
Undergraduate Course Review Policy

Effective Date March 1997

Purpose

Athabasca University courses must be current in terms of content, examples, case studies, teaching and assessment methods. This is a key aspect of:

- academic integrity
- academic accountability
- program quality
- overall credibility and profile of Athabasca University as a Canadian university.

This policy will provide the guidelines and processes whereby Athabasca University's undergraduate courses are current in relation to the nature of the discipline, pedagogy and assessment, and so to maintain the university's reputation as a leading distance education provider, to uphold academic integrity of its programs, and to provide students with the best possible learning experience.

Definitions

This revision of the course Review Policy emphasizes the seven-phase course development process as it applies to evaluation (phase 6) and to course revision (phase 7). The seven phases of course development are:

Phase 1 General Program Plan

Phase 1 embraces the long-range institutional and educational plans that stipulate the criteria for development, revision or cancellation of new or existing programs. These long-range plans are identified in two sets of plans: (1) the Strategic University Plan and sub-plans and (2) the plans of both academic centres and program areas that flow out of that plan.

Pre-Phase 2 Brief Academic Program Proposal

Before the detailed Phase 2 Program Plan is prepared within the parameters set by the Strategic University Plan, a brief Pre-Phase 2 Proposal for a new program is circulated for discussion among the Academic Centres of the University. The Pre-Phase 2 allows for a full discussion of options to cross-list courses and modularize



others for adaptation for different disciplines; thereby helping to avoid duplication of effort before significant investment is made in program development. After responses to the circulated Pre-Phase 2 Proposal have been received and responded to, the Pre-Phase 2 Proposal is approved by the Office of the Vice-President, Academic.

Phase 2 Detailed Individual Program Plan

In Phase 2, a detailed program plan is prepared that describes courses, levels, and course relationships within programs identified in the Phase 1 General Program Plan and the Pre-Phase 2 Proposal. This plan is subsequently presented for approval by the University according to guidelines set by Athabasca University Academic Council, Athabasca University Governing Council, and Alberta Learning.

Pre-Phase 3 Preliminary Course Proposal

Prior to the development of a course Phase 3 Proposal, a Preliminary Course Proposal is prepared. The Preliminary Course Proposal is then circulated to provide opportunities for cross listing, modularization, and joint use of curricula and avoidance of duplication. After the course coordinator responds to the comments submitted by academic centres and various departments, the Centre Chair then approves the Preliminary Course Proposal.

Phase 3 Individual Course Plan for Design, Development and Delivery

The course coordinator submits a Phase 3 Report for all new courses. As appropriate, the Report describes such planning details as major course components, delivery mode(s), estimated costs, needed supplementary library materials, selected texts, and other required resources. (For reading courses, a Short Phase 3 Report is circulated.) The Report is circulated for discussion among the Academic Centres as well as pertinent departments. Upon the recommendation of the Centre Chair, the Vice-President Academic approves the Phase 3 Report.

Phase 4 Course Materials Preparation

In Phase 4, the course coordinator oversees preparation of course materials according to the course specifications described in the Phase 3 Report. Before submitting the Phase 4 materials for editing and production, the Course Coordinator checks them to ensure their integrity and completeness. The Phase 4 course materials are then edited by the University's course materials editors, or by editors approved as meeting these standards; visual design, typesetting, and electronic elements are added, as needed; and copyright clearances are obtained. Course Materials Production then receives all course materials that meet minimum production standards for printing and distribution to students.

Phase 5 Delivery and Tutoring



Delivery and tutoring of the course are undertaken according to the delivery specifications described in the Phase 3 Report.

Phase 6 Evaluation

The focus of Phase 6 is on evaluation of the instructional effectiveness of the course materials. Evaluation includes a feedback process for the purpose of making the course more effective. It may involve collection of data from a variety of sources (e.g., students, program reviewers, call centres, help desks, tutors, Library Services, Course Materials Production, and others as appropriate). Evaluation results are reported to the Centre Chair and the Office of the Vice-President, Academic. The Centre Chair/Director will be responsible for ensuring that the results of Phase 6 are incorporated into the course revision.

Phase 7 Course Revision

Course revisions occur during Phase 7 and are the responsibility of the course coordinator. Each course is assessed annually by the Course Coordinators according to such criteria as: relevance of the material; currency of the texts and other purchased materials; rigor of the course content; accuracy of the materials; currency of tests and assignments; aesthetic and instructional effectiveness of the text and multimedia; adequacy of library resources and services; and transferability to other universities. A revision is conducted on the basis of the assessment. Phases 6 and 7 are subject to the Course Review Policy. The Centre Chair approves all revisions.

