

REVISED GUIDELINES FOR COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

Formerly known as Program Review. Guidelines revised by The Council on Institutional Effectiveness Program Review Work Group, Spring 2009; renamed by The Council on Institutional Effectiveness in Spring 2010.

The process of Comprehensive Program Assessment at Meredith College began in 2002-2003 and has included all units-academic programs, college programs and administrative services. The purpose of Comprehensive Program Assessment is program enhancement through periodic self-study, and internal and external reviewer feedback. The Comprehensive Program Assessment process provides an opportunity to answer key questions important to long-range planning for the program, to reflect on how the program is situated within the institution and to evaluate the effectiveness of current assessment and planning components including mission, outcomes, methods and results.

Before beginning a second round of Comprehensive Program Assessments in 2009-2010, the Council on Institutional Effectiveness (CIE) reviewed and revised the old guidelines to update and improve the process. The revised guidelines were streamlined for an electronic format, while still providing links for more information and for answering [frequently asked questions](#). In Spring 2010 CIE again revised the guidelines and made some minor changes to ensure that the process will provide useful information for decisions related to institutional planning and resource allocation. If you have questions that have not been answered in this document, please contact [Pam Steinke](#), Director of Research, Planning and Assessment (RPA) or send a suggestion through the [feedback page](#) on the RPA website.

Part I. Calendar – Seven-year Cycle

The Comprehensive Program Assessment cycle was originally planned as a 5-year cycle; however, in reality, the first round took 7 years to complete. Therefore, the second round of Comprehensive Program Assessments was scheduled on a 7-year cycle with approximately 9 programs, across divisions, being reviewed each year as specified in the [Cycle 2 Comprehensive Program Assessment Calendar](#).

For those departments/programs that have specific accreditation or approval associations reviewing their programs and operations, the self-studies will be scheduled to coincide with the outside review whenever possible. The department or school may utilize the reports prepared for and received from the accrediting or approval agency. Those programs may be asked to provide responses to any additional questions that Meredith's guidelines call for which were not examined by the agency involved and to give attention to long-range goals if the accrediting body does not include that component. However, the College will not require these departments/programs to duplicate efforts.

Part II: Funding

The College is setting aside some funding each year to help support the cost of Comprehensive Program Assessments. The funds allocated to a department or program will need to be spent within the fiscal year for which they are granted. A typical Comprehensive Program Assessment will be *funded between \$750 and \$1500*. Note that this is less than the last cycle due to budget cuts. An [application for funding](#) must be filed in the Office of Research, Planning and Assessment, with a preliminary budget for expenses. Requests for additional funding beyond \$1500, due to the size and complexity of the department or program, will also be made at this time. The decisions about additional funding will be made by the Council on Institutional Effectiveness in consultation with the Vice President concerned.

Funds will be allocated only with appropriate receipts. Any honorarium paid to an external peer reviewer will be sent only after the final report of the review team has been received.

Part III: Timeline

Keeping in mind that the primary purpose of Comprehensive Program Assessment is program enhancement in context of institutional enhancement, departments/programs are encouraged to think carefully about what information will be needed in order to get useful feedback. Some of this information may be available from [institutional sources of data](#). The focus of the self-study will be on key questions specific to [academic](#), [college](#) and [administrative](#) programs that can be answered from the review and will provide the background and scope needed for the peer reviewers. The entire [timeline](#), from initial discussions to Comprehensive Program Assessment completion, will take *12 to 18 months*. The action plan will be completed within 6 months of completion of the review and a meeting with CIE will take place within 12 months of the visit. Program enhancements will continue to be reported in the annual Continuous Improvement Reports (CIRs) for up to 3 years after the Comprehensive Program Assessment.

Part IV. Key Questions of Self-Study and Organization of Report

The Comprehensive Program Assessment process must be motivated by the desire for program enhancement for it to work; therefore, all reports will be organized around departmental/program outcomes but each department/program will choose how to approach each section in which key questions are answered, in consultation with their supervising units and based on their current planning needs. Key questions are specified for [academic](#), [college](#) and [administrative](#) programs. Additional guidance on how to approach each section is also provided.

The following organization for self-study reports is recommended:

- a) Mission and Outcomes;
- b) Assessment (organized around outcomes);
- c) Department/Program Content and Effectiveness (organized around outcomes);
- d) Operations and Resource Management;
- e) Collaboration in Support of the College
- f) Strengths and Challenges
To learn more about using a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats analysis for Comprehensive Program Assessment, link to [James Madison University site](#) (<http://www.jmu.edu/ie/SAUPProgramReviews/SWOTAnalysis.shtml>);
- g) Actions to Improve Programs and Operations (organized around outcomes).

In completing the examination of its programs and operations, each department/program should consult any professional standards that might apply, relevant [peer](#) or benchmark institutions, as well as the criteria outlined by the regional accrediting association and any other pertinent accrediting, licensing or approval agency.

The self-study should result in a written report, together with any appropriate supporting documentation. A portfolio approach can be used, if desired. The report will be submitted to the supervising Vice President and any other supervising unit (Dean, AVP) and then to the peer review committee.

Part V. Peer Review

When a self-study has been completed, a review by a group of peers must take place consistent with the following recommendations:

- A team of two to four reviewers is used including one to two [reviewers external to the Meredith community](#), one of whom serves as chair of the committee with responsibility for completing the final report (typically, external reviewers are given an honorarium and an external reviewer who serves as chair, is given more than an external reviewer who does not chair the committee);
- The Department Head or Program Director in consultation with the VP of the division and Dean or AVP (when applicable), will determine the make-up of the peer review team;
- Internal reviewers (i.e., colleagues within the Meredith community but outside the particular department/program undergoing a Comprehensive Program Assessment) may be included as members of a peer review team (see the [list of past internal reviewers](#) to help formulate a peer review team if an internal reviewer is to be used; Meredith faculty and staff members will usually be asked to participate in no more than one Comprehensive Program Assessment per year and participation on a peer review team is typically not compensated, although the department/program may wish to acknowledge the contribution of its internal reviewers in some way).

Part VI. Sharing of Results of Comprehensive Program Assessment

The department/program will write an [action plan](#) in response to the peer review to be turned in within 6 months after the peer review report.

The Comprehensive Program Assessment process at Meredith not only provides information for unit level planning but is also part of the overall process of planning and assessing for continuous improvement at Meredith. Therefore, results of Comprehensive Program Assessment must be shared as follows:

- *Electronic copies* of the self-study, peer review report, and action plan are filed with the Office of Research, Planning and Assessment for institutional documentation and for review by CIE and other interested faculty and staff (note that beginning in 2009-2010, *all Comprehensive Program Assessment documents are open to Meredith faculty and staff*).
- Action plans are discussed at a meeting with CIE within 1 year of the visit;
- Actions taken after the action plan is developed are recorded by departments/program in the annual [Continuous Improvement Report \(CIR\)](#);
- Comprehensive Program Assessments are discussed with each VP and other supervising units to help set divisional planning and budgeting priorities and to share, as appropriate, when setting college-wide planning and budgeting priorities.