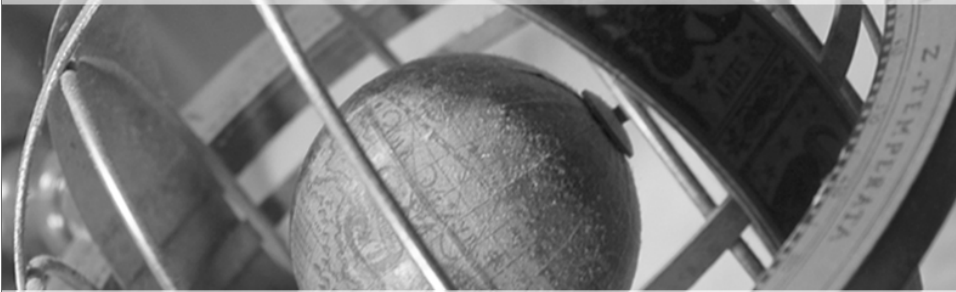


Role of AUCC in promoting and enhancing quality culture in higher education at home



**Presentation to IAU Global Associations Meeting
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Association of Universities
and Colleges of Canada



Association des universités
et collèges du Canada



AUCC's role

- **Criteria and process for Institutional Membership**
- **AUCC's "Quality assurance at Canadian universities" website**

Set the context for remarks by reminding international partners about the "higher education landscape" in Canada:

- Constitutional authority for education is vested in provincial and territorial governments. Council of Ministers, Education, plays a coordinating role.
- Federal government plays important role (transfers to provinces, research funding, student assistance, international academic relations), but there is no federal ministry of higher education.
- AUCC is a non-government, membership-based organization representing 92 Canadian public and private not-for-profit universities and university-degree level colleges. However, given absence of an identifiable government authority for higher education at the federal level, AUCC's role as the voice of Canadian universities at home and abroad becomes particularly important.

There are two key ways AUCC plays a role in promoting and enhancing a quality culture in higher education at home:

- **Criteria and process for Institutional Membership**
- **AUCC's "Quality assurance at Canadian universities" website**

This presentation elaborates on these roles and speaks to some of the impacts stemming from these roles.

Perhaps quickly mention as an aside that – apart from these two key roles -- AUCC also promotes a quality culture through our **membership meetings**. These meetings occur twice annually and our spring meeting focuses primarily on a president's role as a "change agent", with a "Presidents' Circle" lecture on some aspect of presidential leadership and a thematic focus. These thematic sessions often relate to the issues of quality – such as our focus in April on enhancing the undergraduate experience. Our experience is that our members are very engaged on these issues and appreciate a forum such as the one AUCC provides so they can talk with their peers about leading change.

Criteria for Institutional Membership

- **Canada has no system of institutional accreditation**
- **Key criteria for Institutional Membership:**
 - Legislative authority; Governance and administrative structures; Mission statement and appropriate academic goals; Scope of academic programs; Commitment to scholarship and research; Academic freedom and intellectual integrity; Size of student body; etc.
- **As of 2005, AUCC members have been invited to reaffirm their adherence to the membership criteria every five years**

Canada has no formal system of institutional accreditation. Membership in AUCC held in conjunction with a provincial charter may be accepted in lieu of institutional accreditation.

AUCC membership criteria cover a range of issues. The key “high level” categories are listed here to give a sense of elements examined in determining Institutional Membership.

These categories are expanded upon in some depth in AUCC’s by-law, as well as in the “guidance” given to Visiting Committees”. The criteria include “indicators” of appropriate practice.

For example, when we assess “academic programs”, we ensure the Institutional Member “offers a full program or programs of undergraduate and/or graduate studies that animate its mission and goals, and that lead to a university degree or degrees conferred by itself or, if federated or affiliated with, or a constituent of a university, by the parent institution”.

The indicators listed for this criterion include:

- Highly qualified academic staff holding the PhD or other appropriate terminal degree, and relevant professional experience where appropriate;
- Undergraduate programs taught by senior academic staff;
- **A quality assurance policy that results in cyclical or continuous assessment of all of its academic programs and support services, and which includes the participation by those directly involved in delivery of the program or service, as well as by other institutional colleagues and external experts and stakeholders;**
- Provision for the periodic evaluation of the performance of academic staff including a student assessment component;
- Access to library and other learning resources appropriate to the institution's mission, goals and programs;
- The periodical monitoring of graduate outcomes, and established and transparent processes for disseminating this information inside and outside the institution;
- Academic counselling and other student services appropriate to its programs;
- Financial resources to meet its mission statement and goals;

This gives you a flavour of the level of detail with which Institutional Membership is assessed. [NOTE THAT OTHER EXAMPLES CAN BE USED FROM THE LIST OF MEMBERSHIP CRITERIA INCLUDED IN BRIEFING BOOK]

In addition, we have recently instituted a process whereby members are invited to reaffirm their adherence to the criteria for membership in the association. We have only been through this process once so far, but our early experience is that our members take this reaffirmation process seriously and have used it as an opportunity to take stock of these important AUCC “guide posts”

The background of the slide features a faint, grayscale image of an armillary sphere, a model of objects in the sky, such as the Sun, Moon, or planets, representing their relative positions and movements. The sphere is composed of a series of concentric circles representing lines of celestial longitude and latitude and other astronomically important features such as the ecliptic.

