

# **A MEASURE of Success: Adapting Program Review to Facilitate Continuous Quality Improvement**

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## **Introduction**

In an effort to facilitate continuous quality improvement and accountability, Waubonsee Community College reevaluated its program review process in light of the college's institutional outcomes framework, the TOP MEASURE, and a focus on continuous quality improvement fostered by the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP). Waubonsee's revised process embraces a more holistic approach to program review by: a) a focus on teaching and learning rather than traditional statistical measures of success, b) the inclusion of both academic and administrative areas within a five-year program review cycle, c) the use of a new web-based data management system to house data from across the institution, and d) a new user-friendly reporting format. In developing the revised program review process, the college focused on actions that facilitate a culture of evidence and data-driven decision-making through the active participation of faculty, staff and administrators. The revised program review process is representative of the college's responsiveness to the national call for greater accountability and information transparency by institutions of higher education.

## **The Revised Program Review Process**

Waubonsee's Outcomes Program (TOP) is facilitating the creation of a culture of evidence that informs practice through data-driven decisions. The college revised its program review process to include faculty and staff in order to focus on student learning outcomes. Traditionally, the Program Review Report was created at the administrative level and the results have not been optimized for program-level decision making. The college uses multiple methods to assess the quality, cost and need of each program including:

- Defining outcomes assessment at the program and course level
- Reviewing and revising course outlines and syllabi
- Evaluating and approving curricular changes in Curriculum Council
- Developing new programs that support student success
- Collecting data in the WEAVEonline data management system
- Collaborating with Institutional Research, Information Technology and Financial Services to gather institutional data
- Reporting the results of the process to the ICCB - led by The Outcomes Program

During the 2006-2007 academic year, TOP met with the academic and student services areas to discuss each program. The goal of the meetings was twofold. First, TOP staff discussed the new program review guidelines in order to communicate college expectations and to discuss the new emphasis on teaching and learning. Second, the program under review shared their data and information to provide TOP staff with a clear picture of the goals of the program. The meetings allowed both groups to better understand the program review process as well as learn about the innovative teaching techniques and student assistance that each area provides. Faculty and staff members are instrumental to this process. They shared information related to the success of their program, innovative teaching and learning strategies and best practices. Multiple meetings were held with each program area during the 2006-2007 academic year and the result of those meetings was a deeper and broader level of data for the Program Review Report.

### **Examples of Program Review – Computer Information Systems and Developmental Writing**

The Computer Information Systems and Developmental Writing departments provide specific examples of the impact of the revised program review process on program and curricular revision. Waubonsee's Computer Information Systems (CIS) department was the recipient of an American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) MentorLinks: Advancing Technical Education grant, which was developed with the support of the National Science Foundation. MentorLinks is designed for community colleges looking for outside expertise to improve the undergraduate education and preparation of technicians in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields. The MentorLinks grant partnered Waubonsee Community College with Nashville State Community College and provided for faculty from both institutions to visit their partner college and discuss curriculum. In April 2006, a focus group met to discuss Waubonsee's CIS curriculum and make recommendations on the skills and knowledge that students needed to succeed in the workforce.

Based on the results of the focus group, the program started a self-study of the curriculum to assess its relevance and discuss possible changes. The most significant change to the program's curriculum was the definition of the Core Requirements that are part of each degree. The Core Requirements provide students with the foundation necessary to pursue their field and consist of 5 courses: Business Information Systems, Introduction to Programming, Networking Essentials, Information Technology Project Management and Introduction to the Internet. Once a student has completed these Core Requirements and their General Education Requirements, they

can choose from 4 different degree tracks – Computer Software Development, Web Site Design and Development, Computer Support and Network Administration and Security. Because the core is cross-functional, students will have more time to decide which track they want to pursue. These curricular changes will provide Waubonsee’s CIS students with a solid foundation in whichever field they choose.

