UC Merced
Division of Student Affairs

Program Review Guidelines
2009-2011

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Thanks goes to our colleagues at UCLA for providing us with their materials that have been tailored to meet the needs of UC Merced.

Program Review Guidelines

Introduction & Purpose

The UC Merced Student Affairs Strategic Plan, WASC guidelines and the Student Fee Advisory Committee all expect that the Division of Student Affairs will establish a process that ensures Student Affairs programs and services are ready and able to meet the needs of an ever-changing student body. As a Division committed to continuous programmatic improvement, Student Affairs must systematically assess, acknowledge, and appropriately respond to new challenges, identify potential opportunities, and routinely strive to enhance our programs and services. The adoption and implementation of the program review guidelines detailed in this document are important steps towards achieving many of Student Affairs' goals. In addition, the program review process provides a powerful vehicle for answering public calls for increased organizational accountability and providing documentation of Student Affairs' valuable contributions to student learning and development outcomes.

Key Guiding Principles

The Student Affairs Program Review process is a formative assessment tool designed to enhance organizational performance via the systematic review of data pertaining to department activities, service delivery and use, resource management, and contributions to the advancement of the Student Affairs mission and strategic plan.

More specifically, the purposes of program review are:

- Facilitate systematic reflection and documentation within Student Affairs units on organizational performance with respect to objectives, university priorities, and the Student Affairs mission, aspirations, and strategic goals;
- Provide evidence of the excellence and effectiveness of the units' programs, activities, services, and operations;
- Foster a contemporary understanding of UC Merced's students' characteristics, needs, and experiences;
- Assess the department's effectiveness with respect to contributing to student learning and development outcomes and/or business and service outcomes;
- Encourage strategic thinking about the department's plans for the future;
- Define ways, primarily within existing resources, that a department can continue to improve in the quality of its programs, services, activities, and operations; and
- Identify obstacles that inhibit the unit from achieving its desired goals and develop an action plan for managing these obstacles.
- Provide an opportunity for a simultaneous evaluation of the unit head independent of the evaluation of the department.

The Division of Student Affairs mission statement, learning objectives and current strategic plan provide the foundation for the Student Affairs Program Review process.

UC Merced Student Affairs Mission Statement

Student Affairs recruits and develops dedicated students and staff who are committed to lifelong learning. In keeping with the University's Principles of Community, we cultivate a campus environment characterized by respect for human dignity and diversity. Toward these aims, Student Affairs promotes an enriched learning environment, often collaborating with faculty and units campus wide, to provide students with opportunities to realize their intellectual, physical, social, and emotional potential.

Vision Statement

The Division of Student Affairs strives to become a leading model of innovative approaches for student-centered initiatives as we deliberately grow to meet the expanding needs of our richly diverse students, alumni, and greater community.

Learning Outcomes Statement

The Division of Student Affairs strives to add to the students' complete educational experience at UC Merced through our efforts to:

- Improve confidence in their abilities (learning, social, critical thinking, creativity, problem solving, and purposeful risk taking)
- Develop a sense of civic responsibility and engagement
- Demonstrate effective written, verbal, and technological communication
- Increase capacity for leadership and teamwork
- Articulate a sense of self, identity, and knowledge of their effect on others
- Develop an understanding and appreciation of human differences

Consistent with our mission, vision and learning objectives, the program review process provides an opportunity for Student Affairs staff members to systematically review organizational efforts directed towards enhancing the academic and educational experiences of UC Merced students; listening and responding to the experiences, needs, and interests of students from all backgrounds and communities; cultivating respectful and learning-centered professional environments; maximizing technological efficiencies; and serving as responsible stewards of institutional resources. Beyond merely providing a means to systematically survey unit activities and management practices, the program review process facilitates the translation of assessment data into strategic action plans focused on ensuring the continuous improvement of organizational performance and the advancement of mission-critical activities.

The program review guidelines also reflect the values that have historically guided Student Affairs assessment activities. More specifically, the guidelines outlined in this document:

- demonstrate a respect for students from all backgrounds and communities;
- highlight the importance of including student voices in the process and products of assessment;
- underscore the value of identifying and assessing student learning and development outcomes;
- promote the effective use of organizational resources;
- prioritize the development of quality programs that meet students' ever-changing needs; and
- maintain a focus on connecting Student Affairs activities to the broader institutional mission and strategic priorities.

