

**Findings and Recommendations:
Evaluation of the Program Review System
Of the Illinois Community College Board**

July 2005

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This paper presents the findings of an evaluation of the Program Review System of the Illinois Community College Board and recommended revisions to the System. The evaluation was conducted by consultants in collaboration with the ICCB staff and a Working Group of college representatives (see attached list).

Introduction

This evaluation was undertaken because community colleges and the community college system have changed substantially during the past decade including expanded responsibilities for adult education and workforce development, increased emphasis on transfer and articulation, and increased efforts to assure quality.

Since ICCB's Program Review System was redesigned in the early 1990s, there have been three developments that provided the context for this evaluation of the System and the development of recommendations. First, colleges have developed comprehensive planning and quality improvement processes that are supported by information systems providing analyses appropriate to campus decision making. Second, accrediting organizations, particularly the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association have encouraged colleges to develop assessment systems and continuous quality improvement processes. Third, the Program Review System may now focus on the original purpose—evaluating instructional programs. During the past decade, various reporting requirements were added to program review to address colleges' contributions to achievement of broad statewide goals and objectives. Now other mechanisms, including performance indicators and related reports, provide accountability for these contributions.

The recommendations described below recognize the development of campus level systems and clarify the purposes of ICCB's Program Review System in that context. They are designed to provide colleges with flexibility to incorporate the Program Review System into campus planning to provide both colleges and the ICCB with information needed to meet their respective responsibilities in a timely and efficient manner. The following topics are addressed.

- Clarifying the purposes of Program Review and the roles of the colleges and ICCB
- Integrating program review with campus planning and quality improvement processes
- Developing a Web-based information system and reporting methods

- Developing guidelines and schedules for reviews of academic disciplines and cross-disciplinary programs—general education, adult education, remedial/developmental programs, vocational skills, and transfer programs—in addition to occupational programs
- Revising reporting requirements and sharing best practices

The evaluation of ICCB's Program Review System began with a comprehensive survey of colleges about campus-level program review and other planning and quality control processes. The history and features of the current system were examined and compared to examples of program review systems in other states. Survey results and other materials related to the evaluation of the Program Review System are available at <http://virtual.parkland.edu/oire/PRWebSite.htm>

After meetings with the Working Group and ICCB staff, preliminary recommendations were developed and distributed to colleges. The preliminary recommendations and related analyses were posted to a website and comments invited. A presentation was made at the fall meeting of the Illinois Association of Institutional Researchers. The preliminary recommendations were then discussed in meetings with several ICCB committees—Program Advisory Committee, MIS and Research Advisory Committee, the Chief Academic Officers, and Chief Student Services Officers. After a second meeting with the Working Group, the preliminary recommendations were revised. The revised recommendations were then discussed at focus group meetings held at Heartland, Waubensee, and Rend Lake Community Colleges and attended by academic officers, institutional researchers, and others responsible for on-campus program reviews. Based on the advice of the Working Group, advisory committees, and focus groups, the recommendations were refined and revised.

Clarifying Purposes

Because of the progress that colleges have made in developing quality improvement process, data systems, and procedures, ICCB's role can now be focused on assisting colleges in improving local reviews, disseminating best practices, addressing state-level issues, and promoting the system's responsiveness and accountability.

Recommendations

*Statement of Purposes
of Statewide Program Review*

1. *The purposes of Statewide Program Review are:*
 - a. *To support campus-level planning and decision-making related to:*

- *Assuring the continuing need and improving the quality and cost-effectiveness of instructional programs;*
 - *Assessing, improving, and updating programs on a regular basis;*
 - *Discontinuing programs when there is no longer sufficient demand, quality cannot be maintained at an acceptable level, or they are no longer cost-effective.*
- b. *To demonstrate the accountability of the community college system in maintaining high quality, cost-effective programs that are responsive to the needs of students, businesses and industries in Illinois.*
- c. *To identify best practices, exemplary innovations, and program issues that need to be addressed at the state-level by the ICCB.*
2. *Individual colleges should have the primary responsibility to evaluate instructional programs, to make decisions about improvement and continuation, assure that program review results are considered in campus planning and budget development, and to report results to the Illinois Community College Board.*
3. *The Illinois Community College Board should have the responsibility to assure that each college has an appropriate review process, to coordinate and report on accountability efforts, to support local program review processes, to collect and disseminate information about best practices, and to identify and develop solutions for statewide programmatic issues.*

