

QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCESS AUDIT
ASSESSORS' REPORT WORKBOOK

Vancouver Island University

DATE OF SITE VISIT: April 12 and 13, 2017

PREPARATION DATE: 2017/04/20

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Overall Assessment

Summary:

Vancouver Island University, as a Special Purpose Teaching University, has a clear commitment to quality assurance in its Academic Plan, strong policies and procedures on program review and a clear awareness of where these processes need to be improved.

Commendations

Provide clear statements that articulate areas where the institution has shown exemplary practice in the field of program quality assurance and improvement. These are mechanisms that are especially noteworthy and may be worthy of emulation by other institutions in the system.

- Vancouver Island University (VIU) is an open access teaching institution that provides quality educational opportunities for a diverse student population across the broad range of certificate, diploma, degree and graduate programs. Its commitment to student success and teaching excellence is expressed in its mission statement and is embodied in initiatives like the VIU Centre for Innovation and excellence in Learning. The VIU Academic Plan states that “VIU is structured to offer a compelling approach to university learning by integrating teaching excellence, internship and co-op work experiences, civic engagement, open access and ladder educational pathways.” Strong institutional quality assurance practices, then, will be practices that support VIU’s commitment to teaching excellence, strong programs, experiential learning and community engagement. Or, to put it in a student context, strong quality assurance practices will help VIU students achieve their goals and meet high academic standards.
- There is a strong commitment at VIU to quality assurance as the basis for improvement of academic programs. The University representatives at all levels are also very clear that the point of all this work is a better educational experience for students.
- In addition to the Program Reviews that are founded in Degree Quality Assessment Board requirements, the university has its own, unique Summative Program Assessment (SPA) process that is directed more at institutional decision-making and program improvement, rationalization and resource allocation.
- VIU is both committed and connected to its communities and has a special interest in serving First Nations communities in its area. Following on new

objectives in the Academic Plan, VIU is making a point of developing programs in consultation with First Nations people. This goal is achieved by talking directly to leaders and communities and working through the First Nations Advisory committees that the university has established.

- During our site visit the assessors met with three quite different programs to talk about their program review experience. One program was reviewed several years ago before many of the current policies and procedures were formulated and before there was a template for the program self-study. The other two had completed more recent reviews under the current guidelines and had the opportunity to learn from the review experience in previous years. There was a big difference in the scope and detail of the review, the positive impact on the program and the enthusiasm of the faculty in the two programs reviewed more recently. The assessors took this as evidence that the quality of the review process has been improving since the current guidelines came into effect in 2015.

Affirmations

Provide clear statements that articulate areas where the institution itself has found a weakness, identified the weakness, or intends to correct it (a plan of action has already been developed). In effect, this is affirming the institution's judgment and findings in its Institution Report.

- VIU has identified the need for a formalized performance review process for all faculty. Currently only probationary faculty undergo performance review. The assessors concur with the need for a formalized performance review process for all faculty to ensure quality programming and instruction.
- Regular teaching and course evaluations to collect feedback from students are under discussion at VIU and are viewed by the assessors as essential to ensure quality instruction.
- We commend VIU for its focus on continuous improvement of the quality assurance processes. The university is working on revisions to policies, procedures and templates relating to program review with the intent of improving the process.

- The assessors heard real frustration that, after an enormous amount of work had gone into the multi-year development of a new program and a rigorous program approval process, it was turned down by the Minister without, in VIU's view, commensurate or convincing justification. The assessors recognize that ministerial consent for a new degree is a requirement of the University Act (48.2). The challenge is to align the goals of these processes and recognize the regional development expertise of the institution in Ministerial decisions.

Recommendations

Provide clear statements that articulate areas needing improvement.

Recommendations may also be made in relation to areas of concern identified by the institution in its Institution Report, and for which no plan of action has been articulated by the institution.

