June 21, 2024

Institutional Response to DQAB Associate of Arts Degree Program Review

Introduction

Alexander College (AC) was pleased to host members of the Degree Quality Assurance Board (DQAB) program review panel during an in-person site visit on Monday, May 27, 2024. We appreciate the panel members' thoroughness and collegiality, and regard the entire review process as a constructive, informative experience that will enhance Alexander College's ability to provide excellence in higher education for students from many cultural backgrounds and language abilities through internationally recognized university-transfer courses and degree programs, individual support services, and campus activities that foster local and global community engagement.

Section 1: Panel Executive Summary

The expert panel describes Alexander College as a "two-year college with campus locations in Burnaby and downtown Vancouver," noting that our students "are primarily international students." The panel further observes that AC "began offering the Associate of Arts Degree (AA) in June 2006" and that "consent to offer the degree was renewed in 2009, 2014, and 2019." Commenting on developments since the last AA renewal, the panel observes that Alexander College moved into a new and larger Burnaby campus in 2021 and is preparing to open a new downtown campus at 570 Dunsmuir Street with the intention of offering the AA at both campuses. In the panel's view, "together, the current campus and the planned downtown campus offer students modern and well-supported classrooms, labs, and support facilities." Characterizing Alexander College as "an established private college in the provincial college system," the panel observes that AC "is active in BCCAT, the BC Deans of Arts and Science, and the BC Registrars Association," among other provincial bodies. The review team further noted that it has given "careful consideration to AC admission policies, grading and progression policies, and the local implementation of the provincial AA template."

Overall, the panel's report resulted in 14 requirements that are summarized below, with an institutional response and implementation timeline for each.

Section 2: Degree-Level Standard: Conditionally Met

The review team noted that "Alexander College AA concentrations largely reflect AA credential requirements" (p. 8) and that "the college offers a sufficiently diverse range of transferrable courses taught by qualified faculty to support the Associate of Arts degree" (p. 11). The requirements below primarily involve use of courses/credits in Category D.

Requirement 2.1: "That credits earned in each AA category consist of entire courses and that credits from the same course cannot be used in two different categories."

Institutional Response: Our intention is to announce the stipulation related to Requirement 2.1 in July-August 2024 and to apply the requirement to Spring 2025 graduates and beyond. Students graduating prior to Spring 2024 will be grandfathered.

Requirement 2.2: "That Program Planning Sheets be revised to classify POLI 100 and POLI 200 as social science courses, not Humanities courses." See AA Category C, 6 credits in Humanities other than English.

Institutional Response: Requirement 2.2 will be announced in July-August 2024 and apply to Spring 2025 graduates and beyond.

Section 3: Credential Recognition and Nomenclature: Standard is Conditionally Met

The panel observed that Alexander College's "local implementation" of the Associate of Arts degree in "General Arts, Pre-Social Work, Psychology, Sociology, International Relations, and Economics" appears to reflect the purpose of the credential (p. 15). That said, the panel also called for a reduction in the number of concentrations, namely in Business (p. 16). In assessing the Credential Recognition and Nomenclature Standard, the panel further noted "ample evidence of strong articulation of courses, attendance at articulation meetings," and participation in "deans of arts and science meetings."

Requirement 3.1: "That the Associate of Arts nomenclature no longer be used with Alexander College Business programs."

Institutional Response: New applications to the business concentrations will no longer be accepted as of September 9, 2024. Previously admitted students will be grandfathered toward completion of their business-related credential over a 3.5 year (48 month) period effective September 2024.

Recommendation 3.1: Include Business-related degree pathways in the AC University Transfer Planning Guide.

Institutional Response: Following the general intent of the foregoing recommendation, AC intends to augment business-related pathways in the AC University Transfer Planning Guide over the next academic year.

Recommendation 3.2: "That Alexander College consider developing a two-year diploma program in Business as a replacement credential for the AA (Business) and AA (International Business)."

Institutional Response: The foregoing recommendation is under consideration.