The primary reason for conducting program reviews is to ensure the continuation of high quality programs and services in Student Affairs and to make sure that our offerings are central to the role and mission, priorities, and strategic goals of Student Affairs and the University.

Program Review Budget

The Student Affairs Program Review process will require a commitment of time and resources from everyone involved. It is assumed that the financial support for all steps in the program review process will be absorbed at the department level. As such, cost efficiency should be a consideration (although not necessarily the deciding factor) with respect to selection of panel members for both the internal and external phases of the program review process. If the program review process causes financial hardship for a department, the Director should submit a program review budget and request for funds to his/her AVC who will discuss the request with the VCSA and the other AVCs. Budget requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Program Review Cycle

Student Affairs unit reviews will normally occur on a five-year cycle. Since this is a new process for UC Merced's Student Affairs units, a pilot will be conducted with three units starting in the summer of 2009. Based upon that experience, modifications of these guidelines may occur and then a schedule will be developed by the VCSA and the AVCs in consultation with the unit directors and the Student Fee Advisory Committee, if Registration Fee funding is involved.

When possible, the schedule will be coordinated with other review and accreditation activities. It is important to note that accreditation reviews are conducted for other purposes and do not take the place of the Student Affairs' Program Review. However, elements of and preparation for these reviews may overlap and therefore coordination of these reviews will occur to eliminate unnecessary duplication of effort.

A unit may request a program review at any time. If human and fiscal resources are available, this request will be accommodated. When circumstances warrant, a request to extend or postpone a scheduled program review may be submitted in writing to the appropriate AVC. The VCSA and the other AVCs will review this request and respond to the Director of the department. In situations where the program review findings indicated very serious problems in the department, the department may be added back into the schedule for re-review on an accelerated basis to ensure that the identified problems have been addressed.

Program Review Process and Timeline

The Student Affairs Program Review process consists of six steps: 1) Pre-Review Preparation, 2) Department Self-Study and Report, 3) External Program Review Site Visit and Report, 4) Developing the Department Action Plan, 5) Implementing the Department Action Plan and 6) Comprehensive Unit Head Evaluation. The guidelines for each step are provided below. While these guidelines are not binding and may be adapted to the needs of the individual department under review, they should be followed as closely as possible.

As outlined below, the Student Affairs Program Review protocol should take approximately 16 months to complete. The program review cycle begins in May when the department receives written notification that they are scheduled for review and ends in August of the following year with the submission of the department's action plan. Departmental pre-review preparations will likely begin well in advance of the program review cycle, however, as many units engage in the annual collection and analysis of assessment data.

Although the suggested 16 month timeline is intended to structure and standardize the review process, the actual time needed to complete each program review step may vary according to the department and the unique needs of each review.

The suggested Student Affairs Program Review timeline is as follows:

Step 1: Pre-Review Preparation (3 - 4 months)

I. **Notification in Writing to Unit(s) Scheduled for Review**

Using the established five-year review calendar, departments that are slated for review in the coming academic year will be formally notified in writing via a letter from the VCSA's Office. The letter of notification will include a copy of the Program Review Guidelines and other specific information regarding the review process.

II. Department Review Orientation Meeting Scheduled/Held

The appropriate AVC will meet with the staff of the unit undergoing review in order to discuss the review process, answer questions and provide clarification about the process, and to help create a participatory process of program review in which all staff members are engaged and involved.

III. Identification of the Self-Study Protocol

The program review self-study protocol is selected by the Director of the department in consultation with the AVC and the VCSA. The Director of Institutional Planning and Analysis and her staff are also valuable resources in this process. Following are the four primary choices with respect to the self-study format:

A. Any mandated or optional professional accreditation processes: Program review is intended to provide Student Affairs departments an opportunity to evaluate their programs and services to ensure that they are ready and able to meet the needs of an ever-changing student body. However, certain departments are required or encouraged to participate in accreditation procedures specific to their functional area. In an effort to reduce unnecessary duplication of effort and help ease the overall workload of preparing for agency accreditation, the self-study or department profile component of an accreditation process may be used to fulfill some or all of the UC Merced Student Affairs Program Review self-study expectations.

B. Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS): CAS "has been the pre-eminent force for promoting standards in student affairs, student services, and student development programs since its inception in 1979. For the ultimate purpose of fostering and enhancing student learning, development, and achievement and in general to promote good citizenship,"[1] CAS provides a set of industry-approved standards and self-assessment guidelines for 34 functional areas.

