

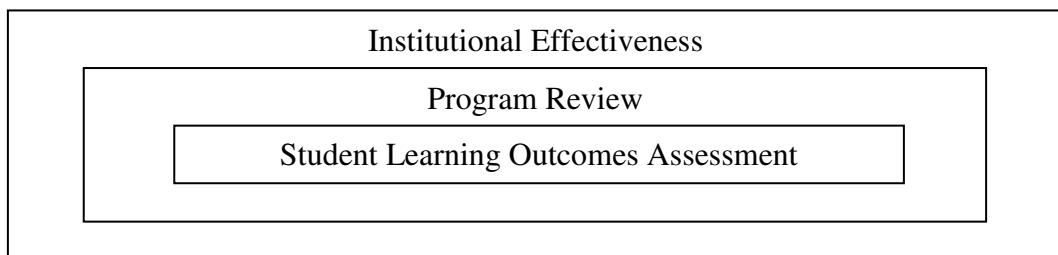
Introduction to Program Review

Every successful organization must continually determine if it is accomplishing what it sets out to do. This fundamental logic underlies program review, but is often lost amid the details of actually conducting a review. Related to this are frequent misunderstandings about the use of review results. Certainly, it can be satisfying to have written evidence of program successes, and it is sometimes necessary to document program results to people outside of the program. However, the essential use of program review is as a guide to the future of the program; program review is absolutely necessary for the health and continuous improvement of a program.

The program review process at Mesa Community College will occur once every four years for each program, according to a scheduled cycle. Reviews can also be conducted on an “as needed” basis in between. For example, faculty might wish to review a program when there is a change in the program’s philosophy or goals, the curriculum, the mode of delivery, or even in location.

This document is intended to provide academic and occupational areas conducting program reviews with a framework for how to proceed with their work.

It is intended that these guidelines be detailed and prescriptive enough to give clear guidance to those people who will begin the program review process, yet flexible enough to allow each program to develop a review process that best meets its particular needs. The paramount practical application of program review is to determine the extent to which the program is meeting its intended mission and goals and to set future direction of the program. Program review is part of the college’s institutional effectiveness agenda. Embedded within program review is a component that directly assesses student academic achievement by measuring explicitly stated student learning outcomes. While program review occurs every four years, formal assessment of student learning is done annually and is part of the college’s Student Assessment and Continuous Improvement Plan. The context for program review within the institution is illustrated below.