Section 4: Curriculum/Program Content: Standard is Conditionally Met

The panel reported that, "overall," Alexander College courses "reflect provincial norms in terms of learning outcomes, topics, textbooks, and evaluation methods. Course articulation in the BCCAT system is extensive as both a sending and receiving institution, an indicator that its courses are well accepted as equivalent to university courses" (p. 18). The panel acknowledged AC's "efforts to address the challenge of effective academic writing" (p. 18). The panel also issued requirements for enhancing student success.

Requirement 4.1: "That AC implement its planned updates to English prerequisites in Associate of Arts courses as scheduled, from 2024 to 2026-2027."

Institutional Response: The prerequisite updates will be implemented over the specified period of time, starting in Fall 2024.

Requirement 4.2: "That AC require a minimum C – (C minus) grade for course prerequisites in the AA program."

Institutional Response: To allow for adequate stakeholder notification, Requirement 4.2 will be announced in July-August 2024, to be effective in Winter 2025 and onward.

Recommendation 4.1: "That AC create a new category of Academic Alert in Academic Standing policy A-18 for students whose GPA is a least 1.50 but below the minimum 2.00 cumulative GPA requirements of the AA."

Institutional Response: Rather than making a new category of Academic Standing in our current policy, following the conclusion of each term we intend to identify AA students whose term or cumulative GPA is at least 1.50 but below the minimum 2.00. These students will receive an email informing them that their GPA puts them at risk of not meeting the minimum 2.0 for graduation. The email will also provide detailed information about college supports and resources, including the Writing and Learning Centre, Academic Advising, Health and Wellness counseling, etc.

Section 5: Learning Methodologies/Program Delivery: Standard is Conditionally Met

The review team commented on the classification of weekly instructional hours in several History and Philosophy course outlines and noted that faculty should ensure that course outlines for all lab courses "include specific lab assignments and grades."

Requirement 5.1: "Since several History and Philosophy courses list two weekly lecture hours of instruction and one weekly tutorial hour, the purpose of the tutorial hour should be reviewed and converted to an instructional hour where appropriate."

Institutional Response: Curriculum Guides have been revised as advised.

Requirement 5.2: "That courses with lab science requirements have specific lab assignments and marks assigned to lab activities on the course outline."

Institutional Response: Required material was added to applicable Curriculum Guides prior to the start of the Fall 2024 semester.

Section 6: Admission and Transfer/Residency: Standard is Conditionally Met

Requirement 6.1: "Revise EAP program to limit access to AA courses while students are completing the language proficiency requirements for the AA, with a proposed maximum for students in ENGL 099 of two AA courses for which students have already met the prerequisite requirement."

Institutional Response: Requirement 6.1 will be implemented in Winter 2025 term and beyond.

Requirement 6.2: "Because effective academic writing is foundational to student success and because all students admitted to the AA are required to have the necessary prerequisites, ENGL 100 should be attempted no later than the second semester of the AA program."

Institutional Response: All associate degree students will be notified of Requirement 6.2 in July-August 2024. The change will become effective for the Winter 2025 term and beyond.

Requirement 6.3: "Recognizing that the mature student category anticipates the future success of students who do not have an academic track record, limit the Mature Student category to a maximum of 10 credits in the first semester and a GPA requirement of 1.5 for continuation in the program."

Institutional Response: To allow adequate time for stakeholder notification, Requirement 6.3 will be implemented for the Winter 2025 term. Mature students admitted prior to September 9, 2024, are exempt from this change (i.e., grandfathered). Policy A-03 will be amended accordingly.

Requirement 6.4: "Change the minimum acceptable transfer grade for regular admission from D to C – (C minus) (1.67/4.33) with an average transfer GPA of C (2.00/4.33)."

Institutional Response: Effective Fall 2024, we require a minimum course-to-course transfer grade of C – (C minus) (1.67/4.33) for courses taken elsewhere to be eligible for transfer credit consideration.

Requirement 6.5: "Delete the option of waiving language proficiency requirements in policy A-01 (Admission Requirements) through provisional admission. Require all students accepted into the AA program to provide acceptable evidence (i.e., test scores or courses passed) that they meet the language proficiency requirement."

