

October 2, 2023

Institutional Summary and Response to 2023 Associate of Arts Self-Study External Review

1.0 Overview

The external review of Alexander College's Self-Study was conducted by Dr. Julie Longo, Associate Vice-President Academic, Langara College; and by Samantha Patridge, Associate Professor and Undergraduate Education Committee Chair, University of the Fraser Valley. The Self-Study external reviewers commended Alexander College (AC) on a "thorough and thoughtful Self-Study of [the] Associate of Arts Degree. The reviewers noted that "the report spoke directly to the criteria in the DQAB standards for degree level education in BC," and that both "policy and process documents" and "institutional data . . . demonstrated attention to DQAB standards" and a "commitment to the BC transfer system" (p. 1).

Commenting on their site visit, the reviewers state that it was "well-organized and well-attended by the constituent groups, and that "all members of the constituent groups were forthcoming in their perspectives and helpful in answering questions." The reviewers further observed that all of the college groups they spoke with "demonstrated an impressive commitment to the mission of the organization and a good appreciation of systemic and academic challenges facing their particular student body" (p. 1).

According to the reviewers, "the faculty, administrators, and support services described an organization that is responsive to changes in the post-secondary sector, the greater provincial environment, and the changing needs of students. Faculty told us they felt supported by the institution and most of them spoke with pride about how much they enjoyed working at AC" (p. 1).

Acknowledging the "extraordinary challenges" that Alexander College and all post-secondary institutions underwent during the pandemic, the reviewers state that AC has consolidated its online experience by instituting several impressive quality assurance practices, including the adoption of mandatory internal professional development for all faculty teaching online courses" (p. 1).

Commenting on "rapid growth in enrolment and a changing student population," the reviewers note that AC has responded by scaling up faculty hiring and by adding services to support students and faculty (p. 1). In establishing a context for their report, reviewers describe an institution that takes its responsibilities very seriously.

Throughout the body of their report, the reviewers provided many other appreciative, detailed comments about AC's practices and procedures. The material below emphasizes reviewer observations and recommendations, and is supplemented by institutional responses.

2.0 Degree-Level Standards

2.1 Review Observation: The reviewers note that "AC has proposed changes to their AAD that are meant to anticipate the results of the *Draft Quality Review Degree Program Criteria (2022)*" (cited on p. 2).

Institutional Response: To confirm, relevant passages in the Self-Study describe anticipated institutional responses to DQAB-proposed associate degree changes that appear in the *Draft Quality Review Degree Program Criteria* (2022). For example, a DQAB-proposed change refers to the elimination of a lab science requirement for Associate of Arts degrees (Appendix, pp. 21-23). If this proposed change receives Ministerial approval, Alexander College will exercise its discretion to retain a lab science requirement.

2.2 Review Observation: The panel inquired about presenting associate degree concentrations as guided pathways.

Institutional Response: Associate degree concentrations assist students in tailoring their studies to areas of interest while retaining the overarching breadth of associate degrees. Indeed, for the purposes of student transfer, associate degree credentials carry distinct advantages because receiving institutions in BC typically grant associate degree holders a block of 60 credits.

2.3 Review Observation: Enrollment data seems to suggest that most students are choosing the AAD General.

Institutional Response: AC's exploration of the potential popularity and development of new associate degree concentrations is grounded in an ongoing assessment of student interest, post-secondary sector gaps and developments, and legislative directives.

2.4 Review Observation: The college may benefit from an advisory committees so that program development is made up of both academic and industry professionals who can provide valuable advice on skills and competencies needed in graduates.

Institutional Response: The creation of an Associate of Arts program advisory committee is underway.

2.5 Review Observations: The reviewers suggest that AC could place greater emphasis on the work-related relevance of associate degrees.

Institutional Response: Following DQAB directives, AC emphasizes associate degrees as credentials that facilitate university transfer. We are also promoting associate degrees as credentials that develop generic transferrable skills such as collaboration, critical thinking, and communication

2.6 Review Observation: The panel recommended further exploration of work-integrated learning and/or experiential learning opportunities within AC's associate degree curriculum.

Institutional Response: AC's curriculum promotes experiential learning in the form of class field trips to sites of cultural, historical, and environmental significance. Given our relatively small class sizes, opportunities for student research comprise another form of experiential learning, enabling students to practice the methods of quantitative or scientific inquiry.

Review Observations and Recommendation: The expansion of associate degree concentrations may call for a data-driven process on sunseting concentrations with low enrollment.