Although ICCB has the authority to discontinue programs in the very rare circumstance that a college is unable or unwilling to deal with a program that has serious deficiencies, it has special procedures for this circumstance that go beyond program review.

Integrating Program Review and Campus Quality Improvement

Most of the college representatives responding to the survey indicated that ICCB's Program Review System was a component of their institution's planning and review processes. Several noted that the primary value was to provide academic leaders with a foundation for developing campus-level quality improvement processes. Almost all of the colleges used Program Review to make program elimination decisions or at least considered results with other information in making those decisions.

The five-year cycle based on ICCB's follow-up study schedule serves as the basis for review schedules at most colleges. Two-thirds indicated that they reviewed programs on this schedule, however, some colleges had established a two-year calendar for each set of reviews so that assessment data could be included. Others had adjusted the review calendar to fit their assessment, planning, or budget development cycle.

The remaining colleges indicated that they reviewed data and made program decisions annually or had established a "continuous quality improvement" process. Several made a distinction between campus quality improvement and planning processes and ICCB's Program Review System. Several of these colleges indicated that few important program decisions were made on the basis of ICCB's System, although the results were considered, and that the campus process was more intensive, used better and more up-to-date data, and had more commitment from faculty and academic administrators. Because program decisions are made annually by these colleges and ICCB's reports are limited to a certain set of programs, the System might miss program eliminations and other major program decisions. To enable the colleges to integrate the ICCB Program Review system with the colleges' internal assessment, planning, and quality improvement processes the colleges must have the flexibility to integrate program review with campus planning and quality improvement processes.

Recommendations

4. *A manual of instructions for Program Review should be developed and revised once every five years.*
5. *All ICCB follow-up studies and any special requests related to the program review should be made available to the colleges one year prior to the date for submission of program review reports (by the September preceding the August submission date). Special requests should be limited to occasional critical statewide issues related to instructional programs.*
6. *Colleges may use the most recent audited state-level data available from ICCB at the time they begin their annual program review process or at appropriate times in a continuous quality improvement process.*
7. *A five-year program review schedule for programs and instructional areas should be maintained. With prior approval by ICCB staff, colleges may use alternative schedules for justifiable reasons, such as accommodating*

more frequent program reviews and campus planning cycles or coordinating accreditation evaluations.

Developing a Web-Based Information and Reporting System

Surveys respondents and discussions among ICCB staff and the Working Group suggest that the comparative data provided by ICCB to support program review—including enrollment, completions, costs, employment trends and student follow-up studies—are useful. However, the data tables and the *Addendum* are usually distributed too late in the cycle for many colleges.

Recommendations

8. *An on-line information system should be developed to support continuous access to the most recent statewide data available and to allow colleges to obtain data that best meets their needs.*
9. *The on-line information system should provide access to wage and labor databases such as the Occupational Employment Statistics (OES), Illinois occupational supply and demand data, and Clearinghouse information on transfer students.*
10. *A Web-based reporting system should be developed to allow colleges to submit program review reports electronically.*
11. *Unit cost data will continue to be available but colleges may use locally developed cost data. While this makes statewide comparisons difficult, program-level data from the ICCB Unit Cost Study are not useful for review of some programs.*

Reviewing of Disciplines and Cross-Disciplinary Programs

Surveys submitted by college representatives and discussions with staff, the Working Group, advisory committees, and focus groups indicated that the existing Program Review System works well for occupational programs. However, the reporting format is less successful for academic disciplines and cross-disciplinary instructional areas—transfer programs, general education, remedial and developmental instruction, and adult education—and schedules for coordinated statewide reviews have not been developed.

