

Framework for Undergraduate Curriculum Evolution at Ryerson University

Approved by Senate, June 7, 2011

Preamble

The curriculum framework outlined in this report was approved by Senate on June 7, 2011. The framework facilitates the evolution of undergraduate curriculum at Ryerson University, and is guided by the current academic plan to give students more choice and develop curriculum for the twenty-first century.

Background

For decades, the Ryerson community has discussed how its curriculum can better serve students while retaining its traditional strengths. While Ryerson's current curriculum model has built the foundation for highly regarded professional and professionally related programs, society's needs and students' aspirations are rapidly changing in the twenty-first century.

Ryerson is at a historic juncture where it can move from discussion into action. There is an opportunity to evolve the curriculum to meet the needs of students in an increasingly interdisciplinary working world while preserving Ryerson's strengths in providing them with an intentional curriculum, professional pathways and liberal studies.

Ryerson's tripartite curriculum model implicitly evolved as practice before it was ratified as policy in 1977. The model divides courses into three distinct categories: professional, professionally related and liberal studies. The first category includes courses which provide professional training; the second, courses which provide complementary knowledge for the profession; and the third, courses which provide a "social and cultural" context for all professions as well as writing skills and critical thinking development. This highly prescriptive and intentional curriculum served Ryerson well. Over the years it adapted to a changing institution and continued to provide a framework for career-relevant education.

However, as Ryerson and its programs evolved, defining a profession along traditional lines for students became limiting, and there has been increased student demand for more curriculum choice. By 2005, the demand for change led to the *Curriculum Review Report (the Currie Report)*, authored by external consultants. After extensive consultation, the provost and vice president academic at the time believed that Ryerson was not ready for the changes that report proposed. He recommended that the next provost "monitor the evolution of the tripartite curriculum model, taking into consideration the Academic Standards Committee annual reports..., and that, in consultation with the Academic Planning Group, consider whether more fundamental change is desirable."

When consultations were undertaken in 2007 to inform Ryerson's current academic plan, *Shaping our Future*, there came renewed awareness of the desire among students for more opportunity to define their own educational paths leading to the increasingly diverse careers that they envision. This is

supported by various student survey results, and faculty who also expressed the desire to see the curriculum afford broader opportunity.

Recent consultations

In order to advance the current academic plan, consultations on a proposed framework for a revised curriculum model were conducted over the last six months. Faculty teaching chairs, in partnership with student senators, hosted an information session for students, faculty and staff in their respective faculties. Consultations with student senators and the RSU Executive, librarians, the Chairs, Directors and Deans (CDD) group, the Academic Planning Group (APG), associate deans, the Senate Priorities Committee (SPC), the Chang School of Continuing Education, and the RFA Executive were also held. The feedback on the proposed model was generally positive. Most of the discussion was not about the model itself, but rather with its implementation and the details which would need consideration. Implementation details common to many faculties include course access and availability, resources for the teaching of additional elective courses, and the provision of appropriate student advising. Now that the framework has been approved, these and other questions will be assessed during the implementation phase.

Relationship to other initiatives

Senate is also implementing, beginning in fall 2011, the new Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP). As part of this process, both the periodic program review and new program implementation processes will require programs to consider undergraduate degree level expectations (UDLEs) and to map curriculum to student learning outcomes. This presents an ideal opportunity to revise the curriculum structure and to define the attributes of a Ryerson graduate which we expect our curriculum to provide.

An important goal of the approved curriculum framework is to allow more student choice. In addition to approving the curriculum framework at the June 7 meeting, Senate also approved a revision of the minors policy, which allows students more flexibility in achieving a minor, and is appropriate for both the existing and the new model. The minors proposal specifies that a minor is six courses, as approved by the ASC, and that while minor courses would normally be taken as part of the professionally related elective group, students could use up to two “core” courses (as is the present case) and up to two of their liberal studies courses (the proposed change) to complete a minor. ASC believes that this change to the minors policy is an important, and relatively simple, first step in providing greater student choice.

At the same time, there is significant expansion in access to post-secondary education, particularly within the GTA. In order to respond to this growth and to ensure viability, sustainability and success, Ryerson has developed a new funding model. The new funding model was also developed to support the implementation of the new curriculum framework, providing the necessary incentives for faculties to mount new liberal studies and professionally related courses, and encourage even more minors. The new funding model should also make compensation for teaching departments more transparent and accountable.

Framework

The framework retains a tripartite structure including a program core that collapses current professional and professionally related required courses (including those selected from narrowly defined groups), a redefined professionally related elective (PRE) category that eliminates PR tables and opens courses to all students, and retention of the liberal studies (LS) category. In the consultation process, much of the discussion focused on LS, with general support expressed for looking at the current definition and purpose of these courses, and revisiting the LS governance structure. Part of the implementation process would focus on LS.

The framework accommodates those programs that have external professional accreditation requirements. Accredited programs are an integral part of our academic reputation and their accreditation requirements would be fully maintained.

The main features of the proposed curriculum framework are the definition of a program core and “professionally related electives”, and the elimination of PR tables. The suggestion of double majors, and percentages and number of courses in each category reflect current Ryerson practice and some comparator university norms. The category names are suggested only. The framework presented is a starting point to advance curriculum evolution, and its suggested components are not set in stone but rather, will be assessed during the implementation phase.

The approval of the framework begins a year of planning, modelling and impact assessment, followed by several years of implementation. There are currently several Senate policies that guide curriculum, and one of the first tasks will be to create one overarching curriculum policy.

Curriculum framework

EXISTING MODEL	APPROVED MODEL (based on 40 courses)		NOTES
	Core Courses		
Professional 50-75%	Specialization 25-30 courses (60-75%)	Double major 13-15 courses each (60-75% total)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Specialization: Current (P + PR Required) ▪ Major must have both breadth and depth ▪ Specialization, Major and Option recorded on transcript ▪ Stream not recorded
Professionally related 10-40%	Professionally related elective courses 4-14 courses (10-30%)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ This category will allow more student choice of courses related to their individual career path. ▪ Elimination of current PR tables ▪ Exclude courses too close to core courses (anti-requisites)
Liberal studies 8-20% (6 courses)	Liberal studies* 6 courses		

* Currently engineering program students are required to complete four liberal studies. There is no intention to alter this.

Guiding principles

Based on the above, there are several guiding principles – most of which are articulated in the current academic plan – to be considered going forward:

- Students should have more flexibility to define their personal educational and career goals, and therefore should be given more curricular choice.
- Ryerson is known for its mission to provide career-relevant education and programs must maintain sufficient rigour and depth to ensure that this mission is served.
- Graduates must be well rounded, with a breadth as well as a depth of knowledge.

- The undergraduate degree level expectations (UDLEs), which are now part of Ryerson's Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP), establish a framework for defining the attributes of a Ryerson graduate both generally and on an individual program basis. The curriculum model should provide the appropriate structure to ensure that students meet these educational objectives; including critical thinking and communication (particularly writing) skills.

Implementation process

The provost will appoint an implementation team, chaired by the vice- provost academic and including appropriate administrators, faculty and students from each faculty, and representatives from the Registrar's Office. Appointments to the implementation team will be done in consultation with academic deans and faculty members. The team will establish sub-committees which will consult more broadly with faculty, staff and students. Regular reports will be submitted to the Academic Standards Committee (ASC), Academic Governance and Policy Committee (AGPC) and as appropriate to Senate.

timeline

May 2012 Report due to Senate, including revised policies

It is anticipated that curriculum implementation will be phased in over a one- to two- year period.