Periodic Reviews of the IR Office and WASC Criterion for Review 4.2

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Discussion Topics

- What should practitioners consider before conducting a periodic IR review?
- What are some potential risks and benefits associated with a review?
- Can program reviews "ensure the effectiveness of the institutional research function"?
- What role, if any, should CAIR play regarding IR program reviews and/or CFR 4.2?

WASC CFR 4.2: Quality Assurance

- The institution has institutional research capacity consistent with its purposes and characteristics.
- Data are disseminated internally and externally in a timely manner, and analyzed, interpreted, and incorporated in institutional review, planning, and decision-making.
- Periodic reviews are conducted to ensure the effectiveness of the institutional research function and the suitability and usefulness of the data generated.

Periodic Reviews of IR Functions

The review is *not mandated (by WASC)*, but suggests that institutions should consider implementing a systematic assessment plan that is derived from the purposes and goals.

Institutional Reporting & Policy Analysis

IR Golden Triangle

Planning, Enrollment & Financial Management

Quality Assurance, Outcomes Assessment, Program Review, Effectiveness, Accreditation

Costs of Not Having a Systematic Review:

1. Decisions based on assumption rather than fact
2. Unable to determine potential improvement areas
3. Lack of appropriate (optimum) progress to meet expectations of the Institution and accreditation agencies.

Review Guidelines:

1. Define the IR purpose (mission) and goals (outcomes) - *What are you trying to do?*
2. Identify performance indicators for each goal: Determine standards and achievement targets
3. Conduct assessment to gather the necessary information needed for assessing what is going on within IR unit. - *How well are you doing it?*
4. Determine how assessment results align with standards and targets and will be used for improvement.

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Periodic Reviews of the IR Function

Heather Brown's portion for
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What I've learned from IR reviews

- **Cyclical or ad-hoc**
- **Confirm what you know, and...**
- **Surprise you**

Cyclical IR Reviews

- **Measures that may be used for most service reviews and also fit IR:**
  - **Timeliness of response**
  - **Staff helpfulness**
  - **Staff knowledge**
  - **Overall quality**

Cyclical IR Reviews, cont

- **Unique measures I've used on cyclical reviews:**
  - Information from IR is…
    - is dependable and accurate
    - clear and understandable
  - Researchers…
    - Demonstrate integrity and ethical behavior
    - Are available and approachable
    - Show an interest in feedback and improving performance
  - IR has had a positive impact on…
    - Planning
    - Decision making

Cyclical reviews: practical matters

- **Who to survey?**
- **Setting a standard in advance**
- **Open-ended questions**
  - **What is most useful?**
  - **What more can IR do?**
- **Formal report with data and narrative**

Ad hoc or special focus IR reviews

- New director, new office, change in office mission or charge, reorg, opportunity for new staff…

- What areas have the most important needs? How well is IR meeting these needs?

- Is IR focused on what matters to the institution? School? Department?

- What to cut and what to add to the IR calendar?

Some questions

- On avg, how many times per week have you found yourself wishing you had additional research or information (about your students, program, or dept)?

- I have the information I need to make informed decisions (agree/disagree).

- How would you characterize your need for research and analysis in the year ahead? (no change, more, much more)

Open ended questions

- **What report(s) are most useful?**
- **What additional reports would you like to see?**

Additional sources of info for IR reviews

- Mission/charge of the office
- Calendar/agenda of cyclical reports
- Significant initiatives with other offices (e.g., BI, assessment, accreditation)
- Project tracking metrics:
  - # of hours, # of projects related to function/purpose
- Frank discussions with Cabinet at your institution, and researchers at other institutions.