

Program Assessment, Program Review, Program Prioritization – What’s the Difference?

Each academic department is required to have an Assessment Plan and submit periodic assessment updates. Additionally, each department is subject to a program review once every six years, and there is talk about using program prioritization in the future. How are these different, and what overlap is there between these processes?

Program Assessment

Program assessment is a process designed to continuously improve the quality of our academic programs. The department faculty designs the plan, performs the assessment, and uses the results to improve their programs. The results of the assessment activities are reported to MSU administration so that changes and progress can be noted and reported to accreditation evaluators.

Ideally, program assessment results should not impact program review or program prioritization. However, there are points of overlap:

- Program assessment should result in program improvement, and that will likely be noticed in a program review.
- A department’s failure to have or follow through with their assessment plan will be noticed during a program review.
- Identifying areas in which students are performing below expectations on student learning outcomes, and responding to that assessment, could be viewed favorably for a department in a program review.

Program Review

Program review is a periodic in-depth evaluation of how a department is doing. A program review covers a wide variety of aspects of department performance.

- The number of degrees awarded each year is monitored, in part, to meet a requirement of the Board of Regents that the University demonstrate that its program offerings adapt to meet changing interests of students.
- The department’s research and service productivity are reviewed.
- The department’s progress on its own strategic plan is part of the review.
- The department’s alignment with institutional priorities is reviewed.
- The extent to which a department utilizes assessment of learning outcomes to demonstrate and improve student performance is a part of a program review.

Because program reviews occur only periodically, they are not strong inputs into program prioritization.

Program Prioritization

Program prioritization is intended to help the Institution use limited resources as effectively as possible. The program prioritization process is not yet in place at MSU. At other institutions, criteria such as the following have been used for prioritizing programs:

- Consistency with University Mission, Vision, Values, and Goals.
- External and Internal Demand
- Quality
- Productivity
- Cost Effectiveness
- Potential
- Centrality
- Impact

Priorities would be used to strategically direct campus resources. Programs might be targeted for investment, maintenance, realignment, or elimination.

At this time MSU is developing a new strategic plan, which is a necessary preliminary step before any prioritization effort.