

The intent of this document is to provide members of the Review Team with an overview of the University of Saskatchewan’s Academic Program Review process and guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the reviewers during the review engagement.

PREAMBLE

The Academic Program Review process is an instrument to assess and improve the quality of academic programs, placing the review of academic programs as a priority for assessment at the University of Saskatchewan (USask). Building on the lessons learned from previous review initiatives (Systematic Program Review from 1999-2005 and Graduate Program Review from 2010-2018), a cyclical review process including all undergraduate and graduate programs will ensure that the University of Saskatchewan is in alignment with review processes and practices in Canada. This commitment to systematic review activities is aligned with the standard presented by the Saskatchewan Higher Education Quality Assurance Board to “implement a periodic external program review and assessment process to ensure the ongoing currency of the program and the quality of its learning outcomes” (Quality Assurance Review Process: Program Review Standards and Criteria, 2014).

PURPOSE

The primary purpose of Academic Program Review is to ensure that USask students are provided with the best possible learning experience in a robust learning environment. The review engagement will provide opportunity for program leaders to critically reflect and engage in a clear and transparent process of assessment of a program’s strengths and weaknesses that will result in valuable recommendations for quality improvement. Review outcomes will inform program revision, renewal, and strategic planning decisions. The review process demonstrates the University’s commitment to program quality to a wide variety of key stakeholders including University of Saskatchewan governing bodies, Government of Saskatchewan, and the general public.

OVERVIEW OF THE REVIEW PROCESS

All of the Academic Program Reviews conducted at the University of Saskatchewan include the following elements:

- a. Deputy Provost typically appoints a three member Review Team consisting of one Internal Reviewer (faculty member from the University of Saskatchewan) and two External Reviewers, selected from nominees provided by the academic unit.
- b. A Self-Study Report, providing detailed background information about the program under review, will be prepared by the academic unit. The self-study content will be relevant to the academic programs over a five-year period and will provide the Review Team with the information necessary to comment on the six Quality Assessment Standards described below.
- c. A series of in-person meetings will be scheduled typically over a two day period during a site visit for the Review Team to meet with relevant academic, administrative, and student stakeholder groups associated with the programs under review. In some situations, the site visit will be carried out in a virtual manner. Under such circumstances, the stakeholder meetings will typically be carried out over a three week period.
- d. Upon completion of all review meetings, the Review Team will submit an External Review Report that will provide opinion and perspective on program quality related to each of the six Quality Assessment Standards.

- e. A response to the report will be provided to the Deputy Provost by the Dean/Director along with a plan of action and timeline to implement recommendations for improvement.

ROLE OF EXTERNAL REVIEWER

Typically there are two External Reviewers appointed for each review. They are responsible for conducting all aspects of the review including:

- Preparing for the review process by becoming familiar with the Quality Assessment Standards by which the programs will be assessed and analyzing the self-study document and other materials provided by the University of Saskatchewan before the review meetings begin.
- Determining the objectives of each meeting with program stakeholders (in advance of the meetings) to identify the appropriate questions to be asked and/or topics to be covered (depending on the stakeholder).
- Chairing all meetings involving the Review Team and stakeholders. This can be done by having one External Reviewer act as chair for all meetings or having both External Reviewers switch off as chair for each meeting (to be determined at the discretion of the Review Team).
- Authoring and issuing an External Review Report to the program leaders at the conclusion of all stakeholder meetings. The External Review Report is normally due roughly 30 days after the exit meeting with program leaders. The timeline can be negotiated and confirmed with the Office of the Provost and VP Academic during the review. The Review Team will be provided with a template to construct the External Review Report.

ROLE OF INTERNAL REVIEWER

The Internal Reviewer is a key member of the Review Team and is selected by the Deputy Provost and/or unit under review. The role of the Internal Reviewer is to act as a resource to the External Reviewers while providing context and insight on the written or verbal information received.

Specific duties include:

- Attending all Review Team meetings and assisting with facilitating discussions and managing meeting time while in the meetings.
- Providing additional information, insight, and context on various aspects of the University of Saskatchewan, college, or unit at the request of the External Reviewers.
- Ensuring that the meeting schedule is adhered to.

The Internal Reviewer will not participate in writing the External Review Report, but they may be called upon to provide their perspective or opinion to the External Reviewers as required.

QUALITY ASSESSMENT STANDARDS

The Academic Program Review process utilizes the following six Quality Assessment Standards as guidance for the review. The criteria are derived from the detailed degree level standards for undergraduate and graduate programs, articulated by the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada.

1. Program Administration - A quality program incorporates effective systems and procedures in the areas of recruitment and admissions, program management, and in the allocation of awards and scholarships to students.

Program leadership anticipates the ongoing evolution of their discipline, which is reflected in evolving program delivery and program planning activities. There is an anticipation and analysis of how future trends may impact the recruitment and selection of students, the content and quality of program delivery, the understanding of how students learn in the discipline and the student experience. Administrative structures (committees, etc.) facilitate ongoing quality enhancement of teaching and learning and frequent review of program and course learning outcomes.

