



December
2006

California Postsecondary Education Commission

Updating the Commission's Program Review Guidelines and Procedures

This report provides an update on the work of the Commission's Program Review Committee that periodically makes recommendations for enhancing the Commission's program review procedures. In adopting the report, the Commission concurred with the following recommendations: (1) criteria related to social need should be described more fully in the guidelines, (2) greater consideration should be given to the development of a statewide and regional long-range program plan that will be beneficial to the legislature and to California's public and private higher education systems, and (3) specific procedures should be established for assessing the extent to which adult continuing education needs are being met.

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The Commission advises the Governor and Legislature on higher education policy and fiscal issues. Its primary focus is to ensure that the state's educational resources are used effectively to provide Californians with postsecondary education opportunities. More information about the Commission is available at www.cpec.ca.gov.

Background

The review of proposals for new educational programs, campuses, and off-campus centers is among the most important responsibilities of the California Postsecondary Education Commission. Such reviews help ensure that state operational and capital funds are spent wisely and have desirable educational outcomes.

Although the Commission updated its procedures for reviewing proposals for new campus facilities in 2002, it has been over 25 years since academic and vocational program procedures were written.

As college and university campuses develop and propose novel and innovative programs to address emerging societal needs, such as *medical physics, cancer pharmacogenomics, transnational feminist studies, bioinformatics, and stem cell biology*, it is important that the Commission ensure that its program review process continues to provide valid and forward-thinking assessments.

The specific guidelines used by staff in reviewing proposals for new undergraduate and graduate programs have remained fairly unchanged over time and are presented in Appendix A.

The Commission's guidelines include the following seven criteria:

- Student Demand
- Societal Needs
- Appropriateness to the Institutional and System Mission
- Number of Existing and Proposed Programs in the Field

- Total Costs of the Program
- Maintenance and Improvement of Quality
- Advancement of Knowledge

It should be noted that the Commission's program review process involves much more than the set of guidelines and principles identified above; rather, it is a deliberate and dynamic process undertaken to help ensure a reasonable alignment between the long-term program plans of California public colleges and universities and the long-term societal needs of the State. The next section contains a brief summary of findings and recommendations from the Commission's previous program review update in 1981.

Findings and Recommendations of the 1981 Program Review Update

In 1981, the Commission contracted with a private consulting firm to evaluate and make recommendations regarding state-level program review practices in California. The consulting group produced a report titled *Quality and Accountability: An Evaluation of Statewide Program Review*. It contained the following recommendations:

- The Commission should direct more attention in the program review process to State and institutional master plans, and less attention to individual program proposals.
- Efforts should continue to be placed on refining the Commission's process of reviewing existing programs.
- A higher priority should be devoted to periodic intersegmental review of selected program areas.

The Commission determined in 1981 that the recommendations supported the general policy direction with respect to program review. The current program review guidelines and principles support that policy direction.

Key Issues under Consideration by the 2006 Program Review Advisory Committee

An advisory committee has been established to assist the Commission. The advisory committee consists of representatives from each of the public systems of higher education and a representative from the independent sector will be appointed in the near future. Several program review issues are being considered by the committee, including issues related to long-range program planning, societal need, and adult continuing education.

Long-range program planning: The Commission is statutorily responsible for preparing a five-year state plan for postsecondary education that integrates the planning efforts of the public higher education systems. In developing the plan, the Commission is directed to consider the range of programs appropriate to each public higher education system and to consider the educational programs and resources of the independent sector.

It has been over ten years since the Commission produced a comprehensive planning document that aligns the long-range program plans of the higher education systems with the long-range societal needs of the State. In recent years, an annual program review report summarized the five-year program plans of the California State University and the University of California. At their initial meeting, the advisory committee agreed that the systems and the State could benefit greatly from more state-level program

planning. Because the state's *Master Plan for Higher Education* is basically an undergraduate planning tool, a state-level program plan for graduate and professional education, which incorporates the graduate plans of the independent sector, could be especially beneficial to the state. The program review advisory committee is currently discussing three critical questions: (1) What would such a plan look like and what defining characteristics should the plan entail? (2) What resources would be required to produce a high-quality plan? and (3) How can the plan be used by the systems, the Legislature, and the administration?

Societal Need: The Commission's program review criterion related to *societal need* is based on the premise that postsecondary education institutions should bear a responsibility for preparing students to meet a number of State needs, including workforce and industry needs, knowledge needs, and the need for an informed and engaged citizenry. Institutions often find it difficult to document a compelling need because empirical evidence of social need is often hard to compile. In such cases, Commission analysts have assisted institutions in establishing need by directing them to relevant sources of data and descriptive information. Given the complexity involved in reviewing proposals for new programs in fields such as law, medicine, and educational leadership, Commission analysts believe that the program review criterion of *societal need* must be described more completely so that program planners will have a better understanding of the type and level of information expected to be included in proposals. The advisory committee will assist in this effort.

Adult Continuing Education: The Commission is mandated to periodically review and make recommendations on the need for, and availability of, postsecondary continuing education programs for adults. The advisory committee will consider the efforts of public higher education systems in the area of adult education and the Commission's work on the nexus between workforce preparation and higher education. The advisory committee may also make recommendations to assist the Commission in meeting its adult education advisory responsibilities.

Next Steps

The advisory committee will hold several meetings early next year to resolve the key issues and to assist the Commission in preparing an updated set of program review procedures and guidelines. The enhanced guidelines will be shared extensively with the higher education systems before being submitted to the Commission for final adoption.