1. Those Student Affairs departments for which CAS standards and guidelines exist may choose to utilize the CAS Self-Assessment Guide as the frame for the self-study review process and report

2. If the department has completed a CAS self-study within the academic year prior to their Student Affairs Program Review cycle, it may use that CAS self-assessment process as the foundation for the program review self-study report

[1] Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education. Retrieved July 10, 2007, from http://www.cas.edu.

3. It is important to note that although the CAS Self-Assessment Guides include worksheets and overview questions intended to facilitate the compilation of reviewer ratings for each of the CAS criterion measures, these completed worksheets and short answer responses do not fulfill the UC Merced's Student Affairs Program Review self-study report expectations. Rather the information and insights gleaned from the CAS self-assessment process should inform the development of a comprehensive and coherent self-study narrative that addresses the thirteen organizational domains outlined in the CAS Standards and Guidelines.

C. Industry Standards and Guidelines for Self-Study: If there is a set of standards and/or guidelines that are published by a representative, governing body, or professional association for the units's area of Student Affairs or for the types of services that the office provides, the department may propose them as the protocol for the self-study portion of the department's program review process. Please submit the complete description of standards and guidelines for self-study to the appropriate AVC for consideration.

D. UC Merced Student Affairs Program Review Self-Study Guidelines:. These criteria are intended to provide a structure for the review and should be augmented by whatever information is deemed necessary to create an effective self-assessment. General areas include:

1. Department Mission, Purpose, and Function
2. Strategic Position and Planning
3. Organizational Resources
4. Gauging Department Performance and Effectiveness
5. Summary of Findings

IV. Data Audit

Each department undergoing review will conduct an audit of all data and information resources available to assist and inform the program review process. This audit will include:

A. A review of assessment activities conducted at the unit level. The department must submit a completed copy of this updated inventory to the appropriate AVC as well as include it in the appendices of the self-study report.

1. Please describe any departmental efforts to collect data. This can include any method of data collection, including survey data, focus groups, interviews, utilization counts (e.g., card swipe counts), etc. Further, please be sure to document assessment efforts of any

population such as students, other clientele, staff, etc. Please be sure that you address the following fields in your description:

a. Title of assessment effort/topic

b. Brief description (purpose, sample, methods, schedule, etc.)

c. Is the data used for planning purposes? If so, how?

d. Are reports and/or data available to share?

e. Highlights of most recent findings

2. A review of any external assessment processes (e.g., participation in CAS Standards or industry benchmarking studies) or accreditation practices or mandates. Please be sure that you address the following fields in your description:

a. Title of assessment effort/topic

b. Brief description (purpose, sample, methods, schedule, focus, etc.)

c. Is the data used for planning purposes? If so, how?

d. Are reports and/or data available to share?

e. Highlights of most recent findings

f. Under the "Comments" field of the template, please also include the entity that conducts the assessment/accreditation as well as the timeline for the process.

B. A review of data collected at the organizational or institutional levels. This can include survey data (e.g., University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey, UCUES and the National Survey of Student Engagement, NSSE) that provide measurement of the department's effectiveness or impact with respect to articulated student outcomes and/or departmental objectives. It can also include qualitative data that capture students' experiences with the unit or information on those developmental processes that the department intends to foster in students.

C. The collection and review of department data relevant to specific questions posed in the self-study protocol. Each of the self-study protocols outlined in Section III require the self-study panel to gather and reflect on information pertaining to a wide range of departmental processes and performance measures (e.g., budgeting, human resources,

technology, legal responsibility, etc). After selecting a self-study protocol, the units's program review coordinator and/or self-study panel should carefully review the protocol, identify the information needed to develop a thorough self-study report, and begin collecting this information in the interest of expediting the self-study review process.

V. Formation of the Self-Study Review Panel

The Director of the department, in consultation with department staff, will identify/invite people to serve as members of the self-study team. Following are guidelines with respect to the membership of the Self-Study Review Panel:

A. External Members: In order to provide a more objective yet informed viewpoint, one member of the Self-Study Review Panel must be external to the department. Some suggestions for this member include:

1. If an advisory panel/council exists for the department, it is suggested that representation from this group be included on the Self-Study Review Panel.

