

Quality Assurance Suite of Activities: Guidelines for Reviews

Purpose and Scope

High quality teaching and research programs are a hallmark of the University of Alberta, and the university is committed to a rigorous program of quality assurance to maintain program excellence. The ultimate goal of the Quality Assurance (quality assurance) suite of activities is quality improvement through a transparent process which determines strengths, challenges, opportunities, and best practices for each undergraduate and graduate program as well as the strategic directions, research and creative outputs of each Faculty.

Quality assurance at the University of Alberta is a peer-review process, comprising detailed examination of the quality of teaching, learning, and administration of programs and the impact of research, scholarship and creative outputs of faculties of the University of Alberta. External perspectives are another essential aspect of the quality assurance process and all review committees will be chaired by an academic leader from a peer institution.

The quality assurance suite of activities is composed of an undergraduate program review, designed to evaluate all undergraduate programs and their administration; a graduate program review, which evaluates professional and graduate programs; as well as the President's Visiting Committee (PVC), which concerns itself with the strategic planning of the faculty including innovativeness, global impact and competitiveness, and the future plans for research and programs. At the request of the Provost and Vice-President (Academic), this process may be adapted to review the quality and impact of administrative portfolios.

The quality assurance activities set out below are not intended to overlap and duplication of information in the self-study templates should be avoided. Faculties are encouraged to align the reviews to reduce redundancy as well as to improve strategic alignment of programs. Faculties that include accreditation processes are further invited to align all review processes to maximize value and minimize overlap and redundancy.

Legislative/Policy Context

The Campus Alberta Quality Council (CAQC) was established in 2004 as an arms-length quality assurance agency. While the primary responsibility for academic and institutional quality assurance rests with Alberta post-secondary institutions themselves, the Post Secondary Learning Act (PSLA) gives the CAQC responsibility for monitoring degree programs approved on its recommendation to ensure standards of quality continue to be met. Specifically, the PSLA gives the CAQC the power to conduct a comprehensive evaluation after six years of offering an approved degree program. In addition, the PSLA gives the CAQC the responsibility to conduct other periodic reporting, to review and comment on cyclical internal institutional reviews, and to recommend the rescinding of ministerial approval to offer a degree program if quality standards are not met.

Institutional Authority

As chief academic officer and chief operating officer (in function), the Provost and Vice-President (Academic) is responsible for academic leadership including quality assurance of academic programs. The Provost, with the Vice-Provost (Programs), is responsible for the quality assurance suite of activities; however, the Vice-Provost and Dean of the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (GPS) also has responsibility for graduate program

reviews. The President and Vice-Chancellor is responsible for the PVC. The Vice-Provost (Programs) is responsible for ensuring that undergraduate and graduate program reviews are completed within the five to seven year cycle prescribed by the CAQC, and typically that the President's Review Committees are completed on a similar regular schedule. Within the Office of the Provost, unless otherwise noted, the Vice-Provost (Programs) is the liaison with the CAQC and the Ministry.

Institutional reporting is submitted to the General Faculties Council (GFC), which hears the results of the quality assurance activities through reports to the GFC APC. The Board of Governors receives quality assurance reporting through the Board Learning, Research and Student Experience Committee (BLRSEC).

Quality Assurance Suite Schedule

The schedule for quality assurance is set by the Office of the Provost to ensure all University programs are reviewed in a planned cycle of seven years and that the interval between review activities does not exceed eight years. While every effort is made to accommodate the scheduling needs of units within their designated review year, the review schedule must be balanced between the logistical demands of the process and the scheduling needs of Faculties. The schedule is publically available on the website of the Provost and Vice-President (Academic).

In addition to the cyclical quality reviews and PVC, the Provost will monitor review results as appropriate, but at least on an annual basis.

The planning and preparation timeline for undergraduate and graduate program reviews is approximately twelve to fourteen months. A PVC may be prepared concurrently but will usually begin only after program reviews and accompanying reports are complete.

