

**Acadia University**  
**Academic Program Review Committee**  
**Unit Review Process**  
*As approved by Senate (June 13, 2005)*

**Preamble**

The Acadia University mission statement clearly identifies that the purpose of the institution is academic. Its focus is “providing a liberal education based on the highest standards in a scholarly community that aims to ensure a broadening life experience for its students, faculty and staff. “

Many academic programs at Acadia University have much in common and as a result are clustered by Faculty, but each has different features and is somewhat unique. All units are the responsibility of one Senate and one Board of Governors and each has the responsibility to align with and contribute to the mission and priorities of the University as a whole.

Academic programs at Acadia University are the direct responsibility of four Faculties, seven Schools, close to twenty academic departments or programs, the Division of Distance and Continuing Education (DCDE), and the Library. Because of this complexity the academic review process at Acadia University, while coordinated in a central way, is properly based in those Faculties, Schools, Departments, and programs.

Times and circumstances have changed since the Senate’s Academic program cluster review process was developed and implemented. In July 2004 Acadia University actively engaged in developing a strategic plan that will identify the mission, values and priorities of the University. Another important step in this focus on academic centrality at Acadia is to refine the Senate’s Academic program review process to clarify and put into effect the plans and priorities of the institution through its individual units.

**Purpose of a Unit Review**

The purpose of a unit review is to sustain, and wherever possible, enhance the quality of each academic unit’s activities, and through each unit the University as a whole.

The responsibility of each unit review is to provide information, both qualitative and quantitative, and recommendations that can serve as a basis for planning. The review should identify strengths and weaknesses and serve to support program development and refinement. The reviews will lead to more focussed unit planning to address undergraduate (and where applicable graduate programs), research opportunities and unit infrastructure and administration.

Reviews may be at the Departmental level, School level, Faculty level, or across Departments and Faculties for programs that are interdisciplinary (ie Women’s Studies). The Library and the Division of Distance and Continuing Education (DCDE)

will also be reviewed. From these reviews, more will be learned about the structure and quality of undergraduate (and applicable graduate) programs and instruction, the contribution of each program to related disciplines and fields of study, the scope and significance of the program of research being pursued, the degree to which programs meet students' learning needs and goals, the appropriate characteristics of staffing complements, the priorities and aspirations of each unit and the extent to which they are being realized, the particular challenges and opportunities faced by the unit, the degree to which the unit is meeting internal and external service responsibilities, and the role the unit plays in meeting the University's mission, values and priorities.

### **Review Coordination**

The coordination of all unit reviews is the responsibility of the Vice-President (Academic) working in partnership with the Academic Program Review Committee (APRC), the Dean, and the unit under review; in the case of the library, with the University Librarian and library staff, and with DCDE the Director. The recommendations of the Committee on the basis of the review process are advisory. Specifically, the Vice-President (Academic) and APRC will:

- Develop a schedule for reviews in consultation with the Deans, who themselves will consult with Heads and Directors.
- On consultation with Deans' Council, develop a schedule for reviews;
- Receive, review, and comment on the self-study report;
- Appoint the review team;
- Develop terms of reference for the review team in consultation with the unit;
- Receive and transmit the report of the review team;
- Meet with the Dean and unit head (or University Librarian and library staff) to discuss the report and the unit's response;
- Receive the unit's implementation plan;
- Report regularly to Senate on the status of reviews;
- Identify issues of University-wide concern and make recommendations concerning them to appropriate bodies or individuals.

### **The Review Process**

#### **1. Initiation**

Reviews take place in accord with a 10-year cycle. In scheduling reviews efforts should be made to coincide with unit accreditations and whenever possible with the review or 5-year update of closely related units.

#### **2. Time frame**

The review process is completed over a 16-month period as indicated in the following schedule. Time frames may vary depending on the size of the unit being reviewed.

Beginning in the Fall Term

<i>MONTH</i>	<i>ACTIVITY</i>
May	APRC to inform Senate as to which units are to be reviewed in the coming year.
September	Self study initiated; review team nominees submitted to VP-Academic
January	Self study received by APRC
February	Terms of reference determined and Review team established, documentation sent to review team
March/April	Review takes place (2 to 3 days)
June	Report received by APRC and transmitted to unit
October	Unit response received by APRC
December	Implementation plan finalized within the faculty
Five years later	Follow up to review and preparation of priorities and directions for next four years

Beginning in the Winter Term

<i>MONTH</i>	<i>ACTIVITY</i>
September	APRC to inform Senate as to which units are to be reviewed in the coming year.
January	Self study initiated; review team nominees submitted to VP-Academic
May	Self study received by APRC
June	Terms of reference determined and Review team established, documentation sent to review team
Sept/Oct	Review takes place (2 to 3 days)
December	Report received by APRC and transmitted to unit
March	Unit response received by APRC
May	Implementation plan finalized within the faculty
Five years later	Follow up to review and preparation of priorities and directions for next four years

**3. Unit Self-Study**

The self-study should address such aspects as the history, current status, pending changes, future prospects, and opportunities. Strengths and limitations of the program under review should also be critically examined. While the self-study procedures are for

the members of the unit to determine, as many as possible should participate in examining pending changes and future prospects and opportunities. The most successful self-studies are those that involve the majority, if not all, of the members of the unit.