2. In an effort to make the Student Affairs Program review process as collaborative as possible across departments, Directors are encouraged to consider fellow Directors of Student Affairs departments slated to undergo program review in future cycles as a potential external member of the Self-Study Review Panel.

3. The collaboration between Student Affairs and our colleagues in Academic Affairs is a priority for the advancement of the Student Affairs strategic plan and a critical element in our ability to effectively serve students. As such, Directors are encouraged to consider inviting faculty or colleagues from the Schools or other academic departments to serve as an external member of the Self-Study Review Panel.

B. Student Members: Students are the primary constituents of our efforts. Thus, the Self-Study Review Panel must include at least one student. It is advisable that the student(s) have experience with the department (e.g., frequent user, student employee, intern, etc.). If the unit receives Registration Fees, the unit must request the SFAC to appoint a student member.

C. Internal Members: There are no restrictions on the identification and inclusion of internal members for the Self-Study Review Panel.

VI. Identification/Formation of External Review Panel and Site Visit Scheduled

The External Department Review Panel will consist of 1-2 people from outside the University with expertise in the area(s) being reviewed. Although the Department

under review may select anyone from other universities, other non-profits, or the private sector who has relevant knowledge and expertise, units are strongly encouraged to consider their UC colleagues and counterparts as members of the External Review Panel.

The process for selecting members of the External Review Panel will be as follows:

1. The department Director will generate a list of potential external panel participants. This list will include twice the number of names (i.e., 4-6) than there are slots to fill. Sound rationale should be presented for why each person has been nominated. If there is an order of preference, the names on the list must be presented in priority order.

2. This list of suitable panel members will be forwarded to the VCSA for consideration. Please also provide a copy of this correspondence to the appropriate AVC who supervises the department undergoing program review. In consultation with the AVCs, the Vice Chancellor will respond in one of the following ways:

    a. Approval of the list of potential External Review Panel members as submitted.

    b. Approval of the list of potential External Review Panel members in a different priority order.

    c. A request for additional names to be considered for External Review Panel members.

B. Invitations to serve on an external review panel may come from the Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs or the unit head/manager. Once the panel is confirmed, the department is responsible for scheduling the 1-2 day site visit and establishing the agenda. The Director/Manager of the department under review must be present for the site visit as well as the VCSA and the appropriate AVC.

<u>Step 2: Department Self-Study/Report</u> (5 - 6 months)

The department self-study provides the basis for the entire review process. It represents a valuable opportunity for the department to make a candid assessment of itself and to consider future directions and opportunities for improvement that would strengthen the department. Each unit undergoing review will prepare a self-study report using as its organizing framework the criteria and questions identified in the protocol selected as part of the pre-review preparation (Step 1, Section III above).

The purpose of the Department Self-Study Report is to:

A. Outline the department's objectives, priorities, resources, programs and strategic plans as well as its position within Student Affairs and the University.

B. Address how well the department performs in relation to its mission, goals and strategic plans.

C. Define ways, primarily within existing resources, that the department can continue to improve in the quality of its programs, services, activities, and operations.

D. Provide evidence of the excellence and effectiveness of its programs, activities, services and operations.

E. Identify priorities and key questions for external review.

The self-study narrative and supporting documentation should fulfill the purposes outlined above. The specific format and content of the report will be determined by the particular self-study framework selected by the Self-Study Review Panel. Regardless of the self-study protocol selected, the self-study report should conclude with a 1-2 page **External Review Issues Statement** that clearly outlines the key issues and questions identified during the self-study process that the department would like external reviewers to address during the site visit and in their final report.

Report Submission Guidelines:

A. While the Director of the department under review has latitude with respect to decisions regarding the preparation of the self-study report, the final report should represent the input of <u>all</u> members of the Self-Study Review Panel. As such, the department is encouraged to create a system in which the Panel is able to provide feedback on a draft of the document.

B. While there is no firm limit with respect to the length of the report, it would be challenging to address fully the criteria of most self-study protocols in less than 10-15 pages of narrative (exclusive of appendices).

C. Departments need to submit a final draft of the report to the appropriate AVC prior to submitting the final report to the Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs and the External Review Panel. Incomplete reports will be returned to the department with detailed feedback on how the report is to be revised.

