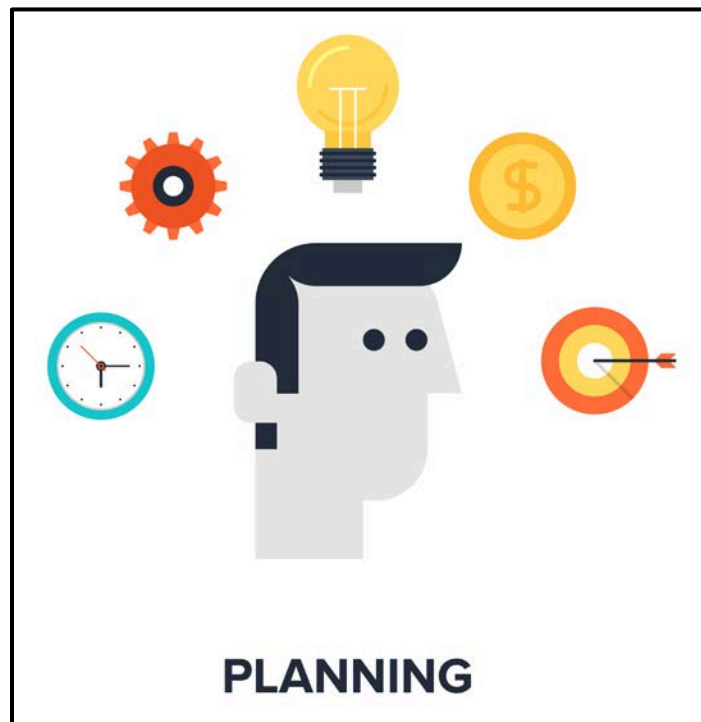


Curriculum Review: Guiding Questions, Creating a Review Plan, and Timelines



Patti Dyjur
Frances Kalu
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Authors

Patti Dyjur, PhD, Curriculum Development Specialist
Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning, University of Calgary

Frances Kalu, PhD, Curriculum Development Specialist
Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning, University of Calgary

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Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning
434 Collegiate Blvd NW
University of Calgary, Calgary, AB Canada T2N 1N4

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Guiding Questions

What do you want to find out in your curriculum review?

Definition

Guiding questions are critical questions or concerns that guide the curriculum review process (University of Calgary, 2012). Similar to a research study, a curriculum review uses guiding questions to focus inquiry on specific avenues of curriculum issues. You will not be able to investigate every aspect of a curriculum, so the guiding questions identify what you most want to explore in the review, which could range from broad encompassing questions to specific curricular concerns.

Importance of Guiding Questions

Guiding questions:

- Help you define your investigation
- Help identify what types of data to collect and can be used to write questions for student and instructor surveys and focus groups
- Structure the findings section of the curriculum review report
- Help to develop an action plan
- Form the foundation of the interim report

Your internal and public reports will both include a section on the critical questions used to guide the curriculum review process. You will probably have 3 – 5 questions that you address in your review. You may be given one or more guiding questions from your Unit Lead or Associate Dean of Teaching and Learning, so check to see if they have any standard questions you are expected to address in your review.

Feedback on the Guiding Questions

It is advisable to get feedback on the rough draft of your guiding questions. Every project is different, but you may want to get feedback from the review team, students, advisory committees, and/or the dean, department head, or associate dean of teaching and learning. You might elicit feedback at a department meeting, through email, or informal means.

Questions to consider for your review:

This list can provide a starting point of questions to guide a curriculum review process:

General questions:

- What are the strengths of the program?
- How are program-level learning outcomes (PLOs) addressed in specific courses of the program? Are there any program-level learning outcomes that are not adequately addressed?
- Looking at the scope and sequence of the courses within the program, are there any gaps and/or overlaps in learning outcomes? If so, where?

Accreditation:

- If your program has an external accrediting body, you might add guiding questions to fulfill their requirements to allow you to complete both accreditation and the U of C's curriculum review process simultaneously.

