California Community Colleges
DSPS Program Review and Plans

How has it changed with the new Title 5 Regulations?

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Introduction

In October 2015, new Title 5 Regulations officially changed the way DSPS Program Review and Plans are conducted. This was a significant change for a process that had been highly regimented at the state level in terms of reporting, due to the mandated nature of the program’s services and funding. The statewide plan’s five-year cycle aligned with the accrediting commission’s six-year cycle, and included a campus visit led by the Chancellor’s Office DSPS Technical Assistance Provider. Campus practitioners knew what was required and what to expect, so it is understandable that there have been some questions with the new process.

The new regulation does not eliminate DSPS program evaluation and planning, nor does it eliminate the program’s responsibility to provide a copy of the program evaluation and plan to the Chancellor’s Office upon request. Instead, the new regulation localizes the evaluation and planning process within the context of the individual college. Two factors influenced this decision: pressure placed upon colleges by their accrediting commission to fully integrate their planning and program review processes and align them in a meaningful way with resource allocation; and the financial impact of the Great Recession of 2008 upon categorical program support, including Program Plans. When the state began its revision of Title 5 Regulations, it became apparent that a new model could more effectively meet the accountability needs of the state and reduce the burden of duplication of effort by DSPS Programs throughout the state. The regulation and its implementing guidelines describe the new model, which eliminates the CCCCO DSPS Program Plan and recognizes the work being done locally through Program Review.

Section 56046: DSPS Program Plan

Each district receiving funding pursuant to this subchapter shall develop and submit to the Chancellor, at such times as the Chancellor shall designate, a DSPS program plan for each college within the district. Upon approval by the Chancellor, the plan shall be a contract between the District and the Chancellor. Expenditures of funds appropriated pursuant to this subchapter must conform to the approved plan.

(a) The unit or program plan developed as part of a college’s accreditation or strategic planning processes shall meet the requirements of the plan required by this section if it contains at least all of the following:

1. the long-term goals of the DSPS program;
2. the short-term measurable objectives of the program;
3. the activities to be undertaken to accomplish the goals and objectives; and
4. a description of the methods used for program evaluation.

(b) Each district shall submit updates to its plan to the Chancellor upon request.

[Italics added]

Section 56046 Implementing Guidelines

While a DSPS Plan is required by this section, the intent is to reduce duplication of effort and utilize the Plan developed by DSPS as part of the college’s accreditation or strategic planning process as the Plan for Title 5. As part of the accreditation process colleges are required to conduct a self-evaluation to evaluate institutional effectiveness. In addition, many colleges undertake strategic planning as part of their ongoing efforts to effectively manage and plan for the college’s current and future needs.

Therefore, as part of the college’s accreditation process or district wide strategic planning, if DSPS develops its own program or unit plan, it may be utilized as the DSPS Plan for Title 5 compliance as long as it includes the following elements:

1) the long-term goals of the DSPS program;
2) the short-term measurable objectives of the program;
3) the activities to be undertaken to accomplish the goals and objectives;
4) a description of the methods used for program evaluation.

Additional elements which are recommended, but not required to be in the Plan include:

a) Mission statement
b) Number of students served
c) Description of academic adjustments, auxiliary aids, services and/or instruction provided
d) How the program adheres to Section 56000 regarding duplication of services
e) Staffing
f) Minimum qualifications
g) Educational Assistance Classes
h) Student Learning Outcomes
i) Student and faculty satisfaction surveys

Although the accreditation cycle is currently 6 years, the DSPS program or unit plan should be updated as necessary.

Documentation: The DSPS plan should be kept on file and available for review and audit purposes.

Discussion

All colleges in the state of California are required to engage in program review and integrated planning, evaluation, and resource allocation; so your DSPS program is likely already meeting the requirements of Section 56046. However, to assure that your program review, or program plan as it is called for state reporting purposes, is effective at both meeting the needs of the state and positioning your program for adequate support and funding at the local level, you need to go beyond the basic four requirements listed in the regulation. There should be little in the list of “additional elements” in the Implementing Guidelines that is new to you, as you are already addressing most if not all of them in the Program Review you submit to your college.

The purpose of this primer is to assure that you understand what each of the basic elements and additional elements entail, and how you can use them to deliver upon the current and future needs of your students, meet state and federal regulations and requirements, and advance your program within your local college’s integrated planning, evaluation, and resource allocation process.
Components of Program Review and Plans

Each college is unique; even within the same district, colleges are unique. A long body of research supports this, but anyone who has worked at two different colleges can attest to how differently similar organizations accomplish the same task. It is part structure, but to a large extent it is cultural. Because of this, components of program review may have different names for the same thing, or they may accomplish the same things in different ways, but ultimately, they complete the process of self-evaluation and planning that makes perfect sense within their institutions and meets state and federal regulations and requirements. Each component of Program Review will be presented in the order they typically occur in most college forms and documents.

Mission

Within higher education, a program’s mission describes its purpose, the programs and/or services that it delivers, the student population that it serves, and how it supports their learning and achievement outcomes. In the California Community Colleges, and particularly in a program such as DSPS, it would be appropriate to add language regarding equity as well. Mission statements are usually one to three sentences in length. They clarify exactly what the program sets out to do, in succinct format.

