

Senate Committee on Academic Development

Report to Senate - Meeting of March 19, 2013

Report to Senate on Recommended Procedures Concerning the Temporary Suspension of Admissions to Academic Programs

The following recommended procedures concerning the temporary suspension of admissions to an Academic Program and/or Plan ¹(see footnote for definitions) were drafted in response to a motion passed at Senate on 25 November 2011:

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.

Although conflicting legal opinions on governance and decanal authority do not leave the issue free of doubt, SCAD has proceeded on the assumption that authority to temporarily suspend admissions to an academic Program/Plan rests with the Dean(s)².

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').

² This assumption was confirmed by the Honourable Frank Iacobucci in his legal opinion dated November 12, 2012: "Returning to Question #2(b), in my opinion it is likely that a court, in the absence of a specific direction from the Senate that decisions involving the suspension of enrolment into an academic program must be made by the Senate, would not find it to be unlawful for an authorized delegate of the Senate to make such a decision".

However, if admissions to a Program/Plan are temporarily suspended, then it is in the overall best interest of the University, and particularly of its students, that the procedures followed be as transparent and consistent as possible across Faculties and Schools.

Analysis and Discussion

The decision to temporarily 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 overall best interest of all stakeholders, it is important that whenever possible, all of the relevant issues surrounding a proposed temporary suspension have been considered at both the level of the affected Academic Unit(s) and the level of the Faculty/School.

Discussions that have ultimately led to a decision to temporarily 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 a decision has been reached by consensus or mutual consent. Factors that led to the initiation of such discussions are extremely varied, not infrequently complex, and have originated from both academic and resource (including financial) concerns. These concerns have arisen from issues both internal to the University (e.g. outcome of an internal academic review (IAR)) and external to the University (e.g. Ontario Council of Graduate Studies (OCGS) appraisal or professional accreditation review). In some instances, the factors have been Program/Plan-specific while in others they have been more general.

Further, in some instances the factors were publicly and widely known, whereas in others they have been more confidential and/or sensitive in nature (e.g. they may have related, at least in part, to staffing and/or personnel issues). Thus, factors that have played a part in a decision to temporarily suspend admissions have been contained in reports from external reviewers of an academic Program/Plan and/or an accreditation report, sections of which contained 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 have influenced decisions to temporarily 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 review; now Cyclical Program Review and Quality Council Appraisal)
- 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
- loss (or unavailability) of faculty or facilities that results in a compromised ability or inability to deliver a Program/Plan of the high quality desired

- loss (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 high quality desired
- uniqueness of Program/Plan offered by Queen's
- diminished relevance of the Program/Plan in relation to changes in the academic discipline
- lack of compatibility with the strategic direction of the Academic Unit/Faculty/University
- scope and duration of the possible impact (e.g. whether the suspension affects an academic Plan or an entire academic Program)

Motion

that Senate approve the *Recommended Procedures Concerning the Temporary Suspension of Admissions to Academic Programs.*

Respectfully submitted,



Laeque K. Daneshmend, PhD, DIC
Chair, Senate Committee on Academic Development

Committee Members:

L. Anstey, PhD'15, Education
M. Baird, Chemistry
L. Daneshmend, Deputy Provost (Chair)
J. Emrich, Faculty of Law
D. Garvie, Economics
A. Gill, BCom'15
I. Johnsrude, Psychology
L. Long, BComp (Honours)'13
K. McAuley, Chemical Engineering
P. Oosthuizen, Academic Colleague

Recommended Procedures Concerning the Temporary Suspension of Admissions to Academic Programs

Recommended Procedures for Decision Making

In considering a decision to temporarily suspend admissions to an academic Program or Plan, the relevant Dean(s) has a critical leadership role to play. The underlying factors giving rise to the concerns about a specific academic Program will dictate the urgency of the situation. Some of the recommended procedures in the decision making process below may not be appropriate in all situations, particularly those involving a privacy issue, sensitive or confidential staffing and/or personnel issues and/or issues related to a Section 13(1) FIPPA exemption. Consequently, it is not intended that the recommendations are to be followed in a prescriptive inflexible manner.

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.
2. Ensures that alternatives to temporarily suspending admissions to the Program/Plan have been explored and explains, to the extent possible, the feasibility (or lack of feasibility) of these alternatives.
3. Conducts an analysis of the anticipated effect, if any, a temporary suspension might have on other academic and non-academic units and/or Programs/Plans at Queen's.
4. Conducts an analysis of the anticipated impact, if any, a temporary suspension might have on the equity goals of the Academic Unit/Faculty/University, and steps that will be taken to ensure that, to the extent possible, these goals continue to be met.
5. Develops a communication plan regarding his/her decision in consultation with the Provost, including a media release if appropriate.
6. Conveys his/her decision, and when possible, 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.

Recommended Procedures Following a Decision to Temporarily Suspend Admissions

Once a decision is made to temporarily suspend admissions, it is imperative that there is a well-articulated plan in place that will ensure that students currently enrolled in the affected Program/Plan will be able to meet graduation requirements. Every effort must be made to communicate this plan in a timely fashion to the students, staff, faculty, and academic administrators affected by the decision to temporarily suspend admissions.

If admissions to a Program/Plan are temporarily suspended, it is recommended that the suspension be time-limited (for up to 2 years) and the Dean (or Deans) 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 temporary suspension, it is further recommended that the Dean (or Deans) should advise the Provost and Senate (with reasons) of his/her further decision regarding the temporary suspension which may be one of the following:

- a. to extend the temporary suspension by a further 2 years (maximum).
- b. to lift the temporary suspension and resume admissions to the original Program/Plan
- c. to lift the temporary 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 consider closure of the Program/Plan according to existing protocols

If options a, b or c above are to be followed, timing of the decision should take into consideration, to the extent possible, provincial application deadlines (e.g. OUAC) (particularly in the case of direct-entry Programs) and publication deadlines for recruitment materials.