

New Directions for Program Evaluation

October 13, 2004

Background

The Board of Curators of the University of Missouri System (UM) and the Missouri Department of Higher Education (DHE) mandate that all academic programs and centers will be evaluated every five years. To meet this requirement, UMKC has submitted annual reports to both organizations; however, the sheer number of these reports has often unduly burdened the academic units and limited the ability of the UM and DHE staffs to audit the programs and provide detailed feedback and recommendations.

New Goal: Continuous Quality Improvement

To enhance the effectiveness of the review process, UM and DHE staff are exploring options whereby their oversight would be limited to periodic audits of the review processes in place at each institution. In this new scenario, authority would be vested with each institution for developing and managing a comprehensive program review process that accommodates its own unique functions, culture, and history. The common aspect shared by various approaches will be the continuous improvement of academic program quality based on evidence of outcomes. The UM and DHE audits of the review processes will assess the extent to which this goal is met.

Piloting a New Evaluation Tool

As a pilot project, the UM system recently introduced a review process developed by William Massy and referred to as the "Academic Audit." More so than in previous evaluation models, the Academic Audit requires faculty members to address issues of quality in the full range of academic processes related to institutional goals including: student learning goals and outcomes, department curricula, teaching and learning processes, assessment activities, research outcomes and the research environment, and community engagement. UMKC's Department of Communication Studies completed an Academic Audit in 2002-03, and the English Department has elected to participate in the process in 2004-05. UM Academic Affairs offers the Massy model to the four campuses as a potential tool for developing processes for continuous quality improvement.

Aligning Local, State, and Regional Evaluation Standards

At the national level, accreditation standards and procedures are also changing. Since UMKC's last accreditation visit in 1999, the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) of the North Central Association (NCA) has considerably modified its accreditation standards. When the HLC visits in 2008-09, it will expect to receive convincing evidence that UMKC is committed to the assessment of student learning outcomes, that the faculty and administration use assessment results in decision-making and planning, and that an on-going process for continuous quality improvement is in place. Extensive faculty involvement is required to meet these standards.

In recent years, program evaluation at UMKC has included the following:

1. The Council on Program Evaluation (COPE) has relied on senior faculty members and external content experts to conduct the program evaluations at five-year intervals. All members of the Council have completed their terms, and a five-year cycle of COPE activities will end in Fall 2004.

2. In 2003-04, UM System initiated a Program Viability Audit (PVA) process, and the Resources for the Vision Committee (RFVC) has implemented the PVA, reviewed UMKC's academic programs, determined that some have deficiencies, and created a process conducting follow-up on its recommendations. RFVC activities are now completed.
3. With the exception of most academic units in the College of Arts and Sciences and the School of Biological Sciences, all other UMKC schools have external accrediting agencies that review and report on the status of UMKC's programs. UM and DHE are currently considering ways to incorporate the results of these agencies into an evaluation system.

Toward a Comprehensive Evaluation System

Clearly at a major crossroad, UMKC now has an opportunity to reshape its program evaluation procedure so that it better supports continuous quality improvement, institutional planning, and budgeting, while responding to the requirements of the HLC, UM System, and DHE. UMKC is now able to incorporate the best elements of previous program review activities into a more productive and effective evaluation process.

Next Steps

The Provost will establish a standing committee comprised of senior faculty members representing all academic units to redefine program evaluation at UMKC. As this new process replaces all previous programs, the role of the committee will be to oversee program review processes and to monitor quality assurance issues. The committee will provide the Provost the results of its assessments and offer recommendations to focus and enhance the quality of UMKC's academic programs. An objective in this new model is to link the committee's recommendations to the academic units' action plans and to the Budgeting for Excellence program.

The committee is an advisory body that will review and make recommendations to the Provost with respect to the following:

1. Development and implementation by each academic unit of a rigorous evaluation and review process for continuous academic program quality improvement including timeliness of review;
2. Review and follow up on all internal and external evaluation activities and reports;
3. Review of the academic units' action plans for alignment with the goals of UMKC, the University of Missouri, and the Missouri Department of Higher Education;
4. Identify trends in selected datasets related to evaluation and review processes and action plans;
5. Incorporate the expectations of the NCA Higher Learning Commission into UMKC's evaluation processes in preparation for the accreditation site visit in 2008-09.

Plan of Action

Throughout AY 2004-05, the new oversight committee will meet for two hour sessions twice each month to examine best practices in program evaluation; to plan a comprehensive system supporting continuous quality improvement, strategic planning, and budgeting; and to develop policies and procedures for program review.