Most colleges now focus on discipline areas in their reviews of non-occupational areas. This approach has the advantage of being consistent with organizational structures and facilitating involvement of faculty at the

departmental level in the review of their offerings. However, these reviews are not directly linked to statewide analysis and follow-up studies like those available for occupational programs. If a schedule were developed for reviews academic disciplines and cross-disciplinary programs, information about statewide issues and best practices could be collected and accountability enhanced for these important instructional areas. In addition, with coordinated reviews of cross-disciplinary programs, colleges could address the broader objectives of these areas and their importance to their missions.

Reviews of academic disciplines would focus on the quality of individual courses and clusters of courses, using assessment and other information. Reviews of cross-disciplinary programs would build upon the reviews of academic disciplines, as appropriate, and address such broad questions as:

- What are the objectives of this program and to what extent are these objectives being achieved?
- How important is this program and how does it contribute to the mission of the college?
- To what extent is the program integrated with other instructional programs and services?
- What improvements are needed and what resources will be required?

Colleges may also address issues specific to each cross-disciplinary area. Guidelines for reviews of transfer programs collectively might call for colleges to consider trends in completions and transfer patterns and student satisfaction. Reviews of remedial and developmental programs might consider the students' advancement and success in college-level work.

There are currently substantial accountability mechanisms for evaluation of adult education that apply to those offered by community colleges, secondary schools, and community based organizations. ICCB reviews of these instructional programs should appropriately focus on issues that apply to colleges only, such as the linkages of these programs with remedial and developmental education, career and technical education, and transfer programs. Other issues might include: sharing of faculty resources, participation of units in college planning, relationship within the college organizational structure, and college staff relationships to support adult education students' transitions.

Recommendations

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- 12. A five-year program review schedule should be maintained. The current schedule should be amended to reflect the transition to the revised Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP 2000).*

13. *Reviews of Academic Disciplines should occur on a five-year schedule and focus on the quality and learning outcomes of individual courses and clusters of courses. General education and other courses designed for transfer should be examined. Remedial courses should also be included in the reviews as appropriate.*
14. *Courses designed for transfer in majors, such as business, education and engineering, may be reviewed as appropriate with related occupational programs, academic disciplines, or cross-disciplinary reviews on schedules determined by each college.*

Academic Discipline Reviews	
Year	
1	Written & Oral Communications
2	Mathematics
3	Physical & Life Sciences
4	Humanities & Fine Arts
5	Social & Behavioral Sciences

15. *Cross-Disciplinary Reviews should occur on a five year schedule and focus on the college-wide objectives for selected instructional areas and examine the extent to which desired outcomes are being achieved.*

Cross-Disciplinary Reviews	
Year	
1	General Education
2	Adult Education and ESL
3	Remedial/Developmental
4	Vocational Skills
5	Transfer Functions and Programs including the AA, AS, AAT, other specialized transfer degree programs, and the AGS degree program

Student and Academic Services

The evaluation and review of student and academic services is just as important as the review of instructional programs. These services, and in fact, all administrative and support units contribute to academic programs and achievement of a college's mission. However, developing a common statewide schedule or a common statewide process for these areas would not be beneficial because the organization and structure of these units vary greatly from college to college. As a result, the colleges need more flexibility in the ICCB Program Review System to enable them to review and evaluate these areas most effectively.

Recommendations

16. *Each college should evaluate student and academic services, including advising/counseling, financial aid, library, admissions, and registrar functions, at least once during each five-year cycle. Colleges should determine their own schedules within the five-year program review cycle for reviews of student and academic support services.*
17. *A brief summary of the review of student services should be provided to the ICCB on a template designed for that purpose.*

Revising Reporting Requirements and Sharing Best Practices

Currently, each college prepares a three to five page report for each program or cluster of programs reviews. Although the review questions are appropriate, the reports frequently contain a considerable “boilerplate” that simplifies the reporting process but reduces the relevance of the report.

