

Advice on Conducting Cyclical Program Reviews

- Advice on how to write a CPR (self-study), including for departmental-level reviews when the department has disparate programs, to ensure the report is reflective of each program.
- Is there a best or emerging model of practice for how programs organize themselves internally to complete a CPR?

Some things to consider:

- The Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) operates at the program level and therefore any advice we may offer you for departmental reviews may understandably be challenging at times to align with the QAF's requirements.
 - Particularly for departments with disparate programs, if / where possible, consider breaking up the unit of review to be less "bundled" and more focused on the individual program as the unit of review.
- When "bundling" is to occur, the QAF requires each distinct program still be readily identifiable, analyzed and evaluated. This is true for the:
 - Self-study;
 - External reviewers' report; and
 - Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan (FAR/IP)
- The QAF also requires that the evaluation criteria and quality indicators specified in the IQAP and the QAF are addressed in the self-study *for each discrete program being reviewed*.

Given this, some advice for conducting a CPR that is to cover multiple (disparate) programs within a single review might include:

- A CPR is too big a job for just one person. Consider forming a CPR working group that includes appropriate representation from across the various programs and which could potentially be responsible for the following:
 - Planning the consultation exercises
 - Analyzing the data
 - Writing the self-study (see QAF guidance appended below)
 - Nominating the slate of potential external reviewers
 - Meeting with the external reviewers
 - Writing the response to the reviewers' report
 - Writing or minimally implementing the FAR / IP
 - Being involved in the subsequent monitoring report requirements
- If you don't already do so, consider:

- Developing terms of reference for the review, or a document that similarly outlines the methodology / guidance for preparing the self-study / CPR more broadly. This could include:
 - Clear plans for the methods of collection of data (see also handout 4) from a variety of sources, covering each disparate program, and how and when views of key stakeholders are to be obtained, including:
 - Consultation methods: Faculty retreats, focus groups, surveys, etc.
 - ✓ Given the disparate nature of the programs, it may be helpful to hold multiple versions of some or all of the consultation exercises to ensure sufficient focus / data is at the program level
 - ✓ See also QAF guidance: [Involving Students in Quality Assurance Processes — Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance \(oucqa.ca\)](http://oucqa.ca)
 - Key stakeholders:
 - ✓ Current students and recent graduates of each program under review;
 - ✓ Faculty and staff for each program under review
 - ✓ Internal partners (Centre for Teaching and Learning, Institutional Planning (or equivalent), the University Librarian, Academic Advising / Counselling, Equity Office, Co-op / WIL / Experiential Learning Office, IT, etc.
 - ✓ Related industry partners / employers, etc.
 - Confirmation of the process for record-keeping (see also handout 5)
 - A plan for addressing the required evaluation criteria for each distinct program
 - Communication plan / feedback mechanisms for throughout the CPR process (see also handout 7)
- Developing more than one self-study or, if a single self-study is to be created, adding a sufficient number of appendices that clearly outline the unique elements of the distinct programs being reviewed within the Department
- Take a project management approach:
 - Hold a Department / program retreat to specifically focus on / plan for the CPR
 - If there is not one available centrally, create a timeline for yourself (see also handout 2)
 - Create a communication plan (see also handout 7)
- In addition, you will need to ensure that the QAF requirements for the qualifications of the external reviewers is met – i.e., that there is “suitable disciplinary expertise, qualifications and program management experience” within the review team. Where there are multiple disparate programs being reviewed at one time, this might mean more external reviewers will need to be added to ensure sufficient coverage of disciplinary expertise within the review team.
- Plan for any change in leadership during the CPR process (see also handout 8)

- Finally, you may wish to ensure the IQAP and / or its supporting guidelines (with examples of best practices, where possible) and templates provide sufficient guidance so that everyone is clear on expectations for how to review programs as part of a departmental-level review.

The main message is that some pre-planning at the outset will smooth the process overall.