- The current program review process is required of degree programs only. In the past, non-degree programs were also required to undergo program review. It is evident from the feedback the assessors received that program review benefits non-degree programs and hence we recommend that program review be required for both degree and non-degree programs to ensure quality for all VIU programs. The assessors note that the review process for non-degree programs can still be differentiated in terms of the nature of external review. One suggestion the assessors heard was to use a "virtual" external review, i.e., a desk review of the self-study documentation by qualified external reviewers.
- Accredited programs are not required to undergo program review but the assessors received feedback indicating that even accredited programs benefit from program review since they cover different criteria. We therefore recommend that accredited programs either do a joint external review with program review and accreditation teams, or conduct a self-study to cover program review criteria that are not addressed in accreditation.
- The program review guides provide useful guidelines of the criteria to cover. A review that addresses all these criteria would result in a rigorous assessment of a program's quality. There is, however, no requirement that all these criteria be addressed, hence actual reviews may not be as rigorous. This is a weakness in the processes, as it does not ensure consistency across reviews. We recommend that the criteria be mandatory to ensure consistent high standards in all VIU program views.

- While the institution is to be commended for its use of one-year action plans, there is perhaps room for a clearer statement of accountability for action plans after the one-year reporting phase.

Signed:

Chair of the QAPA Team



11 May 2017

(Signature)
Robin Fisher
(Printed Name)

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QAPA Assessors:



May 12, 2017

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1. Overall Process

<i>Does the process reflect the institution's mandate, mission, and values?</i>	
CRITERIA:	COMMENTS / RECOMMENDATIONS:
<p>The institution should be able to demonstrate that it has an established institutional and program review planning cycle and process to assess the effectiveness of its educational programs and services, their responsiveness to student, labour market, and social needs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vancouver Island University's (VIU) mandate, mission and values are outlined in the Academic Plan and its recent update. The Academic Plan is the basis for the work on program quality assurance in, as the Plan emphasizes, an institution that is teaching focused and offers a range of programs from certificates to degrees and in trades to university level graduate programs. The Academic Plan emphasizes quality, access and community engagement. • The Academic Plan is implemented through VIU's clear program review policy and accompanying procedures that include a program review planning cycle that ensures programs remain relevant to the Academic Plan • VIU has two somewhat distinct methods of review – formative Program Review and Summative Program Assessment (SPA). Program Review is about quality assurance for both internal and external purposes whereas SPA is generally directed at the institutional issues of program improvement, rationalization and the better allocation of resources. Together the two approaches provide for regular assessment of all programs and their responsiveness to student, labour market and community needs. They do

	<p>not, at this stage, involve the review of academic services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SPA is an institutional level assessment of all programs, conducted initially every 3 years, and now every 5 years. The SPA assesses the alignment of all programs both with the institution’s mission and with student and community needs, using a set of common metrics across six areas: context, relevance, quality, financial performance, access, and institutional priorities. It can trigger a more in-depth review of a program, and so contributes to quality assurance and program improvement, as well as supporting allocation of resources across programs. • The combination of the SPA with program review provides a quality assurance process that ensures that all programs are assessed either through the SPA, or Program Review, or both.
<p>The process should contribute to the continuous improvement of the institution.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With both forms of review there is a continuous cycle of reviews, action plans and the implementation of recommendations where possible. Follow-up on the implementation of the findings and plans is carried out by the program, a sub-committee of Senate and the Deans. While there are, of course, areas that could be strengthened this cycle leads to continuous improvement of programs.

