

Periodic Program Review of Undergraduate Programs

Periodic Program Review Manual
PART II: Peer Review

2014

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1. Periodic Program Review of Undergraduate Programs

The objective of the periodic program review is to assess the quality of undergraduate programs ensuring that programs achieve and maintain the highest possible standards of academic quality and continue to satisfy societal need. Periodic Reviews also serve to satisfy public accountability expectations through a process that is transparent and consequential.

Periodic program reviews are carried out under the authority of the Senate as set out in the Ryerson University Act, 1977 (amended), and apply to all undergraduate degree programs, including those offered jointly with other post-secondary institutions. The periodic program review process is applied to all programs on an eight year cycle.

Senate Policy 126 governs the periodic program review of undergraduate programs. This policy was amended in May 2011 to reflect the requirements of the newly formed Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance (Quality Council). This manual is a guide to the Peer Review Process for undergraduate programs only.

2. Peer Review Process

Peer review is an integral and crucial part of the periodic program review process. The team includes experts from Ryerson and from other universities who evaluate the program under review and the program's self-study report. This peer review includes a site visit and report which addresses the elements outlined in the University's periodic program review policy.

2.1 The Peer Review Team

The Peer Review Team (PRT) consists of two or more faculty from the relevant discipline(s), field(s) or profession from another university, including universities outside Ontario where appropriate, and one additional reviewer, either from within the university but from outside the discipline (or interdisciplinary group) engaged in the program, or external to the university. For a program offered jointly with another university unless one internal reviewer is agreed upon by all participating institutions, one internal reviewer will be appointed from each participating institution.

The membership of the undergraduate PRT will be determined and appointed by the Dean based on written information provided by the program. All members of the PRT will be at arm's length from the program under review. See Appendix A for more details on choosing arm's length reviewers. Information on potential reviewers will be submitted from the program to the Dean and will include names and brief biographies of four or more faculty external to Ryerson and two or more faculty internal to Ryerson. The external and institutional reviewers will be active and respected in their field, and are normally associate or full professors with program management experience. If graduate and undergraduate reviews are done simultaneously, the Faculty Dean and Dean of YSGS must decide if a combined PRT or separate PRTs are required.

The Faculty Dean or Dean of Record for undergraduate programs will invite one of the external reviewers to act as Chair of the PRT.

There will be a site visit, structured to include the opportunity for PRT discussion with students, faculty and staff.

The PRT, in consultation with the School/Department who administers the program being reviewed, determines a suitable date for the site visit.

In the case of accredited programs, at his or her discretion, the Vice Provost, Academic may require a separate Peer Review when the accrediting body's assessment does not fully cover all of the areas required by the University's program review process or may require an Addendum to the materials presented to an accreditation board associated with the academic discipline under review.

2.2 Mandate

For undergraduate programs, the general mandate of the PRT is to evaluate the academic quality of the program and the capacity of the School/Department to deliver it in an appropriate manner. More specifically, the Peer Review will address the:

1. Clarity of the program's learning outcomes and their consistency with the institution's mission and academic plans, and alignment of the program's learning outcomes with the institution's degree level expectations
2. Alignment of the program's learning outcomes with admission requirements
3. Effectiveness of the curriculum in reflecting the current state of the discipline, evidence of innovation and/or creativity in content and delivery, and appropriateness of delivery to meet the program's learning outcomes
4. Appropriateness and effectiveness of methods used to assess achievement of the program's learning outcomes and learning objectives
5. Appropriateness and effectiveness of the academic unit's use of human, physical and financial resources and support services
6. Quality indicators relating to students, graduates and faculty
7. Initiatives taken to enhance the quality of the program and the associated learning and teaching environment

Important: The final report structure must follow the format provided in *Reviewers Report for Existing Programs* found in Appendix B.

2.3 Site Visit

The site visit is a key element of the peer review process. An objective of the site visit is for the reviewers to:

- observe the program in its "home";
- interview the administrators, faculty and staff who are responsible for delivering the program;
- assess program facilities; and
- communicate with students.

2.3.1 Pre site visit activities:

Once the site visit date is established the School/Department, in consultation with the PRT Chair, will make arrangements for lodging, on-campus meals, conference rooms, meetings, etc. The PRT Chair will convey this information to other members of the PRT. The Peer Review Team will be provided with a Letter of Invitation, a site visit agenda, a proposed schedule and the periodic program review mandate, along with the program's Self-Study Report and all relevant documentation. The PRT is reminded of the confidentiality of the documents presented.

Approximately one month prior to the site visit, all PRT members will receive the following documentation:

- a) information on the University and its mission
- b) a link to the most recent Academic Calendar
- c) a copy of the Periodic Program Review Manual PART II: Peer Review
- d) a complete copy of the program's Self-Study Report

The PRT Chair, in consultation with the team members, may request additional information from the School/Department if such information is considered essential for the proper assessment of the program.

After reviewing all the documentation members of the PRT should discuss the agenda and proposed schedule for the visit and establish the assignments for the team members.