Some examples of mission statements include:

- Our goal is to support the college student with a disability to enter campus life, its programs and activities, both on campus and through Distance Education. We emphasize educational achievement as well as retention and success, in both higher education and career goals. Reasonable accommodations, when eligible, are provided to minimize the effects of your disability and maximize your potential success within Mission College courses, either on campus or in a Distance Education setting. (Mission College)

- The Disability Support Services office is dedicated to providing equal access and reasonable accommodations for educational and programmatic opportunities to students with disabilities on campus while promoting self-advocacy and independence. Our mission commits Moreno Valley College to offer opportunities for students to develop their potential while also educating the campus community on disability related matters. (Moreno Valley College)

- Our mission is to cultivate a university experience for a student that promotes success in their life pursuits. The Center for Access & Success serves as a faculty resource in offering students equity and excellence in education, maximizing each student’s educational potential while helping him or her develop and maintain independence. The Center’s philosophy is one that encourages self-awareness, self-determination, self-advocacy, and independence. (University of Massachusetts/Dartmouth)

The mission statement is often the first item appearing in a program review or plan, as it sets the context for all that follows.
Program Description
Program description provides an overview of the curricular programs or services that the program offers. In the case of DSPS, it includes both courses and services, so the program review often falls into a special category similar to Counseling, which also offers both. The description includes an overview of the program, including its services and courses, its hours, location, and any special information regarding the program. This section often includes the number of students served and the modalities through which they are served. In short, the program description provides the overview of how you deliver upon your mission. The following sections provide the details and the effectiveness with which you accomplish your mission.

Staffing
The staffing section includes certificated and classified staff, adjuncts, and hourly employees. You typically include the position titles and full-time equivalencies of the positions. In the case of certificated staff, you will include that they meet minimum qualifications for the position, which is important for DSPS, with its multiple positions and their specific minimum qualifications. If you need more staff, this is where you discuss it. Data are essential, and your college may have a data set for you to use in requesting certificated and classified staff, but if they don’t, contact your Program Review representative and Institutional Researcher to establish a data set demonstrating workload and need for your unique program. You need to track all appointments and other student interactions, how long they take, and other data that reflect workload. This type of record keeping is useful for communicating campus needs locally, and for reporting compliance effort externally.

Services
In the Services section, you typically describe in detail the services offered, with corresponding data regarding how many students are receiving those services, and how often. This includes DSPS counseling, alternate media production, student computer lab/high tech center, and testing services, to name a few; be as comprehensive as possible in identifying the many services you deliver. Include the total number of service contacts, broken down by disability category, even though you no longer need to report them all to MIS. You will still want to report them to your campus as it represents workload. The new disability category weights could be used in this section as well; the college needs to understand the different workloads associated with the distribution of students you are serving. If there are needs in this area, introduce them here, and document them. Be sure to recognize program accomplishments as well, as this is the student side of the program, what they receive, how they benefit, and how you have complied and delivered upon services required by state and federal laws and regulations.

Beyond students, include the work you do with faculty in support of helping your students get the appropriate educational experience. If there are other groups you work with on behalf of your students, such as distance learning support personnel, include them too. Tell the comprehensive story.
Courses
In this section, you address the courses you offer in the same way that academic programs address theirs. Your college likely provides the data set for you to assess and present in this section. It usually includes FTES, productivity, retention, success, and is required to provide disaggregation by gender, age, and ethnicity, although many colleges provide additional data as well. Be sure to accentuate outcomes of the courses, the diversity of the students, and any other data that convey your efforts to increase achievement (retention and success) and learning outcomes. This is the opportunity to dig deeper into the course outcomes to recognize strengths and identify challenges.

Student Learning Outcomes and Program Learning Outcomes
Program Review is the venue for reporting the overall learning outcomes assessment, including the schedule for assessing each service and course, the findings from the assessments, and the plans for improvement. You may have both Student Learning Outcomes and Student Services Outcomes, or some other outcome, depending upon the context of what you are assessing and the model that your college uses. You will report the overarching Program Level Outcomes, and plans for improvement. Federal law requires that colleges post their outcomes in terms of achievement, which you covered in the Courses section, and learning, which is this section.

Assessments
In addition to assessments you conducted for Student Learning Outcomes and Program Learning Outcomes, you may have conducted other assessments. This would be an appropriate point to describe any point-of-service surveys, focus groups, or other assessments that comprise your overall assessment plan. You have already reported service and course outcomes and achievement data, workload data assessment in terms of number of students served, and other assessments specific to your program. If all of your assessment was covered in the discussion of Services, Courses, Student Learning Outcomes, and Program Learning Outcomes, then it has been reported in a contextualized format and there would be little new material here.

Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities, and Threats
In this section, the program discusses its strengths, challenges, opportunities, and threats. People sometimes get confused in this section, as it introduces both internal and external factors regarding your program. For example, in 2008 and the six years that followed, the biggest threat for DSPS programs was the poor economy and the lack of state funding; the biggest challenge was finding a way to continue serving your students in a manner mandated by law. The threat is external, while the challenge is internal. In terms of strengths, it may be the high number of students persisting from term to term and fall to fall; while the biggest opportunity may be the option of leveraging student equity funding to get additional support for your students’ needs. In this case, the strength is internal, and the opportunity is external, as equity funding comes from the state.

Discuss your program in terms of what it does well (strengths) and the opportunities available to you, and the challenges and threats you are experiencing, and how you are faring. If one of the challenges is a sufficient number of staff to serve your students, this is the point to return to the topic, as it should
have been introduced in the staffing section, and you need to convey it again here. Use qualitative and quantitative data to support and document your discussion. This is a critical juncture for most integrated planning, evaluation, and resource allocation models; it is the point where you convey your needs based upon the detailed, data-informed evaluation that you just provided.

Be very specific and strategic about how you want to advance your program, as it will become the basis for your long and short-term goals and your short-term objectives for accomplishing each.

**Long and Short-Term Planning and Assessment (Required)**

Based upon your overall assessment of the program and your discussion of its strengths, challenges, opportunities, and threats, you will have a strong sense of two to four goals that you would like to achieve. Some will be long-term, usually meaning three or more years, and others will be short-term, meaning two years or less. Goals describe where you want your program to be within the context of better accomplishing its mission. Based upon your evaluation of services, courses, staffing, and any other criteria, you have identified where you want to improve, and this becomes the basis for your goals.

Goals are usually higher level, visionary declarations, so you create short term objectives, which are actionable and measurable to achieve each goal. Some goals will need more objectives than others, it depends on the breadth and scope of the goal. And regardless of whether the goal is long term or short term, you will need objectives and a systematic assessment plan to achieve it.

An example of a long-term goal may be to increase the percentage of students participating in your DSPS Tutoring Program. You identified this problem in your Strengths/Challenges/Opportunities/Threat analysis. Your objectives may include: 1) outreach and marketing; 2) determining which subjects need the most support; 3) providing tutors who are trained, or can be trained, in strategies proven effective with students with disabilities; and 4) assuring that the hours are adequate to meet student need, and that they are offered at times that are optimal for student attendance. In the case of outreach and marketing, your assessment plan might include student surveys and focus groups to see if the message is being conveyed, and how you might improve it. You could also administer a periodic short survey when students come to the tutoring center, asking them how they learned about the service, and a series of other questions regarding hours, tutoring qualities (for example, “The tutor makes the course material understandable to me,”), etc. And you will want to track tutoring attendance before the new practices begin, including times of day and days of the week, plus subjects tutored, and continue to track these data throughout the year. You may also be able to have Institutional Research conduct a transcript analysis to see if there has been an improvement in course completion and success. Analysis of the data will help you know where to tweak the service to make it more effective. This is a standard example of a goal, its actionable objectives, and its assessment plan.

You could also use this goal to get additional funding for the service.
Program Review Cycle:
Just as the CCCCO DSPS Program Plan had a multi-year cycle, your college’s Program Review has a multi-year cycle. Each college sets its Program Review cycle according to its larger institutional planning cycle and resource allocation process. Because each college is different in the way it organizes its planning cycles, this could be anywhere from a three-year cycle with a comprehensive program review in Year One, followed by annual review updates in Years Two and Three, to a five-year cycle with a comprehensive program review in Year One, followed by four years of varying levels of updates. There is no set rule as to the length of the cycle. It is local.

How to use Program Review and Planning to Advance your Program
As a categorical program, college administrators and those in planning and resource allocation often assume that your program is supported wholly by the funds you receive from the state. And because a lot of your most detailed data and analysis were included in a plan that went to Sacramento, rather than the program review that went to your campus integrated planning, evaluation, and resource allocation process, your needs may not have been adequately conveyed to the campus. Even if you attached your CCCCO DSPS Program Plan to the program review, it was probably not reviewed for additional support or funding, as local systems have their own forms and processes for these things.

The change to Section 56046 is actually in your favor. You do not have to fill out two separate reports and follow two different reporting cycles. You can put all of your effort into the program review, learn more about the funding model at your college, and advance your program locally. There are a lot of misconceptions about DSPS services and classes, and this is your opportunity to share what you do, how you do it, how effectively you do it, and what you need to do it even better.

Contact us
Should you have any questions regarding Program Review, you can contact us at DSPS Solutions. Our lead consultant on this service is Dr. Jill Baker, the first Dean of Institutional Effectiveness for San Diego Mesa College, Co-Chair of the Planning and Institutional Effectiveness Committee, co-author of the College’s Educational Master Plan 2013-2019 and its Strategic Initiatives, Co-Chair of Program Review, and Co-Chair and Lead Writer of the 2010 San Diego Mesa College Self-Study for Reaffirmation of Accreditation. Dr. Baker also served as an external evaluator for ACCJC in the area of Standard One: Mission, Academic Quality and Institutional Effectiveness, and Integrity. She also taught the Program Evaluation course for the Rehabilitation Counseling Program at San Diego State University.

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