GUIDELINES FOR A REVIEW OF THE CURRICULUM
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INSTRUCTIONAL DEVELOPMENT UNITS
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Introduction

Curriculum review in the context of our new Strategic Plan 2007-2012, is to set the stage for a guided process through teaching and learning, so as to develop the knowledge and skills that the UWI graduate of the future must possess. Before we delve into curriculum review we should first explore the meaning of curriculum.

If we define curriculum as Doll (1996) does, then we believe that the curriculum “... is the formal and informal content and process by which learners gain knowledge and understanding, develop skills, and alter attitudes, appreciations, and values under the auspices of” (p.15) the institution. This definition embraces what one learns and how one learns and highlights the centrality of the learner in the curriculum processes.

The curriculum thus defined, especially the formal aspects which are planned and presumably observable, can be readily reviewed and evaluated and hence improved upon. Informal aspects which include, but are not limited to, students’ own strategies which they use to cope with the university’s bureaucratic organisation and arrangements, and their social relationships within the institution, are somewhat more challenging to plan for, but which can enhance or erode the gains of the formal curriculum. Therefore, in using the curriculum to ensure academic standards, relevance and responsiveness to needs of our student population, we will have to constantly ask questions such as: What is going on here? What effect is it having on our curriculum intentions? How can we improve on what we are doing?

In order to effectively review and improve the curriculum, it is necessary to ask these questions and then break them down into constituent parts depending upon:

- The nature of the discipline.
- The specific curriculum intentions in a discipline.

Benefits of Curriculum Review

Some of the benefits of a review of the curriculum are as follows:

(i) More relevant curricula/ programme offerings

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(ii) Better performing students
(iii) Better prepared graduates
(iv) Improved graduate satisfaction
(v) Improved employer satisfaction
(vi) Improved relationships between students and teaching staff
(vii) Greater staff satisfaction with student progress
(viii) An educational institution that is more responsive to the needs of its various publics

Structuring the Curriculum Review Process

The major challenges to units or departments in engaging in a review of their curriculum are where to start and how to get the process going.

It should be underscored that the curriculum review process is underpinned by dialogue. This dialogue has three distinctive characteristics. It is deliberative and informed. It is introspective and honest. It is grounded in philosophies about teaching and learning. The latter characteristic can be a major stumbling block to the process and it becomes a greater imperative to understand and dialogue about these different philosophies since they may be competing. Part of the initial dialogue must then aim at consensus about teaching and learning philosophy and or acceptance of differences in beliefs and possible impact on practices in the department or unit.

In organising the review a committee approach, which is transparent and inclusive, has a decided advantage. Using the committee approach charges departmental representatives with responsibility to lead the process, to do the background work required of the process, such as accessing needs analysis data and curriculum information, as well as to develop the timelines and conceptualising and organising activities that are integral to the process.
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The Curriculum Review Process

There are five major steps in the curriculum review process which should be repeated at regular intervals to enhance curriculum effectiveness. These steps are:

(i) Situation Analysis
(ii) Curriculum (Programme) Design
(iii) Development of Implementation Strategies
(iv) Curriculum (Programme) Implementation
(v) Curriculum Evaluation

I. Situation Analysis
This is a process of critical analysis

(i) Review of external factors that impact the curriculum or programme of offerings, for example, disciplinary trends in content and practices, employer demands and expectations, trends in teaching and learning and assessment practices, accreditation requirements as relevant

(ii) Review of internal factors, for example, curriculum shifts/creep, student performance, student characteristics, student expectations/satisfaction, teacher expectations and beliefs, teaching strategies, assessment, teacher preparedness, teaching loads, teacher: student ratio

(iii) Review of institutional factors, for example, strategic initiatives, benchmarks, goals and objectives.

Note: All factors will not be relevant to all curricula or programme offerings and decisions will have to be made about which issues are important to the review of a particular curriculum. However, as far as possible, analyses should be based on hard data which can be obtained from records, reports, surveys, stakeholder views, focus group interviews, and may be both quantitative and qualitative in nature.

II. Curriculum (Programme) Design
A process of conceptualisation, projection and clarification

(i) Identification of learning outcomes, guided by societal needs, discipline requirements and university goals, and expressed in the form of graduate knowledge, skills, attitudes and values (based on data from the situation analysis). See Appendix I for an example of university goals

(ii) Distinction between learning outcomes that are generic (department or faculty or the University) from those that are specific to a discipline/sub-discipline
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(iii) Identification of the courses that will lead through a three-year process to specific learning outcomes. There must be a clear link between learning experiences at each level to give the best chance of meeting the learning outcomes.

(iv) Inclusion of courses to close learning gaps; dropping of courses that no longer have a role in fulfilling the learning outcomes; modification of courses that require changes in content and/or implementation strategies to better meet the desired learning outcomes.

(v) Elucidation of the roles of each course in contributing to desired learning outcomes. (Rationale for each course).

**Note:** A useful strategy to employ at this stage is a matrix that shows the relationship between the current status of courses and desired learning outcomes. In the matrix, one dimension (horizontal) should have the learning outcomes to include attitudes and values, and the other dimension (vertical) should contain the list of courses offered at the various levels leading to the degree qualification. With this visual, judgements can be readily made about which courses serve what purposes.

III. Development of Implementation Strategies
A conceptualisation and rationalisation process grounded in specific knowledge about pedagogy/andragogy and assessment

(i) Identification of new/different content, modes of teaching/learning and assessment consonant with learning outcomes, and disciplinary imperatives.

(ii) Determination of strategies and stages in course and programme implementation.

(iii) Prioritisation of strategies.

