



Academic Unit Planning

The Implications of GRANTING EXTENSIONS During the Planning Cycle

April 2020

Purpose of This Guidance Document

This document is directed to Deans of Record, Unit Heads, and others who participate in the Academic Unit Planning (AUP) process. Its objective is to improve the timelines of the process.

Each unit undergoes an AUP process at least every seven years. Given the large number of academic units at Memorial University, it is important that AUP processes proceed on schedule. Occasionally, unforeseen circumstances necessitate an extension. The Dean of Record oversees AUP progress and is the arbiter to review and approve requests for extensions made by Unit Heads.

Various issues have prompted requests for an extension, and this document outlines potential implications of delays during the AUP process and provides suggested strategies to avoid the need for extensions.

The Academic Unit Planning Process: An Overview

As a rule the St. John's and Grenfell Campuses use a seven year AUP cycle and the Marine Institute a five year cycle. The AUP process can be initiated more frequently to align with an external accreditation cycle or by recommendation of a Dean of Record¹ or the Vice-President (Academic). Once established, these cycles are incorporated into an overall schedule for the University by the Academic Unit Planning Committee of Senate.

The AUP process, described in the AUP Procedures has the following milestones for a seven-year cycle:

- AUP launched with Information Session.
- Unit submits Self-Study (one year after launch)
- Panel conducts unit Site Visit (two months after Self-Study)
- Review panel submits Panel Report (one month after Site Visit)
- Unit Submits Formal Response to Panel Report (one month after Report)
- Unit submits Action Plan (two months after Formal Response)
- Unit submits One-year Update (one year after Action Plan)
- Unit submits Three-year Update (three years after Action Plan)
- AUP re-launched with Information Session (2.5 years after three-year update; 7 years after launch).

The AUP is distinct from external accreditation review. The Unit Head will determine how to coordinate these activities and inform the AUP coordinator and the Dean of Record. The AUP component will be managed by the AUP Coordinator.

¹ For the St. John's Campus, the Dean of Record for departmentalized Faculties, is the cognate Dean of the Faculty or School. In the case of non-departmentalized Faculties or Schools, the Associate Vice-President (Academic) serves as the Dean of Record. For the Marine Institute, the Dean of Record is the Associate Vice-President (Academic and Student Affairs) Marine Institute. For the Grenfell Campus, the Dean of Record is the Dean of the School

Extensions and Implications

It is the responsibility of the Dean of Record to review requests for extensions. Given the ramifications of delays, the AUPC recommends extensions be granted only under extraordinary circumstances. For example, delays of the AUP launch are disruptive to the entire planning cycle, while mid-stream delays reduce momentum and negatively impact relevance. It is in the Unit's best interest to complete their AUP and to present it to their Dean of Record within the recommended timeline.

Listed below are commonly quoted, but mostly inadequate, reasons for delay.

AUP LAUNCH

Commonly cited reasons for extension requests/delays:

- Changes to leadership in the academic unit:
 - There is a new Unit Head and needs time to be oriented to the unit
 - There is an interim Unit Head and the permanent Head should lead planning
 - The Unit Head's term is ending and the new Head should lead planning
- Significant organizational change (e.g. faculty complement, organizational structure, location, curriculum)

Implications of delays: If the launch for an AUP process is delayed, this will shift all other AUP activities for the unit by the length of that delay. Launches should take place in the Fall semester. Launching in the Winter extends the panel visit to late Winter or early Spring of the following year. There are substantial challenges associated with scheduling a Site Visit during this period as it conflicts with the exam period (late Winter) or is set at a time when students are not on campus (Spring). Site Visits scheduled in the Winter and early Spring also may be affected by winter storms.

Mitigating Actions: Organization change represents an opportunity to review and refresh the Unit's activities. Avoid the impact organization changes or changes in leadership can have on the process by establishing a standing committee responsible for AUP processes. This committee would ensure continuity throughout organizational changes to the Unit.

If a launch must be delayed:

- Minimize the delay.
- Shorten the Self-Study so that the Panel Visit remains on schedule.

