

ACADEMIC PROGRAM EVALUATION AS INSTITUTIONAL SELF-STUDY: EVALUATING A GRADUATE PROGRAM OF PSYCHOLOGY

Arne Collen, Ph.D.
Saybrook Institute, San Francisco, CA and
California School of Professional Psychology, Berkeley, CA.

Abstract

Whether for program development, change or accreditation, academic program evaluation provides a very useful means of establishing and sustaining institutional self-study. The recent evaluation of the four graduate programs of the Humanistic Psychology Institute serves to model several important aspects of this process.

Key terms: academic program evaluation, accreditation, graduate education, institutional self-study.

Introduction

Obtaining some form of accreditation has become a recognized goal of developing graduate programs. The ongoing institutional self-study is the primary evaluative model used by accreditation bodies. It is the subject of this paper to show that academic evaluation, as a growing specialty of program evaluation, is very suitable and applicable to the self-study process. To this end, I will make use of the recent evaluation of the four graduate programs of the Humanistic Psychology Institute to illustrate several important aspects of academic program evaluation in the service of institutional self-study.

Method

During the 1979-1981 academic years a small faculty committee of the Humanistic Psychology Institute completed an evaluation of the graduate programs. The purposes of the evaluation were to obtain information about current programs for institutional self-study for regional accreditation and provide a baseline for future program reviews. The evaluation (or review) cycle followed by the committee consisted of seven steps (Figure 1). This sequence served to guide the committee and represented a rough flow chart of the review process. The evaluation was formative by intention. The emphasis was placed on addressing a set of questions (Table 1) about the clarity and adequacy of relations (Table 2) between the mission of the institution and the objectives, requirements, and courses of each program. The committee gathered information from five sources, which included institutional publications, course materials, surveys of student and faculty opinion, and student files.

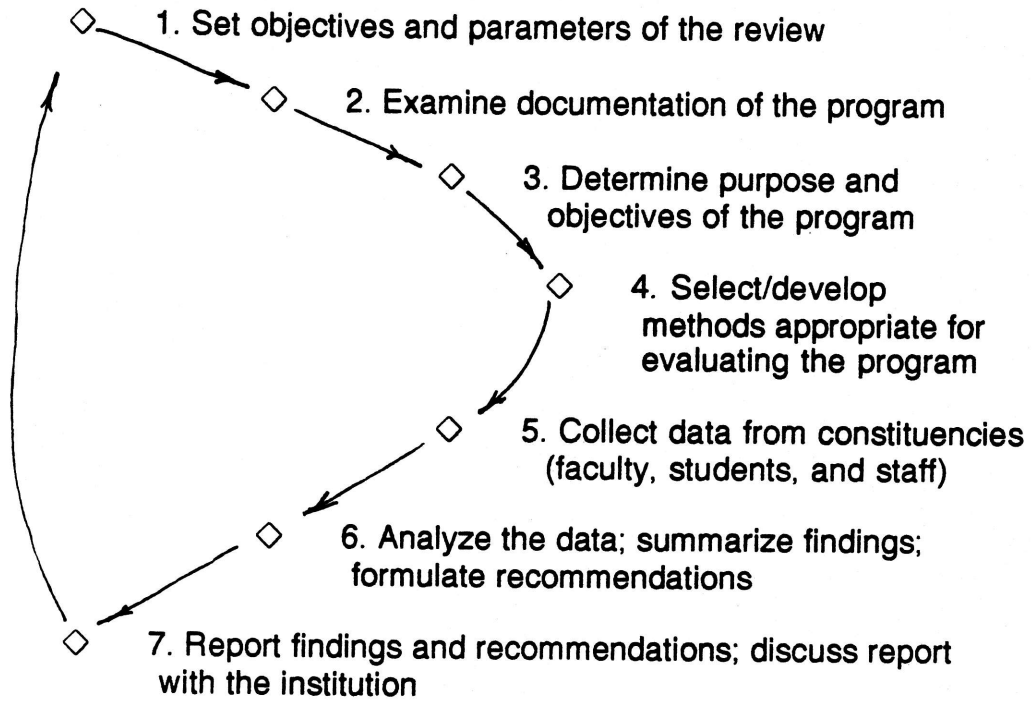


Figure 1. A Review Cycle for Formative Academic Program Evaluation.

MISSION

- ◇ Does the statement of mission clearly convey the goals and purpose of the institution?
- ◇ Does the statement of mission clearly convey a set of agreed upon goals?

