Dear Professors,

Attached please find the report of the Program Reviews Taskforce, which was formed in the 2011-12 Academic Year. Its charged included 1) examining the current process and report on how the process might be better utilized in academic planning within departments and/or divisions and by the administration, 2) exploring the benefits of aligning reviews of programs with similar issues, and 3) reviewing the self-review guidelines and procedures to determine whether revisions were necessary. At the request of Academic Senate Chair Linda Sarna, please review the materials with your committees and provide a response. Responses are most helpful when they contain a clear statement of support of the report and its recommendations, a statement of support contingent upon reservations, or a statement of opposition to the report. Minority reports are always welcome. Committees may also simply decline to opine or raise no objections.

Please respond to me by December 7, 2012 so that the Executive Board may review and synthesize the various positions into a single Academic Senate response at its meeting on December 13, 2012.

Thank you,
Jaime

Jaime Ronaldo Balboa, Ph.D.
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September 18, 2012

Linda Sarna, Academic Senate Chair 2012-13
Andy Leuchter, Academic Senate Chair 2011-12

RE: Ad Hoc Committee on Program Reviews

Dear Professors Sarna and Leuchter,

The ad hoc Committee on Program Reviews has completed its review of the Academic Senate’s program review process. The Academic Senate leadership charged the committee with 1) examining the current process and report on how the process might be better utilized in academic planning within departments and/or divisions and by the administration, 2) exploring the benefits of aligning reviews of programs with similar issues, and 3) reviewing the self-review guidelines and procedures to determine whether revisions were necessary.

The committee met as a whole on several occasions. As well, individual discussions took place to allow the greatest input from the members.

On behalf of the committee, attached is the final report. Please feel free to contact me to discuss the report and how best to proceed.

Sincerely,

Professor Jan Reiff, Department of History/Statistics
Chair, Ad Hoc Committee on Program Reviews

cc: Carol Bakhos, Near Eastern Languages and Cultures
Stuart Brown, Physics and Astronomy
David Lopez, Sociology
Joseph Nagy, English
Richard Weiss, Chemistry and Biochemistry
Jaime Balboa, Academic Senate CAO
Linda Mohr, Academic Senate Assistant CAO and Director of Program Reviews
Report of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Program Reviews

September 10, 2012

Carol Bakhos
Stuart Brown
David Lopez
Linda Mohr
Joseph Nagy
Jan Reiff, chair
Richard Weiss
This moment is propitious, in the words of this working group’s charge, for “examining the Academic Senate’s program review process, with a view toward maximizing the impact of the reviews beyond the individual units under review.” WASC’s recent UCLA assessment acknowledged the importance of our Senate review process and embraced the strategy of using that process to encourage programs to imagine and implement plans for incorporating and evaluating learning outcomes in their curriculum. In the face of ongoing budget cuts, Graduate and Undergraduate Councils have increasingly encouraged departments preparing self-reviews to incorporate strategic plans for their futures as well as describing past achievements and present challenges. Review schedules have been adjusted to permit programs that see common issues to be reviewed in the same year. In instances where review teams have identified issues common to other academic programs, the Councils have asked teams reviewing those other programs to raise those issues previously identified. When degree programs across divisions or across campus have experienced similar challenges that surface in the review process, the Councils have forwarded those challenges to administrators to consider in their future planning. In short, much of the groundwork for utilizing the data collected and the recommendations generated in the program review process more fully in planning has already been laid.

The rapidly changing environment in which UCLA (and the rest of higher education) finds itself makes the products of program reviews potentially even more valuable for the difficult planning that must occur. Self-reviews provide an excellent opportunity for programs to focus on strategies for ensuring excellence in the curriculum within that larger planning environment. As UCLA’s current learning outcomes effort illustrates, program reviews offer an excellent opportunity for assessing the impact of new administrative initiatives. The outside reviewers who come to evaluate an average of 15 to 19 departments across campus each year provide valuable insights and information to departments, Senate committees, and administration. Careful attention to issues and opportunities across reviews and years can ensure that the Senate can offer ready evidence and scholarly direction to administrators who need to be nimble in planning within this ever and rapidly changing environment.

At the same time, faculty whose departments are under review and Council members conducting the reviews would benefit greatly from a deeper understanding of the broader planning environment in which the programs are and will be operating in the future. Clearly this must involve an awareness of the financial issues faced by UCLA more generally and divisions and departments more specifically. But it might also involve some introduction to curricular innovations underway elsewhere on campus that have contributed to a department’s educational excellence within this new environment.

