

Evaluation of Selected Activities in the Accreditation System

November 2010

Overview of this Report

This agenda item briefly describes the updated Initial Program Review (IPR) and Program Assessment (PA) review processes. In addition, the item reports data from selected questions on the reviewer evaluation surveys that describe what the reviewers learned through the process and how the experience of being a reviewer will benefit reviewers' programs.

Staff Recommendation

This is an information item.

Background

The accreditation process requires, in year four of the accreditation cycle, that all programs submit updated narrative responses to program standards, documentation to support the narrative, and information about the program's candidate assessment system. The Professional Services Division (PSD) implemented a review process of these PA documents as follows:

- BIR members or program coordinators are invited to participate in a two-day PA review;
- The morning of the first day is spent orienting reviewers to the accreditation cycle, describing details of the PA review process, and concluding with calibration activities to ensure all documents receive a fair review;
- Reviewers are paired and assigned PA documents in a credential area with which they're familiar; and
- The pairs of reviewers spend the afternoon of the first day and all of the second day reviewing the PA documents and writing the Preliminary Report of Findings.

The accreditation cycle does not explicitly address the IPR process which, until February 2010, was managed by each consultant with program responsibility. For example, when the consultant responsible for reading specialist credential programs received an initial program proposal, she would go to the BIR database, identify BIR members with reading credential program experience, and invite them to review the document. This meant that the four documents that arrived throughout a year were reviewed by pairs of readers who met on their own time with unequal amounts of training and little calibration. The consultant always reviewed their comments before sending them to the program, but it became clear that this process consumed a lot of consultant time and was prone to unequal reviews by readers.

In February 2010, the PSD shifted the IPR to reflect the same process as is used for the PA. This means that initial program documents from all credential areas are reviewed at the same time, once a month, by BIR members or program coordinators who are trained to understand how to segment the program standards (or use a segmented standards form) and are calibrated to increase the quality and fairness of the process.

Evaluation of the Document Review Process

Another attribute of the accreditation process is the requirement that the process, itself, undergo on-going evaluation, review, and improvement. Consequently, every IPR or PA reader is sent the link to an on-line evaluation survey that asks, among other things, these two questions:

- What have you learned from your experiences assessing program documents during these past two days?
- As you reviewed IPR/PA documents, what things did you do to make the process more efficient/effective for you and your reading partner?

PA reviewers have been submitting evaluations on and off for the reviews that occurred since July 2009. Response counts range from 0-11, with a total of 67 responses from which these data were drawn. Since the IPR process is relatively new, the evaluation survey was completed by only the first group of readers (n=16). Note: some reviewers participate multiple times and may be represented more than once in the survey responses.

Responses to the two questions were analyzed separately by type of review (IPR or PA), but due to the similarity in response types and frequency of those responses, they are presented jointly. The survey questions were open-ended and allowed a response that contains as many as 300 characters across five lines of text.

The first question being presented asked reviewers to describe what they learned while assessing program documents. Categories that represent all responses are shown in Table 1, below, beginning with the most frequent response. Examples of the responses are included.

Table 1. Responses to Question about What Readers Learned while Reviewing Program Documents	Count
1. Learned attributes of well-written, easy to review documents. Know how to be more efficient and write better documents with clearer ties to standards (e.g., clearly written document is easy to assess; learned importance of connecting specific evidence to standard; how to look at evidence provided to judge standards; can now guide district through process; hope all program leaders and trained stakeholders will participate in program assessment readings)	29
2. Kudos to staff and improved process (e.g., valuable exercise to learn to review documents; great opportunity to share with colleagues; learning that CTC is kinder and gentler helped her do her work; continue to be impressed with improvements; peer reading helped sort out what doc really says to helps reach consensus)	14
3. Better understanding of standards; understand how to write to a standard; many ways to do it (e.g., better understanding of skills and knowledge beginning teachers bring to first year of teaching (from induction person); looked more deeply at focusing and aligning programs with standards and utilizing key descriptors in standards; better able to focus on standard language as I review and write documents)	13

Table 1. Responses to Question about What Readers Learned while Reviewing Program Documents	Count
4. Learned more about accreditation process (e.g., increased knowledge of how system operates and accreditation process works; less anxious. See whole process as opportunity to look closely at program and make improvements (BTSA person))	4
5. Suggestions to improve review process (e.g., provide hard copies of standards, wants suggestions for shortcuts in the PA review process; if need to use new set of standards, tell reviewer so can prepare)	4

The four most common responses indicate that becoming trained and experienced in the accreditation system equips one to guide one’s own institution in the process and to learn how to use CTC staff for support. Staff has observed that faculty and staff from institutions scheduled for a site visit often sign up for the Board of Institutional Reviewers (BIR) training about a year before the site visit. It appears that participating in the program assessment review process similarly equips reviewers to provide specific direction to their own programs as they prepare for PA. In addition, being a PA reviewer seems to develop a more confident understanding of how to unpack the standards and, therefore, how to write specifically to the standard elements. Furthermore, experienced reviewers can elucidate the role of documentation (evidence) in supporting the program narrative.