PROGRAM

- ◇ Are the educational programs consonant with the mission?
- ◇ Are the educational programs promoting the mission of the institution?
- ◇ Does the stated purpose of the program meaningfully relate to the mission?
- ◇ Does the program as described contain a clear set of program objectives?
- ◇ Do the program objectives as stated clearly relate to the purpose of the program?
- ◇ Does the program consist of an integrated, organized sequence of study?

REQUIREMENT

- ◇ Do the requirements of the program clearly relate to fulfilling the objectives of the program?
- ◇ Are there unnecessary program requirements?
- ◇ Is there a blatant omission of an important requirement?

COURSE

- ◇ Are the offerings designed to meet the requirements of the program?
- ◇ Do the offerings of the program promote the objectives of the program?

Table 1. Focal Questions for Academic Program Evaluation.

<u>Level</u>	<u>Stated in terms of</u>
1. MISSION	GOALS
2. PROGRAM	GOALS & OBJECTIVES
3. REQUIREMENT	PURPOSE
4. COURSE	OBJECTIVES

Table 2. Levels at which Academic Program Evaluation Can Occur.

Results

Applying the information gathered to the questions, the state of development of each program, as well as salient program strengths and weaknesses, became readily apparent. Further, the extent of evaluation possible became known. The statements of mission varied sufficiently to warrant more effort for greater clarity. The brief history and small number of students in the Master's program precluded any but a preliminary evaluation. Objectives of the Doctoral program in the external format were clearest of all programs and appeared in line with the mission as written. Specific content areas where courses were provided and were not provided were revealed. The rate of student progress through the program could be determined. In marked contrast was the Doctoral program in the residential format which did not have clearly written objectives and had ill-defined curricular boundaries between requirements and courses. The fourth program, interdisciplinary in intention, needed more clarity of purpose and definition of structure.

Recommendations and Discussion

Based on the analysis of printed material and survey data, the committee put forth specific recommendations to the faculty and president of the institution. The recommendations stressed continued improvement of the programs and the active participation of all constituencies in the process. The recommendations asked for greater clarity of mission, statements of program objectives and attention to specific content areas through curriculum development. The committee sought and obtained opportunities to report and discuss the program reviews and recommendations with faculty, students, and the president of the institution. The final report of the committee described the objectives and parameters of the reviews, the steps of the review cycle followed, the data gathering procedures, and the findings and recommendations. The regional accreditation team relied heavily on this report during their site visit and in their report to the accreditation commission.

Bibliography

- Anderson, S., Ball, S., Murphy, R., and Associates (1975). *Encyclopedia of Educational Evaluation*. San Francisco: Josey-Bass.
- Astin, A. and Panos, R. (1971). The evaluation of educational programs. In R. Thorndike (Ed.). *Educational Measurement*. Second edition. Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, pp. 733-751.
- Collen, A. (1981). *Review of Curricula of the Humanistic Psychology Institute*. San Francisco: Saybrook Institute.
- Craven, E. (Ed.) (1976). *Academic Program Evaluation*. San Francisco: Josey-Bass.
- Cronbach, L. (1963). Course improvement through evaluation. *Teachers College Record*, **64**, 672-683.
- Dressel, P. (1976). *Handbook of Academic Evaluation*. San Francisco: Josey-Bass.
- Dressel, P. (1981). *Improving Degree Programs: A Guide to Curriculum Development, Administration, and Review*. San Francisco: Josey-Bass.
- Hastings, U. (1966). Curriculum evaluation: the why of the outcomes. *Journal of Educational Measurement*, **3**, 27-32.
- Messick, S. (1970). Evaluation of educational programs as research on the educational process. In F. Korten, S. Cook, and J. Lacey (Eds.). *Psychology and the Problems of Society*. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, pp. 215-220.
- Provus, M. (1971). *Discrepancy Evaluation*. Berkeley, CA: McCutchan.
- Stufflebeam, D. (1968). Toward a science of educational evaluation. *Educational Technology*. [July]
- Tyler, R., Gane, R., and Scriven, M. (1967). *Perspectives of Curriculum Evaluation*. Chicago: Rand McNally.
- Wilson, R. (Ed.) (1982). *Designing Academic Program Reviews*. San Francisco: Josey-Bass.
- Winter, D., McClelland, D., and Stewart, A. (1981). *A New Case for the Liberal Arts: Assessing Institutional Goals and Student Development*. San Francisco: Josey-Bass.
- Worthen, B. (1968). Toward a taxonomy of evaluation designs. *Educational Technology*. [August].