It was within this context that the workgroup began its deliberations. Its first step was to brainstorm, first with Senate Chair Andrew Leuchter, who convened the workgroup, and then among itself about the wide range of ideas that had been advanced for rethinking program reviews. Some were ideas that had been floated earlier—reviews done divisionally or
combining program reviews and administrative reviews under administrative leadership. Others, such as splitting reviews of graduate and undergraduate programs, emerged from departmental experiences and preferences or reflected past practices. Also included in this first phase was a serious discussion of the limitations of the program review process as understood by the committee based on members’ own experiences and from complaints and suggestions received by Councils and the Academic Senate Executive Office. Among these observations were the arguments that the review process required far too much effort from departments for the value they produced; Interdepartmental Degree Programs (IDPs) typically have insufficient staff support to assist with the process; a handful of departments were often held in a kind of permanent review limbo as the Senate pushed for actions perceived as impossible to achieve for reasons beyond the department’s control; and occasional reviews were off-target, perfunctory, or simply bad. The immediate result of this broad discussion was a series of possible strategies to enhance the value of reviews to individual departments, to instruction that reaches beyond individual departments, and to UCLA more general strategies that involve minor and sweeping changes to the program review process, some of which appear in the recommendations below.

Conscious of the differing responsibilities allocated in UCLA’s system of shared governance and cognizant of the reality that individual programs as well as the overall educational experiences of our students can only thrive through close cooperation with the administration, the working group sought the opinions of administrators most directly involved with the program review process: department chairs, deans, vice provosts and vice chancellors, and the Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost. We solicited, via e-mail, insights and suggestions from the chairs (sometimes multiple chairs) of departments that had been reviewed in the past three years or under review in this academic year. The lack of response from the chairs was, perhaps, most suggestive for our enterprise. One chair was willing to speak confidentially but would not put any observations in writing. Only a handful of chairs were willing to take the time to offer either suggestions or criticisms. Competing responses from the past and present chair of one department demonstrated just how differently reviews were perceived even within the same unit. Some chairs felt that planning within the context of a review opened the possibility that the administration would use well-designed strategic plans arbitrarily to make cuts that might more appropriately be made in other departments or programs that had not done such planning. Although it is always presumptuous and sometimes misleading to base conclusions on so much missing data, we cautiously interpreted this lack of response as a tacit acknowledgement that, in the eyes of many department and program chairs, their planning for the future and the Academic Senate’s program review had little to do with each other.

We also issued invitations to all of the deans of divisions with programs reviewed by the Senate to meet with members of the workgroup. All but four accepted our invitation. In our individual conversations with them, we asked first for their observations on the program review process and its relationship to planning on campus. After they had volunteered their insights and criticisms, we then asked them to comment on some of the ideas that had surfaced in discussions among ourselves and with others. Among the deans, there was almost universal agreement that reviews served a useful purpose and did have an impact on their planning. They also agreed that not all reviews were equal, for reasons having to do with the review process itself and for reasons external to that process. Beyond those points of agreement,
however, opinions diverged widely. A few thought the idea of reviewing all degree programs within a division during a one- or two-year period was worth exploring. Others, however, were strongly opposed to such a strategy for reasons ranging from the strain that it would put on divisional resources, to losing the insights gained through the review spread across years into departments and, beyond the departments, the division. The meetings with the deans were particularly useful for helping us to understand the overall UCLA planning process, particularly in this period of budgetary uncertainty, and for identifying the various ways in which the Senate’s review might best intersect with those planning processes. Our meetings with Vice Provosts Smith and Littleton, Associate Vice Chancellor Davies, and EVC and Provost Waugh were similarly valuable for the special insights they provided.

Finally, we gathered information on the review processes of other UC campuses and consulted a 2001 study of the UCLA Academic Senate Reviews to see if any of the insights that emerged from that effort continued to be useful in the present context.

The committee’s conversations, research, and reflections based on the experiences of members of the workgroup in various roles in the program review process led us toward several conclusions. First, the program review process is both sound and valuable. However, it is not without flaws that should be corrected, especially if the reviews are to provide the data and faculty voice into the planning process that the charge to this workgroup anticipated.