(iv) Setting of benchmarks/targets and identification of indicators of success.

**Note:** Knowledge of teaching/learning and assessment strategies and the different purposes they serve will be a decided advantage. Brainstorming is advocated for determining appropriate strategies, but finally priorities must be established. A collective understanding and supportive environment are required especially when new approaches to teaching and learning and assessment are to be used.

IV. Curriculum (Programme) Implementation

_Enactment of strategies_

- Implementation of reviewed courses at respective levels in the context of their rationale.

**Note:** It is extremely difficult, if not impossible to successfully implement a large number of new practices at once. Conscious and, preferably collective,
decisions must be made about what will be implemented, how this implementation will take place, who will be the first adopters and at what stages in the life of the programme or academic year these changes will be made.

V. Evaluation

Assessment of curriculum effectiveness

(i) Establish oversight committees
(ii) Monitor benchmarks/targets/indicators
(iii) Use data obtained to make adjustments/further decisions
(iv) Review different aspects of the curriculum as decided
(v) Make judgements based on evidence.

Note: If benchmarks/indicators etc. are set for achievements throughout the programme, then changes can be made during the curriculum implementation process. If targets are set at the end of the programme changes can only be made at the next set of offerings. Thus, it is preferable to set targets at the onset so that monitoring and feedback form an integral part of the curriculum review process. Figure 1 shows the interrelationship among the steps in the curriculum review process and the role of evaluation in providing feedback at each stage.
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SITUATION ANALYSIS
Critical assessment of impacting factors

IMPLEMENTATION
Curriculum enactment

EVALUATION
Assessment of curriculum effectiveness

CURRICULUM DESIGN
Conceptualisation, projection and clarification of curriculum intentions

DEVELOPMENT
Identification and rationalisation of curriculum implementation strategies

Figure 1. Recommended Steps in the Curriculum Review Process
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Bibliography


Further Readings

Diamond, R. M. (1989). Designing and Improving Courses and Curricula in Higher Education: A Systematic Approach. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers. This book, consistent with its emphasis on a systematic approach to curriculum review and reform, provides comprehensive guidelines for curriculum visioning, change and development. Guidelines are presented for developing the ideal curriculum; adjusting the ideal to the real; clarifying instructional objectives; evaluation instruments and procedures; design of instruction; implementing, evaluating and refining the course or programme among others,

Fraser, S. P & Bosanquet, A. M. (2006). The curriculum? That’s just a unit outline, isn’t it? Studies in Higher Education, 31 (3) 269-284. This article reports a phenomenographic study of the ways in which academics conceptualise the curriculum in higher education. Variations in curriculum conceptions are critiqued through the work of theorists who use Habermas’s theory of knowledge-constitutive interests. The intention of the article is to explore the epistemologies and assumptions that underpin these conceptions in order to promote an inclusive shared vocabulary as a basis for curriculum development.

Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) (2006). Retrieved from: http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/codeOfPractice/section7/default.asp This paper outlines the Code of Practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education for programme design, approval, monitoring and review. The Code is established on the principle ‘that formal and effective procedures should exist in all institutions for the design, approval, monitoring and review of programmes of study’. Of particular interest are the codes for programme design which include among several others that “institutions periodically undertake a broader review of the continuing validity and relevance of programmes offered.

Wolf, P. & Hughes, J. C. (eds.) (2007). Curriculum development in higher education: Faculty-driven processes and practices. New Directions for Teaching and Learning. No. 112. Winter 2007). This volume consists of ten chapters by a variety of authors/practitioners. It commences with the broad context of curriculum reform and advocates a scholarly approach to curriculum development, implementation and evaluation, explores curriculum development processes, presents candid experiences and reflections and critical analyses of the challenges faced by curriculum reform leaders. The authors collectively present the context and catalyst of higher education curriculum reform, advocate for the Scholarship of Curriculum Practice, and provide examples of curricular assessment and development initiatives at a variety of institutional levels among other ideas.
### GUIDELINES FOR A REVIEW OF THE CURRICULUM

#### Appendix I

**Extract from the UWI Strategic Plan 2007-2012**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AIM</th>
<th>STRATEGIES</th>
<th>TIMELINE</th>
<th>MILESTONES</th>
<th>PERFORMANCE INDICATORS</th>
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</table>
| To prepare a distinctive UWI graduate for the 21st century – one who has a regional frame of reference and exemplifies the following attributes: (i) a critical and creative thinker; (ii) a problem solver; (iii) an effective communicator; (iv) knowledgeable and informed; (v) competent; (vi) a leader; (vii) a team player; (viii) IT skilled and literate; (ix) socially and culturally responsive; (x) ethical; (xi) innovative and entrepreneurial; (xii) a lifelong, self-motivated learner | • Emphasize and carry out Curriculum Renewal as a reflective and dynamic process.  
  - Review academic programmes every 3 to 5 years.  
  - Establish mechanisms for stakeholder feedback. | 2007-2012 | • Completion of curriculum review for all academic programmes by Year 3  
  • Implementation of recommendations for change within 1 year of the reports  
  • Achievement of targeted improvement in stakeholder satisfaction levels | • Level of satisfaction observed in annual Student Experience Surveys  
• Student retention rates  
• Level of student satisfaction indicated in annual Exit Surveys  
• Level of satisfaction reported in biannual Employer Surveys  
• Level of satisfaction indicated in Graduate Trac Surveys (on Employment and Graduate Study Destinations)  
• Graduate Employment Levels  
• Rate of Conversion of Undergraduate Students to Graduate Study  
• Improvements in degree quality of graduating classes |