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## **Senate Policy on the Review of Graduate Programs at Saint Mary's University**

### **1. Preamble**

The Saint Mary's University Act, 1970 (including amendments to December, 2007), states that "Subject to the powers of the Board, the Senate shall be responsible for the educational policy of the university." The Graduate Program Review process is therefore carried out under the authority of the Academic Senate with detailed oversight the responsibility of the Academic Planning Committee, a standing committee of Senate chaired by the Vice-President, Academic and Research.

All graduate programs (graduate diplomas, and Master and PhD degrees) are the responsibility of the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (FGSR). While the FGSR is academically responsible for the programs, the delivery of the programs is accomplished in collaboration and in close working relationships with the Faculties of Arts, Commerce, and Science. Individual graduate programs are facilitated by its Graduate Program Committee which is led by its Graduate Program Coordinator (roughly analogous to a Department Council and Departmental Chair, respectively, for undergraduate programs).

Graduate programs at Saint Mary's fall under either research-based or professional categories, following the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission (MPHEC) Degree Level Qualifications Framework. Examples of research-based programs include the MA in History, the MSc in Applied Psychology, and the PhD in Business Administration - Management. Examples of professional graduate programs include the Master of Business Administration, the Master of Finance, and the Master of Management of Cooperatives and Credit Unions.

For purposes of this policy, the term "program" is used in the broadest sense. It could refer to a review of graduate programs in an entire discipline (e.g. MSc and PhD in Astronomy; Graduate Diploma, MA and PhD in International Development Studies); all graduate programs housed within a given Department, academic unit or Centre; a specific interdisciplinary program; or a graduate program housed within a specific Department.

The term "graduate program" is used to represent the academic unit responsible for the program under review. While some graduate programs are housed within specific departments which are very closely involved in their delivery, this policy and process does not constitute a departmental review. The focus is on the learning environment, educational experiences, and research activities (the latter, especially for research-based programs) of graduate students in the program. Department resources and departmental service will be taken into account only to the extent that they shape this experience.

To ensure that the policy stays current and relevant to its users, and reflects changes in quality assurance processes, the Senate Procedures for the Review of Academic Programs at Saint Mary's University should itself be reviewed and revised (as necessary) in the seventh year of each seven year cycle of reviews.

### **2. Statement of Objectives**

Graduate Program Review is a process of internal, formative self-evaluation combined with and guided by peer review. It is aimed at monitoring and improving student learning and the many facets that support learning. Graduate program review:

- encourages continuous program improvement through a process of self-evaluation;
- enables graduate programs to maintain currency and academic credibility through the peer review process;

- promotes high-quality programs that are responsive to student needs, societal priorities, and the public good;
- enables graduate programs to ensure that program goals are consistent with the University's mission and Academic Plan;
- assists a graduate program in planning for future program development;
- informs institutional decision making and resource allocation.

### **3. Guiding Principles**

Guiding principles for the development and implementation of the graduate program review process represent principles inherent in the collegial governance environment of academia. These include:

- **Academic Freedom:** Respecting the university's commitment to the principle of academic freedom, reviews should be open, fair, inclusive, critical and constructive.
- **Peer Review:** As a central tenet of the academy, external assessment by peers remains a central feature of all program reviews.
- **Accountability:** Participating in a regular cycle of program reviews demonstrates accountability to a university's many communities: to students, faculty and staff, as well as to government, funding agencies, and the general public.
- **Transparency:** The university community will be informed of the program review outcomes for each review cycle. This information will be included in the Academic Planning Committee's annual report to Senate and posted on the Senate Office website.

### **4. Scheduling of Program Reviews**

A seven year program review cycle has been developed by the Academic Planning Committee, a Committee of Senate, in consultation with the Deans.

- Each program will normally be reviewed once in every seven year cycle.
- Notwithstanding the normal seven year cycle, reviews may be scheduled at other times to accommodate accreditation review timelines, to allow for thematically similar programs to be reviewed simultaneously, or to facilitate the timely discussion of significant issues in the discipline and/or program.

