Major Program Comprehensive Review Report. While primary responsibility for this report rests with the appropriate department head or chair, the development of the report involves the entire staff of the program. After notification of the impending Comprehensive Review by the Vice President for Academic Affairs, the department uses the Fall Semester to prepare the report.

The report itself describes departmental activities in support of the program under review and summarizes relevant assessment data collected in the preceding years. The purpose of assessment data analysis is to determine strengths and weakness in meeting program objectives and to support the options for program improvement presented. Typical reports are organized as follows:

Section I. Description of Activities and Recent Innovations in Support of Program Objectives. (Beginning with a program’s second comprehensive assessment review, this section will also review the effectiveness of innovations growing out of previous reviews.)

Section II. Presentation and Interpretation of Assessment Data and Related Information (organized in subsections by program objective)

Section III. Summary of Program Strengths and Weakness

Section IV. Presentation of Options for Program Improvement (including curricular and other program adjustments and resource needs)

Assessment data and related information used in the report can include many materials but primary emphasis is placed on information that documents program outcomes, especially student learning outcomes. Strength and weakness analysis is normally discussed in relation to program objectives and college purposes. Options for program improvement can take a variety of forms. They may include any of the following: plans to revise program activities, requirements, staff responsibilities or curricula; proposals for additional resources, new forms of departmental or college support and emphasis, curricular and other program adjustments, etc.