Conducting the Review

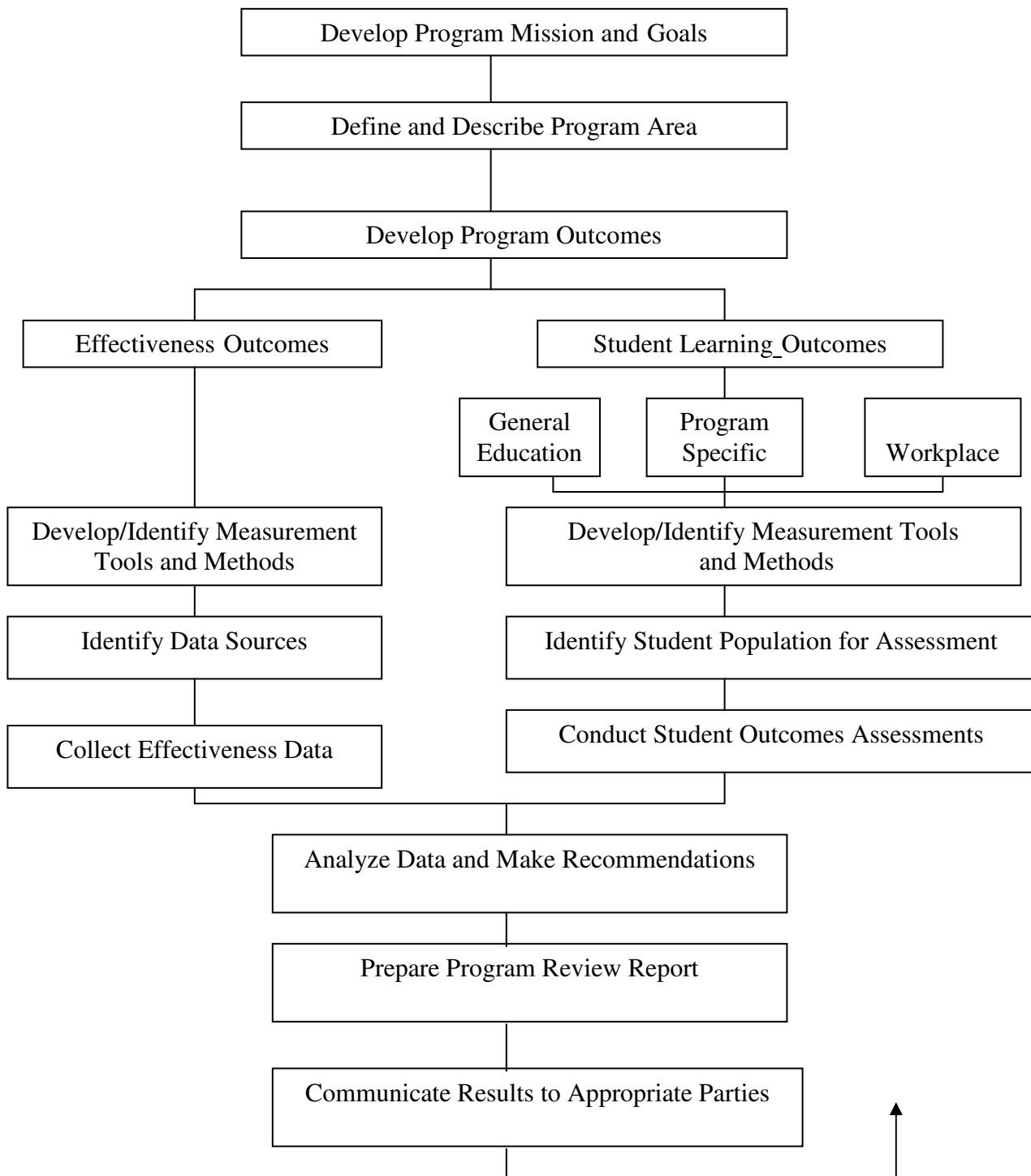
There are many logistical considerations related to program review, such as timing, deciding who will be involved, developing/identifying measurement tools, methods, data collection, and writing the report.

For most programs, the entire review process will be accomplished in one academic year. In some instances, if there are complex program components, if multiple data collection instruments have to be designed and large surveys conducted, or if a program is under development, the process may carry over into a second academic year.

The responsibility for conducting the review of each program will rest with the academic department having immediate jurisdiction over it. The review will be carried out by a departmental program review committee composed of faculty/staff in the program and will include the department chair. While program review need not be a complicated and confusing process, it can become time consuming, and the more people who can constructively contribute to the review the better. Ideally, everyone in the program will recognize that they should play a part in making sure that the review is valid and worthwhile; a well done review will benefit the program. As those involved in the review deem it necessary and practical, others, such as colleagues outside the program with experience in program review, current students, alumni, outside experts and consultants, can be included in the review process.

Program Review Process and Procedures

The flow chart diagram below illustrates the major steps to the program review process. Each step is described in more detail in the remainder of this section.



Develop Program Mission and Goals

The **mission statement** includes a broad description of the program's philosophy, purpose, role, and scope, which clarify the program's intentions for the future. It defines why, what, and for whom the program exists. The mission statement of a program within Mesa Community College should be linked to the college's mission. Typically, faculty seek participation of external constituents (such as representatives from employer groups, four year institutions, or the community at large) in helping to develop or review the program mission. These constituents may comprise a program advisory board or there may be a less formal structure for gaining participation.

In developing a mission, it helps to examine the purpose of the program by asking questions such as: *What groups of students is your program intended to serve?* And *Is the program designed primarily to:*

- prepare students for transfer?
- prepare students for career entry?
- provide "service" to other programs?
- promote development of basic skills?
- provide service to business and industry?
- provide service to the community?
- other?

The **program goals** are general statements that describe where the program is headed. They are the vital areas where activities should be focused in order to achieve the mission—what you want to accomplish through the program. They should be clear enough so that judgements can be made about their attainment. An example of a program goal for the Transfer Program in Accountancy is "...to enhance students' ability to succeed at a four-year institution."