2.3.2 Site visit activities:

A site visit normally takes place over a 1-2 day period. The visit provides an opportunity for the PRT to assess qualitative factors such as intellectual atmosphere and morale, professional attitudes and the quality of staff and students as well as the information contained in the program review documents. The PRT will be provided with:

- a) access to appropriate senior administrative officers including the Dean and the Chair/Director of the School/Department responsible for administering the program being reviewed and relevant Assistant/Associate Chairs and Program Directors;
- b) access to individuals and groups of faculty members to evaluate professional attitudes, motivations, morale and opinions concerning theoretical and practical elements of the curriculum;
- c) access to students and student groups (including representatives from joint or collaborative Ontario institutions);
- d) access to support staff from the School/Department;
- e) tours of physical facilities such as laboratories, studios, libraries and computing facilities to evaluate their effectiveness;
- f) access to administrators of related departments and librarians, as appropriate;
- g) coordination of site visits to Ontario institutions offering joint programs (excluding college collaborative programs), where appropriate; and
- h) access to documents if requested by the PRT (e.g. course outlines, a sample of tests, examination papers, laboratory reports, projects, etc.).

At the end of the visit, the PRT will have an informal debriefing session with the designated Faculty Dean, the Vice Provost, Academic, and/or the Provost, the Chair/Director of the program, the Assistant/Associate Chairs and Program Directors, and any other individuals who may be invited by the PRT. The purpose of the session is to provide preliminary oral feedback on the outcome of the visit and an evaluation of the process. During the debriefing, the PRT should present the perceived strengths, shortcomings and opportunities of the program and indicate matters they have identified for consideration. This session is meant to be informational only.

2.4 Peer Review Team Report

The PRT will prepare a consolidated visiting team report describing the events of the visit, the findings of the visit and a summary of the findings of the team members. The PRT should pay special attention to:

1. the program's strengths, weaknesses and opportunities;
2. the program's developmental plan; and
3. recommendations for actions to improve the quality of the program, if any, distinguishing between those that the program itself can take and those that would require external action.

Recommendations included in the report should state (if applicable) any additional resources the PRT believes should be considered, respecting Ryerson's autonomy in determining budget allocations.

Reminder: The final report structure must follow the format provided in *Reviewers Report for New Programs* found in Appendix B

The PRT will submit its report to the Dean within four weeks of the site visit. The PRT will also send a copy of the report to the Chair/Director of the program assessed.

2.5 Response to the PRT Report

2.5.1 Response of the Program:

Within four weeks, the program will submit a written response to the PRT report to the Faculty Dean. The written response may include any of the following:

1. Corrections or clarifications of items raised in the PRT report
2. A revised developmental plan with an explanation of how the revisions reflect the recommendations or respond to the weaknesses or deficiencies identified in the report
3. An explanation of why recommendations of the PRT will not be acted upon

2.5.2 Response of the Dean

A written response to the PRT report must be provided by the designated Faculty Dean. The Dean will provide a response to each of the following:

1. The overall state of the program based on the data and analysis contained in the self-study
2. The plans and recommendations proposed in the self-study report
3. The recommendations of the PRT
4. The program's response to the PRT report

The Dean will also describe:

1. any changes in organization, policy or governance required to meet the recommendations;
2. the resources that would be provided to support the implementation of selected recommendations; and
3. a proposed timeline for the implementation of any of those recommendations.

3. Submission of Periodic Program Review

The following is submitted to the Vice Provost, Academic:

1. Self-Study Report and Appendices, with clearly marked revisions, if applicable
2. Peer Review Report
3. Program's Response to the Peer Review Report
4. Faculty Dean's Response to the Peer Review Report
5. Executive Summary

The Vice Provost, Academic, will submit the Periodic Program Review to the Academic Standards Committee of Senate (ASC). Refer to Periodic Program Review Manual PART I: The Self-Study Report page 19 for further information about the submission.

APPENDIX A: Choosing Arm's Length Reviewers

Best practice in quality assurance ensures that reviewers are at arm's length from the program under review. This means that reviewers/consultants are not close friends, current or recent collaborators, former supervisor, advisor or colleague.

Arm's length does not mean that the reviewer must never have met or even heard of a single member of the program. It does mean that reviewers should not be chosen who are likely, or perceived to be likely, to be predisposed, positively or negatively, about the program. It may be helpful to provide some examples of what does and does not constitute a close connection that would violate the arm's length requirement.