<i>Is the scope of the process appropriate?</i>	
CRITERIA:	COMMENTS / RECOMMENDATIONS:
<p>(i) There should be evidence of a formal, institutionally approved policy and procedure for the periodic review of programs against published standards that includes the following characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A self-study undertaken by faculty members and administrators of the program based on evidence relating to program performance, including strengths and weaknesses, desired improvements, and future directions. A self-study takes into account: • the continuing appropriateness of the program’s structure, admissions requirements, method of delivery and curriculum for the program’s educational goals and standards; • the adequacy and effective use of resources (physical, technological, financial and human); • faculty performance including the quality of teaching and supervision and demonstrable currency in the field of specialization; • that the learning outcomes achieved by students/graduates meet the program’s stated goals, the credential level standard, and where appropriate, the standards of any related regulatory, accrediting or professional association; • the continuing adequacy of the methods used for evaluating student progress and achievement to ensure that the program’s stated goals have been achieved; • the graduate satisfaction level, student satisfaction level, and graduation rate; and • where appropriate, the graduate employment rates, employer satisfaction level, and advisory board 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are well-developed policies and procedures for both SPA and Program Review along with templates for the various documents required by the process. At the same time, VIU is in the process of revising its policy on Quality Assurance to align more with Degree Quality Assessment Board requirements. • Both forms of program review involve a self-study that potentially covers the appropriate characteristics. The assessors did note that the templates cover “suggested” topics and recommends that these topics be made mandatory. The office of University Planning and Analysis provides data, for example, on student numbers and progress as well as feedback from students. • Resources and their effective use are a strong part of the process, particularly in SPA. Human Resources and Financial Services provide data and support as part of the process. • Assessing faculty performance is an area that needs development and VIU is aware of that. The assessors were asked their view of this matter and were clear and unanimous in recommending that a form of periodic performance assessment of faculty be developed that involves evaluating

<p>satisfaction level.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>An assessment conducted by a panel that includes independent experts external to the institution. The assessment should normally include a site visit, a written report that assesses program quality and may recommend quality improvements; and an institution response to the report;</i> ➤ <i>A summary of the conclusions of the evaluation that is made appropriately available.</i> 	<p>career goals and progress, and is linked to professional development. VIU is currently engaged in an institutional conversation about faculty evaluation and the assessors urge that it be continued.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The assessors also responded to VIU's question about the need for the regular evaluation of teaching and courses by students and agreed that this would be a very positive development in a teaching- focused university. There is an institutional conversation going on and the assessors urge that it, too, be continued. • VIU is committed to developing learning outcomes and assessment at the program and course levels. Implementing this commitment is a work in progress with some variation across programs. Some programs, particularly perhaps professional programs, have well developed learning outcomes while others are moving in that direction. The assessors were very impressed with the work of the Center for Innovation and Excellence in Learning to support academic programs in developing learning outcomes and assessment. • VIU does a good deal of work around student assessment. In addition to program-level assessment it has developed its own Student Experience Survey and uses the British Columbia Graduate Outcomes Surveys and other
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	<p>forms of graduate self-assessment. The assessors noted the sometimes small numbers in individual programs limits the value of these assessments.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both forms of program review ask about graduate employment rates though less about employer satisfaction. Where appropriate program advisory committees are very much involved in program reviews. • Program Reviews include an external review carried out by a panel of experts in the field (two external and one internal member) who do a site visit. SPAs are normally, but not always, done by panels internal to the institution. Both forms of reviews include all of the elements listed here. • The documents produced by the review processes are made available to the programs, to appropriate university administrators, to Senate and its committees and posted on the VIU website.
<p>(ii) The institution can demonstrate that it has a policy and process for new program approval that includes peer / external review by appropriate experts.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VIU has policies procedures and document templates for the approval of new programs that involve external consultation. There is a new policy under development with standards that align with recent changes in DQAB guidelines.

Are the guidelines differentiated and adaptable to respond to the needs and contexts of different units, e.g. faculties or departments or credential level?

<p>CRITERIA:</p>	<p>COMMENTS / RECOMMENDATIONS:</p>
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<p>(i) Are the guidelines adaptable to the range of programs and offerings within the institution?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During the site visit the assessors talked to representatives from three quite different programs all of which had engaged in the process of program review. • The two forms of program review have the advantage of providing flexibility through different approaches for different programs. SPAs are done on all programs and Program Reviews are just for degree programs and this is an area that VIU could look at. Some 34% of its programs, covering 46% of students, are non-degree programs and therefore do not go through Program Reviews but rather only SPAs. The assessors suggest that VIU look at extending Program Review to non-degree programs.
<p>(ii) Do the guidelines provide measurable, consistent means and direction to undertake diversified program review?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The guidelines provide suggested criteria and thereby allow too much flexibility and do not ensure consistency across programs. If the categories in the review guidelines were made “required” rather than “suggested” it would enhance the level of consistency, while at the same time allowing flexibility in how those criteria are addressed
<p>(iii) Are the guidelines consistent with institutional Mandate, mission, vision and associated strategic goals?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes

Does the process promote quality improvement?