SELF STUDY

Commonly cited reasons for extension requests/delays:

- Changes to leadership in academic unit since the launch;
- Departure of key proponents, authors of Self-Study (including leaves)
- Inability to obtain data

Implications of delays:

Self-study submission deadline is one year after the launch. A delay will shift the panel visit by the length of the delay. As indicated above, the panel visit should occur away from exams yet while students are present and when the likelihood of inclement weather is low. Remember too that the Review Panel needs time to review the Self-Study prior to its visit.

Mitigating Actions: Self-study must be a collegial process; it should not hinge on key person. The AUPC recommends that a steering/working group guides the self-study process. It is also a good idea to plan for early completion of the self-study. The AUPC also recommends timely approval of the Self-Study Report. There should be regular updates to the Dean of Record from the Unit Head as the Self-Study Report is being finalized in order to identify issues in the report that may postpone its transmission to the Panel. Data requirements should be identified early in order to identify potential challenges with their acquisition.

PANEL SITE VISIT

Commonly quoted reasons for extension requests/delays:

- Issues with the Self-Study document delay approval;
- Challenges confirming panelists;
- Challenges scheduling the visit
 - Availability of external panelists
 - Availability of faculty, staff and students
 - Scheduling conflict with other AUP Site Visits;
- Weather or other issue impacting travel of external panelists;

Implications of delays: Scheduling AUP site visits is challenging. The AUP coordinator will work with the Unit and the panelists to establish a schedule. Once in place, every effort must be made to ensure it proceeds. If a Site Visit is deferred, it will likely take some time to reschedule, requiring identification of new external panelists and possibly the updating of key data in the Self-Study document. The rescheduled Site Visit may not occur until the next academic semester or even year. This will significantly delay the unit response and action plan and likely impact the overall relevance of the process.

Mitigating Actions: The AUPC urges Deans of Record to energetically work to a satisfactory Self-Study document. Panelists must be identified early in the process and that accommodation is made for the Site Visit. The Unit should anticipate scheduling challenges for external panelists and be prepared with a secondary list.

PANEL REPORT

Commonly cited reasons for extension requests/delays:

- Issues similar to those noted above;
- Issues requiring further consideration or communication between panelists and Department or Faculty

Implications of delays: This shifts the timeline for the remaining steps. The Unit Response, Action Plan and subsequent approvals by the Dean of Record and the AUP Committee will fall out of synch.

Mitigating Actions: The AUPC recommends the Panel: 1. establish reporting timelines at the start of processes/initial meeting. 2. ensure that key points are settled soon after the site visit. 3. synthesize individual notes and reports into a cohesive report while the material is fresh in their minds.

UNIT RESPONSE AND ACTION PLAN:

Commonly cited reasons for extensions requests/delays:

- Sensitive issues identified in the panel report
- Sensitive issues identified in the response and action plan
- Difficulty arriving at consensus for developing the action plan

Implications of delays: If the unit response and action plan are delayed, further delays may be caused during final approval by the Dean of Record and AUP Committee. This would then delay the one-year and three-year reports.

Mitigating Actions: The unit's standing AUP committee should meet with the Unit Head to begin planning the response and action plan. Templates for action plans are available from CIAP. The Dean of Record should meet with the Unit Head soon after the panel report to identify and work to resolve issues that may delay completion of the reports.

ONE-YEAR AND THREE-YEAR REPORTS:

Implications of delays: Any of the above-noted delays will also extend the time required for the submission of the one-year and three-year reports.

Mitigating Actions: The unit should be monitoring progress on an annual basis, guided by the AUP standing committee. A well-developed action plan will facilitate this monitoring.

Summary of Considerations

Unit Heads and Deans of Record should consider the following mitigating actions to prevent delays:

- Avoid delays, it's not going to go away!
- Establish a AUP Standing Committee
 - Strike the Self-Study working group (sub-committee of the AUP standing committee?).
 - Do not assign responsibility for writing the Self-Study to one individual.
 - Monitor progress annually.
- If a phase must be delayed:
 - Keep the delay to a minimum
 - Shorten subsequent phases where possible.
- Try to avoid scheduling site visits during the Winter semester.
- Approve the Self-Study Report promptly.
- Identify and resolve potential problematic issues early.
- Provide multiple options for scheduling the site visit.
- Ensure timely submission of Panel Report
- Follow the established AUP process timelines as closely as possible.