



## Senate Policy on the Review of Programs at Saint Mary's University

### 1. Preamble

The Saint Mary's University Act, 1970 (including amendments to December, 2007), states that "Subject to the powers of the Board, the Senate shall be responsible for the educational policy of the university." The Program Review process is therefore carried out under the authority of the Academic Senate with detailed oversight the responsibility of the Academic Planning Committee, a standing committee of Senate chaired by the Vice-President, Academic and Research.

The focus is on the learning environment and the educational experiences of students. Any related research activities, department resources, and departmental services will be taken into account only to the extent that they shape this experience.

The following definitions apply to this policy:

**"Program Review"** is used in the broadest sense. It could refer to a review of full degree programs in an entire Faculty (e.g., BSc, BA, BComm); some or all programs in a given Faculty, Department or academic unit (e.g., Graduate programs, majors, minors, diplomas, and certificates). Programs required to meet with external accreditation requirements will be scheduled concurrently with this process.

**"Full Degree Program"** is a university-level program that meets any of the following criteria:

- o results in an exit (stand-alone) credential.
- o is the equivalent of 90 to 120 credits (3 to 5 years in duration) of study at the undergraduate level and includes a mixture of applied and theoretical work.
- o is a type to be tracked as per MPHEC decision (which may change from time to time).
- o and are the responsibility of the individual faculties (Arts, Sobey School of Business, and Science).

**"Graduate Programs"** represents graduate diplomas, Master and PhD degrees and are the responsibility of the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (FGSR). While the FGSR is academically responsible for the programs, the delivery of the programs is accomplished in collaboration and in close working relationships with the individual faculties (Arts, Sobey School of Business, and Science) and the specific departments/programs within the faculties.

**"Undergraduate Programs"** represents programs such as Honours, Majors, Minors, Diplomas and Certificates within a discipline under review. This policy and process does not constitute a departmental review.

All programs offered for credit are subject to program review.

### 2. Statement of Objectives

Program Review is a process of internal, formative self-evaluation combined with and guided by peer review. It is aimed at monitoring and improving student learning and the many facets that support learning. The program review:

Encourages continuous program enhancement through a process of self-evaluation;



One-Year reports are to be submitted 1-year following Senate approval of the Action Plan.

Three-Year reports are to be submitted 3-years following Senate approval of the Action Plan.

Executive Summary results following program reviews will be posted on the SMU website.

#### 5. Program Review subject to Accreditation

Combining a Program Review and an Accreditation Review can be challenging, and the feasibility of doing so may well be discipline specific.

Accreditation is a process by which a program is evaluated to determine if it meets certain pre-determined minimal criteria or standards. A program review process is an on-going and continuous evaluation of a program for the purpose of quality improvement. Both of these processes can be described as quality assurance processes and often include assessing, monitoring, guaranteeing, maintaining and improving.

There are several factors that need to be considered when deciding how to combine, coordinate or completely segregate a program review with an external accreditation review including:

- Levels of complexity of program(s) offered (undergraduate, graduate, professional)
- Review cycle of both the program review and accreditation
- Qualifications required for reviewers' evaluation criteria
- Issues currently facing program(s) and the University

MPHEC states: that the self-study report or the external site visit (and the report) "when and where appropriate, the results of accreditation may be included and/or substituted for this component, or a portion thereof".

As a first step, the degree of alignment or overlap of the processes should be determined by comparing the accreditation review template with the templates for the program review self-study and the external review team report. Depending on the outcome of the comparison, it may be determined that:

- the accreditation review meets all or most of the criteria for the program review and that some part of the program review process can be fulfilled through accreditation review; or,
- the accreditation review will not sufficiently meet the requirements of the program review and a regular program review process must be followed.

Academic units should consult with the Dean's Office and the Faculty of Graduate Studies & Research as appropriate to make this determination.

#### 6. Policy Revision

To ensure that the policy stays current and relevant to its users, and reflects changes in quality assurance and program enhancement processes, the Senate Procedures for the Review of Academic Programs at Saint Mary's University will be revised as follows:

The Senate Policy on Program Review will be reviewed every 5 years.

Changes to the Senate Policy on Program Review may be scheduled at other times to accommodate necessary modifications to the document.