Purpose of the program:

- How current is the program? What is being emphasized? Are we preparing graduates for traditional and/or emerging roles?
- What careers do graduates of the program go on to have?
- How can we make the program more innovative?
- What is the right balance of discipline-specific courses and interdisciplinary courses to give students a solid grounding in the discipline yet enhance their learning of broader perspectives? What might a multidisciplinary approach look like?

Students:

- Who are our students?
- Why is there so much drop-off in registration after the introductory course? Why do students decide not to continue in the discipline?
- What aspects of the program are problematic for students and how might we address them?

- What do students want out of the program? What are their career goals?
- What percentage of alumni go on to graduate studies at our institution?

Student learning experiences:

- To what extent do teaching and learning activities across the program scaffold student learning, building it from an introductory level to more complex concepts? Is there a need for more diversity of teaching and learning activities used in the program?
- What high-impact educational practices (Kuh, 2008) do we have in our program, and where are they located? Do we need to any or distribute them differently across the program?
- What aspects of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) do we excel at? What results are we dissatisfied with, and how might we address them?
- How might we plan a non-traditional learning experience for students? What would that look like? How would it be scaffolded and assessed?
- How are we connecting theory to practice? What improvements should be made in this area?
- What teaching methods are currently being used? Is there sufficient diversity?

Student assessment:

- To what extent do student assessment strategies across the program support and capture student learning? Is there a need for more diversity of student assessment strategies used in the program?
- What are the DFW rates (grades of D or F, withdrawals) for the program? What is the rate to completion? If the statistics are not reasonable, what measures should we take to improve?
- How do we approach formative feedback across the program?
- Are our policies around (grading, deferrals, etc.) effective or do we need to set/ examine specific policies?

Prerequisites:

- Do we have the right prerequisites for upper-level courses?
- Are more prerequisite courses needed for students to be successful in upper-level courses? Less?
- Is a lack of prerequisite courses in certain upper-level courses problematic for students in terms of their success in certain upper-level courses? Do they have the necessary understanding in order to succeed in these courses?

Consistency across sections of a course:

- What approaches are different instructors taking to multiple sections of a course? How consistent are course outcomes, student learning experiences, and student assessments? Are there any issues, especially in courses that are prerequisites for other courses?

- How much flexibility should we give different instructors in multiple sections of a course to bring their own expertise and research interests to the learning experience?

Content coverage:

- Are students getting opportunities to acquire foundational knowledge in the field?
- Is there a balance between foundational knowledge/ content and other curricular concerns such as critical thinking and communication?
- To what extent does the program facilitate student learning of (writing skills, critical thinking, professionalism, innovation, research skills or other initiative or strategy being targeted)? How can improvements be made?

Core courses:

- Do we have the right core (required) courses in the program?
- How are the content and theories in core courses built upon in subsequent courses? How are we scaffolding student learning throughout the program?
- Is there adequate flexibility in the program to allow students to take courses of interest to them, such as the embedded Sustainability Certificate?

Time to completion:

- Where are the bottlenecks in the program and how do we resolve them?
- What courses have high percentages of failure rates and/or withdrawal?
- What courses are out of sequence or offered in the wrong term?
- Who is graduating from our program, and who isn't? Why do students transfer out of the program?

Intended and Perceived Curriculum:

- How effective are instructors at conveying course expectations to students? What is the difference between the intended curriculum and what students actually learn (the perceived curriculum)?

Academic integrity:

- How do students learn about academic integrity? Are we doing enough and the right things in this area?
- How do we help students who are struggling?

Staffing:

- Where should we put our resources? Should we be “realizing efficiencies”, lowering class sizes, using sessional instructors more/ less?
- Do we concentrate on the learning experience in service courses that have students from all faculties (for example, first-year tutorials) or dedicate more resources to advanced courses that have more of our majors?

Faculty/ department and institutional priorities:

- How does our program align with graduate attributes, at the faculty and/or institutional level?
- Does our program align with strategic priorities?
- How are Indigenous perspectives being incorporated into the program in terms of Indigenous pedagogies and/or content?
- Are there any new or emerging priorities or initiatives that we should examine as part of our review; for example:
 - How do we enhance mental health and wellness in our students and staff?
 - What are our priorities regarding technology integration into teaching and learning?
 - What are our priorities regarding the internationalization strategy?
 - How is experiential learning enacted in the program and what opportunities exist to further incorporate it?

