

Development and Implementation of Quality Enhancement Model for Achieving Accreditation of BBA Program at Al Ghurair University

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Abstract

In recent years, United Arab Emirates has taken serious measures to improve the quality of higher education. The Commission for Academic Accreditation of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, United Arab Emirates conducts a program of licensure of institutions of higher education and accreditation of each of their academic programs to ensure that these institutions operate at international standards of quality. Like other institutions in UAE, Al Ghurair University is a licensed institution and all its programs are subject to the periodic accreditation process of the Commission for Academic Accreditation. This article addresses the process for obtaining the accreditation of Bachelor of Business Administration program and explains the development and implementation of a quality enhancement as well as program assessment and improvement models that helped the university to receive the full accreditation of this program. These models fully illustrate and explain the complete process of monitoring, evaluating and improving the overall quality of the academic programs and the support services offered by the university.

1. Introduction

Accreditation is often described as a public statement that a certain quality threshold has been reached or exceeded [1] and it aims at achieving quality simply by ensuring that certain prescribed standards are reached by the institution while offering its academic programs. The authority to license non-federal educational institutions to grant degrees and other academic awards and to accredit the programs of all institutions in United Arab Emirates (UAE) rests with the Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA), Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research [2, 3]. It is mandatory for all educational institutions to follow the standards and criteria set by the CAA to seek the licensure and the accreditation of academic programs. The CAA grants initial licensure for a specified period (up to five years). After completing this period the institutions are required to apply for subsequent renewals after every five years. Only after being granted initial licensure, the institutions start seeking the initial accreditation for their

academic programs. The institutions must seek initial accreditation of each program before its launch as prescribed in the CAA procedural guidelines. The institutions are required to submit a self-study to seek full accreditation within two years after the graduation of first cohort of students in that particular program. Subsequent renewal of accreditation of all academic programs is also mandatory after a time frame specified by the CAA. In essence the process for accrediting a program consists [4] of the following:

- a) Preparation and submission of a self-study by the offering institution as a critical self-evaluation of the effectiveness of the program;
- b) Peer review by trained external evaluators, including a site visit;
- c) A written report by the evaluators focusing on the academic standards, quality assurance processes, and recommended improvements;
- d) A decision by the accrediting agency to fully accredit the program, or to deny the accreditation.

The accreditation of the BBA program passed through a similar process before obtaining full accreditation by the CAA.

2. Al Ghurair University

Al Ghurair University (AGU) was established in 1999 as a private higher educational institution in UAE and was granted a license to operate as an institution of higher education by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, UAE in 2001. Since then AGU is offering quality higher education through various undergraduate and graduate programs namely; Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA), Bachelor of Science in Electrical and Electronics Engineering, Bachelor of Science in Computer Science and Engineering, Bachelor of Science in Computer Information Systems, Bachelor of Arts in Interior Design and Master of Business Administration. Recently, AGU has launched two programs Bachelor of Law and Bachelor of Education both in Arabic medium. AGU has also established collaborative relationships with reputed international educational institutions.

3. BBA program and initial quality assurance system at AGU

In support of the University's mission, the College of Business Studies is responsible for providing high quality education in the field of business administration and aims at stimulating intellectual interest and business insight among its students by means of providing quality instruction, advising, research, and related support services. The College is committed to maintaining international academic standards, using multidisciplinary approaches, and using state-of-the art teaching methods and technologies to broaden students' knowledge and equip them with appropriate skills, attitudes, and confidence to deal with real-world business problems. The College values its ongoing interaction with all its stakeholders, and continuously assesses its contribution to the business community and the larger society to maintain a satisfactory level of performance. The College of Business Studies provides a student-centered learning community that presents, applies, and extends the current boundaries of knowledge about today's dynamic global business environment.

The BBA program is offered by the College of Business Studies with specialization in marketing, finance, accounting, international business, and information systems & e-commerce. At the time of initial accreditation, the CAA recommended the use of Bloom's Taxonomy of learning levels in all BBA courses and to develop course and program learning goals and outcomes to facilitate the consistent outcome assessment [5]. Subsequently a set of course learning outcomes for each course of the BBA program curriculum were developed by following the Bloom's Taxonomy.

