

University Review Committee: 2012 Report to GFC

For the Period July 1, 2011 - June 30, 2012

Committee Background

The University Review Committee (URC) is responsible for the “coordination and facilitation of systematic reviews” (General Faculties Council, 1987, p. 1) of the quality of academic and academic support units.

Membership of the URC for the period was:

- Robert Boudreau (ex-officio, Chair).
- Shamsul Alam.
- Roberto Bello.
- Hadi Kharaghani.
- Richard Perlow.
- Peter Visentin.
- Thelma Gunn.
- Belinda Spiteri (Secretary).
- Paul Sparrow-Clarke (Resource).

Meeting Dates

The URC met on the following dates:

- September 23, 2011.
- October 6, 2011.
- November 1, 2011.
- November 4, 2011.
- November 22, 2011.
- December 20, 2011.
- February 28, 2012.
- May 24, 2012.

Completed Reviews

The following review was completed for the period: Department of Theatre and Dramatic Arts.

Current Reviews

The following reviews are presently under way:

- Department of Kinesiology and Physical Education.
- Bachelor of Education.
- Department of Economics.
- Department of Philosophy.
- Bachelor of Management – Accounting.
- Bachelor of Management – Information Systems.
- Bachelor of Management – Human Resource Management.
- Bachelor of Management – Finance.
- Department of Native American Studies.
- Department of Modern Languages.
- Department of Music.
- Bachelor of Management – First Nations Governance
- Bachelor of Management – General Mgt
- Bachelor of Management – International Mgt
- Bachelor of Management – Marketing.

Future Reviews

The University Review Committee is in the process of establishing a cycle of regular reviews. See the quality assurance website (www.uleth.ca/quality) for updates.

Process Review

The *Academic Quality Assurance Policy and Process*, the current guiding document for formal AQA, contains a provision for a regular review of the AQA process. To meet this requirement, the URC completed a formal review of the AQA Policy and Process. This review began in May 2011 and concluded February 2012 with the approval of an action plan.

Modeled on the structure of a quality assurance review of a program or unit, the QA process review proceeded through four main steps: (1) self study; (2) external review by Robert Woodrow (University of Calgary) and Terry Murphy (St. Mary's University); (3) URC response; and (4) Vice President (Academic) response.

The self-study consisted of compiling contextual information on the institution and its quality assurance processes, and gathering feedback on the process from two main sources. First, URC members conducted interviews with ten individuals and two focus groups. The interviews and focus groups were with individuals who had been involved with one or more academic quality assurance reviews. And second, the URC held a special meeting for a roundtable discussion on the quality assurance process and how it could be improved.

A themes analysis of the information from the interviews and a summary of issues from the roundtable were the basis for the Self-Study Report, which was released in October 2011. The Self-Study Report was one of the pieces of information provided to the external reviewers.

The external review was conducted by Robert Woodrow, former Deputy Provost and Associate Vice-President (Academic), University of Calgary, and Terry Murphy, former Vice-President (Academic), Saint Mary's University. The external reviewers visited the U of L campus on November 8 to 10, 2011. The External Review Report summarized their observations and recommendations.

Next, the URC developed a response to the External Review Report. This response extracted all recommendations from the external reviewers, along with some additional recommendations that emerged from the self study, and addressed each of them with a plan for taking action. The URC forwarded its response, plus the other two documents, to the Vice President (Academic) for his response.

Analogous to the Dean's Response in the program or unit review, the Vice President (Academic) developed a response to the Self Study Report, External Review Report, and the URC Response.

The final steps involved extracting recommendations for improvement from the review documents and putting them, along with required actions and timelines to address them, into an action plan. The URC extracted 34 recommendations. The Committee accepted all the recommendations and developed an action plan to address them.

After completing the AQA process review, the URC completed a thorough revision of the *Academic Quality Assurance Policy and Process*. This comprehensive revision addressed the majority of the recommendations from the AQA review action plan. A brand new, Quality Assurance website is now live at <http://www.uleth.ca/quality>. This website addressed several of the recommendations pertaining to the wide and open dissemination of AQA information and outcomes. Our Institutional Analysis unit began using data templates to provide a standard set of data for reviews, another key recommendation from the process review. Six recommendations—for example, linking quality assurance to budget planning and resource allocation—involved longer term work, and the URC began planning the best approach to implementing them.

CAQC Audit

Campus Alberta Quality Council began a process to audit the quality assurance processes at the four Alberta Comprehensive Academic and Research Institutions. The audit has two main purposes:

1. “Has a quality assurance process for internal review of its degree programs that meets the Minister’s expectations.
2. Applies its quality assurance process for its degree programs and addresses review findings with an appropriate response.”¹

The University of Alberta and the University of Lethbridge were the first two institutions selected to undergo the audit.

The U of L’s audit took place in April 2012. The Audit Team conducted a site visit April 3-5, and completed their report May 1. In its report, the Audit Team noted the U of L’s reinvigorated commitment to academic quality assurance:

On paper, and on the basis of our examination of future planning for quality assurance, the University of Lethbridge is well placed to move confidently forward. The internal policy work (complimented by the Woodrow and Murphy external review) of the past year or so, the engaged commitment of the senior academic administration, and the widespread institutional experience of nearly a dozen unit reviews currently underway hold great promise for the future. The audit team is confident that the necessary elements for a renewed and reinvigorated unit review process are in place and that a full commitment to this process will increasingly and visibly embed quality assurance into the culture of the University. (QA Audit Report, p. 6)

The U of L’s approach in refocusing on and enhancing quality assurance, especially the quality assurance process review discussed in the previous section, has addressed, or will address in the near future, many of the Audit Team’s comments. As the team’s report notes, “our audit of the policies and practices of unit review at Lethbridge find us largely in agreement with many of the proposed changes [from the QA process review]” (QA Audit Report, p.6). Some examples are a formal, fixed schedule of future reviews, a six-month time limit for developing the Self Study Report, and linkages to our various planning documents. However, we did extract 12 unique recommendations from the Audit Team report, which the URC is in the process of addressing.

¹ Audit Pilot Project Task Force: Framework for Audit Teams (2011).