

UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN
PLANNING AND PRIORITIES COMMITTEE OF COUNCIL
FOR INFORMATION

PRESENTED BY: Dr. Darrell Mousseau
Chair, Planning and Priorities Committee

DATE OF MEETING: June 17, 2021

SUBJECT: For Information: Academic Program Approvals Process Review

SUMMARY:

The findings and recommendations of the Academic Program Approvals Process Review Project, led by the Governance Office from September 2020 – June 2021, are presented to Council by the Planning and Priorities Committee (PPC) and Academic Programs Committee (APC). In keeping with the University of Saskatchewan’s (USask) commitment to “Boundless Collaboration,” and the goal of “aligning structures” as articulated in the *University Plan: 2025*, structural and procedural changes are recommended to improve the timeliness of the academic program approvals decision-making process, while striving to maintain the rigorous reviews that ensure high quality, innovative programming, and financial sustainability. The recommended changes involve streamlining or removing steps, reconfiguring responsibilities, collaborating, and delegating.

Implementation of the recommendations will be phased. Proposed changes will require approval by the respective governing bodies. To support the new decision-making model, administrative resources will need to be realigned, and business practices will need to be updated. A pilot project for specific program-types will go forward in the fall of 2021, allowing time for review and refinement, followed by appropriate governance approvals in 2021/22, and full implementation by 2022/23.

The findings and recommendations of this review support the University of Saskatchewan’s (USask) goal of “aligning structures” as articulated in the *University Plan: 2025* (USask 2019, p.12). The new decision-making model will support the development, revision, and approval of high-quality, current, and innovative programming at USask, along with effective and efficient academic governance.

BACKGROUND:

At a Deans’ Council retreat in January 2020, concerns were raised about USask’s ability to approve new and innovative academic programming (e.g., microcredentials), given existing

decision processes, in time to maintain our competitiveness, and to meet external and student demand. The needs of an organization, its stakeholders, and its communities evolve over time. Therefore, it is incumbent on the university to periodically conduct governance reviews to ensure that our governance models continue to support our academic goals and strategies.

In September 2020, with the endorsement of PPC and APC, the Governance Office initiated a review of the academic program approvals processes. The objective of the review was to align governance structures and processes, and business practices for the approvals of academic programs to enable USask to meet its mission and vision in delivering high quality and innovative academic programming. The project team was led by the Governance Office, with representation from the Registrar's Office, Institutional Planning and Assessment (IPA), College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (CGPS), and the College of Arts & Science.

The methodology for the project was a qualitative case study involving document analysis, process mapping, secondary research, an environmental scan of comparable U15 institutions' program approval processes, and internal consultation. The project team completed an Interim Report in February 2021 (Thomarat, J., 2021). The findings of the Interim Report and sample 'future state' models informed subsequent consultations across campus. Consultations took place from March-May 2021 with over 25 groups, representing more than 150 people. The Interim Report, environmental scan, primary and secondary research, and consultations led to the development of these recommendations.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings and recommendations of the Academic Program Approvals Process Review are presented in accordance with a conceptual framework based on public policy and higher education administration literature. The framework involves examining decision-making either as structure or as process (Bess and Dee 2008, p.592). From there, the appropriate balance between expediency and rigour determines timeliness. Resources are required to enact the chosen decision-making framework, and to communicate the requirements to stakeholders. *The recommended changes to USask's academic program approvals decision-making model involve structures, processes, timeliness, rigour, resources, and awareness:*

- Structures
 - Eliminate the requirement for 'notices of intent' to PPC for new programs or major changes to existing programs.
 - Review APC and PPC responsibilities for program approvals, changes, and reviews.
 - For graduate program proposals, reduce the number of approval steps with committees of CGPS in alignment with the College's governance review.
 - Align the timing of Senate confirmation of admissions qualifications changes with the timing Council approvals.
- Processes
 - Develop holistic process maps, from application to implementation.
 - Realign processes for financial sustainability assessment and tuition setting.
 - Enhance coordination and collaboration between supporting offices.