Second, the usefulness of reviews to planning can be greatly enhanced if information is shared between the administration and departments at critical junctures in the review process. It needs to take place as departments begin the self-review process. It needs to continue as deans meet with or provide issue statements to the review teams. Exit meetings that bring reviewers, departmental leaders, and administrative representatives together at the end of the review need to serve as opportunities for reviewers to understand the constraints and possibilities in which they will frame their observations and final recommendations. The Councils need to bring larger issues and emerging strategies that reach beyond individual departments to the attention of the administration as well as to Senate leadership and other Senate committees where appropriate.

Third, a better strategy needs to be implemented to resolve persistent problems facing departments, IDPs, and programs. Ongoing internal reviews and subsequent eight-year reviews that continue to identify the same issues do not serve the programs being reviewed, the Academic Senate, or the administration. In addressing these issues effectively, we hope we might also address a fourth conclusion. Departments need to see these reviews as something more than a ritual at best and a punishment at worst. We hope they will begin to use them as a way to bring faculty ideas and insights into shaping what UCLA will be in the future. In the section that follows, we hope to weave these four concerns together and to suggest possible outcomes through a discussion of the various stages of the review process.¹

Self-Reviews

Over the years, the Senate has worked to make self-reviews more concise, to encourage departments to ensure greater participation by all their faculty in the preparation of the report, to encourage departments to solicit student input, and to outline future plans even as they look back toward past accomplishments and current challenges affecting their academic and curricular excellence. We believe these efforts have improved self-reviews, but more can be done, especially as self-reviews now bear the added task of documenting program learning outcomes. We see two strategies for helping self-reviews serve departments, the Senate, and the planning process better. The first is to engage the administration, particularly the deans, when the effort of writing the self-review begins. This would seem a logical time for the divisional dean to lay out planning initiatives and budgetary issues for entire departments so the self-reviews can look toward the future with as much up-to-date information as possible. Such an exchange would also let deans hear from many department faculty members about issues they see as confronting the department. The second strategy would be to have a Senate representative (staff or council member) available to attend a department meeting to answer any questions about the process and to explain the Senate’s interest in any special topic that the department has been asked to address in the self-review. Our hope is that these changes would demonstrate that eight-year reviews are an important process through which the faculty can not only celebrate achievements and identify problems but also offer suggestions for the future that will be heard and considered by the Senate and the administration.

The Review

The quality of a review is shaped by many factors. Most critical, perhaps, are the experience of internal reviewers, the appropriateness of external reviewers, the judiciousness of both, and a clear shared sense of what the goals of the review are. Equally important, however, are the quality of information provided to the reviewers by the deans who meet with the review team prior to the review, the issues statements provided by the Graduate Division and the Division for Undergraduate Education, and the reviewed department’s cooperation and the level of its investment of time and energy in the process. Anticipating that the possibilities suggested above will foster cooperation, the workgroup focused on ways to better inform internal reviewers of their tasks.

On the best ways to inform internal reviewers, opinion was widely divergent. One point of view argued that, by reorganizing the scheduling to do reviews divisionally instead of the more seemingly random way they are currently scheduled, Council reviewers could be better prepared and the Councils themselves better informed in evaluating the information. There were compelling arguments made for the creation of experienced internal review teams that might conduct several reviews in one year (perhaps within the same division to concentrate reviewer expertise). In the final evaluation, however, the input we received and what committee members understood from experiences on the Councils and the difficulty in finding faculty members willing to serve on the Graduate and Undergraduate Councils with their already heavy responsibilities led us toward more nuanced strategies to avoid repetition and ways to improve and standardize the quality of the reviews.
The first suggestion is to offer the possibility that departments or programs, the Senate, or deans could request that reviews be scheduled in the same year if a compelling argument is made for doing so. If all parties consented to the request, the Councils could then schedule internal reviewers in such a way as to create some consistency across those linked reviews. If such scheduling placed too heavy a burden on Council members in a given year, the Councils might recall former Council members to serve on reviews, an already-approved and occasionally-used option. Using recalled members to participate in reviews might also be a way to provide consistency to reviews of programs that have much in common but that are not reviewed during the same year. A reviewer who had been particularly insightful in an earlier review might be particularly well-suited to serve on the review team of a subsequent review that has significant curricular overlap.

