Designing an Annual Departmental Review Process with Standardized Metrics

Dixie State University, Public Baccalaureate University in Saint George, UT

- **About:** Dixie State University (DSU) is a public university with a total enrollment of 9,673.
- **Challenge:** DSU conducted program reviews every three or five years, but departments were not monitored annually. DSU leadership wanted to develop an annual process that would be comprehensive without disproportionately burdening department chairs.
- **Solution:** DSU partnered with APS to build a standardized annual departmental review process that engaged deans and department chairs with departmental data. As part of the review process, the leadership team created annual report templates that outlined critical metrics. The reports are now supporting data-informed conversations.
- **Impact:** Academic leaders at DSU now have visibility and access to data to evaluate departmental performance that supports data-informed resource allocation decisions.

Activating APS Metrics in Annual Report Templates

Historically, DSU required three- or five-year program reviews, which involved state requirements and did not include quantitative metrics. Wanting to better monitor departments and leveraging access to critical data in the APS platform, the provost and his team created an annual report template for department chairs to complete.

Embedding APS Metrics Into Annual Report Templates

DSU’s leadership team hand-picked metrics from the APS platform to include in the template. Each metric aligns with DSU’s strategic priorities and provides department chairs with a more robust picture of their department’s performance. Additionally, DSU expects that these annual reports will facilitate the process of completing state mandated reports every seven years, a process that had historically lacked clear direction from the state.

Student Progress
- Credit Hours Lost to DFW
- Median Course Completion Rate

Enrollment Trends
- 3-Year Growth in Attempted SCH
- Intercurricular Dependencies

Costs
- Cost per SCH

Seat Utilization
- % of Classes with Size <10
- Median Section Fill Rate
- Median Class Size
- 3-Year Average Change in Distinct Course Offerings by Department

Faculty Workload
- % Courses Taught by Course Division and Instructor Type
- Faculty Mix by Instructor Type and Assigned Department

Along with the APS metrics, DSU also included data from their institutional reports and qualitative metrics, such as faculty awards and department accomplishments.
Leveraging Departmental Reports for Data-Informed Conversations

Department chairs completed the annual report templates with metrics in the APS platform. DSU’s leadership team, including the provost, used the reports to guide data-informed conversations with individual department leaders.

Illuminating Departmental Insight Through Standardized Review Process

DSU’s APS value leader, a member of the Institutional Research office, held bi-monthly training meetings for department chairs to better understand data, as well as how to find and effectively use data in the APS platform. The Director of Academic Planning also offered one-on-one meetings with chairs to walk them through the template.

Once trained, the department chairs completed the annual departmental reports, which were submitted to their deans. The deans reviewed the reports and wrote responses. They then submitted both to DSU’s leadership team.

After reviewing the reports on their own, the Provost and other DSU leadership organized individual meetings with all 24 department chairs and their deans. Together, they discussed the reports and shared insights. Department leaders also supplemented information in the reports with qualitative insights, such as scholarly activity.

The individual meetings resulted in takeaways for both sides, DSU’s leadership team and department leaders. Various campaigns, such as creating a plan to support five lower maturity departments, were identified.

A Sustainable Process to Measure Departmental Health

DSU’s annual departmental review process democratized data across campus and quickly dispelled fears of data being harmful to departments. Not only did the use of data facilitate conversations, many of which would have not occurred without the data, but it also allowed DSU to create a way to efficiently measure departmental health.

Established a Baseline for Departmental Performance

In reviewing the reports, DSU’s leadership identified high performing departments and departments to monitor.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Baseline Performance Indicators</th>
<th>Campaigns for Fall 2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Progress</strong></td>
<td>Pinpointed departments with high DFW rates and low junior graduate rates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Enrollment Trends</strong></td>
<td>Identified departments facing declining enrollments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Costs</strong></td>
<td>Determined departments exhibiting low resource efficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Seat Utilization</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Faculty Workload</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What Inspired Dixie State University to Implement an Annual Review Process?

DSU used Academic Vital Signs, which includes best practice strategies and tactics for designing and implementing an annual departmental review process. Academic Vital Signs helped DSU understand the importance of conducting annual reviews, as well as how to choose metrics to align institutional and departmental priorities.

For more information, access the resource online.