



ST. FRANCIS XAVIER UNIVERSITY GUIDELINES FOR ACADEMIC REVIEWS

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1. Purpose

The Academic Review process aids in the monitoring, review, and reform of academic programs by the University. The overall objective of Academic Review is the pursuit of continuous improvement of the quality of StFX's educational offerings. Consistent with our principle of being student-centred, it is also the goal of CAR that its assessments be performed in light of service to the education of students and the resultant benefit to the larger community.

The key to the process is the department's self-assessment supplemented by external experts' scrutiny. Academic Units are aided in program planning by engaging in regular analysis of the quality and appropriateness of their program offerings. Reviews are intended primarily to assess the quality of the programs and services offered rather than the performance of individuals.

The CAR process is informed by MPHEC's (Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission) best practice guidelines (2016). These guidelines are consistent with the context of StFX's mission and core values and the University Strategic Plan 2023-2028.

The assessment criteria are comprehensive in their range and in their use across programs and units; the criteria position the student experience as the focus of the review and reflect the institutional mission and values.

The main purpose of any review is

- a) to assess the contribution of the academic unit to the university;



- b) to assess the contribution of the academic unit to the institutional mission and to the community at large.

Bearing in mind that resource allocation is outside the purview of CAR, reviewers shall assess the following:

- 1.1 The continuing appropriateness of the program's structure, method of delivery and curriculum for the program's learning outcomes and the degree level expectations.
- 1.2 The achievement by students and graduates of the learning outcomes in light of the program's stated goals, the degree level expectations, and, where relevant, the standards of any relevant regulatory, accrediting or professional body.
- 1.3 The continuing appropriateness and effectiveness of the methods used for the evaluation of student progress and achievement in light of the degree level expectations.
- 1.4 The capacity of the faculty and staff to deliver the program and the quality of education necessary for the students to achieve the stated learning outcomes, and to meet the needs of the existing and anticipated student enrolments.
- 1.5 The continuing performance of the faculty, including the quality of teaching and supervision, and their continuing progress and achievement in research, scholarship or creative activity, and professional activity in light of the program under review.
- 1.6 The appropriateness of the support provided to the learning environment, including but not limited to library and learning resources (e.g., human, physical and financial resources; academic advising; student services; graduate studies office; registrar services; technological services; centres for teaching and learning, etc.), unless such supports are assessed through other means.
- 1.7 The effectiveness and appropriateness of the use made of the existing human, physical, technological, and financial resources.
- 1.8 The continuing appropriateness of the academic policies (including admission, promotion and graduation requirements; requests for transfer credit and advanced standing; and appeals) and of the governing and decision-making structures of the academic unit.
- 1.9 The definition of indicators that provide evidence of quality, including enrolments, graduation rates, time-to-completion rates, student satisfaction levels and, as appropriate, relevant measures of graduate outcomes (e.g., graduate employment rates, employment in field of study, employer satisfaction level, further study, etc.).



2. Terms of Reference of the Committee on Academic Reviews (CAR)

The Committee on Academic Review shall

- 2.1 Establish the assessment cycle and related schedule which normally does not exceed seven years (with no programs exceeding, in practice, 10 years between reviews).
- 2.2 Recommend to the University Senate a schedule of Academic Units to be reviewed.
- 2.3 Ensure that any review begins with a Self-Study and includes a Library Report.
- 2.4 Ensure that all academic reviews reflect student input and involvement.
- 2.5 Ensure that all documentation be treated with appropriate confidentiality.
- 2.6 Select and appoint External Reviewers.
- 2.7 Advise the External Reviewers on the expectations of the review.
- 2.8 Decide on the disposition of the recommendations in the External Reviewers' Report.
- 2.9 Report to the University Senate on the reviews conducted on Academic Units.
- 2.10 Review and recommend to the University Senate changes to these Guidelines as needed, and not less frequently than every seven (7) years.

