The APA 2012 Annual Report Online (ARO) Commission on Accreditation (CoA) Portal Survey

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Office of Program Consultation and Accreditation
BACKGROUND

The Commission on Accreditation (CoA) and Office of Program Consultation and Accreditation (OPCA) together with Liaison International built the CoA Portal, a secure, web-based data collection and accreditation database. The Annual Report Online (ARO) was the first component of the Portal to be finished and launched in June 2012. The ARO is a repository of annual reports whereby all accredited programs are required to submit program data on new students/trainees and faculty/supervisors as well as annual updates to existing records and program related data.

The CoA anticipated that the new ARO platform would be a much needed improvement compared to the old system while understanding that any new system would experience obstacles and need adjustments in the future. In an effort to support accredited programs in the task to submit ARO data and to seek feedback from users of the CoA portal, the Commission approved use of a voluntary, anonymous 5-degree, Likert-scale formatted survey. Approximately 25% of the registered CoA Portal users contacted through email on December 5, 2012 returned completed surveys by December 31, 2012. After the survey closed, OPCA Research staff analyzed the results and presented a report to the Commission. This is an executive summary of that report and describes the plan of action agreed to by the Commission. Please use the following link to access a copy of the full report: SURVEY REPORT.

SURVEY RESULTS

Overall, survey respondents were generally satisfied with the new CoA Portal platform. A majority agreed that the website was easy to use and designed for all levels of users. Respondents reported finding the progress bars on the ARO dashboard helpful and understood how and when to use the “mark as complete” buttons. Respondents expressed dissatisfaction in areas of adequacy of ARO instructions, expected functionality of the site, and the rate that pages loaded. Also, there was overall agreement that it was frustrating that the site redirected users to the first page of the profile tables, that column sort preferences for the profile tables were not saved, and possible solutions were not provided when the user encountered errors in the reliability check.

A key feature of the new online accreditation system is synchronization of the ARO and self-study, meaning that many of the data entered annually for the ARO will prepopulate self-study tables at the time of program reaffirmation of accreditation, thus it is noteworthy that most respondents agreed that ARO data for previous years was input into the new database accurately. Plus, most respondents agreed that their program updated and/or added records during the 2012 ARO and that their data was consistent with self-study data.
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Respondents reported that ARO resources offered by the OPCA Research office such as the data entry training provided in the webinars and the tip emails were helpful. A little more than 50% of respondents indicated that they did not participate in data entry training. Exploratory analysis showed that participation in data entry training tended to facilitate better understanding of instructions and features in the CoA Portal. Exploratory analysis also found that administrative respondents, moreso than program directors, tended to understand better how to download a spreadsheet of ARO data and agree that the CoA portal instructions were adequate. Interestingly, administrative respondents tended to participate in data entry training moreso than program director/faculty respondents.

ACTION PLAN

The goal of the CoA moving forward is to support programs in their effort to successfully submit accurate ARO data on time. The Commission has prioritized several solutions to reduce the number of obstacles to efficient data entry and to mitigate confusion about which data are required. Data entry training will be offered in a series of webinars by OPCA Research staff; two webinars will be broadcast within a week of the ARO opening and two will be broadcast later in the summer. This year, the Commission ensured that the ARO closes on a weekday so that the Research office is available for any last minute questions prior to submission. In the CoA Portal, users will find that instructions have been added and rewritten throughout the ARO, in particular to clarify the “Other Contributors” faculty/supervisor classification and the system reliability check feature, which caused numerous delays in submission last year due to lack of immediate feedback for users who encountered reliability check problems.

Additionally, the CoA and OPCA have been working very closely with the vendor to rework some of the features in the ARO so that column sort preferences are preserved and not reset when navigating back to the student/graduate/faculty profile tables and the system doesn’t redirect users back to the first page of the profile tables. Moreover, the Commission has approved a plan to temporarily open the Archived records to all programs so that any inconsistencies in individual records can be corrected and/or updated by program staff, which is a significant opportunity given that the ARO is set to be synchronized, partially, with the online self-study in the near-future.

The OPCA and CoA are hopeful that programs will find these improvement efforts helpful as plans go forward to complete the upcoming ARO.