2. Program Structure - A quality program has clearly stated program and course learning outcomes that are appropriate to the level of degree offered, the academic context of the discipline, and/or the expectations of the profession. Program and course learning outcomes, and their connection to the USask Learning Charter¹ and College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies policies,² should be clearly articulated. Course learning outcomes should also be clearly articulated and connected to program learning outcomes. The sequence and timing of courses and their respective course learning outcomes should provide repeated opportunity for students to build capacity in achieving program learning outcomes.

The program curriculum achieves course and program learning outcomes at the level of degree offered. It is current and addresses all aspects of the discipline including opportunities for specialization to cultivate further conceptual depth or breadth. Student learning success is assessed through written, oral, and observational evidence of knowledge and skills in all aspects of the discipline. Indigenous knowledges and experiences, grounded in Indigenous worldviews, are incorporated into the program³. Interdisciplinary collaborations provide opportunities for the acquisition, synthesis, application and integration of knowledge, cultivating the intellectual development of students. Students have access to relevant experiential learning opportunities, which may include research, field-based instruction, community-engaged learning, study abroad, clinical placement, practicum, internship and coop placement.

Quality assessment practices, both formative and summative, utilized during course learning experiences have been shown to improve student learning success. Course-based assessments support both teaching and learning and are used in determining the success of students in achieving course and program learning outcomes.

Quality assessment practices include:

- explicit connections to course and/or program learning outcomes;
- clearly communicated criteria;
- authentic assessments from/of a variety of student learning experiences and context;
- the inclusion of written, oral and observational assessments;
- the utilization of a diversity of assessors (self, peer, instructor, and others); and,
- regular reporting of individual and aggregate achievement of program learning outcomes to students and to other critical stakeholders.

¹ University of Saskatchewan Learning Charter <http://teaching.usask.ca/about/policies/learning-charter.php#OurLearningVision>

² CGPS Degree-Level Learning Outcomes <https://cgps.usask.ca/policy-and-procedure/governance-membership/degree-level-learning-outcomes.php>

³ Indigenization within the Curriculum <https://teaching.usask.ca/curriculum/indigenization.php#EldersMessage>

3. Program Enrolment and Student Funding - A quality program has the profile and reputation to attract and retain a viable number of high caliber students, who will have local, national and/or international backgrounds. The students entering the program have the capacity and preparation necessary to meet the challenges of the program and to successfully complete their degree. Students are supported in applying for scholarships, awards and research grants.

4. Learning Environment - Students have access to appropriate learning and information resources (such as library, databases, computers, classroom equipment, and laboratory facilities) and to an appropriate range of support services. Course instruction uses state of the art modalities and processes that enhance the student learning experience. The learning environment supports the program's stated learning outcomes.

A quality student experience at the graduate level is built on strong interactions with faculty. Students are regularly advised, informed and guided by meetings with their graduate supervisor. The learning environment provides a range of opportunities for students to participate in intellectually and professionally challenging activities.

5. Faculty Profile – A quality program has a distinguished faculty with a national and international reputation for scholarly work. Faculty members are credited with a suitable number and quality of discipline-specific publications, awards, research grants and conference invitations, all indicative of the breadth and level of their engagement in scholarly work. Faculty members have the knowledge and skills required to teach in their discipline. All instructors exemplify learning, teach effectively, assess fairly, and solicit feedback.

Professional programs have appropriately qualified faculty involved heavily in teaching and learning activities. Graduate programs are supported by highly engaged faculty with a commitment to supervision and mentorship.

6. Student Progression and Success – Undergraduate students acquire a basic knowledge and critical understanding of the range of fields within a discipline. They demonstrate the ability to gather, review, evaluate, interpret and critically analyze information relevant to the discipline and to compare the merits of alternative hypotheses. Undergraduate students have the capacity to engage in independent or supervised research, and are able to apply learning from one or more areas outside the discipline.

Graduate students acquire a systematic knowledge of the discipline and are being suitably prepared for professional practice and for research and inquiry. Masters students engage in independent research or practice in a supervised context and demonstrate critical thinking and analytical skills. Doctoral students show a high degree of intellectual autonomy, an ability to conceptualize, design and complete projects, and generate knowledge through original research or creative activity. Graduate students participate in seminars and conferences; they present their research findings through posters and published papers; and have opportunities to develop professional skills through experiences as teaching assistants and research assistants. Graduate students are credited with a suitable number and quality of achievement awards and conference invitations.

A quality program demonstrates that its students, at each phase of the program, are progressing towards achieving program and course learning outcomes. Graduates successfully achieve the defined program learning outcomes, complete their degree requirements in a timely manner, and can access a variety of career paths post-graduation. Students perceive their program to be supporting their learning and achievement of program learning outcomes.

EXTERNAL REVIEW REPORT

The Review Team will be given a report template that will facilitate the development of the External Review Report. In addition to introductory and closing remarks, the External Review Report would consist of observations, insights, and recommendations based on the six Quality Assessment Standards. The Review Team can use and/or modify the report template at their discretion.

SUPPORT

The Office of the Provost and VP Academic will be available to support the Review Team throughout the duration of the review. The office can provide the Review Team with guidance on the review process, answers to questions, additional information needs, and required meetings with stakeholders. Contact details will be provided to the Review Team at the beginning of the review engagement.