3. Composition of Committee on Academic Reviews (CAR)

- 3.1 CAR shall include the AVP, Dean of Arts, Dean of Science, Dean of Business, Dean of Education, and seven (7) tenured Faculty members elected by the University Senate.
- 3.2 Only two Deans shall vote on each case: Science cases - the Dean of Science and the Dean of Arts shall vote; Arts cases - the Dean of Arts and Dean of Science shall vote; Business cases - the Dean of Business and the Dean of Education shall vote; and Education cases - the Dean of Education and Dean of Business shall vote.
- 3.3 Quorum for a committee shall be composed of a majority of the committee members. In this case, quorum would be six (6) members at which four (4) must be Faculty members.
- 3.4 The term of the elected members shall be three (3) years.
- 3.5 Normally the President shall appoint the AVP as Chair.



4. Academic Unit

- 4.1 The Academic Unit to be reviewed shall submit to the AVP by March 31st of the year prior to that in which the Review is to take place the names and profiles of at least four (4) competent External Reviewers. Normally two of these nominees shall be from outside the Atlantic region, and where possible two shall be from larger institutions and two from institutions of similar size to StFX. The Academic Unit shall ensure that there are no conflicts of interest between the reviewers and the Department/Program. CAR will strive to invite reviewers in ways that strike balance between equity-deserving faculty members, regional representation and institutional size. The MPHEC provides guidelines for the selection of external reviewers -

[https://www.mphec.ca/resources/Guidelines for the Selection of External Program Assessors.pdf](https://www.mphec.ca/resources/Guidelines%20for%20the%20Selection%20of%20External%20Program%20Assessors.pdf)

- 4.2 The Academic Unit to be reviewed shall submit to the AVP by March 31st of the year prior to that in which the Review is to take place the names of at least two potential Internal Coordinators. The two nominees will be tenured Associate/Full Professors in arms-length relationship to the Academic Unit, and not in a conflict of interest.

5. External Reviewers

- 5.1 There shall be at least two (2) External Reviewers for the Academic Unit.
- 5.2 The External Reviewers shall offer an opinion on the quality as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the Academic Unit's teaching and research programs, and to offer specific recommendations for the improvement or reform of the Academic Unit.
- 5.3 The External Reviewers are selected by CAR. They need not be those suggested by the Academic Unit but, if not, then the Academic Unit shall be informed of the names and academic profiles of the Reviewers selected.

6. Internal Coordinator

- 6.1 The Internal Coordinator is the principal information resource on institutional procedures for the External Reviewers and participates in the review process, ensuring its confidentiality.
- 6.2 The Internal Coordinator is responsible for:
- a) Reviewing the Academic Unit's Self-Study Report and checking for the completeness of the Report.
 - b) Attending all formal meetings of the External Reviewers with faculty, staff, students, and administrators. The Internal Reviewer may be recused if a member of the



Academic Unit would like to meet with the External Reviewers in private.

- c) The Internal Coordinator shall receive a copy of the External Reviewers' Report from the AVP to review for its completeness and conformity to the CAR Guidelines.

6.3 The Internal Coordinator shall not be a member of CAR.

7. **Duties of the Academic Vice-President and Provost (AVP)**

7.1 Distributing to the External Reviewers, Internal Coordinator, and Dean the following materials at least four (4) weeks in advance of the visit (as requested):

- a) Self-Study Report
- b) Previous External Reviewers' Report
- c) Previous Academic Response
- d) Previous CAR report to Senate
- e) CAR Guidelines

7.2 Arranging travel and accommodations, as necessary, for the Reviewers.

7.3 Setting up the visit schedule.

7.4 Arranging, in consultation with the Chair/Coordinator and Internal Coordinator, a meeting with a broad selection of students that the Academic Unit serves.

7.5 Distributing the completed External Reviewers' Report to those stipulated in the guidelines.

8. **Duties of the Office of Institutional Analysis (OIA)**

8.1 The (OIA) will conduct the survey of graduates of the Academic Unit under review for inclusion in the Self-Study Report.

8.2 OIA will provide the Chair/Coordinator and Internal Coordinator of the Academic Unit a template of the approved CAR questionnaire in March prior to the academic term in which the external review will occur. Academic Units may suggest up to six (6) extra questions for the questionnaire. (If the Unit is also due for accreditation, more questions may be added to satisfy accreditation requirements).