Relevant observations from the first cycle of audits

- Discussions with faculty and staff showed a positive engagement with what are sometimes challenging and complex processes. Even those concerned with the demanding labour involved in conducting Cyclical Program Reviews stated that the self-assessment work was useful, and the process provided a path forward for the programs and departments. In particular, there was evidence of a great deal of advanced planning and communication across the institution, particularly between individual academic units and the QA Office.
- Similarly, one university received particular praise for the training functions provided by its QA Office, such as revisiting and enhancing a program's learning outcomes in the first year of a CPR; provision for orientation workshops and improved supporting material, including guidelines for QA activities; and ongoing mentoring of faculty and programs to assist in a first CPR.
- The creation of the Academic Planning Specialist position in some Faculties as a resource link to one university's QA Office was seen by that Audit Team as an interesting model.
- One administrator identified as a positive outcome of the quality assurance process that, because the procedures and evaluation criteria for New Program Proposals and those for CPRs are applied to all programs undertaking these processes, there was an across-the-board consistency in assuring the quality of the university's programs.

Possible resource for reviews conducted at the departmental level

- The University of Guelph conducts a number of its cyclical reviews at the department level (its [IQAP](#) notes that normally, where there are multiple programs offered within the same academic unit (Department/School), these will be addressed in a single self-study). Likewise, the University of Toronto also conducts most of its reviews at a similar level. It may be helpful to reach out to the QA Key Contacts at one or both universities and compare approaches. They may have some helpful suggestions for reviewing programs at the department level while still ensuring each distinct program remains the unit of review (and vice versa).

QAF Guidance: Creating an Effective Self-study

The requirements for the self-study document are listed in the Quality Assurance Framework (QAF), [Section 5.1.3](#). The following table is intended to act as a supplemental guide for developing an effective self-study that serves as a driver of continuous improvement. Certain elements in this table are required by the QAF, Section 5.1.3. These are marked with an asterisk (*). Best Practice elements not marked with an asterisk are recommended but are not required by the QAF.

Feature	Best Practices	Practices to Avoid
Goal/Purpose	The self-study is a vehicle for continuous improvement and reflects an honest self-analysis of the program's strengths and weaknesses, and considers where and how improvements can be made.	The self-study is aimed at defending or justifying the status quo or meeting minimum criteria.
Focus of the Self-study	<p>The self-study is broad-based, reflective, forward-looking and includes critical analysis of the program(s)*.</p> <p>When a single omnibus document is used for the review of different program levels (for example, graduate and undergraduate), program modes, and/or programs offered at different locations, each discrete program is still readily identifiable, analyzed and evaluated*.</p> <p>The Self-study focuses on the undergraduate and/or graduate program(s) under review (as required by the IQAP and the Quality Assurance Framework).</p>	<p>The self-study is descriptive rather than reflective and analytical.</p> <p>The self-study focuses exclusively on past-practice and does not include a sense of how analysis of past-practice will inform continuous improvement going forward.</p> <p>Discrete program elements are not identifiable when more than one program (or program level) is being addressed within a single self-study.</p> <p>The self-study focuses on the academic unit (department) rather than on the undergraduate and/or graduate program(s).</p>
Process	A methodology/guidance for preparing the self-study is developed, which includes clear guidelines and suggested methods for the collection of data from a	The methodology/guidance for the self-study is delineated only after the key elements of the self-study have been completed, or is not developed at all.

Feature	Best Practices	Practices to Avoid
	<p>variety of sources, as well as describing the importance of critical analysis and careful record-keeping.</p> <p>The methodology/guidance contains a clear description of how the views of students (past and present), faculty, and staff are to be obtained*.</p> <p>The self-study includes a description of how it was prepared, including details on how the views of faculty, staff and students were obtained and considered*.</p>	<p>The views of other faculty, staff and students are not obtained.</p> <p>The process for the drafting and finalizing of the self-study is ad-hoc.</p>
Record Keeping	<p>The program has developed a plan for record-keeping relating to the self-study, including ensuring accurate records of feedback, responses to feedback, and sign-offs. The records and associated documentation are accessible for future reference.</p>	<p>Records relating to the self-study are difficult to access and may not be readily available for future reference.</p>
Authorship	<p>The self-study results from a participatory, self-critical process and documents involvement in its preparation of all faculty and staff in the program, as well as current and recently graduated students.</p>	<p>The self-study is written by a single person, without evidence of consultation with (or sometimes even knowledge of) the program's faculty, staff and students.</p>
Student Involvement	<p>The mechanisms for securing active student involvement in the preparation of the self study are established in the methodology/guidance.</p> <p>Students have an active role throughout the process, including planning, self-</p>	<p>There is no effective plan in place for student consultation or participation.</p> <p>Students may be consulted, but data collected from student consultations/surveys is not incorporated into the self-analysis.</p>