<p>CRITERIA:</p>	<p>COMMENTS / RECOMMENDATIONS:</p>
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<p>(i) The institution should be able to demonstrate that it has appropriate accountability mechanisms functioning for vocational, professional and academic programs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accountability is achieved for all programs reviewed by either method. The Program review process involves developing an action plan after the external report and the program response. Action plans are followed by a report after one year on implementation and progress and further monitoring is done by the Faculty Deans. The SPA also involves accountability by leading to changes that improve sustainability through to, in some cases, the cancellation of programs.
<p>(ii) The institution should be able to demonstrate how faculty scholarship and professional development inform teaching and continue to be a foundation for ensuring that programming is up to date.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> While university faculty normally decide on their own areas of scholarship, in a teaching university some faculty scholarship and a good deal of professional development should inform teaching. To demonstrate that this is happening the institution needs to develop a way for this work to be reported and evaluated. The assessors have recommended that VIU institute some form of faculty reporting and evaluation.
<p>(iii) The institution should be able to demonstrate how learning outcomes are being achieved and how student progress is assessed and measured.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning outcomes are one of the components of the current program review process. Some programs have developed learning outcomes and evaluating those outcomes is part of the program review. The assessment of student achievement of learning outcomes is more of a work in progress. The Centre for Innovation and Excellence in Learning does great work

	<p>with programs on a voluntary basis around curriculum mapping and design and the development of learning outcomes. Although learning outcomes are not a part of all program reviews, it is an area of growing strength. We recommend that rather than being optional, learning outcomes be a required part of program review.</p>
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Quality assessment issues raised by the institution in its self-study that the institution would like the assessors to address.

CRITERIA:	COMMENTS / RECOMMENDATIONS:
<p>Click here to enter text.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VIU raised a number of questions with the assessors, such as the need for faculty performance review and the value of course and teaching evaluations, that we have already responded to. • The assessors thought about whether having two forms of program review and many programs being required to do both would lead to review fatigue. And yet, two of the three programs that we met with were enthusiastic about all of the reviews that they had been through and felt that each one had resulted in definite improvements to their program. • The revisions that are being made to policies and procedures are positive. • VIU asked about their approach for programs that had to do an external accreditation review and how those reviews would relate to Program

	<p>Review and SPA. The assessors responded that, where there was overlap, there was no need to repeat the review process but that they should ensure that any program review requirements not covered in the accreditation should be addressed through program review.</p>
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2. Review findings

<i>Were the responses to the sample program review findings adequate?</i>	
CRITERIA:	COMMENTS / RECOMMENDATIONS:
<p>The institution has a follow up process for internal program reviews and acts in accordance with it.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the Program Review process follow up is done through the action plan, the one-year follow up and continued monitoring by Deans. In the SPA there is a strong process of follow up through the Senate and its committees and the Provost.

<i>Does the process inform future decision making?</i>	
CRITERIA:	COMMENTS / RECOMMENDATIONS:
<p>The program review ensures that the program remains consistent with the institution's current mission, goals and long-range plan.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program quality assurance work at VIU is done in the context of the Academic Plan and its recent update. Self-study templates, the external review and the action plan all include this criteria. The SPA processes and the decisions that come out of it are largely directed at this objective.

Are the review findings appropriately disseminated?

CRITERIA:	COMMENTS:
<p>The institution has a well-defined system to disseminate the review findings to the appropriate entities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review findings go to the appropriate people and units within VIU, they are discussed with external advisory committees and are posted on the VIU website.