



Administrative Program Review at Boston College

August 12, 2009

Overview

Boston College, founded by the Society of Jesus (i.e. Jesuits) in 1863, is one of the oldest Jesuit, Catholic universities in the United States. As it pursues its mission, it continues to strengthen its commitment “to the highest standards of teaching and research in undergraduate, graduate and professional programs and to the pursuit of a just society through its own accomplishments, the work of its faculty and staff, and the achievements of its graduates. It seeks both to advance its place among the nation's finest universities and to bring to the company of its distinguished peers and to contemporary society the richness of the Catholic intellectual ideal of a mutually illuminating relationship between religious faith and free intellectual inquiry.” The University’s Strategic Plan is guiding BC to fulfill its mission and reach its goals.

Administrative Program Review (APR) – along with Academic Program Review – supports the realization of the Strategic Plan by providing a system to ensure that our current work is efficient and effective and assessment of whether or not departments’ activities are aligned with the overall BC Mission and Strategic Plan. APR fits with the University’s strategy, its cultural roots and the standards to which it holds itself. The APR process is consistent with and supports Jesuit principles of higher education, which call for self-examination, the pursuit of excellence and service to others. In addition, a process like APR is called for in the accreditation standards to which the University must adhere.

APR was launched in 2006 as part of BC's Strategic Plan and the University's commitment to continuous improvement and Ever to Excel. The APR process was designed with the help of our Vice Presidents, Directors, managers and staff – and in particular, the Administrative Program Review Planning Committee, comprised of representatives from each of the VP administrative areas, who worked thoughtfully and carefully to develop a program that would fit the University’s culture. Incorporating some of the best ideas from departments of program reviews at other universities, the committee designed a cyclical program review process that has the flexibility to accommodate each department's unique role within the University. The Planning & Design Stage was implemented October 2006 and completed December 2007. The Pilot Stage began June 2007 and ended February 2009. The Steady-State Stage began May 2008 and continues on today. APR is well positioned for success and is equipped to support Boston College’s drive to educate a new generation of leaders for the new millennium – men and women who will be capable of shaping a new century with vision, justice, and charity – with a sense of calling, with concern for all of the human family.

APR is a developmental process of on-going program reviews that involve systematic assessment, planning, action and improvement across administrative units at Boston College. At the departmental level, APR is a set of activities designed to help managers and employees examine their department’s current operations, make adjustments and establish plans for continuous improvements. It is a long-term, continuous process, with repeating cycles in which every administrative unit periodically undertakes a rigorous review of its own operations. APR is considered a “zero-sum” activity; that is, it is not an exercise through which departments are expected to ask for more resources or staff, but rather, where new initiatives are expected to be made possible through reorganization or reallocation of resources.

Process

The review is managed and driven by the department. Department teams review current departmental operations, gain insight from knowledgeable experts at peer institutions, benchmark practices, services, and quality with those of other leading national universities, and develop action plans and measures to achieve high-quality performance results. In order to accomplish these outcomes, departments proceed through a five-step process. First, the Preparation and Kick-Off stage involves establishing a schedule, selecting a Self-Study Team and conducting an initial orientation session. Second, the Self-Study Team completes an in-depth review of the department and drafts a report and preliminary action plan. Third, an External Review Team of peer experts from other leading universities conducts a site visit and formulates a report and recommendations. Step four is creating the Action Plan, which involves analyzing the reports and recommendations in order to create a plan for improvement. Lastly, the Implementation and Follow-Up stage begins with identifying action items for staff and setting a schedule, and it continues with a one-year check-in and regular monitoring by the Vice President throughout the seven years until the department completes another review.

The Self-Study is the “heart of the review” process. It involves self-assessment and reflection across a wide range of topic areas such as Mission and Goals, Activities and Products / Services, Customers and Cross-Unit Relationships, External and Internal Environments, Resources, and Organizational Practices. Through this process the team evaluates current priorities, direction, services, and organizational efficiency, identifies customer needs and collects customer feedback, validates strengths and identifies opportunities for improvement. It then uses its findings to produce a report with preliminary recommendations for an action plan. The Self-Study report helps inform the external reviewers of the state of the department, as they create an independent report and recommendations based on their findings. These two reports provide valuable internal knowledge and external advice, and from them a common set of recommendations is determined and utilized in drafting the department’s Action Plan.

The Office of Administrative Program Review provides support and assistance for departments throughout the review process. The APR staff facilitates an initial orientation session and coaches the department through the process, offering feedback and editing support, project planning, and facilitation services. The APR website (www.BC.edu/APR) houses useful guides, templates, samples, and other resources. Institutional Research provides services such as Data Profiles, Benchmarking, Customer Surveys, Focus Groups, Structured Interviews, and Data Analysis and Presentation for departments during their review.

Benefits and Outcomes

The benefits of conducting Administrative Program Review include:

- Established, clear priorities that link to university mission and priorities
- Improved short-range and long-range planning to reach those priorities
- Participation and input from members regarding improvement
- Integration of assessment methods into its operations for continual feedback
- Improved levels of customer and employee satisfaction
- Enhanced communication within the department
- Support for managers and employees to develop and improve skills
- Opportunities for increasing and supporting diversity
- Broader understanding of university processes

The following are samples of anticipated results and outcomes from departments that have begun the APR process in their areas:

- Improved Operations and Processing
 - Automate Employee Change Request (ECR) processing
 - Relocate and redesign mail services operations with new routes
 - Centralize three units of Counseling Services in one location
- Expanded use of Technology
 - Leverage Peoplesoft for faculty hiring and expanded self-service
 - Install new mail software to improve operations and service
 - Install workstations for clients to complete intake information
- Enhanced Service Offerings
 - Plan for Voice-Over IP telephony migration
 - Develop an effective access management system for residential halls
 - Pilot Internet Protocol Television (IPTV) cable services
 - Introduce bulk mailing services
- Re-examined Activities
 - Expand student formation initiatives in Residential Life
 - Review and rearticulate Counseling Services policies
 - Develop auxiliary model business functions in Residential Life
 - Examine BC Dining purchasing practices to maximize efficiency
- Expanded Communication and Outreach Efforts
 - Enhance BC Dining communication strategy to improve awareness
 - Improve functionality and accessibility of Counseling Services website

The following eleven areas take part in APR: Student Affairs, Information Technology, Facilities Services, Office of the Financial Vice President, Human Resources, Auxiliary Services, Athletics, University Advancement, Office of the President, Office of the Executive Vice President, and Mission and Ministry. The APR process will include five to eight departments per year, with each of the 46 identified departments participating during the seven-year cycle. By reviewing all administrative departments across the University, APR hopes to identify and address cross-functional and/or institutional improvements over time.

APR, complementing other programs initiated by the Office of the Executive Vice President or Boston College's Vice Presidents, is building a highly efficient and effective administrative organization whose culture values self-examination, strategic thinking, mission-aligned planning, the continuous pursuit of excellence, customer service, the use of data in decision making, proactive and effective communication, and institutional learning. In continually building and reinforcing this culture, APR aligns administrative priorities with the university's strategic direction, creates a clear, shared understanding of each administrative unit's role in carrying out its priorities, promotes a deepened sense of purpose, and ultimately leads to a more effective BC administrative organization that can better support the university's continued rise among the ranks of the best U.S. and international universities.