Quality assurance reviews and external accreditation reviews may be conducted concurrently if the accreditation activities satisfy the requirements of the Quality Assurance activities. This will be determined in consultation with the Office of the Provost and Vice-President (Academic), and the following stipulations must be met:

- 1) **Self study documents:** Content requirements in the accreditation self-study documents must be compared to the content requested in the Quality Assurance Self-Study template. This comparative analysis of the accreditation requirements and the Quality Assurance templates must be conducted by the Faculty and submitted to the Office of the Provost and Vice-President (Academic) for review. This 'crosswalk' document will inform the decision about whether accreditation activities satisfy the requirements of the Quality Assurance activities, or whether an alternate process needs to be crafted. In the case of complete overlap between the reports for accreditation and the quality assurance template, the Faculty may submit their accreditation self-study, with the cross-listing of pertinent sections to the quality assurance template, to the Office of the Provost and Vice-President (Academic) for use in the quality assurance review process. If specific content required by the quality assurance process is missing from the accreditation self-study report, the Faculty will be required to submit additional material to address the missing content. The accreditation self-study document, the cross-listing index and any additional information will be reviewed by the quality assurance team in the Office of the Provost.
- 2) **Site visit:** A delegate from the Office of the Provost and Vice-President (Academic) will attend the site visit meeting with the accreditation team. Additional interviews may be conducted as deemed necessary by this delegate.
- 3) **Final report:** A final report of findings related to quality assurance is necessary. The Faculty may submit to

the Office of the Provost and Vice-President (Academic) the external accreditation report to satisfy the requirements of a final quality assurance report. However, the accreditation report must be submitted with an index that shows the pages in the accreditation report where the required quality assurance information is found.

- 4) **Response:** The Faculty must still write a response to the accreditation report (as it pertains to quality assurance) and submit it to the Office of the Provost and Vice-President (Academic). This response will be included in an excerpted report that will be prepared by the Office of the Provost and Vice-President (Academic), shared with University Governance, and posted on a public-facing University of Alberta quality assurance website.

Quality Assurance Suite Overview

The Quality Assurance Suite of activities is a mechanism to ensure that University of Alberta programs meet the highest standards of academic excellence. In addition to program reviews, the PVC includes forward looking and strategic review of research, scholarly activity and creative outputs.

Communications

The Office of the Provost and Vice-President (Academic) maintains a webpage which is the repository for information on the University of Alberta quality assurance activities. The site includes the schedule for reviews, an archive of public reports from each review, all related templates, as well as these guidelines.

Committee members will have access to a secure website where information required for each review will be housed. Information provided is strictly confidential between the University of Alberta and the review committees and will not be shared externally by either body. Only the final excerpted report will be made public.

Coordination and Support

The Office of the Provost and the Performance, Analytics and Institutional Research (PAIR) portfolio provide support for the undergraduate and graduate program reviews as well as the PVC. The Office of the Provost will manage the logistics of all the reviews, including recruiting committee members (in consultation with Faculties), scheduling site visits (in consultation with Faculties) as well as internal and external communications.

PAIR is responsible for providing standard data sets required to complete the analysis in the self-study templates for both the undergraduate and graduate program reviews. In addition, the quality assurance dedicated analyst will work with the faculty to obtain relevant comparator data. Training on manipulation of data will be provided to faculties to ensure consistent interpretation of data.

Initiating the Review Process

The Vice-Provost (Programs) will meet with the Deans of faculties up for review approximately twelve to fourteen months before their review. At this meeting, undergraduate and graduate programs to be reviewed will be identified, and the scope and depth of review required will be determined. The Dean may make requests regarding scheduling of the reviews at this meeting and identify areas of particular strategic interest for the Faculty. The Dean will also designate a key contact who will work with the Office of the Provost to implement the reviews.

The result of this meeting will be a Mandate Letter which outlines the Faculty's commitment to the review process

and the Provost's expectations of the review process. The document will identify key issues to be addressed by the review. Any proposed changes to the self-study template, exceptions to review criteria, or additions to enlarge or enhance the scope of the review to meet the needs of specific disciplines should be outlined in this document.

