COURSE ASSESSMENT AND PROPOSAL REPORT (CAPR): A YEAR IN REVIEW

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Abstract — The Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science at the U.S. Military Academy began a pilot program using the Course Assessment and Proposal Report (CAPR) in Fall 1999. By Fall of 2000 every course in the department was required to use it. The format used for all courses was the same, and course directors were given an option of a web-based entry system or a word-processor based entry system to prepare their CAPR. This paper discusses some highlights of developing and using the CAPR. Among items discussed are the different levels of acceptance between new instructors and more senior faculty. The varying degrees of acceptance of a web-based version of the CAPR also impacted on utility of the tool. Changes to the CAPR should enhance long-range tracking of information for accreditation.

Index Terms — Accreditation, Course Assessment.

BACKGROUND

The Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science developed a Course Assessment and Proposal Report (CAPR) that combined the assessment of a course with the implementation proposal for the next iteration of that course. It was designed in August 1999 and was used for several courses during the academic year of 1999-2000. It has been expanded and is being used for all courses within the department for Academic Year 2000-2001. The course assessment and proposal report had the same basic format for CS and EE courses.

The first section is administrative. It matches course descriptions with other publications, lists when the course is offered, provides number of students enrolled and identifies textbooks. The second section is the course director's philosophy, with the third section being course assessment. Supporting documentation for assessment is contained in annexes so it can be extracted for other requirements. Some of the annexes were standardized for all courses, but others were based on specific needs of courses. The fourth section contains the proposal of the out-going course director for the next iteration of the course. The fifth, and final section, is the proposal from the incoming course director on how the new course director chooses to implement the course. If the outgoing and incoming course directors are the same, then the fifth section is typically omitted. Course Directors had a choice of using a web based form or a word-processing based form.

RESULTS AND LESSONS LEARNED

The web-based approach was touted as being critical for acceptance of the CAPR. Initially, it was preferred because it allowed a very structured approach to data input. Using links to the information rather than data re-entry could enhance documents that shared information, such as program objectives, or course descriptions. But, this made keeping versions of the proposals aligned with version changes in the shared documents very difficult. It was particularly difficult to keep alignment across academic years. In courses where there was a mix of documentation required (such as program output, lab reports, hand-drawings, etc.) it was very awkward to keep track of where all the supporting documentation should be kept. A subsequent requirement for each course to maintain a hard copy of the final CAPR was also difficult to implement via the web. Administratively, it was discovered that the web-based version was actually harder to maintain than the word-processor.

An initial goal of the CAPR was to be a single source of information for a variety of assessment needs. As part of its incorporation into the total assessment program it was necessary to ensure data required for EE or CS accreditation was being collected and documented properly within the CAPR. A review of the CS accreditation documentation indicated courses needed to track information such as time and lessons dedicated to data structures, algorithms, design, etc. Revising annexes without any change to the base document easily changed the CAPR for CS courses. From a process perspective, this indicated the CAPR should be considered a viable tool, as it is readily modifiable without significant changes to the process of producing the CAPR.

There was a definite difference in acceptance of the CAPR among faculty members. The newer faculty, particularly those taking over as a course director for the first time, strongly supported the use of the CAPR. The felt the formalized method of presenting information helped them focus their efforts. The formalization also helped focus data-collection during the course execution as well. Older faculty members, or those who have taught very stable courses, are reluctant to use the CAPR. They have indicated it is predominantly a chore and not an enhancement to their ability to teach. This is due to inertia in producing the first CAPR, as once it is in place, updating it yearly for a stable course is minimal.

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