Institutional Response: AC has never waived (exempted) English language proficiency requirements for any student. In studying Requirement 6.5, we discovered a misplaced subheading in the formatting of policy A-01 and have corrected that typographical error.

Requirement 6.6: "Because EAP admission requirements for language proficiency should be lower than AA and UT admission requirements, update the EAP entry requirement in policy A-01 to reflect the EAP language proficiency defined in policy A-03."

Institutional Response: Policy A-01 will immediately be changed so that it refers to the correct requirement in policy A-03, which is a minimum of IELTS 5.0 overall, or equivalent, for ENGL 098.

Requirement: 6.7: "Increase the minimum grade for a prerequisite course on course outlines from a D to a C – (C minus)."

Institutional Response: Requirement 6.7 overlaps with Requirement 4.2. AC will implement this change in Curriculum Guides over Summer 2024 with an effective date of September 9, 2024.

Section 7: Faculty: Standard is Met

The panel observed that Alexander College "has done excellent work in developing the role of department heads in recent years," noting that "department heads have assumed much of the responsibility for program administration that had previously been the role of [Standing Academic Standards Committee] members." The

review team also recognized "recent efforts to address department head workload by creating a new department head in Psychology" (p. 31).

Recommendation 7.1: "To meet ambitious growth projections from 2024—2027, post for Continuing and Limited Term positions as well as Sessional positions."

Institutional Response: See below for a combined response to Recommendations 7.1 and 7.2.

Recommendation 7.2: "To support plans to hire up to 60 new CT and LT faculty in 2024-2027, expand onsite faculty desk space and storage for faculty teaching materials and files."

Institutional Response: Growth projections and related faculty hiring plans presented in the application for reconsent were developed last summer and in early Fall 2023, before the implementation of institutional enrollment caps and Provincial Attestation Letters. While we recognize the importance of the panel's foregoing recommendations, our enrollment projections for 2024-2027 are continuously being reassessed. At this time, we think it is prudent to monitor ongoing external developments and revise growth, hiring, and space plans accordingly.

Section 8: Program Resources: Standard is Met

The expert review panel noted that "in Fall 2024 a new downtown campus will add 49,591 square feet and a planned 17 classrooms including a computer lab, biology lab, and two chemistry labs, along with new library facilities, a second Writing and Learning Centre, student service facilities, and student lounge space." The panel observed that the "the most dramatic improvements" will be evident in expanded capacity for science labs.

The panel's report contains detailed observations on other program resources. Ensuring adequate desk/office space for faculty is again raised as a consideration. The panel also commented that WLC staffing could be augmented by second-year students who could "make excellent peer tutors with an appropriate investment in training and resources."

"On the whole," the panel reports that "students spoke very highly of most of their instructors, including their online instructors, as well as the classroom technology, and they felt strongly supported by Student [Support] Services programs and staff, academic advisors, and the social media team." Among things they would like to see more of, students referred to "more basic tech skills in office applications and more access to WLC staff" (pp. 35-36).

Section 9: Program Consultation: Standard is Met

According to the panel, Alexander College presented "plentiful evidence of internal monitoring of performance and has long relied on SASC [Standing Academic Standards Committee] members for external quality assurance and guidance." The review panel found that AC has made "clear efforts to adapt and evolve" and "to address emerging issues" (p. 37).

Recommendation 9.1: "That an external program advisory committee be implemented for the AA degree, meeting one or two times per year, and including participation from AA students, community members and employers, and the appropriate department head[s] and SASC [Standing Academic Standards Committee] member[s]."

Institutional Response: We intend to pursue the foregoing recommendation after more immediate items have been addressed. Given the prior caution from DQAB about linking associate degrees and employment, we will need to carefully manage expectations on all sides when soliciting employer participation and feedback.

Section 10: Program Review and Assessment: Standard is Met

The panel noted that AC's "institutional self-study document is extensive and reflects on key issues of program delivery."

Conclusion

We again thank the panel for its collegiality, curiosity, and attention to detail. We trust that this response reflects our commitment to ongoing improvement, and to providing a meaningful, equitable, and inspiring experience for all students who entrust Alexander College with their education.

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