8.3 The OIA will distribute the questionnaires after the Spring Convocation (in May) and compile the results for the report to be completed by July 1. The OIA shall include all graduates who completed their program since the last review of the Academic Unit.



8.4 The OIA shall provide the following documentation to the Academic Unit upon request of the unit:

- a) The names and number of student graduates since the last Review of the Academic Unit.
- b) Enrolment data for each of the years since the last Review of the Academic Unit.
- c) Statistical information, for example the number of students registered, the number of students taking courses as their concentration, those in majors and in honours, and the number of degrees awarded since the last Review (using Student List Generator, and last 10 years of Graduate Reports along with Banner queries).
- d) other information as appropriate.

8.5 The data collected about the Academic Unit will be maintained in the OIA until the next scheduled review and it may be accessed upon request to the AVP.

9. Procedures prior to the External Reviewers' visit to campus

9.1 The Academic Unit shall be notified that it is to be reviewed not later than January 31st prior to the academic year in which the review is to take place.

9.2 The Dean of the relevant faculty shall provide information as appropriate that may be requested by the Academic Unit.

9.3 The Office of the AVP shall provide the following documentation to the Academic Unit:

- a) Faculty teaching load summary for each of the years since the last Review.
- b) Summary of student/faculty ratios in the Academic Units since the last review.

9.4 The University Librarian shall provide the following information:

- a) A summary of library budgets since the last Review.
- b) A summary and assessment of resources relevant to the Academic Unit.
- c) Other information as appropriate that may be requested by the Academic Unit.

10. Self-Study Report

10.1 The Self-Study Report shall be prepared by the Academic Unit in caucus. The Chair/Coordinator of the Academic Unit shall distribute one electronic copy to the AVP, who will distribute to the Dean of the Faculty, External Reviewers, and Internal Coordinator.

10.2 The Self-Study Report shall fulfil the criteria defined in the "Purpose" by providing information on the following aspects of the Academic Unit:



- a) A statement of how the Academic Unit has responded to the recommendations of the previous CAR Report to Senate.
 - b) A description of its academic programs, including the special requirements and procedures concerning course requirements, comprehensive examinations, language requirements, entrance requirements, etc.
 - c) Information on special strengths, including statements regarding the quality in graduate and undergraduate instruction.
 - d) Information on the quality and quantity of its research and scholarly work (including creative works if appropriate) and, if appropriate, the balance between grant-funded research and contract research.
 - e) Information on the achievement of graduates, including lists of scholarships obtained in competition, employment opportunities offered to graduating students, student performance on national examinations or placement in professional or graduate programs as appropriate.
 - f) A review of the Academic Unit's policies on course outlines, office hours, assessment procedures, laboratory requirements, frequency of Academic Unit meetings.
 - g) The balance among teaching, research, and service activities of the Academic Unit.
 - h) The breadth and scope of the Academic Unit's outreach activities.
 - i) The state of the physical and human resources of the Academic Unit including support staff, space, laboratory facilities, library resources, computing services.
 - j) Information supplied by the students in or served by the Academic Unit.
 - k) An updated *curriculum vitae* of all full-time Faculty members and current part-time Faculty members.
 - l) A statement concerning plans and such other information which the Academic Unit considers will assist the reviewers in obtaining an accurate representation of the Academic Unit.
 - m) Information gained from the survey of Graduates as provided by the OIA.
 - n) A recent history of the deployment of full-time and part-time faculty complement.
 - o) Information on the role the Academic Unit plays in the service to other Academic Units, and/or the role other Academic Units play in support of the Academic Unit under review.
 - p) A statement on the relationship of the Academic Unit to the university.
 - q) Statement on the relationship of the Academic Unit to the institutional mission and the community at large.
 - r) The self-study should be submitted to the AVP Office by August 31st for reviews scheduled in the Fall term and by December 1st for reviews scheduled in the Winter term. Submit by email to avp@stfx.ca
- 10.3 The length of Academic Unit Self-Study Reports has varied from 60 to 100 pages. Confidential copies of other Self-Study Reports may be viewed by the Chair/Coordinator of the Academic Unit on request to the Office of the AVP.
- 10.4 All Faculty members in the Academic Unit shall be invited to participate in developing the Self-Study Report. All other associates of the Academic Unit, such as part-time faculty, nurse educators, and laboratory instructors, shall be consulted. The completed Senate Approval May 9, 2025