Also during the 2006-2007 academic year, Waubonsee’s full-time developmental writing faculty members received grant funding for a project that would incorporate electronic portfolios into the college’s English 050 and English 070 courses. The introduction of an electronic portfolio was proposed to provide students with greater flexibility than traditional classroom-style courses by allowing students the ability to interact with their work, their classmates and their instructor outside of the normal boundaries of the scheduled class. The project is an innovative attempt to integrate the need for improved communication skills with an emphasis on technology which would help improve students’ information and communication technology (ICT) skills. Waubonsee’s use of e-portfolios in developmental writing courses will allow students who might be unfamiliar with technology to use it in a non-threatening way that supplements their classroom assignments. The classroom of the future mixes the hands-on, personal-interaction of the traditional classroom with the individual customization and speed of the electronic course to meet the scheduling, lifestyle and professional needs of the modern student. Students need a certain level of autonomy, and students and instructors become partners in the learning/teaching process.

### **WEAVEonline: Using Technology to Streamline Data Collection**

In order to facilitate data collection for the program review process, the college adopted the WEAVEonline Web-based data management system in 2006-2007. Data collection has been significantly enhanced with the implementation of the WEAVEonline system. The college now has a central data repository for all information relating to institutional and unit goals, program review and outcomes assessment. In addition to providing data storage, WEAVEonline provides individual programs the option to align their program outcomes with the college’s strategic goals. For the first time, this process encouraged staff and faculty to link their daily processes with the larger goals of the college and to see how their role supports the institutional goal of student success.

Additionally, the implementation of WEAVEonline has produced a substantive change in the college’s reporting processes. WEAVEonline is now the data source for institutional goals and accomplishments, the college’s strategic plan, program review data and even individual goals and data for faculty and staff. This data will assist the

college in developing reports for the institution as well as reports for governmental agencies and accreditation. The reports will be enriched by the increased access to data and accountability which is built into the revised system of data collection. Over time, the depth and breadth of data collected throughout the college will improve as a result of these efforts.

### **Closing the Feedback Loop with a new Report format**

Waubonsee Community College uses the Program Review Report as a communication tool to facilitate continuous quality improvement within all areas of the college. The report is designed to be meaningful to both internal and external stakeholders and the results help support decision-making college wide. The faculty received information on the revised program review process, as well as a condensed copy of the program review report, at faculty orientation in August 2007. The complete report is also available on The Outcomes Program Web site for all stakeholders. Based on the results of this year's program review process, TOP is working to further revise the process for the 2007-2008 academic year. In the spirit of continuous quality improvement, the college will evaluate this process annually so that it continues to provide a meaningful assessment of college programs. The new reporting format showcases the highlights of each program which include student recognition, pass-rates on national certification exams, innovative teaching and learning activities, and successful grants. The report also includes comments from students, staff and faculty members involved in these programs, which are the heart of the Program Review report. Rather than relying on retention and completion rates, cost of instruction and certification testing to tell the program's story, Waubonsee's report focuses on the student success stories. Personal comments, especially from students are, in many ways, the most important data that can be provided.

### **Conclusion**

The revised program review process reflects the college's goal of providing a comprehensive and responsive program review process that provides both the internal and external college community with important information about student success. The first year of the new program review process was successful. The revised process has incorporated the student services areas with the academic programs smoothly. By involving faculty and staff at a deeper level in the program review process, the college has been able to gather different kinds of data, both qualitative and quantitative, that supports the process. The program review system is becoming transparent to the college community, as well as providing them with useful data for decision making.

Waubonsee Community College's revised program review process is a clear example of the continuous quality improvement system within an educational setting. The five-year cycle allows the institution to regularly review all academic and administrative programs to guarantee that they support the college's vision, mission, values and strategic goals. Involving multiple stakeholders in this process has allowed the college to analyze and use the information from program review to confirm and improve teaching and learning. The revised program review process provides evidence that can be used to make data-driven decisions that guide the institution to broader educational and organizational improvement and student success.

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