Recommendation

The Commission's Program Review Committee recommends the following: (1) criteria related to social need should be described more fully in the guidelines, (2) greater consideration should be given to the development of a statewide and regional long-range program plan that will be beneficial to the legislature and to California's public and private higher education systems, and (3) specific procedures should be established for assessing the extent to which adult continuing education needs are being met.

Appendix A



June 2006

California Postsecondary Education Commission

Summary of the Commission's Program Review Principles and Guidelines

Although each public higher education system in California has a unique mission and social purpose, the systems are united in a most common and fundamental way: each aims to enhance the intellectual, technical, and creative capacity of its student learners. Because advanced knowledge -- scientific, technical, and procedural -- tends to be organized by fields of study, and delivered to students through specific programs, the ultimate success and benefit of the state's higher education enterprise rests with the quality and breadth of institutional degree and certificate programs.

Legislative Mandate

Assembly Resolution 770, Statutes of 1974, established the California Postsecondary Education Commission (CPEC) as the statewide planning and coordinating agency for higher education, with specific mandated planning functions and responsibilities. Primary among the responsibilities given to CPEC is academic and vocational program review. In addition, the Commission is charged with reviewing and commenting on the need for new campuses and off-campus centers.

The Commission's program review responsibilities include the following:

- Review and comment on the long-range plans developed by the public higher education governing boards and make recommendations to the Legislature and Governor.
- Review and comment on the need for new academic, vocational, and certificate programs proposed by the public higher education systems and make recommendations to the Legislature and Governor.
- Evaluate and comment on the program review process of the public higher education systems.
- Identify societal educational needs and encourage institutional adaptability to change.
- Review periodically the availability of continuing education programs for adults and make appropriate recommendations.

The Commission developed a set of principles to guide the program review process. The principles are intended to: (a) safeguard the state against inefficiencies in the allocation of program resources; (b) help ensure that new programs will meet student and societal needs; and (c) ensure that programs are well conceived and that they will have desired educational and social consequences. As defined in statute, the Commission's role in the review process is primarily advisory. However, in the case of Joint Doctoral Programs involving public and private institutions, the Commission has approval authority.

Recent enhancements to the Commission's review process include greater emphasis placed on the long-range plans of the systems so that staff can consider prospective programs five years in advance of implementation. This has enabled the Commission to alert the systems of potential planning concerns early in the review process before formal proposals are submitted.

Definitions

Academic and Vocational Programs: A series of courses arranged in a sequence leading to a degree or certificate.

Program Plan: A program plan contains, at a minimum, an inventory of the programs offered or projected to be offered by the campuses comprising a higher education system. Also included are proposed timetables for implementation and narrative descriptions of problem areas, program trends, and future needs. In general, plans are prepared for a five-year period and revised and updated annually.

Program Proposal: A document prepared by a campus that describes and justifies the need for a new degree or certificate program. The proposal must address each of the Commission's program review elements.

Program Review Council: An advisory body established to assist Commission staff in matters related to program review and academic planning. The Council consists of representatives from the three public higher education systems, the State Department of Education, and the Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities.

Commission's Program Review Principles and Guidelines

1. Student Demand

Within reasonable limits, students should have the opportunity to enroll in programs of study in which they are interested and for which they are qualified. Therefore, student demand for programs, indicated primarily by current and projected enrollments, is an important consideration in determining the need for a program.

2. Societal Needs

Postsecondary education institutions bear a responsibility for preparing students to meet the State's workforce and knowledge needs. Work force demand projections serve as one indication of the need for a proposed program. Although achieving and maintaining a perfect balance between supply and demand in any given career field is nearly impossible, it is important nevertheless that the number of persons trained in a field and the number of job openings in that field remain in reasonable balance.

3. Appropriateness to Institutional and Segmental Mission

Programs offered by public institution within a given system must comply with the delineation of function for that system, as set forth in the California Master Plan for Higher Education. Proposed new programs must also be consistent with the institution's own statement of mission and must be approved by the system's statewide governing body.

4. The Number of Existing and Proposed Programs in the Field

An inventory of existing and proposed programs, compiled by the Commission staff from the plans of all systems of postsecondary education, provides the initial indication of apparent duplication or undue proliferation of programs, both within and among the systems. However, the number of programs alone cannot be regarded as an indication of unnecessary duplication. This is because (a) programs with similar titles may have varying course objectives or content, (b) there may be a demonstrated need for the program in a particular region of the state, or (c) the program may be needed for an institution to achieve academic comparability within a given system.

5. Total Costs of the Program

The relative costs of a program, when compared with other programs in the same or different program areas, constitute another criterion in the program review process. Included in the consideration of costs are the number of new faculty required and the student/faculty ratios, as well as costs associated with equipment, library resources, and facilities necessary to deliver the program. For a new program, it is necessary to know the source of the funds required for its support, both initially and in the long run.

6. The Maintenance and Improvement of Quality

Protecting the public interest and trust requires that educational programs at all levels be high quality. Although the primary responsibility for the quality of programs rests with the institution and its system, the Commission, for its part, considers pertinent information to verify that high standards have been established for the operation and evaluation of the program.

7. The Advancement of Knowledge

The program review process encourages the growth and development of intellectual and creative scholarship. When the advancement of knowledge seems to require the continuation of existing programs or the establishment of programs in new disciplines or in new combinations of existing disciplines, such considerations as costs, student demand, or employment opportunities may become secondary.

Commission Report 06-12

