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Making Program Review Work for You

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Making Program Review Work for You

Without a doubt, external program reviews tend to be one of the more onerous tasks that a Department Chair must oversee. Whether state or institutionally mandated, such program reviews typically result in three major recommendations: the unit needs more funding; the unit needs more faculty; the unit needs more space. In tight fiscal times, recommendations that emphasize an increase in expenditures for operating budgets, human resources, and facilities are unrealistic. As a result, preparing the self-study and participating in the program review process often are viewed as a waste of time by faculty, chairs, and other administrators. In this session, participants will learn about some of the advantages of external program review, when it is done thoughtfully and intentionally with an eye toward program improvement. Key items to be presented are tips for writing the self-study and for selecting the external reviewers who have a solid knowledge of the discipline under review and who are leaders in the field with broad experiences. Finally, participants will engage in discussions that focus on making the program review a meaningful experience for the unit, one that leads to concrete improvements for the programs housed in the unit.

The presenter has served as an external reviewer for a variety of campuses and can therefore speak to the issue from multiple perspectives. In 2014, her unit underwent an external program review that focuses specifically on graduate programs. The resulting thoughtful reviewer report is making it possible for the Department Chair and the Dean to initiate some major curricular, programmatic, and administrative changes that will improve the quality of students admitted to the program, improve student retention and completion rates, and raise the overall profile of the unit. The majority of suggestions require minimal investment of additional resources, making this a fruitful and productive exercise for the Department, because the changes are both realistic and realizable.