Upon satisfactorily meeting these recommendations the program was granted initial accreditation in April 2004. To ensure the quality of its academic programs and the delivery mechanism, AGU took a number of important quality measures that included the use of standard text books, employing state of the art technology to support teaching pedagogy, upgrading library and learning resources as well as implementing formative and summative evaluation system.

The CAA Standards 2007 define the institutional effectiveness as:

"Institutional Effectiveness requires that an institution be formally engaged in evaluating its efficacy - and, consequently, its success in fulfilling its purpose - and that it use this evaluation to drive a process of continuous self improvement. The expectations with respect to institutional effectiveness herein pertain to all programs and all units of the institution. An institution

must provide a plan and indicate how it will address institutional effectiveness in fulfilling its statement of purpose.[6]"

AGU established an independent unit to design and implement a comprehensive institutional effectiveness mechanism requiring AGU to be engaged in evaluating its efficacy and consequently using this evaluation to derive a process of continuous self-improvement as outlined in the CAA's standards for licensure and accreditation [7]. AGU developed an institutional effectiveness manual outlining specific procedures and guidelines for implementing effectiveness mechanism and related quality improvement processes.

4. Self-study and visiting committee report

The overall effectiveness of BBA program was regularly assessed to ensure that the program remains educationally effective and continue to meet the stipulated standards. To achieve this objective, AGU adapted certain direct and indirect measures for assessing the overall quality and effectiveness of the BBA program. Some of the direct and indirect measures used for assessing the BBA program are as under:

Direct Measures:

- course file for each course containing samples of syllabi, tests, assignments, case studies, class projects etc.
- analysis of examination results
- capstone courses

Indirect Measures:

- student evaluation of faculty and course
- graduate exit survey
- alumni survey
- employer survey
- employer feedback on the interns

To prepare self-study a matrix was developed to establish the linkages between BBA courses and the program learning outcomes. Individual course grades and results were analyzed to measure the achievement of corresponding program learning outcomes and to judge whether a particular program learning outcome has been achieved based on the pre-defined criterion. As an indirect measure of assessment, AGU conducted student feedback survey, graduate exit survey, alumni survey, and employer survey to document the effectiveness of the BBA program. Finally, a self-study report addressing the CAA standards was prepared and submitted to the CAA to seek full accreditation of the BBA program. The self-study report contained key features of the BBA program and demonstrated how the program met the criteria of each standard that the

CAA has stated in its standards for licensure and accreditation. In relation to the program effectiveness; data analysis pertaining to various direct and indirect measures used for assessing the quality of the BBA program were documented and included in the self-study report [8].

This report provided a base for an on-site review by a panel of international experts who were the members of the “visiting committee” selected by the CAA. These experts visited AGU campus for 5 days and conducted a comprehensive audit of university documents, infrastructure and facilities, learning and human resources as well as program related documents such as course syllabi, course files, and internship/capstone project reports. After the visit AGU received a report [9] from the visiting committee that included a number of recommendations aimed both at the institution and the program levels. The main thrust of these recommendations was to improve the quality of the BBA curricula and augment the assessment and quality enhancement mechanism process at AGU. Some of the key recommendations relating to the BBA program are given below.

- a) Restate course and program outcomes in measurable terms and link course outcomes with program outcomes.
- b) Design, develop, and implement a comprehensive assessment plan for the BBA program where all program outcomes are written in measurable terms, assessed on a regular basis using both direct and indirect measures at the program level and assessment results are analyzed and used for program improvement.
- c) Prepare detailed syllabus for each course that articulates measurable outcomes, includes weekly schedule of topical coverage, and provides details on assignments and grading.
- d) Establish a system that ensures the integrity of instruction and assessment in individual courses.
- e) Sequence the courses so that upper level courses build on learning in the lower level courses and this is reflected in course assignments for specified courses.

5. Development of quality enhancement model

Most of the accreditation organizations awarding accreditation to higher education institutions require the institutions to demonstrate that they have established a robust and integrated system to engage in an ongoing assessment and improvement process that produces and sustains a continuous improvement in their programs and support service operations. Any robust and effective system of assessment and

improvement must include following three components.

