SUMMARY OF THE PRINCIPAL FINDINGS OF THE QUALITY ASSURANCE AUDIT OF NIPISSING UNIVERSITY

FEBRUARY 2016

Summary of the Principal Findings of the Quality Assurance Audit of Nipissing University

February 2016

Nipissing University was audited in the third year of the first eight-year cycle of quality assurance audits under the Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) for Ontario universities. The objective of the audit is to determine whether an institution has complied with the provisions of its own Institutional Quality Assurance Policy (IQAP), as ratified by the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance (the Quality Council). In addition, the audit provides the opportunity to identify any inconsistencies between an institution's IQAP and the QAF, and, as appropriate, note best practices and share suggestions about other best practices.

The audit involved a review of three cyclical program reviews, two new program developments, and two major modifications conducted under the provisions of Nipissing University's IQAP.

Cyclical Program Reviews:
- Social Welfare and Social Development: BA
- Native Studies: BA
- History: BA; MA

New Programs:
- Social Work: BSW
- Kinesiology: MSc

Major Modifications:
- Teacher Education: BEd
- Master of Education: MEd

In the desk audit phase, the auditors reviewed both the June 2011 and the re-ratified June 2013 versions of Nipissing University's IQAP and all the documentation related to the audited cyclical program reviews, new program proposals and major modifications sent by Nipissing University. During their site visit (March 25-27, 2015), the auditors met with the President and other senior administrative leaders, faculty, staff, and students involved in the quality assurance processes at Nipissing University. The auditors wish to express their sincere thanks to the individuals at the University who committed time to meet and discuss openly and frankly their quality assurances processes.

The eight recommendations made by the auditors concern instances in which the University's practices were not in conformity with its IQAP. These inconsistencies were most often observed in the case of cyclical program reviews.

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Three recommendations are related to issues identified as "causes for concern". These include the failure to prepare and post on the University website the Institutional Executive Summary and Associated Implementation Plan for each cyclical program review; the failure to prepare and send the Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan for each cyclical program review to Senate and to the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance; and, the failure to comply with the IQAP requirement to implement the follow-up monitoring process identified in the IQAP for each program review.

One recommendation is about ensuring that all existing program are included on the schedule for review. There are also recommendations related to the selection and appointment of arm's-length reviewers. The remaining recommendations concern the need to document approval and sign-off by the authorities as defined in the IQAP.

The seven suggestions from the Auditors are designed to assist the university to strengthen its quality assurance practices. The Auditors found a few instances in which the University might clarify or streamline its processes, have formal sign-off or create templates to assist programs in developing self-study documents that line up well with the IQAP requirements.

The auditors commended the University for some "best" practices. Notably, the Provost and Vice-President, Academic and Research is thorough in briefing the external reviewers on their roles in program reviews. He does so both in telephone conversations before the site visit and in writing at the time of invitation. A further best practice is the provision of a template for the reviewers' report that assists them to address all of the evaluation criteria. The University is also commended for including an array of student input to its evaluation of programs including feedback from current students and from graduates.

The audit report concluded with a strong call for action by the University to follow-up on the reviews of existing programs to ensure actions required to address quality issues in programs are taken in a timely way. The Quality Council requires the University to address the "Causes for Concern" by a specified deadline.

The audit report contains eight Recommendations and seven Suggestions. They are intended to support the University in achieving its quality assurance goals. The Recommendations identify instances where Nipissing University's practice is not in compliance with its IQAP. These Recommendations will require that the University amend its IQAP and/or its practices. The Suggestions are meant to encourage actions the University can take in any efforts to improve its current quality assurance practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Nipissing University must:

1. comply with its IQAP to follow the processes for appointment of internal and external reviewers for cyclical program reviews or change the IQAP

2. prepare and post on its website the Institutional Executive Summary and Associated Implementation Plan for each cyclical program review

3. prepare and send the Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan for each cyclical program review to Senate and to the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance

   CAUSES FOR CONCERN

4. comply with its IQAP and implement the follow-up monitoring process identified in the IQAP for each program review

5. ensure that the external and internal reviewers appointed are at "arm's-length" from the program to be reviewed

6. ensure that the relevant officials (e.g. Dean; Provost and Vice-President, Academic and Research) review and provide feedback to the program on self-studies created for cyclical program reviews to ensure that the self-study contains the information required in the IQAP

7. review its list of programs offered against its cyclical program review schedule to ensure the review schedule is up-to-date and that every program is scheduled for review at least once every eight years

8. ensure that there is formal documentation of the approval of relevant governance bodies including Faculty Council, Senate Committees and Senate for quality assurance processes that require these approvals

SUGGESTIONS

Nipissing University should:

1. consider requiring that the responsible authority sign and date the self-study as confirmation that it has been approved

2. consider developing a template for self-studies for cyclical program reviews

3. clarify the role of the Provost and Vice-President, Academic and Research in the preparation of Final Assessment Reports to the Planning and Priorities Committee, and ensure that written documentation of Senate approval is included in the files

4. clarify the role of the Planning and Priorities Committee in reviewing the self-study for cyclical program reviews

5. consider clarifying in the IQAP who the final authority is to sign off on the documentation to be sent to the Reviewers for a cyclical program review

6. ask external reviewers to send their Reviewers' Report to the Provost and Vice-President, Academic and Research

7. consider naming an arbiter to assist in identifying when a program change is a major or minor modification or a new program

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