

A Deeper Dive into The History of the Program Review at Las Positas

You may have noticed that the Program Review template and process changes a bit every year. There are two reasons for this. The first is that the college's needs in terms of reporting and documentation change from year to year. The Program Review Committee (PRC) strives to continually remove questions that are not needed in a particular year, while adding questions that meet current needs. The second reason is that we collect feedback on the Program Review process each year, through surveys, response questions on the template, and feedback from Deans and other Program Review readers. We work hard each year to incorporate feedback, suggestions, and current needs to create the most streamlined Program Review template and process that we can.

In addition, in creating the yearly template and process, we must bear in mind several competing purposes of Program Review. Below, we describe these different purposes, how you can address them in your program review, and how this could benefit your program.

The Program Review process has three major purposes. These purposes are sometimes at odds with one another, which can cause frustration or confusion. The purposes are:

- **College Planning:** The first purpose is to compile information needed for college planning efforts. Administrators, planning committees, and budgeting or allocation departments need to know what programs are planning and what needs they have. The Program Review is a place for programs to document these needs and plans.
- **Mandated Reporting:** There are a number of mandated areas our college must report on, such as SLO assessments or student success metrics. This information could be collected in many ways, but the Program Review is a convenient catch-all place to collect this type of reporting.
- **Program Reflection:** Program Review provides a chance for programs to reflect on their own accomplishments, goals, and challenges, and to communicate those to their Dean and other college readers. For many programs, the Program Review may provide the only opportunity to take stock of where they are and plan out where they hope to go.

During the evolution of the Program Review process at LPC, some program review cycles have emphasized some of these purposes more than others. For example, early Program Review instructions allowed for a free-form report that had to cover a number of topics but could do so in any order, emphasizing program reflection, while the "Common Form" was a spreadsheet that programs entered their needs into, emphasizing college planning.

In the Program Review Committee, we find ourselves navigating the tension between meaningful reflection and planning/reporting needs every year as we develop our template and process for Program Review. We work hard to balance space for authentic reflection with places to include the information needed by the college and beyond.

ADDRESSING THE PURPOSES: CREATING A PROGRAM REVIEW THAT WORKS FOR YOU

Just as different historical Program Review processes have emphasized different purposes, many Program Review writers and readers favor particular purposes. Some people favor a more pragmatic process and feel frustrated with template questions that aren't directly correlated with specific needs for college planning or mandated reporting. Other people favor a more reflective process and may feel alienated if the template feels too perfunctory with a series of unconnected reporting topics.

In terms of planning and reporting, the Program Reviews are viewed in many ways as an aggregate. Not every program needs to answer every question with a maximal level of detail. For many of the reporting questions, committees or departments are trying to look at general trends across the college.

For this reason, it is okay if different programs emphasize different areas of the Program Review that are most meaningful to them. We encourage Program Review writers to focus on sections of Program Review that are most meaningful for themselves and their program. If your program loves to reflect, you can spend more energy on questions that elicit meaningful analysis of your achievements, plans, and challenges. If your program favors a more pragmatic reporting style, you can spend more energy on making sure your mandated reports (such as reviews of SLO or Institutional Research Data) are thorough. All required sections should be filled out, but you can decide for yourself whether a more reflection-oriented document or a more pragmatic document would suit the needs of your program.

BENEFITS OF PROGRAM REVIEW

You might ask: "How does Program Review help my program get what it needs?"

The most direct answer is by communicating your needs and the reasons for them to your Dean or supervisor, who should help you find ways to meet those needs. This is one reason that the reflective portion of Program Review is important. If you have faced an obstacle or unmet need in your program's planning, your Dean or supervisor can direct you to resources and processes or help you find creative ways to address a challenge. Starting in AY20-21, all programs are offered a meeting with their Dean or supervisor to discuss their completed Program Review in order to make sure that each program's needs are heard and addressed.

Program Reviews also help the college address areas of need that are trends across the campus. For example, when a high number of programs reported difficulty processing their curriculum, the college hired a Curriculum Specialist to support this need. Trends in Program Reviews are documented in Division Summaries and may help shape College Planning Priorities and planning documents such as the Educational Master Plan. By documenting your program's needs in your Program Review, you help inform the college of trends and themes that need to be addressed.

While Program Reviews do document program needs, they in themselves do not constitute resource requests. For example, if a program needs a piece of equipment, they should report this in program review so that college planners know the equipment needed across the college. However, the program still needs to fill out an equipment request form and follow the process to obtain the needed

equipment. As you probably know, many committees favor requests that were previously documented in a Program Review, since this demonstrates that the need is well thought-through and has been communicated to campus entities that allocate funds. However, unanticipated needs do often arise, and presence on a Program Review should never be the sole factor in an allocation decision. Again, if you have a need or request that is persistently unfilled, your dean or supervisor is the best person to help you find ways to meet that need.

THE PROGRAM REVIEW COMMITTEE

- Develops and sends out the program review form
- Holds workshops for writers and readers of the review
- Supports deans in creating the Division Summary
- Send the Division summaries to the Institutional Planning and Effectiveness Committee, to be used in developing College Planning Priorities
- Posts finalized Program Reviews and Division Summaries to the Program Review website
- Collects feedback from readers and writers and uses it to continually improve the Program Review Process.

IN CONCLUSION

We hope that this letter helps better explain the purposes of Program Review and how this process can be beneficial for your program. Our goal in the PRC is to develop an annual process that is both meaningful to individual programs and also meets the planning and documentation needs of the college. We also aim to be transparent about the purposes and uses of Program Review.

If you have questions, please do not hesitate to contact the PRC chair, who can help answer them. We appreciate your participation in this planning process that makes LPC a better place for our students.

Sincerely,
The Program Review Committee