### **5. Steps in the Review Process**

Academic Program Reviews are initiated annually by the Vice-President, Academic and Research, on the advice of the Academic Planning Committee. Core elements of the review process include:

- A letter from the Academic Planning Committee to graduate programs confirming their upcoming program review.
- A workshop facilitated by the Dean and the Director, Centre for Academic and Instructional Development, with graduate programs undergoing a program review to outline and discuss the policy and processes (e.g. timelines, resource availability, etc.) prior to the start of the review process each year. Continuing support will be provided throughout the program review process.
- A representative Self-Study Committee established by the graduate program. The Committee will produce a Self-Study Report within the timeline outlined in the Policy Handbook.

- Appointment of a Program Review Committee (PRC) consisting of one faculty member internal to Saint Mary's who is not involved with the program (who will serve as Chair of the Committee), and two faculty external to Saint Mary's who are established scholars in the field with experience in program development.
- An on-site review conducted by the Program Review Committee (PRC).
- The submission of a PRC Report to the Office of the Vice-President, Academic & Research.
- Responses to the PRC Report by the Graduate Program Coordinator, host Department(s) (if applicable) and the Dean of the FGSR and the relevant Dean of Arts, Commerce or Science.
- Consideration of the PRC Report, including responses from the Department and Dean, by the Academic Planning Committee. APC will produce a report, including recommendations with timelines, for submission to Senate. APC's Report will also be copied to the Deans and the Department.
- Senate's consideration of the APC Report resulting in a Senate report, including recommendations and actions to be taken by the Department, with accompanying timelines.
- Development of an Action Plan by the Department based on the Senate Report, and submitted to the Academic Planning Committee.
- A One-Year Report submitted to Academic Planning by the department on the progress made during the year on the Action Plan. This report will be reviewed by APC and an update submitted to Senate.
- The Chair of the Academic Planning Committee will include in his/her Annual Report to Senate a section on the Academic Program Review process and the outcomes from the previous year's reviews.

## **6. Framework for Review of Academic Programs**

In conducting program reviews, both the graduate program responsible for the program and the Program Review Committee should focus on:

### **6.1: Program Goals and Student Learning Outcomes**

- a) **Program Goals:** What is it the program intends to accomplish? Are goals clearly articulated and publicly stated? Are program goals aligned with institutional mission/goals?
- b) **Student Learning Outcomes:** What are the knowledge, skills and attitudes students develop as a result of taking the program? Are they clearly articulated and publicly stated? Are student learning outcomes aligned with the overall goals of the program?
- c) **External Factors:** Describe any external factors or external accreditation requirements which influence or are applicable to the program's goals and student learning outcomes? If this is an externally accredited program, identify the current accreditation status and/or the anticipated date of (re)accreditation.

## **6.2: Program of Study**

- a) **Content, Structure and Delivery:** Identify and outline how they support the achievements of the program's goals and student learning outcomes? Is there alignment between the stated and delivered curriculum?
- b) **Assessment Principles and Methods:** Has the program identified general principles of assessment? Are they clearly articulated and broadly understood by faculty? What methods of assessment are used to put these principles into practice to measure student learning? In individual courses? In the program as a whole? How successful are the assessment methods in helping students learn, and in identifying student learning difficulties?
- c) **Program Development Process:** Describe the program development process within the graduate program and the contributions of faculty (full and part-time), students (current and recent graduates), and other communities (internal and external) to the process.

## **6.3: Teaching and Learning Environment**

Identify and critically analyse how each of the following affects and contributes to the teaching and learning environment for students in the program:

- a) Faculty (full-time and part-time)
- b) Range of pedagogical practices
- c) Modes of course delivery
- d) Teaching/learning resources (Library, etc.)
- e) Physical infrastructure and equipment
- f) Student financial support
- g) Advising/mentoring of students
- h) Professional and career development

## **6.4: Research and Professional Development Environment**

Identify and critically analyze how each of the following affects and contributes to the research and professional development environment for students in the program:

