Program Review: From Mandate to Benefit
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Project Origins
Program review is a required and hopefully beneficial element of college planning. And yet it is largely undefined both in terms of the activities involved and in the objectives and outcomes it should produce. Consequently, colleges are extremely diverse in how these processes occur, which ultimately may also be a factor in their accreditation self-study and review processes.

In Spring of 2014 resolution 07.05 was adopted calling for the ASCCC to "…work with the California Community College Chancellor's Office and other appropriate agencies to further develop research tools that offer quantitative, qualitative and meaningful data for local program review processes." This subsequently led to a joint one-year research effort with the CCCCO LaunchBoard project to examine the feasibility of using state-level data to inform local review for CTE programs.

The Design Process
To get a sense of the additional information that CTE practitioners wanted, that could supplement the data available through local program review processes, ASCCC and the LaunchBoard team held a series of meetings at conferences and via two statewide CCC Confer calls that were attended by about 100 faculty, researchers, and CTE deans. This process led to the development of a concept paper that outlined key criteria as well as desired data points, which were circulated to the field for comment via a survey. This process yielded the following specifications:

PROGRAM REVIEW REGULATIONS

Education Code requires program reviews for CTE programs every two years: 78016 (a) Every vocational or occupational training program… …shall be reviewed every two years by the governing board of the district…"

Accreditation standards set forth by the ACCJC also mandate program review in Standard 1B. This latter mandate does not specify how often program review must occur, but does encourage integration with other college processes: "The institution integrates program review, planning, and resource allocation into a comprehensive process…"

- *Use a graphical, question-driven data display*: visually represent information to address key questions about supply and demand, as well as program completion and employment outcomes. Whenever possible, information should include comparison data that colleges can use to benchmark their performance. Visuals should be backed-up by data charts.

- *Tailor the data displayed:* create a "wizard" feature that allows users to only see the data most relevant for their program's goals. For example, a program that

provides training for incumbent workers might want to see job retention and wage increases, whereas a program that is aligned with a CSU degree might want to see transfer outcomes. Also, practitioners wanted the option to see outcomes for both completers and skills-builders (workers who are engaged in short-term course-taking to maintain and add to skill-sets required for ongoing employment and career advancement).

- *Provide professional development:* offer guides that provide suggestions on how to use the tool in program review processes and in discussions within departments or across colleges. Examine programs that show the strongest outcomes to document effective practices.

During 2014-15, the LaunchBoard team developed a pilot program review tool and worked with 10 colleges that volunteered to review data on a total of 25 programs. Teams of faculty and researchers discussed the information in the program review tool as part of departmental meetings and then filled out a survey on the usefulness of the data and the structure of the tool.

What We Learned

Local program review processes are strengthened by having additional data that are not widely available at the college level. Pilot colleges reported that having labor market and employment outcomes gave them a stronger understanding of whether students met their goals. They also valued access to historical trends and regional context.

Program review processes may be best enhanced by combining traditional local program review data, additional locally-calculated data points, and regional/statewide information. Some practitioners were eager for return-on-investment metrics that were not possible to calculate in the LaunchBoard because financial data are not sufficiently granular in statewide data sets. This type of additional information, combined with regional totals, labor market information, and benchmarking data, would augment and strengthen local program review conversations.

Practitioners would benefit from a common set of data and opportunities to look at the information together. Because program review data may be cut differently by individual colleges, it can be difficult to compare apples to apples when examining results. Statewide tools allow decision-makers to use consistently-defined metrics so they can immediately get to the meatier conversations—such as how a program has been designed or implemented that might influence outcomes.

Additional statewide data is needed about post-college outcomes. Many practitioners focused on data points that are not available in statewide data sets, such as whether students become employed in their field of study, earn a third-party credential, start their own business, or are satisfied with their program. While some of these

questions are addressed in the *CTE Outcomes Survey, colleges must pay out of pocket each year to participate, which may disadvantage colleges with smaller CTE programs and lower budgets. (* The CTE Outcomes Survey is a subscription-funded project that helps subscriber colleges meet specific State and Federal data requirements. Colleges meet these needs either through local research or other vendor provided products.) [We need to tell the reader what this is? Not sure I got it right though???]

Next Steps

LaunchBoard 2.0: The LaunchBoard team, rather than build out a program review tool, elected to redesign the main interface of the LaunchBoard. The Program Snapshot tab is currently being rebuilt so that information is accessed via questions such as "Are we training the right number of students for available jobs?" and "How much money are students making?" Answers are displayed visually, with opportunities to drill deeper into related data, such as more detailed labor market information or disaggregated results. The LaunchBoard team will be sharing a demo version across the state this fall and rolling out a full release in February 2016. This past spring, the LaunchBoard team released another tool that allows colleges to examine program-level data from the CTE Outcomes Survey, which makes information on post-college outcomes more readily available for program review conversations.

Inquiry/Data templates: While information such as students' return on investment cannot be generated from statewide data, research, or inquiry templates could be designed that would facilitate the local calculation of these metrics. Programs are often very limited in the degree to which they can influence improvement due to a variety of local parameters, which are not considered in regional or statewide data. By example, the mere act of coordinating course scheduling across disciplines or within a region requires information that is never collected, especially at the State level and yet that simple bit of coordination could greatly improve student success. It would be beneficial to bring together faculty, researchers, and college leadership to identify high-priority lines of inquiry and research specifically tailored to program review and improvement that could be built into research templates and shared across the state. These efforts could be integrated into other statewide efforts such as the Institutional Effectiveness Partnership Initiative and into regional and sector research activities, and resource planning, to name a few. Stakeholders will also have to partner in professional development activities as an ongoing foundational obligation to ensure faculty, staff, researchers and other leaders remain effective as institutional planners.

The Academic Senate and the LaunchBoard team look forward to pursuing these next steps in the near future. Please take note as these opportunities unfold, your input will be critical to making these efforts beneficial to your programs and students.