- a) Identification of expected outcomes for academic programs and educational support services
- b) Assessment measures to achieve its identified outcomes
- c) Use of assessment results to improve the quality of academic programs and educational support services

The Institutional effectiveness is an ongoing process integrating assessment planning, systematic data gathering, analyzing and interpreting the data in order to improve the quality of an academic program as well as to enhance the performance of various units and operations supporting the program. It involves an organized and well planned mechanism for assessing the outcomes of individual courses and program, goals and objectives of academic and support units in relation to the goals and mission of the university and improving the quality of its programs and services offered by the university. In response to the visiting committee recommendations, AGU revamped its institutional effectiveness and quality enhancement system. To ensure a systemic and integrated system of assessment and improvement, AGU designed and implemented a comprehensive quality enhancement mechanism. A process flowchart depicting the newly designed and implemented “Quality Enhancement Model” is given in Figure 1. This model facilitates the implementation of the above mentioned three components of an assessment and improvement system at all levels of the university. This flowchart describes the following assessment loops:

1. Administrative/Supporting Unit assessment Loop
2. Academic Unit Assessment Loop
3. Academic Program Assessment Loop
4. University Assessment Loop

These assessment loops fully illustrate the assessment process and provide guidance for academic, administrative and supporting units for developing and implementing their assessment plans. All units of the university prepare and execute their plans for assessing the academic programs as well as their respective administrative and educational support services. The assessment and improvement activities are documented by using appropriate template developed as an integral part of the quality enhancement system.