Consider the following questions as you develop the program goals:

1. Do the goals reflect the input of appropriate individuals inside and outside the college?
2. Do the goals describe what you want your program to do in the future, especially if that is different from what it is doing currently?
3. Would you be able to obtain evidence that the program goals had or had not been met?

Define and Describe the Program Area

Any structured educational activity with specific goals and outcomes can be defined as a “program”. While it may appear obvious initially, sometimes defining a program for purposes of review is difficult. Programs are NOT departments, although in some cases, such as Nursing, the department’s sole responsibility is the Nursing program. In most occupational areas, a program consists of an area that confers A.A.S. degrees and/or certificates. But the Philosophy department, for example, does not have any programs completely within its jurisdiction. Rather, the Philosophy department will likely find itself being asked for information in support of other program reviews, and it will certainly be one of the participants in the review of the A.A. degree. And certificate programs should be reviewed as part of the A.A.S. degree with which they are affiliated. The people conducting the program review should first agree that the area is indeed a program and that the review is being done at the appropriate programmatic level.

Once the program is defined, it should then be described. The program description delineates the “inputs” that comprise the program (i.e., what is involved in offering the program). There are many questions which could be used to help guide you in writing the program description. In order to maintain a focus on measuring program effectiveness and student outcomes, your responses to the following questions are most important in describing your program:

1. What is the employment outlook for those students in your program? Identify your source of information.
2. Who are the currently enrolled students who are pursuing your program’s A.A.S. degree and/or Certificate of Completion?
3. Who are the program completers who have received your program’s A.A.S. degree and/or Certificate of Completion in the past 5 years?
4. What has been the success of your program completers in finding employment in positions related to the training you provided/skills they learned?

Develop Program Outcomes

The public, federal and state legislators, accrediting bodies, students and parents are demanding more accountability from institutions of higher education. They want to know what products or outcomes result from the monetary investments that go into education. This focus on accountability creates a challenge for educators to make explicit statements about what will happen as a result of various educational efforts; i.e., to publicly state desired outcomes and to provide evidence that those outcomes were achieved. Therefore, outcomes are an important component of program review.

Outcome statements describe in specific and operational terms exactly what is expected to result from the program. There are two types of outcomes:

Effectiveness Outcomes. These statements describe specific characteristics of a program's effectiveness. They are closely linked to the program's mission and goals. For example, if a goal is to prepare students for employment in their area of study, a related outcome might be that 90% of graduates gain employment in their area of study within six months of graduating. Assessment of effectiveness outcomes typically involves describing program results numerically: how many students were successful in transferring to a four-year institution, how many students obtained employment in the field in which they earned an occupational degree, how satisfied were students with the program, how satisfied were employers with graduates' performance on the job, and so on.

Student Learning Outcomes. These statements describe what students will be able to do, what they will know, and/or attitudes they will hold at the end of the program. Program level learning outcomes are more than an accumulation of course objectives; rather, they reflect a synthesis of what is expected from students at the completion of an entire course of study. They are assessed at least every year so that the college can document what students learn in the program; results help to identify areas of strength or areas for improvement in the curriculum.

For occupational programs there are three categories of student learning outcomes: general education outcomes, program-specific outcomes, and workplace outcomes. It is possible that many of the general education outcomes have been stated as part of the work of the general education clusters working on student outcomes assessment. Occupation-specific outcomes describe the student abilities related to the needed performances and knowledge base for a particular occupational field. Finally, workplace outcomes include those skills and abilities needed by all workers regardless of their area of specialization (for example, punctuality or working in teams).

Develop/Identify Measurement Tools, Methods and Data Sources

In every instance, outcomes need to be stated explicitly before any measurement tools are developed or acquired. Both types of outcomes described above will be measured as part of program review. The appropriate measurement depends upon what is stated in the outcome and what types of questions need to be answered in order to determine whether the outcome was achieved. The measures need to correspond directly to the outcome statements and their corresponding questions. Developing or identifying good measurement tools involves some technical skills that may or may not exist within the program faculty. Staff from MCC's Office of Research and Planning can assist faculty in developing or identifying good assessment measures. Measures used to assess the two types of outcomes are described below:

Measures of Effectiveness Outcomes. These types of outcomes will likely require the use of a survey, interview, or some other technique to gather information about program graduates. For example, if the outcome states that “Graduates will express a high level of satisfaction with the program one year after graduating”, then a graduate satisfaction survey would need to be developed. If the outcome is successful transfer to a four-year institution, then student records would need to be tracked by ID number to the receiving four-year institutions and indicators of success would have to be established.