Institutional Response: We appreciate the importance of continuing to assess enrollment in all degree concentrations. It will take more time to assess student interest in some of the newer associate degree concentrations.

Review Observation: The panel was interested in a rationale for the popularity of the Associate of Arts degree in Psychology, relative to other concentrations and again noted the importance of studying enrollment trends.

Institutional Response: Based on student feedback, we infer that the Psychology concentration is popular among our students because the discipline carries inherent academic interest without requiring heavy quantitative expectations. We agree that the underlying rationale for enrolment trends deserves careful consideration as does the overall mix of concentrations.

3.0 Credential Recognition and Nomenclature

3.1 Review Observation: The Associate of Arts Degree at AC is similar in structure to those at public institutions offering the same credential and reflects DQAB's guidelines. The panel inquired as to whether the associate degree is transferring as a set of courses or as a block.

Institutional Response: The terms and conditions under which AC's Associate of Arts degree transfers to public universities are determined by provincial guidelines.

Most receiving institutions accept associate degrees for the equivalent of block transfer of 60 lower-division credits. Further, as indicated in the *BC Transfer Guide*, all AC lower-division Associate of Arts degree courses transfer widely across the BC post-secondary system. Specific lower-division requirements for baccalaureate degrees must still be satisfied. Thus, the assessment of course-to-course equivalency remains an important consideration and backfill may be necessary.

4.0 Curriculum/Program Content

4.1 Review Recommendation: The panel recommended greater participation by faculty members in the decision-making bodies of the college. The reviewers observed that Education Councils perform particularly important roles as broadly representative bodies at public institutions.

Institutional Response: Alexander College is in the process of broadening representation on its Education Committee, so that this committee performs the function of an academic council that is responsible for academic policy, standards, and program integrity.

4.2 Review Recommendation: Faculty members expressed a desire for more transparent communication around curriculum decisions.

Institutional Response: The Curriculum Committee has developed and approved processes and templates for decisions about the implementation of new curriculum. Clarity on decision-making process for new courses and programs could be improved by publishing these processes in the Deans' Office Canvas shell for faculty. This is underway.

4.3 External Review Observation: The curriculum goals at AC are expressed in terms of General Educational Goals, program objectives, and learning outcomes. The proliferation of different terms to describe graduate outcomes should be considered.

Institutional Response: AC's General Educational Goals were developed and named over a decade ago. We are reviewing these educational goals, and their link to program objectives and outcomes. The concepts of program learning objectives, program learning outcomes, and performance indicators belong

to an established tradition of program evaluation that is widely used in North America and supported by such organizations as the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) and the Institute for the Development of Excellence in Assessment in Leadership (IDEAL). AC has engaged in program evaluation training that is based on ABET and IDEAL terminology and concepts.

4.4 Review Observation: AC has mapped the learning objectives in the AAD curriculum using a typical course selection for a general AAD and demonstrated where in the curriculum students were achieving the program learning outcomes. Ideally, AC would map all AAD concentrations to ensure and demonstrate learning objectives are being met no matter the course combination or concentration. We commend the work done by AC to demonstrate AAD curricular alignment to the six dimensions of knowledge that apply to all the principal degree levels in Canada.

Institutional Response: The point above is well taken. We appreciate the value of comprehensive curriculum mapping and have included a truly comprehensive map in past self-studies. That said, given the wide latitude for associate degree electives, curriculum maps that comprehensively detail how *all* potential individual course selections for *all* concentrations meet *all* program outcomes extend for many pages, resulting in 100s of data points whose volume make interpretation difficult.

5.0 Methods of Delivery

5.1 Review Observation: AC reports they have adapted the Quality Matters (QM) rubric for asynchronous online delivery into an Alexander College--Teaching Online Certificate (AC--TOC), noting that both the Associate Dean and the Instructional Support Centre Supervisor have been trained as certified QM online instructors. The QM rubric for online learning is a widely recognized and respected methodology for building online courses and might be offered as professional development to general faculty members.

Institutional Response: The AC-TOC is, in fact, available to faculty members. Moreover, a new course, entitled Effective use of the Learning Management System (ELMS), is being developed to address best LMS practices amid in-person learning environments. This new course will be available to all faculty members and offered multiple times each year, similar to how we regularly deliver Instructional Skills Workshops.

5.2 Review Observation: There are many opportunities for faculty development offered through the Instructional Support Centre. The Instruction Skills Workshop (ISW), for example, boasts a high participation rate by new faculty, providing a good foundation for praxis and a learning community for new faculty members. AC reports that faculty members engage in both self-directed and “in-house” professional development opportunities and that the latter are mandatory. We suggest AC continue to find incentives for faculty to participate in professional development opportunities.