The second suggestion is to find a way to enhance the role of Senate staff participation throughout the review process to help ensure consistency across reviews and reports and alleviate some of the burden on council members. We want to note that this observation in no way criticizes the current staffing of the reviews, which is extraordinary given their other substantial tasks. The Assistant CAO of the Senate manages all the logistics of the reviews and follow-up along with staffing another Senate committee and handling many other administrative and managerial tasks. Analysts assigned to Graduate and Undergraduate Councils who oversee the review process at most critical points also have other committee responsibilities, within the Councils and with other standing committees of the Senate. An additional staff person accompanied by the reallocation of other staff resources would allow Senate staff, whose familiarity with and knowledge of previous reviews most often is far greater than that of Council members, to be involved more fully in the process from the start of the self-review, through the review itself, drafting review reports, preparing documents, and providing information to be used for university-wide planning. We see this ongoing involvement of a Senate staff member as a particular benefit to the review process given the regular turnover of Senate committee members.

The Review Reports

There are a series of review reports that lead to the Council’s final report. For reviews with outside reviewers, the first report is oral, given at the end of the site visit to the leadership of the unit being reviewed, its divisional dean, representatives of the Graduate Division and Undergraduate Education, the EVC’s office, the leadership of the Graduate and Undergraduate Councils, (when possible) representatives of the Senate’s Council on Planning and Budget and the unit’s Faculty Executive Committee. Although this Exit Meeting focuses heavily on the insights of the outside reviewers, the internal reviewers also provide a brief sketch of what seem to be likely recommendations. This meeting provides one last opportunity for the external and internal reviewers to hear any additional Senate, departmental, or administrative concerns and insights before they begin to craft their reports. This is the only time during the review process

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2 Guidelines for these reports are available online at
http://www.senate.ucla.edu/programreview/documents/5ERGuide.pdf
when administrators of all levels and Senate committee members meet together to raise additional issues, clarify information, and to answer questions. In terms of making sure that programs and the Senate arrive at strategies and recommendations that are appropriate to the planning environment, these meetings are as important in terms of communication among administrators, departments, and the Senate as any that happen at earlier stages in the review process. Frank conversations at this juncture will help to insure that final reports will articulate recommendations that are practical and achievable, as well as reducing or eliminating written reports that include unanticipated recommendations.

External reviewers prepare their own reports or, on occasion, a joint report on the unit being reviewed. These reports appear in the appendix of the final report and serve as data for the internal reviewers as they write their draft report. These reports serve to place UCLA’s academic programs within the broader context of comparable programs elsewhere.

The internal reviewers draft a document that brings together their observations, conclusions, and recommendations based on the self-review, observations shared with them by divisional deans prior to the review, information gathered during the review, and what they have gleaned from the external reviewers’ reports. Although there are published guidelines for these reports on the Senate website (as well as for external reviewers and for self-reviews), these reviews, written either by the review chair or as a group project, vary dramatically. We think that greater participation in drafting this report by Senate staff, especially by a staff member with substantial experience in reviews and who has participated in the particular review, would facilitate the writing of the report and provide greater consistency across reports.

Having the staff member who had worked with the review throughout present at the Administrative Committee meeting along with the chair of the review team would also, ideally, facilitate the Administrative Committee vetting of this draft. With this input, supported by robust issue statements provided by the Vice Provosts of Undergraduate Education and Graduate Division (ex-officio members of the committee) to the review team before the review, there would be less likelihood of a report emerging from the Administrative Committee that varies dramatically from the issues raised with all the stakeholders at the Exit Meeting.

This vetted version of the report is forwarded to the chair of the department or program to check for factual errors. Once corrections are made, the report goes to the full councils for their consideration. When approved by both councils, the report is forwarded to the department and administration for action.

Review Follow-up

One of the most trying aspects of the review process for departments, the Senate, and the administration arises when departments are unable to resolve issues raised in the review. This situation often leads to one or more internal reviews or, worse, a series of eight-year reviews that consistently point to the same deficiencies. This outcome encourages departments to see the reviews as efforts that produce limited, if any, results and leads to frustration within departments. It highlights the gap between the review process and the administrative planning
efforts to solve the problems and issues identified. It encourages the administration to see the Senate as having “no teeth” in addressing and resolving the issues that lie in its purview. None of these results are positive. A new strategy needs to emerge that avoids this situation. We think that a preliminary step in that direction would be to have the dean, department chair, and representative of the Councils meet soon after the final review report is distributed to map out a strategy for resolving the issues rather than simply waiting for progress reports that are due a year later, but often late in arriving, in order to assess whether progress has been made.

