CAS Program Review – Continuing the Process

In the last two issues of the Association Update, we have launched an almost year long overview of how to conduct Program Review for a Fraternity/Sorority Advising Program (FSAP) using CAS. The intent is to simulate what it would look like to conduct this process in your FSAP. By the end of this year, we will have provided a library of resources to walk you through the entire process. Past articles can be found on the CAS Resources page under the section of Guides & Updates.

First, let's differentiate between four terms that will influence your process and your education of the team:

1. **Assessment** is the formal and informal collection of evidence to ascertain a department's success in delivering its programs and services.
2. **Self-assessment** is the process of using assessment evidence for a department to identify how it is doing. In some cases, this may or may not be evaluation.
3. **Evaluation** is the process of using assessment evidence *against a set of standards or criteria* to identify alignment (the act of self-assessment using CAS FSAP Standards is an act of evaluation).
4. **Program Review** is the process of building on self-assessment and evaluation through engaging persons external to the department such as individuals at the same institution (called an internal review) and/or external experts in the field (called an external review).

The process of CAS Program Review consists of seven steps:

1. Plan the Process
2. Assemble and Educate the Team (note this and step three go back and forth some, explained below)
3. Identify, Collect, and Review Evidence (primary purpose of self-assessment)
4. Conduct and Interpret Ratings Using Evaluate Evidence (launches FSAP into program review)
5. Develop an Action Plan
6. Prepare a Report
7. Close the Loop

At this point in the process, our advice focuses on conducting self-assessment as a part of overall program review. In February, we featured an overview of how to lay the foundation (plan the process) for your Fraternity/Sorority Advising Program (FSAP) self-assessment and subsequent program review. At this point there is a need to conduct steps two and three: assemble and educate the team and identify, collect, and review evidence.

Assembling your Team

Who is on your team is an important consideration, and it is not just a one-time deal. First, you must have the team for self-assessment, which typically would consist of staff who administer the FSAP. Whether you are a staff of one or ten, you will need to identify how to best facilitate self-assessment process. If you are part of a larger unit (i.e. fraternity/sorority life as a part of a Student Leadership and Involvement (SLI) office, such as what we have here at the University of Memphis), you may involve staff who work in the SLI in your internal self-assessment. If your office is quite large, you may want to only involve some percentage of staff. Staff is defined as anyone you identify as working for the department; therefore, if appropriate to your context, students, both graduate and undergraduate, could participate.

Be thinking at this point about who would constitute your internal review team. The two questions to guide decision making here are:

1. What is the ideal size given our office?
2. Who can best represent the perspectives we need to carefully examine how our FSAP is aligned with these standards?

The ideal size depends on your needs, but we encourage never having more than nine and preferably around six (and that might be too large as well).

Who can best represent is an important question to ask: who are the primary stakeholders of the FSAP, and who in the university environment influence the success of the FSAP department? Therefore, student engagement is likely vital, but how will you select the student(s) that can best represent the entire Fraternity/Sorority Community (FSC)? Additionally, you want staff and faculty, but do not forget about alumni/graduate member perspectives. A good rule here is to consider who could wear multiple hats in this process. For example, could a faculty member who is the chapter advisor to (fill in the blank) be someone to ask. That would bring in two important perspectives. Consider as you develop your internal review team that people who see the value of and/or understand the operations of the department are important, but conversely, you may benefit from having someone who is just not as familiar but who may have an influential perspective (i.e. someone from academic affairs who works with first-year academic advising).

This step does not conclude when you identify the team: you must educate them on the work ahead. Three important educational components to consider include:

1. What is the overall purpose and functions of the FSAP?
2. Why is this process being conducted, and what factors are influencing not only the process but how this work will end up influencing the future success of the FSAP?
3. How to properly review the evidence at hand.

Identify, Collect, and Review Evidence

Self-assessment requires the review and understanding of the Standards within the FSAP and compiling evidence to demonstrate the extent to which your functions are aligned with the Standards. As you examine the standards, you must also identify sources of evidence that indicate how well you are doing meeting the Standards. We have found those closest to the FSAP, meaning those who are administrators in the unit, often believe they are doing something, but do not necessarily have evidence to prove.

It is important as you identify and collect the evidence that you are honest about how you think you do with each standard. You may think you are hitting all the marks on a standard, but do you have evidence to demonstrate so? There are many good sources of evidence beyond just a survey or a focus group. Use publications, websites, policies, minutes from meetings, summaries of notes you have from advising sessions with stakeholders, calendars, etc. As you prepare to launch this process, it is recommended you begin to strengthen your evidence through better documentation. When enacting a program review, you likely have some fore warning about timeframe. Therefore, if a couple of years out you can work hard to "pass the test" by reviewing the FSAP Standards and identify your sources (and figuring out where you need more evidence). If you are first in the rotation of a new cycle, this may be harder. Note that it is fine to say, "we just don't know" to any of these. Self-assessment is driven toward internal efforts to improve. CAS is not a policing or accrediting body. If you don't know, then the answer is to claim it and figure out steps to strengthen the culture of evidence.

Reviewing evidence takes time. This is why this step in the process will likely consume about four months of time: some period of time for self-assessment by department, followed by a reasonably determined amount of time for your internal review committee (remember that none of these representatives work day to day with fraternity/sorority life on your campus). The education of the internal team has to also be embedded in that four-month time frame (or longer given their busy schedules).

These two steps, assembling and educating the team, and collecting and reviewing evidence will feel iterative: you can launch the internal review team process toward the end of your department self-assessment. However, the internal review team cannot begin their process until the evidence is provided and done so in a way that is organized and connected to the 12 sections of the FSAP Standards.

Conclusion

By the time steps 1-3 are completed, you are likely approaching a six-month mark. There is no perfect timeframe, and you have to make this work for your culture. That said, the thoroughness of this process matters. It matters not so much to an external agency (again, there is no accreditation process), but it can undermine the intent of assessment for overall improvement to the FSAP. Take the time you need to make these steps happen.

In the next issue, we will focus on how the teams create consensus around the scoring of a FSAP. This moves us somewhat into the act of evaluation. We will also discuss how during this time, the FSAP Leadership must be laying the foundation for an external review team (if applicable, but typically required during a program review) and subsequent steps in the program review process.