



Senate Committee on Academic Development Report to Senate - Meeting of May 22, 2012

Interim Report to Senate on Procedures for the Suspension of Admissions to Academic Programs

Background

On January 24, 2012, Senate approved the following Motion:

Moved by Senator Campbell, seconded by Senator El Rahimy, that Senate direct the Senate Committee on Academic Development (SCAD) to outline, for consideration by Senate a procedure for the suspension of admissions to an academic program, paying due attention both to the question of the appropriate governance bodies that should be involved and to consultation with faculty members and students in the program. SCAD shall be requested to produce its final recommendations at the April 2012 Senate Meeting.

At its meetings on February 1st and 29th, 2012, SCAD discussed the above referral from Senate. It was agreed to establish a small subcommittee that would collect information relevant to suspension of admissions to academic programs at Queen's University and provide draft recommendations that would be reviewed by SCAD prior to SCAD submitting its recommendations to Senate. The Subcommittee was chaired by S. Cole (Chair of SCAD) and included elected members of SCAD L. Long, I. Johnsrude, and J. Emrich - as well as H. Horton (Associate Dean, Arts and Science). A memo was sent by the Chair and Secretary on behalf of SCAD in early February soliciting information from Deans of Faculties/Schools about current considerations, guidelines, and/or procedures around decisions to suspend admissions into an academic Program and/or Plan. Responses to this memo were shared with SCAD.

The subcommittee met three times between March 20th and April 18th and drafted a document entitled *Guidelines for the Suspension of Admissions in Academic Programs*. This draft document was reviewed and revised by SCAD at its meeting on May 2nd and it was agreed unanimously by members of SCAD that the Chair would present an interim report to Senate with proposed guidelines (document attached).

Early on in the process SCAD and its subcommittee reviewed responses from each individual Faculty/School that outlined current considerations, guidelines, and/or procedures around decisions to suspend admissions into a Program and/or Plan. The information received from the Faculties revealed some variation in procedures often commensurate with the complexity of the Faculty structure (for example, whether or not the Faculty was departmentalized). However, some common points emerged:

- Discussions relating to a possible suspension of admissions to a Program/Plan are often initiated at the Department/ Program/Plan level.
- Factors influencing decisions to suspend admissions to a Program or Plan are shared by all Faculties in some instances while in other instances, the dominant influencing factors are more Faculty- and/or discipline-specific.
- The formal decision to suspend admissions is made by the Dean.
- The Dean's decision is made after consultation: very broadly in some instances while in others, more limited (e.g. after receiving advice from an advisory board or from his/her senior administration team).

Next Steps

The purpose of this interim report is to update Senate and to seek input from the Queen's community. SCAD proposes that the Interim Report to Senate and the draft document entitled *Guidelines for the Suspension of Admissions in Academic Programs* be distributed to the Queen's community with an invitation to comment as follows:

- Posted on the website of the University Secretariat;
<http://www.queensu.ca/secretariat/index/SuspensionofAdmission.pdf>
- Circulated to all Senators, Deans, Directors and Department Heads with a request to circulate to their students, staff and faculty;
- Deadline for written comments will be **Monday, September 17th**

Comments received will be reviewed by SCAD and a final Report will be submitted to Senate with a target deadline of November 2012. Please send your comments to P. Watkin, SCAD Secretary at: watkinm@queensu.ca

Respectfully submitted,

Susan P. C. Cole, PhD, FRSC
Chair, Senate Committee on Academic Development

Committee Members:

M. Baird, Chemistry
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J. Emrich, Law
D. Garvie, Economics
K. Gossen, JD '12
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DRAFT

Recommended Procedures for the Suspension of Admissions to Academic Programs

Objectives

The following recommended procedures for the suspension of admissions to an Academic Program and/or Plan¹ (see definitions in footnote) were developed to ensure that the suspension is in the overall best interest of the University, and in particular its students, and that the procedures are as transparent and as consistent as possible across Faculties and Schools.

Background

Past records indicate that the decision to suspend admissions to an academic Program/Plan is not one that is undertaken lightly. In order to ensure that such a significant decision is in the best interest of all stakeholders, it is important that whenever possible, all of the relevant issues surrounding a proposed suspension have been considered at both the level of the affected Academic Unit(s) and the level of the Faculty/School.

There is ample evidence from the past that discussions that have ultimately led to a decision to suspend admissions to various Programs/Plans at Queen's have been initiated by faculty members and departments/academic units themselves as well as by more senior academic administrators. Often the decision has been reached by consensus or mutual consent. It is also evident that the factors that led to the initiation of such discussions are extremely varied, not infrequently complex, and have originated from both academic and financial concerns. These concerns have arisen from issues both internal (e.g. outcome of an internal academic review (IAR)) and external (e.g. Ontario Council of Graduate Studies (OCGS) appraisal or professional accreditation review) to the University. In some instances, the factors are very program-specific while in others they are more general. Further, in some instances the factors are publicly and widely known, whereas in others they may be more confidential and/or sensitive in nature (e.g. they may relate, at least in part, to staffing and/or personnel issues). Thus, factors that play a part in a decision to suspend admissions may be contained in reports from external reviewers of an academic Program/Plan and/or an accreditation report, sections of which may contain advice and recommendations that are not disclosed publicly and are exempt under Section 13 (1) of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FIPPA) Guidelines.