Depending upon what types of effectiveness outcomes are being measured, possible sources of information to document effectiveness might be records from other institutions of higher education, employers, student alumni, and the business community.

Measures of Student Learning Outcomes. Measures of student learning should directly assess what is stated in the outcomes. For example, if an outcome states that students will be able to “complete a police report on a traffic accident,” then the assessment should require the students to do just that, perhaps through a simulated activity. An assessment that requires the student to complete a multiple-choice type test about procedures for completing a police report would not be an appropriate measure of the outcome. Furthermore, course grades or GPA’s are not considered to be direct measures of student learning for several reasons: course grades are not “above the course level”; there are wide variations in how grades are assigned; there is not consistency in what is measured to make a grade determination. In most cases, faculty will need to develop assessments that measure their specific program outcomes unless a commercially-developed test can be identified that measures the same student outcomes stated by the faculty.

The source of data to document the attainment of student learning outcomes is always the student. Employer opinions about students, academic records and other documentation may provide interesting insights about the program, but they cannot be considered direct measures of student learning.

Collect the Assessment Data

The next step in the program review process is actually to gather the necessary information using the measurement tools identified or developed. This may involve a variety of techniques and it will definitely require some initial planning. Data collection can easily get out of hand if appropriate planning is not done well in advance. Good planning results in good data that can then be managed and used for decision-making.

In collecting data about effectiveness outcomes, several questions should be addressed early-on prior to collecting the information. For example:

- If surveys are to be conducted, to whom should the surveys be sent and to whom should they be returned?
- Who will summarize and analyze the information?
- If graduates are to be contacted for phone interviews, how many graduates need to be contacted? Where will the contact information be obtained? What resources will be needed?
- If records from other institutions need to be obtained, what are the appropriate channels for proceeding? Are there any issues related to confidentiality that need to be addressed?

In assessing student learning outcomes, a different set of questions can be anticipated, such as:

- Do all students need to be formally assessed or can the student population be sampled?
- Where and when will the assessment be administered?
- Are there any special procedures that need to be developed for doing the student assessment? (For example, will students be in a simulation-type environment that needs to be set up ahead of time?)
- Are there special considerations related to scoring the assessments? (For example, do faculty need to be trained to use certain criteria to score student responses?)

Analyze the Data and Write Recommendations

The appropriate plan for analyzing data about effectiveness outcomes and student learning outcomes will depend upon the type of information that is gathered. In some instances, simple descriptive statistics (for example, average scores on a pre/post test) will be sufficient for answering questions about outcomes. A good data analysis plan will result in meaningful information that relates directly to the stated outcomes and can be used to make programmatic decisions for the future. After data are analyzed by faculty and others deemed appropriate to be involved, faculty will use the information to make specific recommendations about the future of the program.

Communicate Results and Plan Program Improvements

As stated in the first section, the essential use of program review is as a guide to the future of the program. Once the cycle described thus far has been implemented, faculty will have a wealth of relevant information about the program and will have recommendations. At this point, the information will need to be summarized into a report that can be used to communicate findings both within the college and to interested people outside the college. The report documents all aspects of the program, from its description, to its mission, goals, desired outcomes, and results of the appropriate

assessments. Most importantly, information is provided about whether the program is accomplishing what it is designed to accomplish.

Faculty within the program will use the information for several purposes: to understand and document what students who complete the program have learned; to determine whether the program is effective in reaching its other goals; to identify areas in which the program is particularly strong and successful; to identify areas that need to be modified or improved. Modifications and improvements could involve a variety of things. Student learning assessments could show that students are performing very well in five of six outcome areas; curricular changes may be suggested by poor performance on, for example, a written communication outcome. Information collected from employers and alumni may suggest that more emphasis needs to be placed on assisting graduates in job placement. It is very likely that results from program review will provide information that will help faculty create a rationale for setting priorities for the budget. Certainly, program review results will be used in the following year's departmental academic plan. In essence, if a review does not shape a program's plans, it is hardly worth doing.