Academic Program Review
Examining the Experiences of Faculty Members Serving as Internal Peer Reviewers

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Faculty Involvement in Assessment

- Faculty resistance to assessment practices is well-documented
  - (e.g., Rodgers et al., 2013; Shavelson, 2010)

- Often characterized as burdensome
  - (Wergin & Swingen, 2000)

- Attitudes and beliefs affect willingness to engage in assessment activities
  - (Emil & Cress, 2014)

- Faculty commitment promotes a positive culture of assessment
  - (Ndoye & Parker, 2010)
Cross-evaluation uses constructive communication to promote and encourage learning, as well as to disseminate best practices of assessment

(Ketunnen, 2010)

Constructive communication between faculty members from different departments promotes innovation and learning from diverse experiences and views

(Ketunnen, 2010)

Most faculty members do not receive formal training in assessment and are not always aware of resources available to them for assistance

(Gentemann, Fletcher, & Potter, 1994)
Virginia Tech’s Academic Program Review Process

Utilizing Internal Peer Review Teams
Virginia Tech’s APR Process

- Relaunched in 2015
- Facilitated by the Assessment & Evaluation (A&E) unit
- Each academic department/program conducts a comprehensive evaluation of its activities every five to six years
- A member of the A&E unit sits on each peer review team
- Departments choose either a team of all Internal Peer Reviewers (IPRs) or a mix of internal and external reviewers
- Departments may nominate reviewers to comprise up to half of the peer review team
- Peer reviewers are offered a $500 stipend
## Methods & Participants

### Methods
- Semi-structured interviews
- Structural coding
- Focused coding
- Constant comparative method

### Participants
- 14 full-time faculty members from Virginia Tech
- 78% response rate
- Wide variety of academic disciplines
- 8 females and 6 males
- 7 full, 4 associate, and 3 assistant professors
- 5 – 40 years higher ed experience; mean = 22 years
Results

APR Process

- Organized structure
  - “well-executed” and “streamlined”
  - “The process isn’t, I don’t want to say intense, but it was thorough”

- Improvement focused
  - “This felt like the process was genuine in helping this department get better – it was almost like a fresh set of eyes to help them maybe see something differently or suggest some things, which I thought was really really positive”

- Diverse peer review teams
  - “We had different kinds of questions. Different kinds of perspectives, which I think was very useful.”
  - “The questions we were asked to address were general enough that people from... any discipline would be familiar with what was required to do it”
Results

A&E Support

- Assessment professional as point person

- Resources

  - “really well versed in how [APR] works and isn’t afraid to do some of the heavy lifting”
  - Freed reviewers up to “be a little more thoughtful or contemplative on a higher level”
  - Resources “prepared pretty well in terms of laying out specific things that they were looking for in terms of the program that we were going to review”
  - A&E staff provided “cues as to how to evaluate success”
Results

Learning

- APR process, purpose, structure

  - “came in without very much sense of what it is that we were doing or what we were looking for,” but used the opportunity as a learning experience “which is where I found the value”

  - “I saw where the weaknesses were, not necessarily just in their program, but in the way they presented their program. And it helped me to think about what it is that program review should be for.”
RESULTS

Learning

- Other departments

  - “Being a peer reviewer gave me the opportunity to find out how another department did certain things, like annual reviews, strategic planning, teaching assignments, [and] advising”

  - “a decent sense of what unique issues other departments are dealing with” and “gives you insight into the bigger picture” of an institution
Learning

- Assessment in home departments

- "I think when you do it for other departments, it helps you to think about your own program and your own department"

- Participants mentioned having “a better sense of what to expect,” developing “sort of a feel from the other side” of the process, and the ability to “contextualize the way my own program looks at itself”

- “walked away from [the APR] wishing that my own department would use [A&E] more effectively... there’s a tremendous value there”
Results

Additional Themes and Insights

- Cross-disciplinary interactions
- Service to others
- Participation
- Recruitment
- Composition of IPR teams
  - Utilizing junior faculty
Conclusions

Our findings suggest that IPRs...

- Are a viable alternative to external reviewers
- One strategy for improving faculty perceptions of and participation in assessment activities
- Contribute to a deeper understanding of the review process
- Influence changes within reviewers’ home programs
- Increase the dissemination of best practices for assessment
- Contribute to building a positive culture of assessment
Discussion