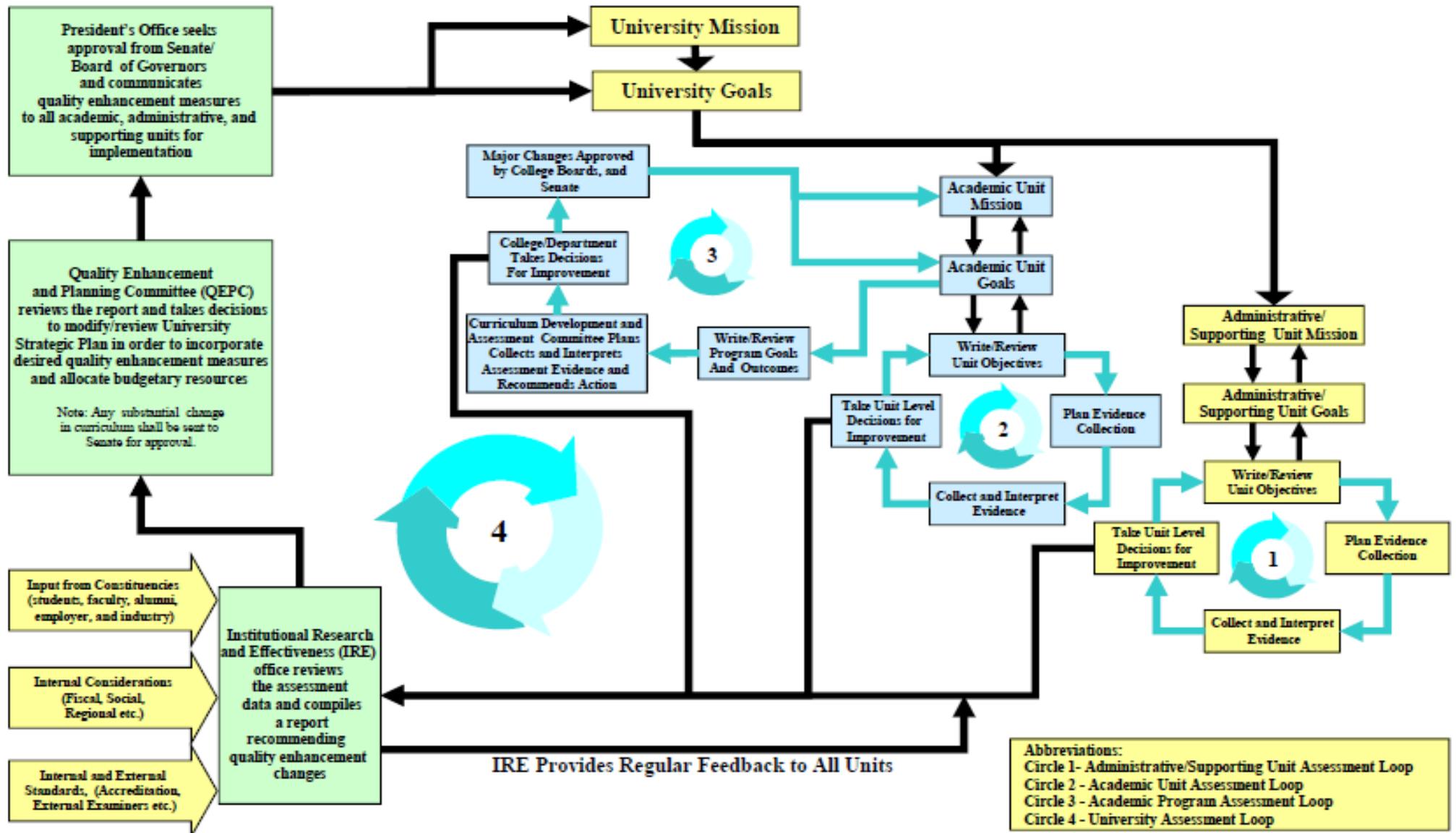


Figure 1. Quality enhancement model

One of the main purposes of this template is to facilitate the individual academic, administrative and support units to develop their assessment plans and document all assessment activities, results and findings. The essential information required to be documented by each unit is as under:

- Goals and measurable objectives/outcomes of individual units and academic programs
- Assessment cycle
- Program or unit related information (title of the academic program, name of the college/department/unit, person responsible for preparing the plan)
- Goals of program/unit
- Academic program outcomes/Measurable objectives of unit
- Curriculum map (program outcomes and course linkage)
- Assessment measures (both direct and indirect)
- Criterion for Success (targeted levels of performance)
- Assessment Findings
- Corrective action for improvement based on assessment findings (sometime this element is also called "closing the loop")
- Completion date

Each unit periodically evaluates their stated outcomes and uses these results to make necessary changes for continuous improvements. The administrative and supporting unit assessment loop illustrated as "Circle 1" in Figure 1, is designed to assess the outcomes/objectives of administrative and support units. The concerned Head/Director of the unit appoints a service assessment coordinator who is responsible for preparing the outcome assessment plan and coordinating all activities relating to the implementation of this plan. In order to complete the loop, all service assessment coordinators document their assessment activities along with the improvement actions based on the assessment findings and submit to their respective Heads or Directors. The Heads/Directors review the report and forward their recommendations to the appropriate committee or authority for approval.

As shown as "Circle 2" in Figure 1, the academic units of the university follow a similar assessment and improvement process to assess their own goals and objectives. The academic programs offered by various academic units are assessed in accordance with the improvement process designated as "Circle 3" in Figure 1. Circle 4 represents the assessment process at the university level as it compasses the assessment of all academic programs as well as the services offered by its administrative and support units with an aim of improving the quality and effectiveness of its programs and services.

To ensure that the academic programs offered at the university conform to international standards, a more comprehensive "Program Assessment and Improvement Model" is developed and implemented. Figure 2 depicts salient features of this model. The assessment and improvement process at the course level takes place every semester and is designated as "Circle 1" in Figure 2, whereas the assessment and improvement of the entire program continues over the specified assessment cycle of the program. This is shown as "Circle 2" in the model. The key element of activity in these assessment loops is to identify potential areas of improvement [10] both at course and program levels.