7.0 Human Resources

7.1 Review Observation: AC should increase the number of regular faculty.

Institutional Response: As noted in our Self-Study, AC’s goal is to achieve 50% regularization among faculty. We are making steady progress toward this goal.

7.2 Review Observation: AC appears to have done a good job of matching enrolment growth with positions related to enrolment growth, including Wellness, WLC, Instructional support, and IT support. Professional staff hold appropriate advanced degrees for their area.

7.3 Review Observation: AC does not have a formal EDI policy (or EDI committee), but leadership expressed an intention to address this gap.

Institutional Response: AC's HR Department continues to lay the groundwork for an EDI policy by doing an environmental scan of policies and committees at peer institutions. Further, we recognize that progress on Truth and Reconciliation involves a distinct social justice obligation. As reported in the Self-Study, a faculty-led working group that reports to the Curriculum Committee is taking important first steps on Indigenizing AC's curriculum.

7.4 Review Observation: The college currently has no self-identified Indigenous students registered, nor does it mention any self-identified Indigenous faculty or staff.

Institutional Response: To encourage Indigenous students to consider AC as a post-secondary option, we have recently introduced many new Indigenous scholarships and are using our social media channels to promote these scholarship opportunities among Indigenous communities. Following the reviewers' observation above, we will consult with our HR department about a means of tracking Indigeneity and other forms of diversity among our employees.

8.0 Program Resources, Infrastructure, and Student Services Units

8.1 Review Observation: Elaborating on student supports, the reviewers note that AC has matched their enrolment growth with a well-developed web of student support activities and services, including student orientation, a Career Services Office, ten hours of counselling for all students, and four academic advisors with RISIA status to assist with student visa advice as a part of their academic advising. AC enjoys excellent student retention rates, which they attribute to their student supports, shifting motivations of their students, a general lack of open enrollment in Metro Vancouver, and remedial programming for suspended students.

8.2-3 Review Observation: Students and faculty noted a lack of space on the Burnaby campus.

Institutional Response: The opening of the large, multi-floor downtown campus is expected to alleviate space pressures at the Burnaby campus.

8.4 Review Observation: SASC reports from several disciplines, particularly in the sciences, identified the need to refresh or improve equipment and the need for more equipment storage space.

Institutional Response: Refreshing equipment is underway, particularly as we equip the science labs in the new downtown campus. The new campus also offers more storage space.

9.0 Program Review Processes and Stakeholder Satisfaction Levels

9.1 Review Observation: All faculty members are required to complete student mid-term reports that represent at least 30% of the assessment of the course. This practice likely contributes to student satisfaction with the programs offered at AC because at-risk students are flagged early and offered support to improve their skills and therefore have a better chance of success at passing courses.

Institutional Response: We agree that mid-term reporting procedures likely contribute to student satisfaction and retention.

9.2 Review Observation: AC conducts annual student satisfaction surveys and demonstrates a record of responding to feedback.

9.3 Review Observation: AC's self-study provides ample evidence of the college's engagement in institutional research and assessment activities. There is clearly a role for a more robust Institutional Research department at AC; this finding is supported by recent administration attendance at the Institutional Research and Planning (BCIRP) conference at Royal Roads in 2023 and the external reviewers' discussions with the Registrar and team.

Institutional Response: AC's VP of [Institutional Research] and Provost are currently leading the implementation of an Institutional Research Office and providing guidance on related practices.

Section 10: AC Preliminary Recommendations

10.1 Review Observation: AC presented an ambitious set of nine internal recommendations emerging from its Self-Study. The panel advise breaking down the recommended actions into phases with timelines that span the next three to five years.

Institutional Response: We think this is excellent advice and will follow it once a confirmed action plan emerges from the re-consent process.

Institutional Summary of External Review Observations and Recommendations

We submit that the External Review observations and recommendations reflect the immeasurable value of the Self-Study process. The External Review contains many insightful observations that AC will reflect upon as it proceeds with the application for re-consent.

In their own conclusion, the external reviewers note that they "were impressed by the commitment of AC's administration, faculty and staff to the institution's mission. The reviewers stated that "the program review process was undertaken thoughtfully and the interest we saw in receiving feedback and advice was sincere. While there are some areas to continue to work on, there are no major concerns that we could see that might delay re-consent." (External Review, p. 14). For its part, AC expresses gratitude to Julie Longo and Samantha Pattridge for their outstanding service to the post-secondary sector.