ICCB staff typically examines reports for reviews of over 800 programs. They focus on the results of program review and itemize numbers of programs eliminated, significantly improved, or identified for further review—which demonstrate the accountability of community colleges collectively. They sort through the reports to identify examples of good practices and innovative approaches to program improvement that may serve as models for other colleges. While examples best practices are considered to be very helpful to other colleges and appropriate signs of accountability, the reporting format does not highlight these examples. In addition, the reports may provide clues about programmatic issues that need to be addressed at the state level, but the format does not call for identifying these problems.

With the development of review processes by colleges and the ICCB’s emphasis on results, program review reporting requirements can be focused and streamlined to assure that colleges and the ICCB have the information needed to fulfill their responsibilities. In addition, the reporting format should allow colleges to report major program changes and improvements resulting from planning and quality improvement process other than program review.

Recommendations

18. *Summary program review reports submitted to ICCB should focus on the results of program review, presentation of best practices and exemplary innovations, and identification of programmatic issues that need to be addressed at the state level.*

19. *While colleges should be expected to address need, quality, and cost of all instructional programs in their reviews of individual programs, detailed reports for local use on these reviews need not be submitted to ICCB. Instead, summary review reports should be designed for use in campus-level decision making and should be examined by ICCB staff in the recognition process.*
20. *The program review summaries submitted by colleges to the ICCB should be simplified in substance and format to minimize paperwork for colleges and facilitate analyses by ICCB staff. Using templates (see attached example) It is recommended that reports should include:*
 - a. *A list of all occupational programs included in the reviews for that year with identification of the types of actions taken using a standard set of classifications such as "retained, substantially improved, designated for follow-up, designated inactive, or eliminated."*
 - b. *A list of actions (continued with minor improvements, significantly modified, discontinued, placed on inactive status, scheduled for further review)) arising from planning and quality improvement processes related to occupation programs that were not included in the reviews that year.*
 - c. *A list of the academic disciplines and cross-disciplinary instructional area reviewed with a brief summary of the actions taken.*
 - d. *Descriptions of innovations or improvements to selected occupational program, discipline area, or cross-disciplinary program that resulted in exemplary improvements in quality, cost effectiveness, or responsiveness to community needs.*
 - e. *Identification of emerging programmatic issues that may need to be addressed at the state level. (Optional)*
21. *Whether colleges use the ICCB five-year schedule or review programs more frequently, results of reviews of all occupational programs, academic disciplines, and cross-disciplinary programs conducted during the preceding academic year should be reported. In addition, colleges should report any major changes made to instructional programs during the year as a result of other planning or quality improvement processes.*

22. *ICCB staff should organize workshops so that colleges could share best practices and strategies for incorporating program review in assessment, planning and budget systems*

Implementation Schedule

The consultants suggest that the first year of implementation of the new system be a pilot year during which colleges can choose either to use the current program review system or to implement some or all of the new reporting formats and procedures. Some colleges have already established reviews of academic disciplines and cross-disciplinary programs. It is suggested that these colleges have the option of submitting updated reports on recent reviews until they can adjust review schedules to coincide with the ICCB schedule. During the pilot year, support systems for the revised Program Review System should be developed.

23. *Fiscal year 2006 will be a pilot year for the revised ICCB Program Review System. Colleges may choose to implement some or all of the revised System or to use the current program review system for the program reviews to be submitted in August 2006.*

24. *The following schedule is proposed for implementation by ICCB:*

September	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Report to Illinois Community College Board
Fall 2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Presentations at fall conferences—introduction and overview• Development & distribution of Program Review Manual
Spring 2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Implementation of Web-based reporting system• Training sessions

Summary and Conclusions

The ICCB Program Review System was developed in the 1980s and last revised in 1993. The past 11 years have brought changes—increased emphasis on accountability, changes in approaches to accreditation, and development of performance indicators. Information systems have been developed and improved at college and system levels. Most colleges have developed comprehensive program review processes and coordinated them with systematic procedures for academic planning, budget development, assessment, and other quality improvement process.