The program assessment and improvement model envisions the constitution of a curriculum development and assessment committee (CDAC) for each academic program. The CDAC is responsible to plan and monitor the outcome assessment activities of the program. This committee continuously monitors the implementation of the approved program and course assessment plans in accordance with the program assessment and improvement model depicted in Figure 2. At the course level, the outcome assessment plan is prepared by the teaching faculty assigned for the teaching of that particular course. The teaching faculty is required to document all assessment activities and report the findings along with recommendations for improving the courses and related services to the CDAC. This committee reviews the reports received from individual teaching faculty along with other assessment data such as course file review reports, survey and feedback from students, etc., and compiles a comprehensive program effectiveness reports for their respective Deans/Heads. The Dean or Head of Department reviews the report and forwards it to the offices of vice president for academic affairs (VPAA) and institutional research and effectiveness (IRE) along with the proposed quality enhancement measures. He/she will also initiate the process of seeking approval from the college or departmental board in case a substantial change in the curriculum or related services are necessary.

After receiving the assessment data/reports from all academic and non-academic units the IRE office reviews the assessment data and compiles a report, recommending quality enhancement changes required at the university level. To oversee the quality and standards of academic programs as well as the services provided by the academic, administrative and supporting units of the University a quality enhancement and planning committee (QEPC) is formed. The QEPC is also responsible to review and revise the strategic plans to ensure that adequate resources are available to implement the strategic and operational plans of the university. This committee reviews the report and recommended quality measures (including the substantial changes