Quality Assurance Suite Activities

UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAM REVIEW

The CAQC's program assessment standards guide expectations for information required in the self-study template. In addition, internal standards on teaching and learning are taken into account. Faculties are provided with a standard data set and asked to complete a self-study template for the undergraduate programs offered under each academic unit (normally the department or small faculty, however grouping of programs will be determined in consultation with the Faculty). The self-study template covers teaching and learning, faculty members, program environment and comparative analysis of undergraduate programs to other appropriate programs.

The preparation of the self-study template should be inclusive of faculty, students, and staff. Other constituencies should be engaged as seen fit by the Faculty. The self-study should be reflective of the changes in undergraduate programs since the last review cycle and should include critical self-analysis of programs and activities which support delivery. The Dean and Provost will also offer suggestions for focusing the review committees as appropriate. The Office of the Provost and PAIR will support the completion of the self-study and ensure that all required elements are present before finalizing and submitting to the review committee.

The completed template is provided to a committee, including external members, for evaluation. The committee will conduct a site visit and provide feedback on program strengths, challenges and the ability to (1) support effective program delivery, (2) deliver content of appropriate breadth and rigour, and (3) engage, support and assess learning through a clearly defined set of student learning outcomes. The committee may also make recommendations for program quality improvement.

The Dean (or Chair of the Department) will have the opportunity to respond to the committee's report. A response to the recommendations and plans to implement the changes and monitor their implementation will be included in a final internal report which will be submitted to the Vice-Provost (Programs).

A final report including an overview of the process, findings and plans for implementation will be provided to the GFC APC and the BLRSEC and may be submitted to CAQC.

Where an undergraduate program is offered in partnership between two academic Departments or Faculties, the Deans of the Faculties concerned will decide where the program shall be reviewed and who shall be responsible for preparing review materials.

Where an undergraduate program is offered in partnership with another Campus Alberta institution, and where the University of Alberta could be considered the lead institution, the Faculty will be responsible for including the program in the self-study template.

GRADUATE PROGRAM REVIEW

The aim of the Graduate Program Review is to ensure programs have the necessary expertise, systems, and resources to: (1) support effective and timely program delivery; (2) deliver content of appropriate breadth and rigour; and (3) engage, support and assess learning through a clearly defined set of learning outcomes. In addition to

ensuring maintenance of expected standards, the review will consider responses to recommendations of previous reviews.

The Graduate Program Review complies with CAQC expectations for graduate programs. Graduate programs typically sit within a unit (Department or Faculty), but there are many that cross units, and so the program focus independent of the unit is important particularly for these multidisciplinary programs.

The graduate program review process includes the development of a self-study report using data as supplied by PAIR, a site visit and report from the review team including member(s) from peer programs outside the University of Alberta, and a response to the visiting team's report by the program and the Dean of the Faculty under review. In the interest of accountability and transparency, a report summarizing the review outcomes will be made available on the Office of the Provost website.

The self-study, which will guide the work of the committee, should assess the strengths and challenges of the programs under review. The study should be both reflective and forward looking, and should include critical and comparative self-analysis using comparator data from two to three similar programs of high national and international reputation. Institutions selected should be aspirational peers – programs or faculties that present a profile that the University of Alberta would like to achieve. The self-study should include input from students, graduates, faculty, and administration for the program. The self-study can be customized, adding materials required to address specific and unique features of the program.

PRESIDENT'S VISITING COMMITTEE

The PVC is the responsibility of the Office of the President; however the coordination is normally provided by the Office of the Provost. The PVC concerns itself with the quality, innovativeness, impact and competitiveness, and future plans for research and scholarly activities. The PVC also relies on the self-studies and reports of the Academic Unit Reviews and the Graduate Program Reviews. The PVC relies on Faculties completing a self-study template which highlights the Faculty's research capacity and impact. The Faculty has the opportunity to respond before a five to seven year plan to guide the unit in increasing its research quality and impact.

REVIEW COMMITTEES

The committees for the undergraduate and graduate program reviews and for the President's Visiting Committee will normally be composed separately. Visits will be scheduled by the Office of the Provost in consultation with the Faculty. Combining review committees may be possible, subject to consultation with the Provost Office; however distinct reports for undergraduate and graduate programs and the President's Visiting Committee must be produced. When not concurrent, the undergraduate and graduate program reviews should precede the PVC.