Non-majors:

- Which of our courses are required by students in other faculties/ programs?
- To what extent are our courses meeting the needs of non-major students?

Your Questions:

Data Sources to Inform Your Review

Putting the Plan Together

Some data sources are a mandatory part of your review. For each guiding question you will gather data from at least one source. If the data are readily available, there is no need to do further data collection. If not, determine what is realistic given practical constraints (usually time and money).

Data Sources for a Curriculum Review

Mandatory Data Collection:

According to the Quality Assurance Handbook Curriculum Reviews (2015), data collection from certain sources is mandatory:

1. Standard Report from the Office of Institutional Analysis (OIA)
 - a. Demographic information, such as number of students, DFW rates, attrition
 - b. NSSE engagement indicators and responses (%) for specific questions (if applicable)
2. Curriculum mapping data
3. Student data (survey, focus group)

In addition, a review team can collect other data as needed to inform their review.

Potential Sources of Data:

There are many potential sources of data which could inform a curriculum review. The classification scheme that follows has been adapted from Worthen, Borg and White (1993), and is not exhaustive.

1. Data collected directly from individuals associated with the program, including students, alumni, and instructors:
 - a. Self-reports: attitudes, opinions, satisfaction, behavior, or history
 - i. Surveys or questionnaires: administered on paper, orally, by telephone, by computer, or in person. Eg. annual student exit survey, satisfaction survey
 - ii. Interviews, Eg. exit interviews

- iii. Focus groups
 - b. Teaching and learning artifacts
 - i. Quantitative student performance indicators, Eg. test results, grades on assignments
 - ii. Assignments: papers, essays, discussion board posts, portfolios (including digital portfolios) and other indicators of student learning
 - iii. Learning activities: simulations, debates, presentations in person or online
 - iv. Personal records such as journals or logs
- 2. Data collected from existing organizational information or formal repositories or databases
 - a. Records
 - i. Standard Report from the Office of Institutional Analysis
 - ii. Program documentation
 - iii. Past curriculum and unit reviews
 - b. Curriculum mapping data (collected from instructors)
 - c. Canadian Graduate and Professional Student Survey (CGPSS)
- 3. Data collected through unobtrusive measures
 - a. Environmental scan or an examination of similar programs across the province or across Canada
 - b. Literature review
- 4. Data collected by an independent (external) reviewer, often associated with accreditation
 - a. Open-ended observations
 - b. Reports and reviews which may include other data collection methods
- 5. Other data sources as identified by the review lead
 - a. Current or potential employer data

Creating a Curriculum Review Plan

Once you have determined your guiding questions, you can start to create a plan for data collection, analysis, action planning, and writing the report. For each guiding question, you will use at least one data source to inform it. If the necessary data are already collected or available, there is no need to conduct further data collection. For example, the Standard Report from the Office of Institutional Analysis includes several years of demographic information, which could be sufficient to answer some questions. Other guiding questions can be better informed from multiple perspectives, such as students and instructors.

Some considerations when creating a curriculum review plan

When creating your review plan, you might want to consider the following:

- What data have already been collected can you use to inform your guiding questions?
- What types of data collection can inform multiple guiding questions?
- How can we get multiple perspectives in both data collection and analysis?
- How can we involve students in the curriculum review plan?
- What is reasonable given practical constraints (usually time and money)?
- How can we leverage existing processes and committees to get the work done? For example, is there an undergraduate curriculum committee that could provide feedback on program-level learning outcomes (PLOs), analyze data, or take on some other aspect of the work?
- If you think you might want to disseminate some of the results, get ethics approval or a certificate of exemption, as advised by Research Services.
- Have we built in a bit of flexibility to accommodate unforeseen circumstances?

Example of a Curriculum Review Plan

Below are three examples of how guiding questions can be used to create a curriculum review plan.