This report described recommended revisions to the state-wide program review system of the Illinois Community College Board. The recommendations are designed to clarify the purposes of the system, enable colleges to integrate program review into on-campus planning and quality improvement processes, improve data systems supporting program review, and streamline reporting requirements.

Example Templates for Program Review Reports

1. SUMMARY REPORT OF REVIEW RESULTS

CAREER AND TECHNICAL PROGRAMS REVIEWED IN ACADEMIC YEAR 20XX

Include programs on ICCB's program review schedule for the year.

Program Identification Information

6-digit CIP	
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Degree Type	(drop-down list)
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Program Title	
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Action

- Continued with minor improvements
- Significantly modified
- Discontinued
- Placed on inactive status
- Scheduled for further review
- Other, please specify:

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Improvements or Rationale for Action

A brief description (up to 150 words) of the improvements made or the reasons for other program decisions.

Principle Assessment Methods Used in Quality Assurance for this Program

- Standardized assessments
- Certification and licensure examination results
- Writing samples
- Portfolio evaluation
- Course embedded questions
- Study surveys
- Analysis of enrollment, demographic and cost data
- Other, please specify:

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2. SUPPLEMENTAL REPORT – ACTIONS TAKEN IN FY 20XX ON PROGRAMS BASED ON PRIOR REVIEWS OR OTHER PLANNING OR QUALITY IMPROVEMENT INITIATIVES

Include programs reviewed in prior years for which action was taken in the current year and/or changes resulting from planning and quality improvement initiatives.

Program Identification Information

6-digit CIP	
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Program Type	(drop-down box)
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Program Title	
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Action

- Continued with minor improvements
- Significantly modified
- Discontinued
- Placed on inactive status
- Scheduled for further review
- Other, please specify:

--

Improvements or Rationale for Action

A brief description (up to 150 words) of the improvements made or the reasons for other program decisions.
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Principle Assessment Methods Used in Quality Assurance for this Program

- Standardized assessments
- Certification and licensure examination results
- Writing samples
- Portfolio evaluation
- Course embedded questions
- Study surveys
- Analysis of enrollment, demographic and cost data
- Other, please specify:

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3. SUMMARY REPORT OF REVIEW RESULTS FOR ACADEMIC DISCIPLINES

Written and Oral Communications, Mathematics, Physical and Life Sciences, Humanities and Fine Arts, Social and Behavioral Sciences

Discipline Area	
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Improvements or Rationale for Action

A brief description (up to 150 words) of the improvements made or the reasons for other program decisions.
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4. SUMMARY REPORT OF REVIEW RESULTS - CROSS-DISCIPLINARY PROGRAMS

General Education, Adult Education, Remedial/Developmental Programs, Vocational Skills, Transfer Programs and Functions, and the AGS degree program

Cross-Disciplinary Program	
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Improvements or Rationale for Action

A brief description (up to 150 words) of the improvements made or the reasons for other program decisions.
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5. SUMMARY REPORT OF REVIEW RESULTS - STUDENT AND ACADEMIC SERVICES

Advising/counseling, financial aid, library, admissions, and registrar functions

Service Area	
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Improvements or Rationale for Action

A brief description (up to 150 words) of the improvements made or the reasons for other program decisions.
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6. INNOVATIONS AND BEST PRACTICES (SELECTED PROGRAMS)

Narrative descriptions of exemplary improvements or innovations for selected occupational programs, academic disciplines, cross-disciplinary programs, or student and academic service functions.

7. LOCAL AND/OR STATEWIDE PROGRAM ISSUES (OPTIONAL)

Narrative descriptions of emerging programmatic issues that may need to be addressed at the state level.

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Evaluation of the Program Review System
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