- a) Faculty expertise and research activity (in terms of capacity to supervise graduate student research)
- b) Research in the program, including areas of distinctive or special strength, recent accomplishments, and the external impact of research
- c) External and internal research funding, including aggregate amounts, sources and number of faculty applying for and number successful in grant competitions
- d) Research collaborations of faculty members with others outside the university including whether the program has formal or informal agreements with other programs or institutions
- e) Professional experience of faculty relevant to the program

- f) Professional development activities of faculty
- g) Community involvement directly related to a Faculty member's specialty
- h) Membership on boards or professional associations relevant to the program
- i) Mentorship of students

**6.5: Administrative/Organizational Environment**

Identify and critically analyse the program's administrative/organizational structure with respect to:

- a) the appropriateness of the roles of program coordinators/directors/managers and committees within the program
- b) the relationship of the program to the host department or departments (if interdisciplinary), faculty or faculties within the University, or bodies in other universities (if a joint degree).

**6.6: Student Characteristics**

- a) **Enrolment Patterns:** What are the enrolment patterns in the program since the last program review, or over the past five years in the event of a first review?
- b) **Student Admissions:** What is the profile of students entering the program (e.g. entering grades, gender, admission status, geography, citizenship, etc)?
- c) **Retention/Graduation:** What is the rate of retention/graduation of students who have entered the program since the last program review, or over the past five years in the event of a first review? Is this rate lesser than/same as/exceed norms?
- d) **Graduate Experience:** What is known about the student experience following graduation (e.g. further study, employment patterns, fellowships, distinctions and awards)? When/how/by whom was this information gathered?

**6.7: Program Strengths and Challenges**

- a) **Program Strengths:** What are the strengths of the program as it currently exists?
- b) **Program Goals:** To what extent is the program achieving its goals? Why/why not?
- c) **Student Learning Outcomes:** To what extent are student learning outcomes being met? Why/why not?
- d) **Curriculum Change:** What, if any, changes to the curriculum are planned or contemplated to better support the program's goals and student learning outcomes?
- e) **Changes to Research Activities:** (for research-based programs): What, if any, changes to research activities and/or thesis supervision are planned or contemplated to better support the program's goals and student learning outcomes?

- f) **Professional Development of Students:** To what extent is the program successfully developing professional skills and opportunities for students and being responsive to employers needs in the development of students?
- g) **Challenges:** What are the challenges, present and future, to maintaining and/or enhancing opportunities for student success in the program?

#### 6.8: Environmental Scan

- a) **Status of the Discipline:** what is the status of the discipline/field regionally, nationally, internationally?
- b) **Program Need:** What are the broader needs (local, regional and national) being met by graduates of the program? How have these needs been identified, and by whom?
- c) **Student Demand:** Is student demand sufficient to support a viable program? Is there a particular population of student which the program currently serves, or could be serving? What is the anticipated future demand for the program?
- d) **Relationship to Other Programs:** What is the relationship of this program to other programs within Saint Mary's? What are the objectives/focus of the program relative to comparator programs (minimum of three), with a rationale for choice of comparator programs.
- e) **Relationship to Other Institutions:** Have there been consultations or are there connections with other universities/departments/graduate programs offering similar, equivalent or comparable programs? How has this influenced the current program offering? Future offerings?
- f) **Resources:** Are the human, physical, and financial resources adequate to meet the current program needs? Anticipated future needs?

### 7. Conclusion

#### 7.1: Summary Statement

- a) **The Self Study Committee** should provide a summary statement on the evidence attesting to the quality of the program, the overall strengths and limitations of the program and the academic unit responsible for it, and future directions.
- b) **The Program Review Committee** should provide a summary statement on the evidence attesting to the quality of the program, the overall strengths and limitations of the program and the academic unit responsible for it, and future directions.

#### 7.2: List of Recommendations

**Program Review Committee** – this section should include an itemized list of the recommendations made by the External Review Committee throughout the report.

### Version History

Version	Date Changed	Updated by	Description of Change
1.0	May 14, 2010	Academic Planning in consultation with the Director of CAID and the Dean, FGSR.	Document creation. Date of Senate Approval: May 14, 2010. Companion document to the Senate Policy on the Review of Undergraduate programs, approved by Senate on March 12, 2010.