Academic Audit: An Overview

The Academic Audit, like more traditional program reviews, is a peer review process including a self-study and a site visit by peers from outside the institution. However, the similarities end there. Unlike the traditional approach to program evaluation, this process emphasizes self-reflection and self-improvement rather than compliance with predetermined standards. The purpose of an academic audit is to encourage departments or programs to evaluate their "education quality processes" – the key faculty activities required to produce, assure, and regularly improve the quality of teaching and learning. An audit asks how faculty approach educational decision-making and how they organize their work, using the resources available to them and working collegially to provide a quality education in the best interests of the discipline and student learning.

I. Elements of the Academic Audit: based upon the approach laid out in
Education Quality Improvement: A Handbook for Departments by Dr. William Massy
(Bill Massy is a professor emeritus of education and business administration at Stanford University and president of the Jackson Hole Higher Education Group)

The Self Study:
- ❖ Departments examine the following five focal areas of the educational process by asking common sense questions:
  - ○ *Determining Learning Objectives*
    - ▪ Have we consciously considered what students who complete our courses/program should know and be able to do? For employment? For their abilities/responsibilities as citizens? Do we use and document information gathered from employers, former students, senior institutions? Do we identify and learn from best practice, evaluate student outcome goals of comparable departments in other institutions?
  - ○ *Designing Curriculum and Co-curriculum*
    - ▪ How do we determine what is taught, in what order, from what perspective? Do we work collaboratively on curriculum design? How do we decide what resources and resource materials will be used as content vehicles? Do we consciously consider how the course design relates to other courses students will take as part of this program? Do we consider out-of-classroom activities that could complement or be integrated into the curriculum? Do we identify and learn from best practice, evaluate curricula of comparable departments in other institutions?
  - ○ *Designing Teaching and Learning Methods*
    - ▪ How are teaching and learning organized for students? What methods will be used to expose students to material for the first time? To answer questions and provide interpretation? To stimulate student involvement with the material? To provide feedback on student work? Do we analyze teaching and

learning processes on a regular basis? Do we strive for coherence in the department's curriculum and educational processes? Do we work collaboratively on process design? Do we identify and learn from best practice, evaluate teaching and learning methods of comparable departments in ours and other institutions?
- o *Developing Student Learning Assessment*
    - ▪ What measures and indicators do we use to assess student learning? Have we defined indicators or measures of achievement based upon our stated learning objectives? Do we assess performance only at the end of the course/program or do we compare beginning and ending performance to ascertain value added? Who is responsible for assessment? Do we work collaboratively on assessment design, implementation, and analysis? Do we base decisions on facts? Do we identify and learn from best practice, evaluate assessment practices of comparable departments in ours and other institutions?
- o *Assuring Implementation of Quality Education*
    - ▪ Are we organized to ensure that our mutual departmental objectives and priorities are implemented consistently? How do we assure ourselves that content is delivered as intended, that teaching and learning processes are being implemented appropriately and consistently, that assessments are conducted as planned and the results used effectively? Do we work collaboratively to implement improvement initiatives? Do we identify and learn from best practice, evaluate quality assurance practices of comparable departments in ours and other institutions?

❖ Departments write a self-study report (20 pages):
- o Describing the current state of their efforts to improve student learning and the academic quality of their programs
- o Describing their strengths and weaknesses in the five focal areas
- o Citing and briefly describing documentation supporting exemplary practices
- o Describing initiatives to address practices that need improvement
- o Describing implementation plan(s) for improvement initiative(s) with the highest priority

The Peer Review:
❖ Auditors are volunteers (primarily faculty) who receive training on education quality processes and audit methodology.
❖ Audit teams (3-5 members) will most likely come from other TBR institutions.
❖ Because the auditors will be focusing on quality <u>processes</u>, they do not need to come from the academic discipline of the department being audited.
❖ Audit visits are typically one day per department.
❖ Auditors meet with departmental leadership, faculty, and students.
❖ Auditors ask questions similar to the self-study questions cited above.

- ❖ Auditors write a report:
  - o highlighting examples of exemplary practice,
  - o noting areas for improvement,
  - o evaluating a department's approach to educational quality practices, and
  - o evaluating a department's level of quality process "maturity."

II. Principles of the Academic Audit: (While there is no "hidden agenda," no "right way" to approach the Academic Audit process, the Academic Audit openly advocates the following principles as foundations of good educational practice.)

- ❖ Define quality in terms of outcomes
  - o Learning outcomes should pertain to what is or will become important for the department's students.
  - o Learning, not teaching per se, is what ultimately matters.
- ❖ Focus on process
  - o Departments should analyze how teachers teach, how students learn, and how to best approach learning assessment.
  - o Departments should study their discipline's literature and collect data on what works well and what doesn't.
  - o Experimentation with active learning should be encouraged.
  - o Faculty should be encouraged to share and adopt their colleague's successful teaching innovations.
- ❖ Work collaboratively
  - o Teamwork and consensus lead to total faculty ownership of and responsibility for all aspects of the curriculum and make everyone accountable for the success of students.
  - o Dialogue and collaboration should be encouraged over territoriality and the "lone wolf" approach.
- ❖ Base decisions on evidence
  - o Departments should collect data to find out what students need.
  - o Data should be analyzed and findings incorporated in the design of curricula, learning processes, and assessment methods.
- ❖ Strive for coherence
  - o Courses should build upon one another to provide necessary breadth and depth.
  - o Assessment should be aligned with learning objectives.
- ❖ Learn from best practice
  - o Faculty should seek out good practices in comparable departments and institutions and adapt the best to their own circumstances.
  - o Faculty should share best practices and help "raise the bar" for their department.
- ❖ Make continuous improvement a priority
  - o Departments should continually and consciously strive to improve teaching and learning.