- 'Right-size' the approval process for the type of qualification or credential.
- Timeliness
 - Start new program offerings two times each year, in June and January.
 - Reduce time-to-approval through collaboration, delegation, and coordination.
 - Consider tuition-setting for new academic programs separately from the annual tuition-setting process for existing programs.
- Rigour
 - Reconsider resource officers and voting membership on APC.
 - Align financial sustainability assessments with the Financial Authority Policy.
 - Augment the 'consultation with the registrar' procedures.
- Resources
 - Update and simplify guidelines and templates.
 - Consider curriculum management software to eliminate duplication, confusion, and 'paper-based' work.
 - Assign a central contact point for proponents and to steward the process.
 - Appropriately manage the workload implications of twice-per-year new program starts.
- Awareness
 - Enhance training and supports for chairs, committees, and proponents.
 - Ensure early, expert, and coordinated support through role and process clarity.
 - Identify opportunities for collaboration by broadly communicating new program proposals.

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS AND TIMELINES:

Proposed changes to Council, Board or Senate's roles or responsibilities for academic program approvals require their approval. Requests for decisions will be prepared as is appropriate.

A pilot project will be recommended for implementation in October 2021 for select program approvals in 2021/22. A project plan will be developed in the summer of 2021 for the full transition to the new governance framework (along with appropriate management and administrative supports), to be implemented for 2022/23.

To operationalize the recommended governance changes, business practices and administrative supports will need to be realigned to the new model. Implementation will require significant collaboration and further time commitments by the Governance Office, Registrar's Office, IPA, CGPS, Student Information Systems (SIS), Admissions, and college admissions and programs offices.

ATTACHMENTS:

Appendix A - Schedule of Consultations

REFERENCES:

Bess, J. and Dee, J. 2008. *Understanding College and University Organization: Theories for Effective Policy and Practice, Vol. II – Dynamics of the System*. Virginia: Stylus Publishing.

Thomarat, Jacquie. February 4, 2021. *Interim Report: USask Academic Program Approvals Processes*. University of Saskatchewan (USask) Governance Office.

USask. 2018. "Planning and Priorities Committee: Notice of Intent for New Programs." Available at: <https://governance.usask.ca/documents/proposals/notice-of%20intent.pdf>.

USask. 2019. *University Plan: 2025*. Available at: <https://plan.usask.ca/documents/University-Plan-2025.pdf>.

Appendix A - Schedule of Consultations

No.	Stakeholder	Dates	Materials
1	APC/PPC Execs	Feb 8/21	Interim report
2	APC	Feb 10/21	Interim report
3	PPC	Feb 10/21	Interim report
4	Governance Committee	March 8 – 2pm	Interim report
5	Catalogue/Programs Group	May 21 – 2pm	NA
6	Registrar/SIS/Admissions teams	March 31	NA
7	CGPS Executive Committee	Mar 18 - 10am	Interim report
8	Deans' Council	Mar 30 – 11:15am	Interim report
9	Associate Deans Academic	Mar 18 – 8:30	Interim report
10	Align with Microcredentials – Nancy Turner et al.	Mar 24 – 3:15	NA
11	Karsten Liber and Maureen Reed, SENS	Mar 17 – 2pm	Interim report
12	Loleen Berdahl, Alastair MacFadden, Murray Fulton – JSJS	April 12 – 11am	Interim report
13	Gordon DesBrisay and Alexis Dahl, Arts & Science	Mar 10 – 2pm	Interim report
14	Andy Allen, Prof, and Liz Snead, ADR, WCVM	April 27 – 10am	Interim report
15	Vicki Parohl, and Noreen Mahoney, Edwards	April 13 – 2pm	Interim report
16	Doug Brothwell and Walter Siqueira, Dentistry	Mar 23 – 9am	Interim report
17	Jay Wilson, Council Chair and Dpt. Head	Mar 19 – 1pm	Interim report
18	College of Education, Deans & Heads	April 28 – 9:30-10:30	Interim report
19	Department Heads' Forum	Mar 30 – 3pm	Interim report
20	Arts & Science Undergraduate Chairs	Mar 31 – 2pm	Interim report
21	Debby Burshtyn and Ryan Walker, CGPS – Review Findings	May 17 – 3:30	PPT
22	APC/PPC Execs – Review Findings	May 31 8-8:30am	PPT
23	APC – Review Findings	May 26 – 4-4:30	PPT
24	PPC – Review Findings	June 2 – 10:00am	PPT
25	President's Executive Committee (PEC) – Review Findings	June 3 – 10:00am	PPT/Briefing
26	University Council – Review Findings	June 17 – 2:30pm	PPT/Briefing
27	Senate Executive	June 15 – 9am	PPT/Briefing