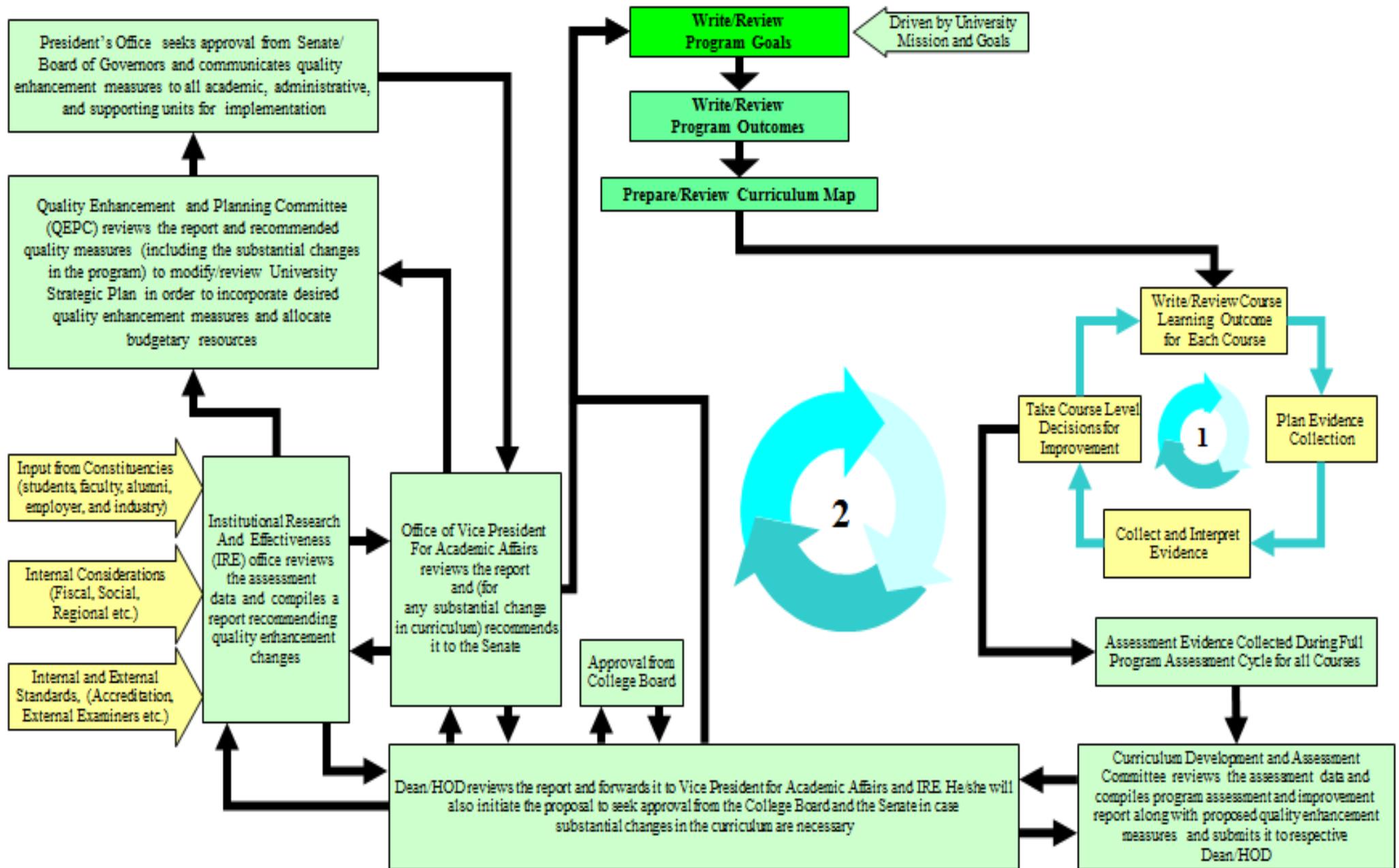


Figure 2. Program assessment and improvement model

in the program) to modify/review university's strategic or operational plans in order to incorporate desired quality enhancement measures and allocate budgetary resources.

To implement the quality enhancement model AGU designed new forms, templates and accompanied guidelines that facilitated the faculty and staff to plan and implement course, program, and unit outcome assessment and improvement plans. These templates and guidelines are primarily developed for implementing the assessment mechanisms and quality improvement processes. A list of the forms, templates, and guidelines employed for the implementation of quality enhance model is provided below:

- Syllabus template
- Templates for preparing assignments, tests and exams
- Academic misconduct and schedule of penalties
- Quality review of student assessment
- Internal co-examiner and external examiner system
- Course learning outcome assessment plan and improvement Program outcome assessment plan and improvement
- Instructor course review form
- Course file checklist
- Terms of reference for "course file review panel", "curriculum development and assessment committee", "quality enhancement and planning committee" and "program advisory boards".

6. Program assessment and improvement for BBA program

The program assessment and improvement model given in Figure 2 was fully implemented for the BBA program offered by the COBS of the university. As a first step, a curriculum map linking the program outcomes and various courses offered in the program was developed to ensure that each course of the BBA curriculum contributes to the achievement of one or more program outcomes. The program outcome assessment activity of the BBA program was carried out by Curriculum Development and Assessment Committee (CDAC) constituted by the Dean of COBS. The convener of this committee acted as "Program Assessment Coordinator" (PAC) who coordinated all activities related to the assessment of the BBA program. The PAC prepared the Program and Course Outcome Assessment and Improvement Plans using the prescribed template. This plan was discussed and approved by the CDAC of the COBS. The CDAC continuously monitored the implementation of the approved program and course assessment plans in

accordance with the "Academic Program Assessment and Improvement Model" depicted in Figure 2.

The CDAC worked closely with the faculty and developed measurable program outcomes and course learning outcomes (CLOs) for each course using standardized templates. A number of workshops were also organized by the university to train and equip faculty members for writing measureable course and program outcomes and using appropriate assessment methods for assessing the course and program effectiveness. The committee also planned and implemented various assessment strategies to measure program outcomes and course learning outcomes and was also responsible for compiling a detailed assessment report based on the assessment data/evidence collected through a number direct and indirect assessment methods. Subsequently, in order to close the loop, the committee finalized its recommendations to improve the quality and effectiveness of the BBA program. To present a full description of assessment and evaluation, the program effectiveness report was finally presented to the CAA. Upon satisfactorily complying [11] with all recommendations of the visiting committee, the CAA granted full accreditation of the BBA program in 2010.

7. Conclusions

The development and implementation of the quality enhancement model and the associated program assessment and improvement model helped AGU in obtaining the full accreditation of the BBA program. The quality enhancement practices established under the above mentioned models assisted faculty and staff in adapting best international practices to improve the quality of the BBA curricula as well as ensuring the integrity of instruction and assessment of individual courses. The program assessment and improvement model is now being comprehensively implemented for all academic programs of the university and the continuous assessment and improvement actions would certainly help the university in attaining recognition not only by CAA but also by other regional and international accreditation agencies.

8. References

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