Membership application process

- **Applicant institution submits extensive documentation to AUCC**
- **Staff recommendation to AUCC Board on establishment of Visiting Committee**
- **Visiting Committee reviews documentation and holds range of meetings at institution**
- **Recommendation and report of Visiting Committee to AUCC Board**
- **Membership votes on AUCC Board's recommendation**

Not only are the criteria for Institutional Membership quite extensive, so too is the process for assessing an application. Visiting Committee members and AUCC's Corporate Secretary do a phenomenal amount of work in order to prepare their report and recommendation to the Board.

Impact of AUCC's approach to membership

- **Creates strong “stamp of approval” in terms of institutional quality**
- **Growing demand for membership**
- **Ongoing reflection of AUCC Board and Committee on Act and By-laws on appropriate application of membership criteria**
- **As Canadian higher education scene becomes more diverse, AUCC must clearly articulate its role as membership organization**

Stepping back from the requirements and process for Institutional Membership, there are important consequences which stem from what we view as a rigorous approach to membership.

First, the discerning approach we bring to our membership underscores the meaning of membership in AUCC. It's the “brand name” of universities in Canada.

Second, given the general recognition of AUCC membership as an important “brand name”, it won't surprise you to learn that there is growing demand for AUCC membership on the part of an increasingly diverse group of institutions. In the past few years, AUCC has welcomed Algoma University College, Ontario College of Art & Design, and University of Ontario Institute of Technology. There are four applications “in the pipeline” and more are expected in the future.

I've observed that for these institutions, the credibility that AUCC membership brings is viewed as tremendously beneficial for their students, their faculty members and the “status” of their qualifications. It is also interesting to note that in a number of cases, institutions' efforts to meet the AUCC Institutional Membership criteria result in positive change, i.e., AUCC's expectations help shape new institutions' organizational development.

Third, it's fair to say that as the demand for membership in AUCC increases and as the diversity of institutions seeking membership increases, there has been a serious and ongoing reflection of AUCC's membership criteria by our Board of Directors, as well as its Standing Committee on the Act and By-Laws and Visiting Committees themselves. As you would expect, the fundamental issues of “governance” and “academic freedom” figure strongly in these ongoing reflections.

Finally, we have witnessed more diversification in terms of the higher education scene in Canada. For example, although not as predominant as in other countries, we have seen some for-profit institutions established under provincial government authority and new types of institutions or foreign providers being granted authority to offer certain university-level programs. In addition, there have been new organizations established in some provinces with a mandate to assess the quality of university-level programs. In this changing context, some of these new institutions or government organizations may question the role that AUCC plays – i.e., question whether we should have the right to restrict our membership. In response, AUCC has always stressed our role as a membership organization (with the power to determine its members), as well as our place in the bigger “constellation” of governments and organizations that together confer legitimacy and credibility on providers of university-level education. That being said, AUCC is unique in its assessment of the institution as a whole and that is an important contribution in our view.

AUCC's QA website

- **Given the need to share information in a proactive way on Canadian QA approach, AUCC formed a working group to:**
 - Articulate *Principles*
 - Devise an institutional survey of all members' QA policy and practice
- **AUCC's quality assurance website**
<http://www.aucc.ca/qa> is a clearing house of information for national and international audiences

In the period 2002-2004, AUCC took note of growing international activity in regard to quality assurance in higher education (meetings of International Commission of CHEA, UNESCO's Global Forum, developments through the Bologna Process, etc.).

We concluded that it was going to be increasingly important to effectively articulate the Canadian approach to QA at the university level for both national and international audiences. We knew Canada's QA approach was robust, but also that it was complex and lacked profile.

In 2004, a working group of approximately 20 experts, including senior university representatives from each province, was convened to discuss the challenge of profiling a diverse approach to quality assurance based on institutional and provincial bases.

Despite the diversity that exists among AUCC members, the working group identified an important set of fundamental **principles** that underpin institutional practices across jurisdictional boundaries. The "Principles of institutional quality assurance in Canadian higher education" were drafted to capture these shared values.

In March 2004, the Executive Head of each AUCC member was invited to endorse the Principles.

In May 2004, an **institutional survey**, also developed by the working group, was distributed to AUCC members. The responses were used to profile each institution's quality assurance policies and processes.