Guiding Question	Rationale	Data Sources	Collection Strategy (Who, when)	Analysis Strategy (Who, how)	Notes
Do we have the right prerequisites for upper-level courses? Are more prerequisite courses needed for students to be successful in upper-level courses? Less?	DFW rates are high in some of our upper-level courses. Also, comments from the student exit survey indicate some duplication in the program.	Curriculum mapping Instructor survey Student exit survey Program docs OIA Standard Report	Mapping workshop in November, all due in Dec. Review Lead to implement student survey in Feb/ March	Curriculum data in aggregate charts All faculty invited to 2 data analysis discussions. Invite student council to participate.	Combine instructor survey questions about prerequisites with the curriculum mapping exercise.
How are we incorporating group work into the program?	Our National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) scores are low in Collaborative Learning: Worked with other students on course projects or assignments.	Curriculum mapping Instructor survey Student survey	Ask instructors to identify courses with group work, and what type Ask students about their experiences with group work	Curriculum data about group work to be presented in aggregate charts. All faculty invited to 2 data analysis discussions. Invite student council to participate.	Add a couple of questions on group work to the curriculum mapping exercise and instructor/ student surveys.
How do we enhance mental health and wellness in our students and staff?	Not only is this an institutional priority, students and staff have mentioned workload issues, especially around exam time.	Instructor and/or student focus groups Student survey Curriculum mapping	Close to the end of term (fall and winter)	Create a Mental Health and Wellness Subcommittee with students and faculty, to analyze the data and come up with an action plan. Discuss recommendations at a faculty retreat.	Customize curriculum mapping to include timing of midterms and major assignments.

Template for Creating a Curriculum Review Plan

Guiding Question	Rationale	Data Sources	Collection Strategy (Who, when)	Analysis Strategy (Who, how)	Notes

Suggested Project Timeline

Please refer to pages 5 – 6 of the Quality Assurance Handbook, Curriculum Reviews.

Preparation Phase: July – September

- Review Lead is appointed
- Provost's Office requests a standard report from the Office of Institutional Analysis (OIA)
- Review Lead drafts guiding questions for the review and gathers feedback
- Review Lead meets with the Unit Lead to discuss CR goals, processes and timelines
- Review Lead consults with the Curriculum Development Consultant to organize support required
- Create the curriculum review plan: data to be collected, how the curriculum will be mapped and what method will be used, how to support instructors, committees needed, the points at which feedback will be gathered from all faculty members (note that some of these decisions may be revised over time as needed)
- Review Lead continues to meet with the Curriculum Development Consultant or Unit Lead as needed

Review Phase: October – April

- Introduce CR to all faculty members teaching in the program
- Write program-level learning outcomes
- Write/revise course outcomes as needed
- Organize an orientation to curriculum mapping
- Monitor and support the mapping process
- Gather other data
- Data representation
- Data analysis
- Write action plan

Report Writing: May – June

- Draft the internal report
- Gather feedback on the Internal and Public reports
- Submit the Internal and Public Report to your Dean and Associate Dean of Teaching and Learning for feedback and approval
- Submit the Public Report to the Provost's Office
- Meet with the Vice-Provost of Teaching and Learning by the end of August

Implementation: Next 5 years

- Interim report submitted after 2 ½ years

Curriculum Review Timeline Worksheet

	Sept. 2017	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan. 2018	Feb.	March	April	May	June	July	Aug.
Write guiding questions												
Create a curriculum review plan												
Write program-level learning outcomes												
Write/ revise course outcomes												
Orientation to curriculum mapping												
Do curriculum mapping												
Gather student data												
Gather other data												
Literature review												
Data representation												
Data analysis												
Write the internal report												

	Sept. 2017	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan. 2018	Feb.	March	April	May	June	July	Aug.
Feedback from all faculty												
Submit the reports to the Dean and Assoc. Dean T&L												
Send to Dean/ Assoc. Dean T&L for feedback												
Submit the public report to the Provost's Office												
Meet with the VP T&L												
Create a communication plan												

Add dates for: Department meetings, retreats, internal deadlines, major conferences, as relevant

References

Kuh, G. D. (2008). *High-impact educational practices: A brief overview*. Retrieved from <http://www.aacu.org/leap/hip.cfm>

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Resources

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