Routine course review - continuous and annual review of a course initiated and coordinated by the academic in charge of each course.

Formal course review - review of a course conducted by the Office of the Vice-President Academic in addition to routine reviews.

Phase 3 distribution list - list of all Academic Centre Chairs, managers and interested University staff who review and comment on Phase 3 reports. This list is revised from time to time to accommodate personnel and organizational changes.

Policy

All undergraduate courses will be reviewed routinely at the centre level, and selected courses will be reviewed formally by the Office of the Vice President Academic. This review is Phase 6 of the Course Production Policy.

The responsibility of routinely reviewing a course lies with the Course Coordinator, as assigned by the Vice President, Academic.

Courses with high registrations or those that have exceptional circumstances, as determined by the VPA in consultation with the Director and/or course coordinator, will be subject to a formal course evaluation.



The criteria by which a course will be reviewed routinely and/or formally, include:

- the relevance of the material
- the currency of texts and other acquired materials
- the rigor of the course content
- the accuracy of the materials
- the currency of tests and assignments
- the course's transferability to other universities in Alberta
- the currency and utility of any Web site or other electronic media.

In both the routine and formal review of a course, opinions and data provided by the following will be taken into account:

- course registrations, completion rates, grading profile, etc.;
- colleagues in Athabasca University, including tutors and beyond as appropriate;
- the copyright office;
- members of the original development team as appropriate;
- existing stock and availability of course materials;
- library activity;
- student's course evaluations;
- the university's educational plan;
- the use of the course a program requirement or elective;
- incorporation or expansion of educational technologies;
- cost implications of materials;
- other sources of information as appropriate.

In addition, a formal review will include the opinions of external reviewers selected by the Vice President Academic in consultation with the course coordinator.

Regulation

N/A

Procedure

The Course Coordinator, in consultation with tutors as appropriate, will annually review his or her courses for all delivery options (individualized, grouped, and on-line study) against the criteria listed above and using information provided by the sources such as those listed above.

When indicated by the results of the Phase 6 course review, the coordinator will propose a revision to the course. He or she will inform the Centre Chair/Director and complete a Phase 7 (course revision) Report with a rationale summarizing the information used to come to this decision. The recommendation will be for:



- a. minor revision
- b. intermediate revision
- c. full revision (see descriptions attached)

The Centre Chair/Director will be responsible for notifying (for minor revisions) or for circulating the revision report (for full revisions) to other Centre Chairs/Directors and program directors, the Coordinator Institutional Studies, and to all those who normally receive Phase 3 proposals. Once all comments are received, the Chair/Director will approve the revision (with or without amendments) and forward the proposal to the Vice President, Academic.

After approval by the Vice President Academic, the Chair/Director will ensure that the course revision is incorporated into the following process:

- annual work loads;
- requests for Subject Matter Expert funds and other resources as required in the annual budget cycle;
- the Academic Centre's long term course development/revision plan;
- annual course development and production schedule (timing and resources);
- examination updates;
- annual calendar development;
- course outline up-dates;
- revision for ACAT

The Course Coordinator will have the overall responsibility for managing the course revision.

Approved By

Council of Centre Chairs
Educational Review Committee
Academic Council, March 5, 1997

Amended Date/Motion No.

Approved by AUAC: Motion 160-6, December 6, 2000
Approved by AUAC: Motion 166-7, October 31, 2001

Related References, Policies and Procedures

[Guidelines for Preparation of Phase 7 \(Course Revision\) Proposals](#)

Course Production Policy

Course Outlines Policy

Examination Currency and Replacement Policy

Role Description: Academic

Role Description: Centre Chair

Guidelines for Course Coordinators



Guidelines for Course Authors
Educational Plan
Strategic University Plan
Educational Review Committee Plan
Library Collections Policy

Applicable Legislation/Regulation

N/A

Responsible Position/Department

Office of the Vice President, Academic
This policy will be reviewed every two years.

Guidelines for the Preparation of Phase 7 (Course Revision) Proposals

1.0 The Purpose of Phase 7 Proposals

- 1.1 Provide the data that shows the successes and problems in the operation of a course.
- 1.2 Identify and provide solutions for the identified problems.
- 1.3 Describe the time, money, and personnel required for the solutions.

2.0 The Content of a Phase 7 Proposal

2.1 Course Demographics

The proposal would indicate whether the following features are satisfactory or if they require change, why, and how they will be changed.

