

Memorandum to All



State University of New York

Memorandum to Presidents

Date: March 1, 1977

Vol. 77 No. 3

From: Office of the Vice Chancellor
for Academic Policy

Subject: Request for Procedures for the Review of
Academic Programs

In October, 1975, the Board of Trustees asked the Chancellor to develop and disseminate guidelines for a rigorous and periodic review of authorized academic programs. We recognize that the graduate program reviews are nearing completion and that most campuses already have in place a system of undergraduate program review. We are not presuming to develop guidelines for your use but rather are requesting that you share with us your campus procedure for reviewing undergraduate programs. This request and the approach were approved by the February Council of Presidents.

Review should proceed along several lines of inquiry simultaneously, with four interrelated criteria applied to each program: quality, need, efficiency, and the interrelationships among programs.

The review of academic programs at the undergraduate level must necessarily begin with an assessment of program quality. It should not be confused with the budgeting process or with the setting of priorities based only on the availability of resources.

It is the traditional responsibility of a university faculty to play a central role in the assessment of program quality. Quality cannot be easily defined or simplistically evaluated. It emerges from honest professional discourse about the standards that should be applied, changes in knowledge, the relationship of programs to each other, student learning needs, and society's educational preferences. Such an evaluation must be carried out openly and in a manner that ultimately lends itself to assessments of differing institutional missions as well as University-wide educational planning.

Although assessment of quality begins on the campus and with the faculty, it cannot end there. Student and administrative views, as well as external perspectives, are necessary elements of the responsible review of the quality of academic programs.

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Each campus should provide the Office of Academic Policy by May 1, 1977 a set of procedures and a timetable for the review of all of its undergraduate programs. Campuses with policies and procedures already in place should provide relevant documents. The implementation of the procedures should begin no later than September 1, 1977. The timetable should allow for completion of the review of all programs within a reasonable time, generally not to exceed five years. After the initial review, program reassessment should recur every five years.

Campuses may wish to use somewhat different definitions of programs, from majors on the one hand to more broad educational functions on the other. For the purpose of comparability, it would be best to use the approved Academic Programs Inventory, but this decision should be made by each campus.

Campuses may wish to use different approaches, e.g., review by related program fields, review by program within a department or division, or review by individual major program.

Campuses may choose to use outside evaluators or consultants in different ways; where possible provision should be made for the inclusion of outside assessments.

Campuses should coordinate program review with anticipated reviews of external evaluators, such as Middle States, Engineers Council for Professional Development, and so on.

We assume that considerable variation in the types of procedures suggested by the campuses will result, and properly so. However, to ensure desirable comparability, we will ask that each set of campus procedures also be submitted for review and examination by a University-wide panel to be convened shortly after May 1, 1977.



Loren Baritz

cc: Chancellor Boyer
Dr. Kelly

This memorandum addressed to:
Presidents, State-operated campuses
Presidents, Community Colleges
Deans, Statutory Colleges

Copies for information to:
President Rose
Vice President Cook