Factors that influence decisions to suspend admissions to an academic Program or Plan are not necessarily mutually exclusive and may include (but are not limited to) one or more of the following:

- loss (or impending or anticipated loss) of professional accreditation
- poor or diminished quality of academic offerings (e.g. impending negative report from IAR or OCGS; now Cyclical Program Review and Quality Council Appraisal)
- loss of faculty or unavailability of faculty or facilities that results in a compromised ability or inability to deliver a Plan/Program of the high quality desired
- low enrolment that might jeopardize the academic quality of the Program / Plan or be considered a poorly justified expenditure of scarce resources

- inadequate applicant pool and yield to fill enrolment targets
- current relevance of the Plan/Program in relation to changes in the academic discipline
- loss of faculty or unavailability of faculty that results in breach of workload agreements if available faculty are required to take on extra workload to allow a Program/ Plan to be offered of the quality desired
- scope and duration of the possible impact (e.g. whether the suspension affects an academic Plan or an entire academic Program)
- lack of compatibility with the strategic direction of the Academic Unit/Faculty/University
- availability of similar Programs/Plan elsewhere in Ontario and/or Canada

Recommended Procedures for Decision Making

In taking a decision to suspend admissions to an academic Program or Plan, the relevant Dean(s) has a critical leadership role to play. Consequently, before the decision is finalized, it is recommended that the Dean(s):

1. Ensures that there are opportunities for affected individuals and groups to provide input into the decision [note: in addition to faculty members, students and staff in the affected unit, this may include one or more of the following: cognate academic units, partner institutions, academic administration, Faculty Board(s) or equivalent, accreditation bodies, external bodies (e.g. COU Quality Council) and/or other relevant stakeholders]]
2. Ensures that alternatives to suspending admissions to the Program / Plan have been explored and explains why these alternatives are not considered feasible
3. Provides an analysis of the anticipated effect, if any, on other academic and non-academic units and/or Programs/Plans at Queen's
4. Whenever possible, ensures the timing of the decision takes into account provincial application deadlines (e.g. OUAC) (particularly in the case of direct-entry Programs); publication deadlines for recruitment materials should also be considered
5. Makes sure that there is a well articulated plan in place that will ensure that students currently enrolled in the Plan/Program will be able to meet graduation requirements. Timely communication of that plan to the students, staff, faculty, and academic administrators affected is essential
6. Develops a communication plan in consultation with the Provost, including a media release if appropriate
7. Conveys the decision, and the reasons for it to: students, staff and faculty most closely affiliated with the Program/Plan; the broader academic community; and, the relevant Faculty Board(s) or equivalent

It is further recommended that:

8. The suspension of admissions to a Program/Plan should be time-limited (usually 2 years) and the Dean should provide an interim report to Faculty Board (or equivalent body) after the first year, and each year thereafter. At the end of the initial specified time of suspension, the Dean should advise the Provost and Senate (with reasons) of his/her further decisions regarding the suspension which may involve one of the following:
 - a. to extend the suspension by a further 2 years (maximum).
 - b. to lift the suspension and resume admissions to the original Program/Plan
 - c. to lift the suspension and resume admissions to a revised/ restructured Program/Plan [note: restructuring/revision may involve major modifications to a Program/Plan which, as defined by *QUQAPs*, will require approval by SCAD and Senate. Additional approvals by COU Quality Council] (and an external accreditation body in the case of a professional Program) may also be necessary].
 - d. to initiate closure of the Program/Plan

If options 8.a, b or c above are to be taken, timing of the decision should take into consideration provincial application deadlines and if possible, publication deadlines for recruitment materials.

¹**Degree Plan:** an approved set of courses required to focus in an area of study. The depth of focus may vary according to Plan type. At least one, but possibly more than one Plan, is required to obtain a degree. Examples of Plans would include a Major in Geological Engineering, a Specialization in Life Sciences or a PhD Graduate in English. In departmentalized faculties (e.g. Arts and Science, Engineering and Applied Science), undergraduate students are usually admitted to Plans following completion of their first year of study. A Plan usually defines between 25-75% of the courses required for an undergraduate degree Program.

Degree Program: an approved set of courses leading to a degree. A degree Program will require one or more Plans, together with other requirements, such as electives, minimum academic performance standards and (for most graduate Programs) a thesis requirement. Examples of Programs would include the BSc (Hons), BSc (Eng), or the PhD degrees. Students are admitted to undergraduate Programs from high school or by transfer from other faculties or postsecondary institutions. It is important to note that a degree Program (upper case 'p') is distinct from the more general concept of an academic program (lower case 'p').

Recommended Procedures for Decision Making

Possibility of a suspension of admissions into an Academic Program and/or Plan raised at departmental, decanal and/or senior academic administrative level



Consultations take place among the appropriate Faculty Dean(s) and faculty members, students and staff involved in the Program/Plan to identify and discuss the issues, possible options or alternatives, and their academic and financial implications

Faculty Dean(s) to act on behalf of the Program/Plan stakeholders and consult more broadly with the Provost and the wider academic community

The Academic Unit(s) begins working with the Dean(s) to develop plans to ensure that students currently enrolled in the Program/Plan will be able to meet graduation requirements

Faculty Dean(s) makes a formal decision to suspend admissions and informs the Provost, discussing with him/her how the decision can be communicated to stakeholders most effectively

The Dean(s) conveys the decision (and the reasons for it) to students, staff and faculty most closely affiliated with the Program/Plan

The Dean(s) informs the broader academic community of the decision

The Dean(s) communicates the decision (and the reasons for it) to the relevant Faculty Board(s) (or equivalent)