Name:	**Senate Policy on the Review of Programs at Saint Mary's University**
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Responsibility:	University Senate
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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:
    - results in an exit (stand-alone) credential.
    - 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.
    - is a type to be tracked as per MPHEC decision (which may change from time to time).
    - 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;

- Enables programs to maintain currency and academic credibility through the peer review process; promotes high-quality inclusive and accessible programs that are responsive to student needs, societal priorities, and the public good;
- Enables programs to ensure that program goals are consistent with the University's mission and Academic Plan;
- Assists programs with future development;
- Informs institutional decision making and resource allocation.

3. Guiding Principles

Guiding principles for the development and implementation of the program review process represent principles inherent in the collegial governance environment of academia. These include:

- Academic Freedom: Respecting the university's commitment to the principle of academic freedom, reviews should be open, fair, inclusive, critical and constructive.
- Peer Review: As a central tenet of the academy, external assessment by peers remains a central feature of all program reviews.
- Accountability: Participating in a regular cycle of program reviews demonstrates accountability in the pursuit of program enhancement to a university's many communities: to students, faculty and staff, as well as to government, funding agencies, and the general public.
- Transparency, Trust, and Inclusion: The entire university community will be informed of and have access to the program review outcomes for each review cycle. This information will be accessible and included in the Academic Planning Committee's annual report to Senate and posted on the Senate Office website.

4. Program Review Scheduling & Reporting Timelines

A seven-year program review cycle has been developed by the Academic Planning Committee, a Committee of Senate, in consultation with the Deans.

- Each program will normally be reviewed once in every seven-year cycle. For the process followed, please refer to the Program Review Handbook.
- All new undergraduate programs will normally be reviewed after five years (as required per MPHEC policy on quality assurance) and subsequently added to the regular seven-year review schedule.
- All new graduate programs will normally be reviewed after one or two cohorts are graduated, and normally by year three of operation of a master's degree (as required per MPHEC policy on quality assurance).
- Notwithstanding the normal seven-year cycle, reviews may be scheduled at other times to accommodate accreditation review timelines, to allow for thematically similar programs to be reviewed simultaneously (e.g., independent minors, minors outside of a department, or freestanding minors), or to facilitate the timely discussion of significant issues in the discipline and/or program.
- Site visits will be conducted either on-campus or virtually by the Program Review Committee (PRC). Mode of venue will be determined on a case-by-case basis and determined by the needs of the institution, program, and reviewers.
- Action Plans are to be submitted 60 days after Senate approval of the program review documents.

- 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.

Version History

Version	Date Changed	Updated by	Description of Change
1.0	September 19, 2014	Academic Planning Committee	Document creation. Date of Senate Approval: September 19, 2014. Merges the Senate Policy on the Review of Undergraduate Programs, and the companion document for Graduate Programs 12, 2010.
1.1	March 11, 2016	Academic Planning Committee	Addition of subsection for Policy Revision within the Preamble.
1.2	May 13, 2016	Academic Planning Committee	Addition of process for programs subject to accreditation.
1.3	July 25, 2019	Academic Planning Committee	Addition of statements: 1) all graduate and undergraduate programs offered for credit are subject to program review, 2) add flexibility for the coordination of program review and accreditation processes, 3) add reference to the Guidelines for Program Review, 4) add clarification for reviewing thematically similar programs together. Revise Section 5 – Steps in the Review Process and add requirement for a three-year report. Revise Section 6.1 - Program Goals and Needs to clarify External factors. Revise Section 6.5 – Continuous Improvement Process to make student feedback a requirement for all review processes.
1.4	Oct 14, 2022	Academic Planning Committee	Revision done to begin to address inclusivity, diversity, and accessibility in program review. Minor editorials applied.
2.0	Aug 9, 2023	Academic Planning Committee	Removed details on procedures and clarified the definitions of various levels of review as they applied to the policy. Minor editorials applied.
2.1	January 10, 2024	Academic Planning Committee	Addition of "Executive Summary results following program review will be posted on the SMU website".