The review requires a frank but balanced consideration of both strengths and areas for improvement, and strategies for future changes. It is also essential that the self-study take into consideration the larger institutional issues and the mission, goals, and priorities of the University. The result of the self-study is a report that serves as a primary document for the external unit review team. The most successful reviews are assisted by reports that are well organized, clearly written, and complete but concise. The quality of the self-study report is enhanced if a small steering group is responsible for its preparation and drafts are circulated to all members for comment. Members of APRC are available to provide advice on the development of the self-study if requested.

A suggested format for the self-study report is as follows:

1. A brief history of the unit, the goals of the unit, intended student outcomes, and the place of the unit in the continuing development of the University.
2. An overview of the unit's staffing profile (including student employment), administrative structure, resources and infrastructure, and membership in professional or registration / certification organizations.
3. An overview of student (undergraduate and graduate) enrollment patterns (5-year horizon) and projected enrollment trends within the discipline, distinguishing between courses available campus-wide and those designed specifically for majors in the program.
4. Statistics describing the numbers of students registered in each degree program and the number of degrees awarded during each year of the period under review (five year horizon).
5. The title of the report or thesis and the name of the supervisor from each student who has been an honours candidate during the review period.
6. Information on the special strengths and successes of the programs being evaluated. Detail in this section should include lists of scholarships obtained by students in international, national, and regional competition, employment history of recent graduating students who do not go on to further study (if known) and any other significant achievements or recognition given to students, numbers of students who proceed to post-graduate studies., and faculty awards or recognition for teaching, research, or service to the community.
7. Comparison of similar programs in the region / elsewhere, and identification of how Acadia's program is unique in the region / elsewhere.

8. Assessment of intended and delivered curriculum, including listing any research on the teaching in the unit, and outlining issues and challenges of delivering intended curriculum.
9. Assessment of use of technology to support teaching and research activities.
10. Assessment of efforts to internationalize the program through research, course offerings, or opportunities for exchanges.
11. Where appropriate, the extent to which the unit has, at formal or informal levels, forged meaningful interdisciplinary linkages: for example, this may include evidence of planning for cross curricular assignments, jointly reinforcing laboratory exercises, teaming of professors within closely connected curricular domains, and collaborative planning or study groups involving professors and students. Also: The identification of areas of linkage that are planned in the future, including:
  - a. Where appropriate the extent to which unit Heads/Directors have explored (and used) ways in which units can meaningfully collaborate to the benefit of their students and faculty.
  - b. Examples of scholarly collaboration between faculty members across units.
12. Where appropriate, provide a description and analysis of the unit's community service program involvements and in particular where the curriculum allows/supports active engagement for students in community-based learning activity. This will include co-op education, fieldwork programs, internships, etc. (if appropriate.)
13. A description of the space available for the support of the programs concerned and a statement on the utilization of current space including a description of any special facilities such as laboratory equipment, field laboratories, and special research opportunities.
14. A description of the principle library resources available for the support of the programs concerned, including the recent and anticipated levels of funding and the extent to which there has been and will be reliance on interlibrary loans and electronic resources. This description is to be developed by Library in consultation with the unit.
15. Departmental budgets for the review period. Examples of where an investment of resources has enhanced the program or conversely where a lack of resources may have affected the program may be highlighted. Include data concerning the funds available for the support of the students within the academic unit during the review period; e.g. levels of financial support for assistantships, summer honours thesis awards, in-course scholarships.

16. A critical analysis of the unit's strengths, weaknesses, and areas of potential development including a description of the unit's future plans and program directions within the context of the University's mission, goals, and priorities, and the development of the discipline itself.
17. Views on University-wide directions, concerns, and suggestions for priority areas.
18. Any other information that the academic unit considers will assist the reviewers in obtaining an accurate appreciation of the programs under review.
19. Appendices: The report should also contain a profile of the academic staff in an appendix to the main body of the self-study report. It is highly recommended that the members adopt a uniform and brief format that summarizes the important information from each member's curriculum vitae over the review period. This information should include teaching assignments, scholarship (including publications, research grants, contracts, and other scholarly activity), and service activities.

Self-studies will be augmented by data from the appropriate administrative offices. Such data will address enrolments, teaching, grants and contracts, space, budget, staff and faculty numbers and will be provided within the Faculty and University context. Additional material such as University planning documents and calendars will also be provided. The goal is to provide the reviewers with sufficient information to have a broad understanding both of the unit and the context in which it operates without burdening them with excessive information.