Self-Study Report must be available to all members in the Academic Unit. Individual comments on the completed self-study may be submitted by any member to the AVP. The AVP shall determine what feedback will be shared with the Reviewers. Any material shared with the Reviewers shall be shared with the Academic Unit.

- 10.5 The Academic Unit shall use the appropriate data gathering tool and must ensure that data collection complies with the Privacy Act, (RSC 1985, c P-21). The Academic Unit shall contact the Office of the Registrar with any questions about the data privacy compliance.

11. External Reviewers' Visit

- 11.1 The External Reviewers together with the Internal Coordinator shall meet with the AVP prior to the review. During that meeting, the External Reviewers' mandate shall be reviewed.
- 11.2 The External Reviewers shall visit the University for 1-2 days, during which time the Reviewers shall meet with all members of the Academic Unit faculty and staff; Chairs and Coordinators which the Academic Unit supports or is supported by; and appropriate members of the library staff, administration, and students who are taking courses in the Academic Unit.
- 11.3 The External Reviewers shall assess the Academic Unit's strengths and weaknesses and make specific recommendations concerning curriculum, teaching, and research. The Reviewers shall conclude the report with a list of recommendations.
- 11.4 All faculty members of the Academic Unit shall have the opportunity to meet with the External Reviewers. The Internal Coordinator may be recused if a member of the Academic Unit would like to meet the External Reviewers in private.

12. External Reviewers' Report

- 12.1 The External Reviewers' Report shall be submitted to the AVP within one month of the Review Visit.
- 12.2 The length of External Reviewers' Report depends upon the nature of the Academic Unit and its current state. External Review Reports are typically 20-25 pages

13. Procedures following the External Reviewers' Visit to Campus

- 13.1 The AVP shall distribute a copy of the External Reviewers' Report to the Internal Coordinator, the Chair/Coordinator of the Academic Unit reviewed, and the appropriate Dean. The Internal Coordinator shall check for the completeness of the report.



- 13.2 The External Reviewers' Report is to be treated as confidential at this stage to members of the Academic Unit and to those identified in Section 10.1 (above).
- 13.3 The Academic Unit reviewed shall prepare a response in caucus and submit within two months to the AVP regarding the recommendations of the External Reviewers' and may make other comments as appropriate.
- 13.4 The Academic Unit response shall include an assessment of the External Reviewers' recommendations and a rationale and plan for their adoption where supported, or their rejection where not.
- 13.5 The Academic Unit response shall be sent to the External Reviewers', the Internal Coordinator, and the appropriate Dean by the AVP for their information.
- 13.6 On receipt of the Academic Unit response, the AVP will send both it and the External Reviewers' Report to the members of CAR.
- 13.7 CAR, on studying the three reports (Self-Study, External Reviewers' Report and the Academic Unit response), shall prepare a written report through the AVP. This final report shall indicate the current and future disposition of the recommendations and suggests action and referral to the appropriate bodies. The AVP shall circulate the final report to the University Senate and, upon adoption of the Report, to the Chair/Coordinator of the Academic Unit.
- 13.8 The AVP shall make available to the University Senate copies of the External Reviewers' Report and the Academic Unit response, upon request.
- 13.9 The Dean shall meet with the Chair/Coordinator of the Academic Unit to facilitate the implementation of the review recommendations. The Dean(s) of the relevant Faculty or Faculties shall report within one year to the University Senate on the status of the implementation of the recommendations.
- 13.10 The cost of the review of an Academic Unit shall be borne by the office of the AVP.

Senate Approved
Date: May 9, 2025