It is equally important to acknowledge that many recommendations result from situations that are beyond what any individual department can change. Without attention to larger divisional or even university-wide concerns, sufficient progress on review concerns cannot be made. For that reason, we also recommend regularizing what has been an occasional practice of the Councils in calling the attention of divisional and university administrators to issues revealed in reviews that extend beyond individual departments. End-of-year reports to the administration that highlight immediate issues such as safety concerns, long-term trends, and surveys of special topics of interest to the Senate addressed by the reviews will bring the important insights gained in the review process to the attention of those who plan for the University. Because of the potential impact of these documents, we suggest that a committee led by the Council chairs for that year and composed of at least one previous Graduate and one previous Undergraduate Council chair draft this report. Depending on the issues addressed, representatives from the Council on Planning and Budget, the Committee on Teaching, or other relevant Senate committees charged with the oversight of issues that emerged during past reviews or that might be considered in upcoming reviews might be invited to participate as well.

Based on these findings, we make the following recommendations:

1) **Deans should meet with departments as a first step in the review process to provide a clearer sense of the short- and long-term planning environment before they start to prepare their self-reviews.** A good understanding of university and divisional strategies is critical for faculty members seeking to do departmental planning. The department will document this meeting in the self-review as they currently document meetings(s) with faculty.

2) **A representative from the Office of Academic Planning and Budget should make a presentation each fall to the Graduate and Undergraduate Councils that provides an overview of the budget climate as it shapes current and future curricular issues and as pertains to reviews undertaken that year.** Council reviewers would benefit throughout the review process from having a clearer sense of the short-term planning environment beyond that provided by individual departmental reports from the Council on Planning and Budget. A thorough and thoughtful overview aimed at providing that financial perspective by administrators most able to offer such a presentation and answer Council members’ questions would be the best way to address this need.
3) **The Senate should formalize a strategy that would allow departments and programs with shared, related, or overlapping curricular or research programs that involve student instruction to be reviewed during the same year.** A proposal to arrange this scheduling could be generated by the department, the Senate, or the dean but ALL, particularly the department, would need to agree before such rescheduling would occur. Such requests would be considered one-time only, although subsequent reviews might once again be held during the same year, given the nature of the review cycle.

4) **The Senate should ask departments to speak to specific issues confronting UCLA in their self-review and during the review process that reflect broader university-wide concerns or policies.** For example, departments being reviewed in the next several years that have initiated on-line courses might be asked to compare those courses with currently offered courses and their role within the departmental curriculum. Other issues might include changes in how teaching assistants are used or the pedagogical impact of initiatives like Challenge 45.

5) **The Senate should formalize the now-occasional practice of a summary document prepared by the Graduate and Undergraduate Council chairs that highlights existing concerns and emergent issues which were apparent in that year’s reviews.** Unlike the annual committee report that summarizes the Councils’ activities, this document should serve as an early warning system of problems that may need to be addressed and opportunities that might be seized. Addressed to the Academic Senate Executive Board and to the administration, this report should summarize and reflect upon the broader issues that emerged in the past year’s reviews, address how those issues compare to those in immediate past years, and suggest their possible implications for the learning environment at UCLA. This report should be used to identify issues that might be asked of departments preparing self-reviews in the following year and to inform conversations between Senate leadership and university administration.

6) **The Senate and administration should explore additional ways to work with units that experience ongoing issues from one eight-year review to the next or across multiple internal reviews in resolving these issues.** Although such reviews are infrequent, the complex reasons that lead to them defy a single solution. For reviews that trigger an internal review, a possible strategy might be the creation of a team consisting of a department representative (most likely the chair), a Senate representative (most likely the chair of the review team), and the dean that would formulate achievable strategies for resolving those ongoing problems well before the internal review so the unit can start to implement those strategies before the next review occurs. A unit experiencing persistent issues from one eight-year review to the next should be flagged by the Senate so it can ask well before the next self-review process begins whether the problems still persist. If so, Senate representatives should work with the unit and the administration to arrive at realistic strategies that faculty in the unit can consider as they prepare the self-review.
The Senate and administration should create a new Senate staff position for a person directly involved with all aspects of the reviews from advising departments and programs on self-reviews, attending pre-site meetings along with assigned lead analyst and appropriate sessions during the site visit, to working with the review team chair in the preparation of review reports, to assisting with the new activities and reports suggested in this document. This person would also be responsible for researching and summarizing information drawn from earlier reviews that would be valuable for issues and ideas currently on the campus’s planning agenda. This person would also be available to assist in the preparation of additional reports from the Senate to the administration and to ensure that Senate information is readily available for consideration as new strategies are being considered by the administration.