In September 2005, the quality assurance section of the AUCC website was launched (<http://www.aucc.ca/qa>). In addition to the Principles and the institutional profiles, the site includes information on provincial and regional quality assurance processes, on the accreditation of professional programs and the adherence of AUCC members to the criteria for Institutional Membership

QA principles

- “Principles of institutional quality assurance in Canadian higher education” endorsed by the executive head of each member of AUCC
- Central elements:
 - Quality assurance and improvement
 - Scope and frequency of reviews
 - Key characteristics of the quality review
 - Information to the public

If we look at the central tenets of the principles they are [HERE YOU MAY WANT TO BRIEFLY LIST A FEW OF THE SUB-POINTS UNDER EACH HEADING TO GIVE AUDIENCE A FLAVOUR OF THE PRINCIPLES DOCUMENT]

Quality assurance and improvement:

-the institution has a formal, approved, transparent policy to ensure the quality and continuous improvement of its academic programs

-the institution is in compliance with the requirements of a provincial or regional authority having responsibility for quality assurance

-there is a procedure for the regular review of the institution's quality assurance policy and related processes.

2) Scope and frequency of reviews

-the policy applies to current and planned programs; is comprehensive in its coverage of all undergraduate and graduate programs; and applies to all programs whether campus-based or delivered at a distance, in Canada or across borders.

3) Key characteristics of the quality review

-the quality assessment process is based on self-evaluation and peer review.

-the process includes the involvement of external disciplinary experts.

*-The process involves internal and external stakeholders including: **students, faculty, and the administration** of the institution, and may also involve alumni and representatives of the community.*

4) Information to the public

*-There is documentation (which is **public**) to guide the quality assurance process.*

*-In the interests of transparency and accountability, the results of the quality assessment are made **public**.*

-The policy, related processes and the calendar for assessments are known within the institution and among external stakeholders including government and the public-at-large.

Members' QA approaches

- **Each AUCC members has its own page which provides information on its institutional QA policy and practice:**
 - Scope
 - Aspects under review
 - Actors involved in implementation
 - Frequency of reviews
 - Role of professional bodies in accrediting professional programs
 - Overarching provincial/regional policy framework

Each AUCC members has its own page which provides information on:

- scope of policy (which programs are covered)
- who carries out the various roles and responsibilities
- which aspects of the program are under review
- which actors are involved in implementation
- frequency of reviews
- role of professional bodies in accrediting professional programs and
- Information on the overarching provincial/regional policy legislative and QA framework (*including whether the institution is in compliance with the requirements of the provincial or regional process for*)

Impact of AUCC's QA website

- **Effective profiling of QA regime in Canadian universities for national and international audiences**
- **Principles and survey have resulted in enhanced quality culture in some cases where improvement required**
- **AUCC more active in monitoring national and international QA developments**

Again, stepping back to look at the impact of the work AUCC has undertaken on this QA project, there are three consequences to highlight.

First, the positive feedback we have received on the website as a clearinghouse of information on QA (particularly from foreign partners and delegations) leads us to conclude that it is fulfilling its objective of more effectively articulating and profiling the robust approach to QA in Canadian universities. Clearly there is more to do in order to link this information resource to other related websites both nationally and internationally. If you have suggestions to make in this regard, they would be welcomed.

Second, we have observed that as a result of the Principles and institutional survey, some of our member institutions have had to examine their own QA approaches and make changes in order to meet the “benchmarks” that the Principles articulate and respond in a fulsome way to our survey. This “gentle pressure” has generally been viewed as a positive contribution by member institutions.

Finally, this QA initiative has required AUCC to dedicate human and financial resources to the effort.

Our goal was not simply to create a static website, but to periodically assess how the information we provide compares to level of transparency on institutional QA policies and practices in other parts of the world. We undertook an initial assessment of this question last autumn and found that our information is still relevant and complete.

We also quickly determined that in order to ensure the QA information resource continue to be accurate, we would need to periodically draw members’ attention to the QA Principles they had endorsed and update the institutional information. We are launching this updating process next month.

The effort therefore requires an ongoing commitment on the part of AUCC.

Concluding thoughts

- **National associations can make a difference in promoting quality culture within their memberships**
- **Initiatives which increase transparency of information on QA approaches can stimulate improved quality culture**
- **Welcome opportunity to discuss how national associations can work together at the global level to increase transparency**

National associations matter when it comes to promoting and enhancing a quality culture.

They matter because they define the “characteristics of quality” they expect from member institutions. Our experience shows that members will “draw the line” when fundamental quality expectations are not met. [YOU MAY OR MAY NOT WANT TO USE THE FNUC EXAMPLE HERE OR POSSIBLY IN THE DISCUSSION]

They matter because they can put issues like QA on members’ radar screens. As a membership organization, we exist to serve our members’ interests which they collectively define. That being said, since national associations have a unique window on international developments (such as developments in 2002-2004 in the area of QA), it is also our responsibility to surface issues and challenges and devise approaches for dealing with them before they become a problem for our member institutions. Our need to better articulate Canadian universities’ approach to QA was one such challenge.

I also think that heightened transparency is a powerful tool. When a national association asks for specific information and members know that their responses will be publicly-available, there is a fair amount of “peer pressure” that comes into play. This can be a good thing in that it inspires members to take steps to meet the benchmarks set by their fellow members and expressed through the national association’s work.

In this spirit, I would welcome the chance to discuss how we might link ourselves together in a more systematic and ongoing manner – perhaps with the good offices of IAU – so that we can further heighten transparency between us for our own benefit, as well as for the benefit of our respective memberships.