

Discussion of Streamlining Initial Program Review (IPR) January 2019

Overview

This item presents a discussion of the current Initial Program Review (IPR) process and considerations as to how it might be streamlined.

Background

Initial Program Review (IPR) is a process in the accreditation system that any approved program sponsor must follow when proposing a new educator preparation program. During IPR, new program proposals are reviewed by a pair of external experts, and as appropriate, by Commission staff with expertise in the program area. The average timeline for a new program proposal to go through IPR ranges from 6-12 months to complete, depending on the type of program, the availability of reviewers, and how quickly the institution provides the additional information requested by the reviewers.

A submission for IPR consists of a narrative response to each program standard, and supporting documentation, where applicable. Depending on the number of standards for any given program, an IPR submission can contain nearly 500 pages of narrative and documentation. Submissions are reviewed by an expert pair, who provides feedback to the submitting institution. The institution responds to the issues that were identified by the reviewers and it is reviewed again. This review process continues until reviewers determine that all program standards are aligned.

Reviewers for IPR are volunteers to the process and complete these reviews in addition to their regular job duties. Recruiting and identifying available reviewers has been a challenge for staff, with required time commitment commonly cited as the reason why reviewers decline an invitation to review.

Program Review is the process that is followed to ensure that programs that are already operating continue to be aligned with the Commission's adopted program standards. As a result of the effort to strengthen and streamline the accreditation system, the [Program Review process](#) was streamlined in a way that relies on evidence rather than narrative. The directions are very specific (see examples for [preliminary](#) and [induction](#) programs) indicating what institutions should submit as evidence to show how the standards are being met. This review is typically completed in a single day. Reviewer comments to staff indicate this is an effective and efficient process for reviewing a program. In addition, the time commitment is significantly reduced.

Discussion

Staff is exploring how to streamline the IPR process. Because in both cases, a single program is being reviewed by expert reviewers, it seems appropriate that the process could be more aligned with the requirements for Program Review. Additionally, a streamlined process could reduce the time commitment placed on reviewers, encouraging more to participate in the process.

Because programs going through IPR are new and not yet operational, more narrative for certain standards than is required in Program Review may be necessary so that reviewers can understand the program design. For example, most program standards contain a standard in relation to the program design and curriculum, in which a narrative response would still be required to help explain the context. Other components of standards may be reviewed based on prescribed evidence, similar to the evidence required for Program Review. For example, the candidate [competency matrices](#) used in Program Review, which link to course syllabi, could serve as a major component of the review for IPR submissions.

Unlike Program Review, which is reviewed once in preparation for a site visit, programs going through IPR will still be required to revise and resubmit submissions as necessary until all program standards are aligned.

Additionally, there may be certain components of a submission that may be reviewed by Commission staff. For example, Program Review requires institutions to submit evidence related to organization structure, faculty qualifications, and course of study. These are components that staff may be able to review for alignment to standards.

As staff continues this work, there are questions for discussion-

1. Is a streamlined IPR process appropriate for institutions with Initial Institutional Approval seeking approval for their first program?
2. Are there specific types of evidence that should be required in IPR that may differ from Program Review?
3. What components can be reviewed by staff and what components need to be reviewed by experts with content knowledge?
4. How much narrative should be required from a new program?
5. For what type of standards should narrative be required?

Next Steps

Staff will continue to discuss the IPR process and based on the COA's discussion develop a future item for the COA to consider.