D. The final self-study report should be submitted in electronic format. One copy of the self-study report also should be submitted to:

1. Each member of the External Review Panel prior to his/her visit

2. The Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs and appropriate AVC

Step 3: External Program Review Site Visit and Report (2 - 3 months)

The External Review Panel, as experts in the field, will be encouraged to evaluate the department and provide insight and feedback on issues and trends particular to the departmental operations being reviewed. The external reviewers will receive and are asked to study the Department Self-Study Report and supporting documents in advance of their site visit. The site visit should span a 1-2 day period to allow sufficient time for the reviewers to meet with members of the Self-Study Panel, department staff, administrators, faculty, students, and others; to visit facilities; and to meet as a review team to discuss points that will be included in their analysis.

The department and Self-Study Panel are encouraged to solicit insight from the External Review Panel regarding questions and issues they would like to discuss from a viewpoint that is external to the university, that is broader in scope (e.g., from a regional, national or disciplinary perspective), or for which members of the External Review Panel are more qualified to answer. This External Review Issues Statement should be attached to the self-study report and submitted to the External Review Panel prior to their visit. Further, a detailed agenda for the visit should be established well in advance of the site visit to allow for adequate time to schedule meetings, prepare materials, reserve rooms, etc.

It is expected that the External Review Panel will adhere to the schedule and address the list of questions and issues provided by the Self-Study Panel. However, it is also anticipated that the background and expertise of the External Review Panel members may help them identify other, related areas and topics of interest during the site visit. As such, all members of the Self-Study Review Panel and External Review Panel are expected to remain open to the different issues and questions that are raised by all participants in the site visit.

At the conclusion of their visit, the External Review Panel will meet with the Director of the department, selected department staff, and members of the Self-Study Panel to share their initial observations. Within 4 - 6 weeks after their visit, the External Review Panel will be asked to provide a written assessment of the strengths, weaknesses, operational practices, and management opportunities for the department. The External Review Report should be submitted directly to the department Director who will then distribute copies to the Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs, the appropriate AVC and the Student Fee Advisory Committee, if a Registration Fee funded unit.

Step 4: Developing the Department Action Plan (2-3 months)

Following consultation with the Self-Study Panel, department staff, Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs, and appropriate AVC, the department will develop a plan of action that addresses the recommendations outlined in the Program Review Report prepared by the External Review Panel as well as reflects information and insights included in the Self-Study Report. The departmental action plan should specify proposed actions, implementation strategies, an action timeline, and responsible parties for carrying out each action. If there are External Review Panel recommendations that the department is not in agreement with, the action plan should acknowledge these differences in thinking and where appropriate, present alternative recommendations.

The completed Department Action Plan will be submitted to the VCSA, the appropriate AVC, and the SFAC if a Registration Fee funded unit.

Step 5: Implementing the Department Action Plan (final month and beyond)

Progress on the Department Action Plan will be evaluated via updates included in the department's annual year-end reports. Further, the points and progress on the Department Action Plan will represent the foundation of the pre-review preparation for the next cycle of program review five years later.

Step 6: Comprehensive Unit Head Performance Review (to occur during external review phase)

In an effort to distinguish Program Review (the formative assessment of a department's effectiveness with respect to its contributions to student learning and development and or business and service outcomes), from the Performance Review (the formative feedback of the Manager/Director of a department on her/his role in leading), a separate process will occur simultaneously with the Program Review.

This comprehensive evaluation will occur once every five years and be in addition to the annual self-evaluation and supervisor evaluation. Each unit head, working with the appropriate AVC, will select individuals to collect feedback from which should include students who work in or use the services of the unit, from staff who work within the unit, from colleagues within student affairs, and from colleagues in other areas at the university. The unit head may, with agreement from the AVC, include individuals in similar positions at other UC campuses. Issues that might be included in the evaluation are: ability to effectively communicate, leadership, partnering with units within and outside of Student Affairs, diversity initiatives and hiring, management of the unit's resources including personnel and budget, fundraising (if appropriate) and vision for the future of the unit.

The feedback will be captured electronically and summarized anonymously by the appropriate AVC or Director of Administrative Services based upon the relationship between the unit head and the individuals who provided the feedback. The written

summary will be shared with the unit head, appropriate AVC and the VCSA and discussed at an in-person meeting.

As the Division of Student Affairs strives to improve its efforts, the knowledge of how unit heads perform, what we do well and how we can grow professionally, becomes critical.