- Title
- Number
- Credits
- Level

2.2 Registrations

The registrations for the relevant time period should be described in terms of:

- special or unique characteristics
- analysis of course registration and program enrollment trends.

2.3 Overview of Planned Changes



This should be an abstraction from the specific details describing the problems, evidence of the problems, and the nature of the proposed changes.

2.4 Detailed Data Analysis

This should be a compilation of data describing the progress and success rates of students, number of exams received, questionnaire data, and reports from all the data sources drawn upon. This section should be treated rather like an experimental results and analysis section, clearly indicating the relationships among data, analysis, and proposed solution.

2.5 Detailed Listing of Course Materials and Delivery Components to be Changed

This section should describe the specific changes to be made. At a minimum, a course revision plan should specify updating of tutor manuals and exam revision.

2.6 Detailed Resource Scheduling

This section should provide a development plan similar to that in new course proposals specifying by whom and when each task will be accomplished.

2.7 Budget

Cost estimates, especially those requiring external expenditures of funds, will be necessary in all proposals.

3.0 Special Considerations

3.1 Existing Materials

In the case of reprinting or reordering, course coordinators should provide information about the expected revision plan for commercially prepared materials and the consequence, if any, on copyright limitations, for the reprinting of materials.

3.2 New Materials

If new commercial materials are planned for purchase, the Course Coordinator should specify if and when these materials will be reprinted or revised by the publisher.

4.0 Phase 7 (Revision) Classification

Revision proposals will be classified in terms of the magnitude of resources required for their completion and in terms of the numbers of administrative units involved in the process. The following descriptions will provide general guidelines for classification of revision proposals for courses offered by individualized study.



4.1 Minor Revisions

This type of revision requires no substantive changes to the academic content or educational design of the course. Usually occasioned by new editions of textbooks, this type of revision is sometimes called a basic revision or a rolling revision. The following criteria reflect an editorial perspective on what constitutes a minor revision:

- revised page numbers in the Study Guide to reflect references to a new edition of the same textbook
- minor revisions to graphics and/or text (less than 5%)
- minor changes to Supplementary Materials Lists or Reference sections
- insertion or deletion of one or two items to a reading File
- minor changes to assignments, study, or practice activities
- insertion of any accumulated addenda material
- updated "generic" (non-course specific) information in the Student Manual
- a requirement of no more than a maximum of six weeks to complete the editing process

4.1.1 Procedures for Minor Revisions

For a minor revision, the course coordinator prepares a revision report (attached) for approval by the Vice President Academic (or designate). The report is then circulated by the Administrative Assistant Academic Support Unit to several departments including Academic Centres, Educational Media Development, Course Materials Production, Office of the Registrar, Learning Services Tutorial, and the Office of the Vice-President, Academic.

These revisions, in substance, require the resources of one unit, such as the Course Coordinator, and only occasional consultation with other units such as the Library, Educational Media Development, or the Office of the Registrar. A revision designated as a "minor revision" should not call upon significant resources that cannot be authorized by a Centre Chair/Director.

4.2 Intermediate Revisions

These revisions require substantive change to the educational and/or academic content of the Study Guide and/or a minority of the course units and with additional changes to other course materials.

4.2.1. Procedures for Intermediate Revisions

For an Intermediate revision, the course coordinator prepares a Phase 7 Proposal for approval by the Vice President Academic (or designate). A Phase 7 Proposal consists of the items listed under section 2.0. The Phase 7 Proposal is then submitted for circulation to the Supervisor, Academic Support Unit to the Phase 3 distribution list.



4.3 Full Revisions

These revisions would involve, more or less, the complete re-writing of the course. Full revisions are sometimes referred to as complete revisions or course replacements.

The following criteria reflect an editorial perspective on what constitutes a Full revision:

- rewriting of substantial portions of the Study Guide to incorporate new concepts, updated information, and references to a substantially revised edition of the same textbook or to a new textbook
- addition of new units, sections, or lessons to a Study Guide
- insertion of several new items to a Reading File (requiring new copyright clearances)
- insertion of new graphic material or substantial revisions of existing tables and figures requiring work from a visual designer
- transfer of text from one medium format to another (e.g., HTML to Interleaf, photocopies to xdot, etc.)

4.3.1 Procedures for Full Revisions

For a Full revision, the course coordinator prepares a Phase 7 Proposal for approval by the Vice President Academic (or designate). A Phase 7 Proposal consists of the items listed under section 2.0. The Phase 7 Proposal is then submitted for circulation to the Supervisor, Academic Support Unit to the Phase 3 distribution list.