For a library self study, it is suggested that the library consider items listed above (where appropriate) along with:

- Collections: size, content, formats, use patterns
- Output statistics and outcome assessments of services and programs
- Library budget
- Descriptions of services offer
- Staffing levels and responsibilities of librarians
- Space considerations

#### 4. **Review Team Selection**

Typically the review team will consist of four members. The APRC will designate the Chair of this team. Two members normally will be chosen from the Acadia University community, one representing a closely related discipline or area, and the other representing the University-at-large. The other two members, including the chair, will be impartial experts in the particular discipline or area, normally chosen from other universities. For a library review, two University Librarians will be chosen from other universities. Members of the review team should be chosen to avoid any appearance of

conflict of interest. Wherever it seems appropriate, however, any one of the four members may be replaced by a representative of the relevant professional association.

The composition of the review team is vital to the success of the process. All members must have credibility both inside and outside the unit under review. The unit is requested to provide the names of 4 to 6 nominees for the external members of the team and also nominees for the internal members of the team to the Vice-President (Academic). A very brief statement about each of the external nominees in which there is a rationalization for the participation of each must accompany the submission.

The size of the review team will be determined by the size and complexity of the unit under review. For small units a review team of two (one internal and one external) may be appropriate.

## **5. Terms of Reference of Review Team**

Without intending to restrict the scope of the review, the expectation is that the review team will provide an opinion about the strengths and weaknesses of the unit's teaching, research, and service programs. This will include an assessment of the numbers and diversity of academic and non-academic staff and their responsibilities, the resources provided, the effectiveness of the unit's organization, the quality of the working environment, the relations of the unit to others, the quality of educational opportunities provided to students (both undergraduate and graduate where applicable) and the effectiveness of the means or measures to evaluate student and program success. In particular, the review team is expected to offer recommendations for improvement and innovation.

As a research institution, the scholarly activities of faculty and students will contribute to the advance of the field of study under question. It is essential that the review team provide an opinion about the quality of the research and scholarly or developmental activities of the program, and the effectiveness of the relationships between the teaching and research dimensions of the programs—particularly for the early research experiences, honours programs, and at the graduate level.

In addition, the Vice-President (Academic), working with APRC, the Dean of the Faculty, and the unit under review will in each case determine more specific issues to be addressed by the review team.

## **6. Site Visit**

The review team for each review will meet at the University for an appropriate period of time, normally two to three days, and prepare a comprehensive report on the unit reviewed. It will consult widely in the preparation of this report with academic and administrative staff, students, administrators, and alumni involved with the programs and activities of the unit under review.

Typically, the review team's time will provide opportunities for consultation within the academic unit (faculty, staff and students); members of the University administration; other individuals inside and outside of the University who influence or who are influenced by the activities of the unit and graduates of the program. Particular efforts must be made to ensure student participation. The on-site consultations commence with a working dinner hosted by the University administration and end with an exit interview with the Vice-President (Academic), the Dean of Research and Graduate Studies, and the Dean of the Faculty; for the library, the Vice-President (Academic), Dean of Research and Graduate Studies, and the University Librarian.

The visit of the review team is to be advertised widely to the University community with an invitation for those who have a vested interest in the program(s) to contribute a written brief to the team which is normally submitted through the Chair of APRC, prior to an advertised date. Such briefs are for use by the review team and will be held in confidence by the members of the review team.

The schedule of interviews during the visit will be developed by the unit under review with appropriate input from the Office of the Vice-President (Academic).

## **7. Report**

While preparing the report, the Vice-President (Academic), the Dean of Research and Graduate Studies, and the Dean of the Faculty, or the University Librarian will be available to provide any additional information requested. The findings and recommendations of the review team should be presented in the form of a brief, concise, written report (with an executive summary) which will be received by the Vice-President (Academic) on behalf of the Academic Program Review Committee. Provided that matters of individual sensitivity or confidentiality are handled with appropriate discretion, the report (in its entirety) will be made available to the Dean, the unit under review, the Library, the APRC, and other interested parties. Normally, the report will be considered a public document and at the completion of the review process will be available to members of Senate along with the unit's response.

## **8. Response and Implementation**

On receipt of the report the members of the unit will meet in committee for discussion. The Dean and the unit head; for the library, the University Librarian and library management team, will then meet with APRC to review the report. Based on the report, comments received from APRC, and any University planning documents, the unit will then prepare a response. The response will address the issues raised and clearly outline priorities and future directions and initiatives for the unit over the next 3 to 5 years. As such it should be prepared in close partnership with the Dean/University Librarian. The response will be transmitted to APRC which may comment on it. The response and any comments from APRC will inform the faculty's long-term planning. The APRC will bring recommendations before Senate.

## 9. **Follow-up**

Five years after the review (and mid-way before the next review) APRC will initiate a follow-up with the unit. The unit will be invited to prepare and submit a brief report in which members of the unit comment on the consequences of the review and initiatives undertaken in response to it and respond to any comments from APRC. In particular they will be asked to describe initiatives and plans for the coming 3 to 5 years until the next review takes place. The follow-up will be reported to Senate and the report and any comments from APRC will be made available on request.

*Approved by Senate: June 13, 2005*