The last comment reflects the idiosyncratic needs of different reviewers. Results from the second question (Table 2, below) may shed useful light on changes in the process that would improve some reviewers’ experience of PA.

The second question being presented asked reviewers to describe what they did to make the process more efficient/effective for them and their reading partner. Categories that represent all responses are shown in Table 2, below, beginning with the most frequent response. Examples of the responses are included.

Table 2. Categories of Responses to Question about What Readers Did to Make the Process More Efficient/Effective for Themselves and their Partner	Count
1. Specific practices that made the process more efficient/effective for the readers (e.g., read 1 or 2 standards together then split the reading and shared comments and concerns before writing Preliminary Report (some shared insights as filled out the form); looked for key phrases in the standards; identified phrases to include in the program summary; true professionalism in that we accepted judgment and opinions of the other; color-coded key components of standards and as read, color-coded aligned sections; read one part of standard at a time and researched response for evidence, then talked about section, worked well to help stay focused)	35
2. Requests to have hard copies of standards documents available and to have a printer available when readers need a particular page as a reference (e.g., not efficient to look at program assessment document and syllabi on computer; took too long to scan for information we needed. Printed out both documents)	11

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3. Responses pertaining to the training; most appreciated the training, some asked that training include other skills (e.g., review and reinforce tasks of reviewers, tried to establish a system for reading (but couldn't); liked the two hour calibration, focus on the standards, and teamwork; in training, discuss ways that readers cross-reference and check each other's work to be "time efficient"; partner taught me tricks to lessen eye strain; remind reviewers they can take a break)	8
4. Comments about other reviewers (e.g., read with same partner twice which really helped. This time fell right into the pattern; some partners work well and others don't; remind others to speak quietly, difficult to concentrate sometimes)	3

The most common category of responses identified specific practices used by teams to be efficient and effective in reviewing the documents which requires comparing program narratives with program standard elements and following the trail of evidence to specific parts of supporting documents. PA documents vary widely in their "user-friendliness" in the same way that institutions vary in the amount of support provided them to develop electronic documents. Nevertheless, the most frequent practice of PA reviewers was to calibrate themselves by reviewing one or two standards together and then splitting the work of reviewing the rest of the narrative and documentation. Some of the comments indicated that both team members read the entire document, focusing on their own standards. These teams would be able to share findings and concerns meaningfully because they have common knowledge of the document. Other teams indicated that they share insights as they completed the Preliminary Report form (e.g., "true professionalism in that we accepted judgment and opinions of the other"), implying that each reader read only the standards they were assigned. If this is true, then it's possible that some documents are not receiving an adequate evaluation, either being found with all standards "preliminarily aligned," or receiving requests for information that goes beyond the language of the standard.

The second comment reflects the difficulty that some reviewers have switching from one electronic document to another. Whether all reviewers can adapt to a completely digital environment remains to be seen; staff may need to consider whether providing hard copies of the standards is important to retain a large and willing pool of reviewers.

As is implied in the last category of Table 1, the third category in Table 2 identifies topics that could be addressed in the PA training process. Specifically, responders asked staff to clarify and reinforce the task that reviewers were to accomplish, provide guidance in organizing the review, suggesting ways to reduce eye strain, and encouraging reviewers to take breaks whenever they need to.

The final category of responses is very small and includes comments about other reviewers; either how having the same partner over time increases efficiency and alerting CTC staff to potential problems with certain reviewers and to the need to maintain a quiet environment.

Staff has informally used the feedback from the surveys to plan for subsequent PA or IPR reading sessions. Paper copies of standards are available during the IPR and PA reading sessions. Staff will

remind readers that the standards documents are available in the rolling file. Based on this analysis, staff will discuss if additional suggestions should be incorporated into the PA training.

Next Steps

At a future COA meeting, staff will provide additional information on the feedback collected regarding the implementation of the Commission's accreditation system.