Review and Approval of Academic Programs

Category: Academic;

Jurisdiction: Provost and Vice President, Academic; Senate Academic Committee;

Approval Authority: Senate;

Established on: March 18, 2011;

Amendments: January 23, 2017; November 20, 2023.

I.   Overview

The Policy for the Review and Approval of Academic Programs (herein referred to as the Policy) governs the review and approval of proposed new programs, major modifications, and the cyclical review of existing programs at Lakehead University.

The Policy outlines university-wide principles for the review and approval of undergraduate and graduate academic programs. The Policy aligns the University's quality assurance processes detailed in the Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP) and the provincially mandated Quality Assurance Framework (QAF; February 2021). The design of the Lakehead University Quality Assurance process is intended to be as streamlined as possible while still ensuring accessibility and transparency to the Lakehead University Community.

II.   Definitions

Programs: For the purpose of this Policy, a "program" is defined as an identified set and sequence of courses and other learning opportunities within an area of study, which is completed in full or partial fulfilment of the requirements for the granting of an undergraduate, second-entry, or graduate degree.

New Program: A "new program" is defined as any degree, degree program, or program of specialization, currently approved by Senate or equivalent governing body, which has not been previously approved for Lakehead University by the Quality Council, its predecessors, or any intra-institutional approval processes that previously applied. The definition for "new programs" is congruent with the QAF requirements and is expanded on in the Lakehead University IQAP.

Major Modifications: The IQAP defines major modifications as changes to programs that include any of the following:

   a) Changes in Program Content
   b) Changes in Program Structure
   c) Development of Transfer pathways and International Exchanges/Agreements
   d) Changes in Program Learning Outcomes
   e) Significant Resource Changes
   f) Changes in mode of delivery of a program
   g) Program Closure
   h) Expansion to a different campus

This definition is expanded on in the Lakehead University IQAP.

III.   Scope

The Policy applies to submissions for approval of new academic undergraduate and graduate programs, major modifications to existing undergraduate and graduate programs, and the cyclical review of existing undergraduate and graduate programs. Cyclical reviews of undergraduate and graduate programs are commissioned through the Office of the Provost and Vice-President (Academic) in accordance with the Cyclical Program Review Schedule.

IV.   Objectives of the Review and Approval of Academic Programs

The primary objective of Lakehead University's program review and approval process is to support programs in achieving and maintaining the highest possible standards of academic excellence through objective and constructive assessment and follow up. The program reviews are intended to improve academic programs through continuous improvement and to demonstrate accountability to the University community and other public stakeholders.

Program reviews at Lakehead University will:

- Ensure rigorous standards for the development of new programs that align with the mission and academic directions of the University;
- Secure the academic standards of existing undergraduate and graduate programs, including for-credit graduate diplomas;
- Ensure that programs are current with respect to developments in the discipline;
- Ensure ongoing follow-up and development of programs;
- Assist the faculties and academic units in future planning by clarifying academic objectives and identifying areas of existing and emerging strengths, and areas of weakness or concern;
- Evaluate the curricular and pedagogical policies and practices of the academic unit offering the program(s).

V.   **Program Review and Approval Principles**

a) Administrative procedures for the review and approval of academic programs will be coordinated and monitored by the Office of the Provost and Vice-President (Academic), and are detailed within the Lakehead University IQAP, as approved by the Senate Academic Committee: Quality Assurance Sub-Committee (SAC-QA), and ratified (April 2011, revised and ratified January 2016) by the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance (the Quality Council).

b) The Lakehead University IQAP will address the protocols by which reviews and approvals will be conducted, the content of the required documents, as well as the circulation of proposals and reports to meet Lakehead University governance requirements.

c) Authority for periodically revising and ensuring implementation of the Lakehead University IQAP and associated manuals/guides rests with the Office of the Provost and Vice-President (Academic). Minor changes to the procedures will be presented to the SAC-QA for information. Any substantive changes to the Lakehead University IQAP will be subject to approval by the SAC-QA, and ratification by the Quality Council.

d) Reviews of academic programs by external bodies, such as professional accrediting bodies, may serve different purposes than those commissioned as part of the undergraduate and graduate program cyclical review process, and will be conducted independently of cyclical program reviews, as outlined in the IQAP

e) Where possible, the University process will aim to streamline the review process by aligning the scheduling of undergraduate program reviews and graduate program reviews.

VI.   Accountability

A. Review and Approval of New Programs, and Major Modifications to Existing Programs

- Institutional review and approval of proposals addressing new programs and major modifications to existing programs are the responsibility of the Senate.

- Faculties are responsible for carefully considering program proposals and for making recommendations to Senate for referral.

- Senate has delegated responsibility to the SAC- QA to verify that Faculties have taken the appropriate steps to ensure that programs are of high quality (i.e. robust, viable and deliverable), and in the interest of the University.

- The Senate Undergraduate Studies Committee (SUSC) or Faculty of Graduate Studies (FGSC): Program/Regulations Sub-Committee, and Senate Budget Committee (SBC) are also involved in reviewing program proposals, in accordance with their terms of reference, prior to Senate approval.

- Other curriculum proposals, including concentrations, disciplines, minors, and specializations, do not require Quality Council appraisal and approval but still require internal review and approval by Faculty Council(s), SAC-QA, SUSC or FGSC, and SBC, as appropriate, prior to Senate approval.

- Minor changes to curricula will continue to be submitted to Senate for referral to the appropriate Standing Committee using existing Lakehead University review and approval processes.

B. Cyclical Review of Existing Programs

- A cyclical program review will be initiated via communication from the Office of the Provost and Vice-President (Academic) and in accordance with the Cyclical Program Review schedule. The Office of the Provost will receive the self-study documentation and make arrangements for the site visit.

- The SAC-QA will be responsible for selecting external and internal reviewers from nominations provided by the Academic Unit, for reviewing the response to the reviewers' report, and for reviewing and approving the Final Assessment Report (FAR) and Implementation Plan. Once approved, a recommendation to accept the report will be forwarded to the Senate Academic Committee (SAC) for approval.

- The Chair of SAC will submit an Executive Summary and Implementation Plan as an item of information for Senate, and for posting on the University website.

- An annual report will be submitted to the Quality Council, by the Office of the Provost, that lists the past year's completed Final Assessment Reports, Implementation Plans and monitoring reports. The Executive Summary and Implementation Plan will be placed on the University website.

Review Period: 5 years;

Date for Next Review: 2028-2029;

Related Policies and Procedures: None;

Policy Superseded by this Policy: None.

The University Secretariat manages the development of policies through an impartial, fair governance process, and in accordance with the Policy Governance Framework. Please contact the University Secretariat for additional information on University policies and procedures and/or if you require this information in another format:

Open: Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 4:30pm;

Location: University Centre, Thunder Bay Campus, Room UC2002;

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