Feature	Best Practices	Practices to Avoid
	<p>analysis, and the preparation of the self-study.</p> <p>Data from a student survey, focus groups, or other mechanisms is used in the self-analysis. The self-study includes data from a number of graduated cohorts as well as current students.</p> <p>An orientation session or guidebook is available to orient students to the purpose of the self-study, the role of the Cyclical Program Review in continuous improvement, and the university's QA processes in general.</p>	<p>Students may be consulted, but they are not provided with a sufficient orientation to understand the process or their role.</p> <p>Student data relates to current students only; data from recent graduates has not been collected and analysed.</p>
Use of Previous Reviews	<p>Concerns and recommendations raised in previous reviews, especially those detailed in the Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan and subsequent monitoring reports from the previous Cyclical Review of the program, are treated as a tool for continuous improvement.</p> <p>Descriptions of how these have been addressed indicate that concerns / recommendations have been synthesized and considered in the larger context of how the program approaches continuous improvement and program review*.</p>	<p>The program's responses to concerns and recommendations raised in previous reviews may be included, but there is no indication that these have substantively informed the program's approach to continuous improvement.</p> <p>No reference to the concerns and recommendations raised in the previous review.</p>
Treatment of Items Flagged for Follow-up in the Monitoring Report and/or Items Flagged for Follow-	<p>Issues flagged for follow-up by the Quality Council at the time of the program's approval and/or through the new program's monitoring process</p>	<p>The program's responses to issues raised for follow-up reports may be included, but there is no indication that these have substantively informed the</p>

Feature	Best Practices	Practices to Avoid
up by the Quality Council, in the Case of the First Cyclical Review of a New Program.	are treated as a tool for continuous improvement and addressed in the self-study accordingly. Descriptions of how these have been addressed indicate that these issues have been synthesized and considered in the larger context of how the program approaches continuous improvement and program review*.	program's approach to continuous improvement. No reference to items flagged for the first Cyclical Review of the program.
Treatment of data	Program-related data and measures of performance, including applicable national and professional standards are analysed and used as the basis for performance evaluation. Data analysis contributes to the assessment of strengths and weaknesses of the program*.	Raw data are attached as appendices or used only in a descriptive manner.
Evaluation Criteria	The self-study addresses each of the evaluation criteria and quality indicators specified in the IQAP and in the Quality Assurance Framework Section 5.1.3.1, for each discrete program being reviewed*.	The self-study does not address each of the evaluation criteria and quality indicators specified in the IQAP and in the Quality Assurance Framework Section 5.1.3.1, for each discrete program being reviewed.
Areas of Strength / Unique Curriculum / Program Innovations / Creative Components / High Impact Practices	The self-study addresses the program's areas of strength, unique curricular elements, program innovations, creative components, and other high impact practices and indicates how best practices will be shared within the program and across the institution*. The self-study indicates that best practices in one area will be used as a driver for	The self-study does not include references to the program's unique curricular elements, program innovations, creative components, and other high impact practices. Or, if these are included, they are listed and not integrated into the program's approach to continuous improvement.

Feature	Best Practices	Practices to Avoid
	continuous improvement in other areas.	
Areas for Improvement / Enhancement / Curricular Change	<p>The self-study notes any areas for improvement, areas holding promise for enhancement and/or opportunities for curricular change identified by staff, faculty and students. The self-study includes analysis of these areas and/or plans for incorporating these suggestions into concrete actions*.</p> <p>The self-study takes a forward-looking approach to any identified areas for improvement, enhancement and/or curricular change.</p>	The self-study responds to the identification of areas for improvement, areas holding promise for enhancement and/or opportunities for curricular change in a defensive manner.
Assessment of Relevant Academic Services	<p>The self-study includes a clear assessment of the adequacy of all relevant academic services that directly contribute to the academic quality of each program under review*.</p> <p>Each relevant academic service (for example, the library, IT services, and/or the Centre for Teaching and Learning) has had input into the assessment of the adequacy of the respective services.</p>	<p>The self-study does not include a clear assessment of the adequacy of all relevant academic services that directly contribute to the academic quality of each program under review.</p> <p>Relevant academic services have not been consulted regarding their contributions to the program under review.</p>
<p>NOTE: The university may identify any other pertinent information that it deems appropriate for inclusion. The input of others deemed to be relevant and useful, such as graduates of the program, representatives of industry, the professions, practical training programs, and employers may also be included.</p>		