At the beginning of the review process, Faculties will be asked to provide a list of potential reviewers from external institutions. The Office of the Provost will be responsible for composing the visiting committees and will contact all potential members. Each committee will include a member identified by the Office of the Provost who is internal to the University and external to the unit, program or Faculty being reviewed. The recommended composition of the review committees is included below; however, additional members or other adjustments may be considered on a case-by-case basis. In order to ensure efficiency and efficacy of the committee, membership of any single committee will be limited to a maximum of eight.

In both the Undergraduate and Graduate Program Reviews, more than one program may be considered by the committee. When composing the list of potential reviewers, Faculties should consider all the programs being

considered and look to strike a balance between knowledge of the unit or Faculty and an appropriate distance to allow for objectivity.

Faculties are responsible for vetting candidates for any conflicts of interest and alerting the Office of the Provost when their list of candidates is submitted. The Office of the Provost will use an assessment process which complies with the [UAPPOL Conflict Policy](#) and the Provost and Vice-President (Academic) will have the power to decide if a conflict can be managed. The Office of the Provost will work closely with Faculties to assure timely population of the committees.

When recommending external reviewers, Faculties should look for academics who are active and respected in their fields. They should have doctoral degrees (or terminal degrees in the discipline) and hold (or have held) academic appointments at the senior level. They should have experience in the design, delivery or administration of a similar program and chosen from an institution offering high quality programs in the field under review. Administrative experience might also be relevant.

Each review process has a different committee chair (see below). In addition to directing the committee's work, the chair is responsible for ensuring that a report is produced in the timeframe provided. The chair will provide an oral report of their findings at the end of the site-visit to an audience including a minimum of the Provost and Vice-Provost (Programs), Dean and applicable Department Chair, Vice-Provost and Dean of GPS for the graduate program review and to the President and Vice-Chancellor and a representative of the Vice-President (Research) for the PVC. Faculties shall determine who else will be invited to hear the results of the committee's work.

The Vice-Provost (Programs) will have a special responsibility to ensure that members of committees understand and fulfil their responsibilities. This will include their mandate to identify strengths, challenges and opportunities in programs and Faculties and to articulate detailed recommendations for improvement. The Vice-Provost (Programs) will also hold the committees accountable for reporting and confidentiality throughout the process.

COMPOSITION AND SELECTION COMMITTEE MINIMUM MEMBERSHIPS

Undergraduate Program Review

- 1 external to U of A (Chair)
- 1 internal to U of A, external to Faculty
- Program area experts, external to U of A, as needed by program specialization (*minimum 1*)

Graduate Program Review

- 1 external to U of A (Chair)
- 1 GPS Council representative, internal to U of A, external to Faculty
- Program area experts, external to U of A, as needed by program specialization (*minimum 1*)

President's Visiting Committee

- 1 external to U of A (Chair), international stature
- 1 internal to U of A, external to Faculty
- 1 Canadian representative from appropriate discipline
- 1 International representative from appropriate discipline

COMMITTEE RESPONSIBILITIES / TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Office of the Provost will work with Faculties to ensure that the committee has access to the appropriate documentation to complete their work. In addition to the self-study document, this may include accreditation

documents or other reviews completed by the Faculty.

The Office of the Provost, in collaboration with the Vice-Provost and Dean of GPS and the Office of the President, will manage the access to information for external reviewers and visiting committees. When not provided through the self-study, the Visiting Committees may request access to course documents including syllabi and descriptions or CVs of faculty members.

Confidentiality is essential to ensure an efficient and effective review process. Committee members shall expect confidentiality of each other, administrators and the Office of the Provost. The confidentiality of members is expected throughout the review process and when the process is complete. The official records produced from the review will include the visiting committee's report and the public report. Committee members will be asked to destroy all transitory records (meeting notes, drafts of their report etc.) after their work is complete.

All records created as a part of the review process will be subject to Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy legislation (FOIP) and will be managed by the Office of the Provost and Vice-President (Academic).