Examples of what may not violate the arm's length requirement:

- Appeared on a panel at a conference with a member of the program
- Served on a granting council selection panel with a member of the program
- Author of an article in a journal edited by a member of the program, or of a chapter in a book edited by a member of the program
- External examiner of a dissertation by a doctoral student in the program
- Presented a paper at a conference held at the university where the program is located
- Invited a member of the program to present a paper at a conference organized by the reviewer, or to write a chapter in a book edited by the reviewer
- Received a bachelor's degree from the university (especially if in another program)
- Co-author or research collaborator with a member of the program more than seven years ago
- Presented a guest lecture at the university
- Reviewed for publication a manuscript written by a member of the program

Examples of what may violate the arm's length requirement:

- A previous member of the program or department under review (including being a visiting professor)
- Received a graduate degree from the program under review
- A regular co-author and research collaborator with a member of the program, within the past seven years, and especially if that collaboration is ongoing
- Close family/friend relationship with a member of the program
- A regular or repeated external examiner of dissertations by doctoral students in the program
- The doctoral supervisor of one or more members of the program

ADDITIONAL ADVICE FOR CHOOSING EXTERNAL REVIEWERS/CONSULTANTS

External reviewers/consultants should have a strong track record as academic scholars and ideally should also have had academic administrative experience in such roles as undergraduate or graduate program coordinators, department chair, dean, graduate dean or associated positions. This combination of experience allows a reviewer to provide the most valuable feedback on program proposals and reviews.

Source: Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance

APPENDIX B: Reviewers' Report on Existing Program(s)

The Peer Review Team (PRT) will review the Self-Study Report and the accompanying documentation submitted by the School/Department which administers the program being reviewed and request any additional information that is needed. The general mandate of the PRT is to evaluate the academic quality of the Program and the capacity of the School/Department to deliver it in an appropriate manner. The PRT will prepare a report which addresses aspects of the School/Department, the Faculty (e.g. Faculty of Arts) and the University that influence the quality of the undergraduate program.

The following *Guidelines for the Peer Review Team Report* describe the mandate for the PRT as outlined in Senate Policy 126, Section IV B The Peer Review Mandate. They are intended to outline the scope of the Peer Review Team Report.

GUIDELINES FOR THE PEER REVIEW TEAM REPORT

Based on information gained from the self-study, the developmental plan, the on-site review, and consultations with members of the Program and University, the PRT is expected to report on, but is not restricted to, the following:

1. Outline of the Visit

- Who was interviewed
- What facilities were seen
- Any other activities relevant to the appraisal

2. General Overview

Recognizing the institution's autonomy to determine priorities for funding, space and faculty allocation, please comment on the following:

- Identify and commend the program's notably strong and creative attributes.
- Describe the program's respective strengths, areas for improvement, and opportunities for enhancement.
- Recommend specific steps to be taken to improve the program, distinguishing between those the program can itself take and those that require external action.

3. Feedback on Evaluation Criteria

Please address the following sections as part of the report.

3.1 Objectives (alignment with institution's plans)

- Is the program consistent with the institution's mission and academic plans and with the Faculty's academic plan?
- Are the program requirements and learning outcomes clear, appropriate and in alignment with the institution's statement of undergraduate and/or graduate Degree Level Expectations?

3.2 Admission Requirements

- Are admission requirements appropriately aligned with the learning outcomes established for completion of the program?

3.3 Curriculum

- Does the curriculum reflect the current state of the discipline or area of study?
- What evidence is there of any significant innovation or creativity in the content and/or delivery of the program relative to other programs?
- Are the modes of delivery appropriate and effective to meet with the program's identified learning outcomes?

3.4 Teaching and Assessment

- Are the methods used to assess student achievement of the program learning outcomes and degree level expectations appropriate and effective?
- Are the means of assessment (particularly in the students' final year of the program) appropriate and effective to demonstrate achievement of the program learning outcomes and the degree level expectations?

3.5 Resources

- Assess the appropriateness and effectiveness of the academic unit's use of existing human, physical and financial resources in delivering its program(s). Note that reviewers must recognize the institution's autonomy in determining priorities for funding, space and faculty allocation.
- Comment on the appropriateness and effectiveness of academic services (e.g. library, co-op, technology, etc.) to support the program(s) being reviewed.

3.6 Quality Indicators

- Comment on the outcome measures of student performance and achievement for the program(s).
- Faculty: comment on the qualifications, research and scholarly record, class sizes, % of classes taught by permanent or non-permanent (contract) faculty; comment on the number of part-time/temporary faculty and their qualifications and assignments.
- Students: comment on applications and registrations, attrition rates, times-to-completion, final year academic achievement, graduation rates, academic awards.
- Graduates: comment on rates of graduation, employment after six months and two years after graduation, post graduate study, skills match alumni reports on program quality (if available and permitted by FIPPA).

3.7 Quality Enhancement

- Comment on initiatives taken to enhance the quality of the program and the associated learning and teaching environment.

4. Other Observations

5. Summary and Recommendations

6. Signatures

- Names of reviewers
- Name of reviewer submitting report
- Date of site visit
- Date report submitted

APPENDIX C: References

Ryerson University Website:

<http://www.ryerson.ca>

Ryerson University Senate Policies:

<http://www.ryerson.ca/senate/policies>

Ryerson University Undergraduate Calendar and Information:

<http://www.ryerson.ca/currentstudents>

Ryerson University Undergraduate Admissions:

<http://www.ryerson.ca/undergraduate/admission/overview>