The Faculty will be responsible for organising site visits as a part of each review process. The site visit may include meetings with representatives of the Faculty or Department, internal and external stakeholders, students and staff. A tour of facilities may also be scheduled. While the Faculties have purview over visit schedules, additional meetings may be requested by the President, Provost, Vice-Provost (Programs), or committee chair.

Reporting

The external review of programs and Faculties is a key aspect of the quality assurance process and the main outputs of the Quality Assurance suite of activities are reports from committees containing feedback and recommendations. These reports are essential in ensuring that the outcome of the quality assurance process is improvements to program, research and creative output quality.

The reports will be used by the Provost, Dean, Directors and Chairs from the Department or Faculty to provide objective insight on quality of programs, research and creative outputs. The reports should summarize the findings of the site visit, include key insights derived from the self-study documents, and incorporate other relevant research, observations and conclusions from the committee members.

UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAM REVIEW COMMITTEE REPORTS

The committee should include the following elements in the undergraduate program review report:

Overview: A summary assessment of the program(s) and recommendations for improvement.

Process: A description of the process used to conduct the external review; including individuals involved, interviews conducted, and other activities (biographies can be included in an appendix).

Program Structure: How the program(s) structure, academic requirements and learning outcomes meet disciplinary and institutional standards.

Faculty: Analysis of academic staff related to program academic quality

Teaching and Learning: Analysis of ongoing efforts to improve and enhance teaching, learning and delivery of the academic program(s) under review.

Program Environment: Analysis of the quality of the staff and facilities which support program delivery and the student experience.

Program Measures and Comparative Analysis: Analysis of the potential opportunities and risks emerging from the discussion of program measure and comparative analysis.

Recommendations: Detailed recommendations for the continued improvement of the program or unit.

GRADUATE PROGRAM REVIEW COMMITTEE REPORTS

The committee should include the following elements in the graduate program review report:

Overview: A summary assessment of the program and recommendations for improvement.

Process: The details of the process used to conduct the external review, including individuals involved, interviews conducted, and other activities.

Strategic Alignment: Assessment of how the program aligns with relevant planning documents and performance indicators at the level of department or equivalent, faculty, university.

Curricula and Learning Environment: How the program's curricula and learning environment(s) meet disciplinary and institutional standards and how the student learning outcomes align with the objectives of the program. Have there been recent changes to curriculum.

Students: Assessment of admission standards and procedures; trends in student retention and graduation rates, time to completion; scholarships; student satisfaction; student achievement in terms of scholarly works and community engagement; student outcomes graduate employment and other post-graduation activities; evidence of ongoing alumni engagement; and areas of concern raised by students.

Professional Training: How the program meets the needs of students for professional training for specific careers and/or diverse career opportunities.

PVC REPORTS

The committee should include the following elements in the graduate program review report:

Executive Summary: A summary assessment of the Faculty's strategic directions and research and recommendations for improvement.

Faculty Overview: Commentary on the faculty strategic plan, research strategy, administrative and organizational structure, facilities and space, awards, collaborations and partnerships, community engagement, advancement activities, communications activities

External Environment Overview: Factors which may influence strategic directions of the faculty.

Undergraduate and Graduate Program Review Final Reports: comments related to research, scholarly activity or creative outputs.

Key topics identified by Faculty, President or Provost

Academic Staff/ Faculty Support and Development: Commentary or recommendations related to faculty demographics, faculty development and endowed chairs and professorships.

Research Funding: Commentary and feedback on research funding overview, specifically the 5-Year trend in research revenues and comparators.

Research Output Indicators: Commentary and feedback on bibliometrics especially comparator institutions.

Graduate Students: Any recommendations related to graduate students not covered by the Graduate Program Review recommendations, especially post-doctoral students, funding and awards (including levels of funding and overview of funding practices), professional development opportunities, research and creative outputs and career outcomes.

EXCERPTED FINAL REPORT

An excerpted version of the committee report and response will be shared with the university community through our governance bodies (the GFC PC and the BLRSEC). The excerpted version will highlight the major report findings and recommendations, and the Dean's plans to act upon those recommendations.

The report will also be made publicly available through the U of A website in order to support transparency of the review process.