



A Guide to Program and Curricular Planning at UVic

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Acknowledgments

Thank you to all the colleagues campus-wide who have participated with such commitment to the programming retreats we have worked on together. This booklet is based on what I have learned from all of you, and the collective results are designed to help others.

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Front cover: Concept maps for a variety of courses with kind permission of participants in recent curriculum design institutes (Jillianne Code Technology Innovation in Education, Elena Pnevmonidou Introduction to Germanic Studies, Julia Rochtchina Introduction to Russian Culture and Society, Helga Thorson Field Schools at UVic, Dawn Yuan Mandarin Chinese and Jianping Yuan Algorithms).

Introduction

There are many reasons academic units may wish to undertake a program curricular review.

These include:

- Comments from an external review committee that the program lacks coherence or structure.
- Changes in student needs or recognition that the program may no longer be attracting its target audience.
- The desire to attract more students to the program.
- Reductions in transfer students from colleges that are starting to offer their own degrees.
- Too many courses at one level and too few at another.
- Perceived lack of balance in workload among colleagues in a unit.
- A realization that the program is no longer sustainable in its current form—due perhaps to a reduction in faculty complement or in faculty teaching requirements (e.g. from 3:2 to 2:2).
- Awareness of increasing calls for accountability from the Province, including the call to define program learning outcomes and to be able to measure their achievement in some systematic way.
- An expressed policy by a Dean to apportion resources equitably and effectively to best meet strategic needs.

- Meeting accreditation standards (in some cases multiple accreditation standards). This mostly applies to the professional schools such as Engineering and Nursing but increasingly to the professional societies for a number of academic disciplines who are also looking at common “standards” that are desirable.
- An initiative to apply for grant funding to develop new program aspects and thus a need to describe the existing structure to highlight the need for innovation.

Once undertaken, a curricular review process can, of course, take many forms. The goal of this guide is to share the process I have developed over the last seven years of practice at UVic, so that it can be helpful to others. The hope is that by outlining the process and sharing best practices, I can support those who might wish to undertake this process on their own, or with a different facilitator, and thus help them to save time. In addition, the guide is designed to tie directly in to some of the requirements of the current Strategic Planning initiatives, for example around the definition of Learning Outcomes for all programs on campus. In this regard, I hope the guide will allow units to achieve this goal in a relatively quick and easy manner, but in a way that might also engender positive improvements to their current practice that will benefit them and their students. The following pages are divided into the parts of the process I have found to work

when colleagues have limited time to devote to it and yet want to see an impactful outcome. The key, of course, lies in the preparation and follow-up. The culmination of the preparation is the full-day retreat, to which all colleagues who

teach in the program (or support it in some key way) are invited. With careful preparation, willing colleagues and an effective and neutral facilitator, it is amazing what can be achieved in just one day.

A model for program design, redesign and review

The following model (figure 1) is one that I have developed over the seven years of working at UVic in a wide range of disciplines. At some level it is very simple and represents what is minimally required for any program if it is to

be coherent. The process that accompanies the model is based loosely on what is termed “backwards” or “reverse” design with an additional UVic twist or two.

FIGURE 1

Minimal elements essential for coherence in a typical 4-year undergraduate program

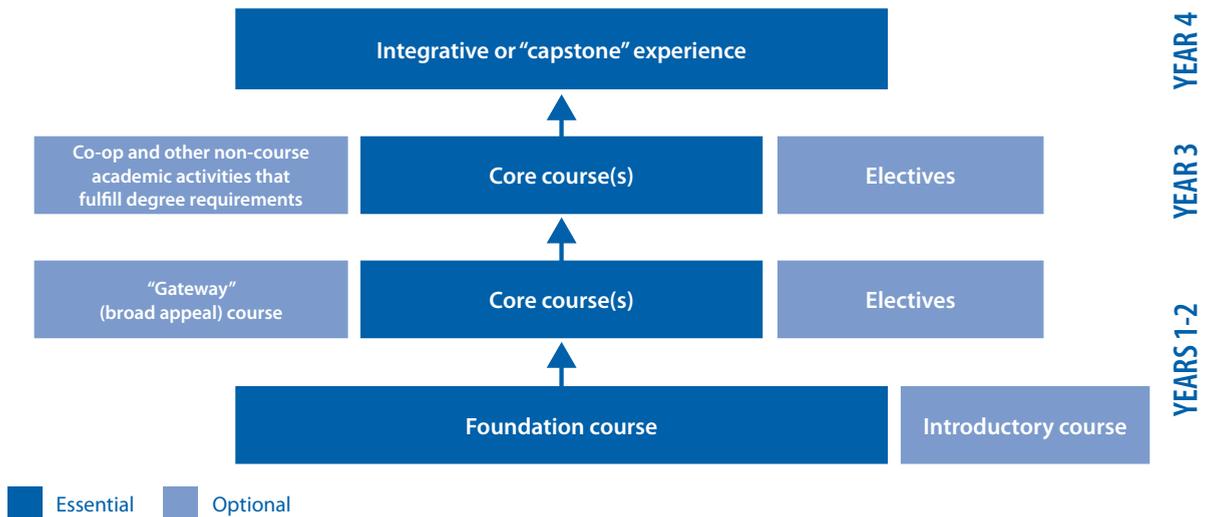
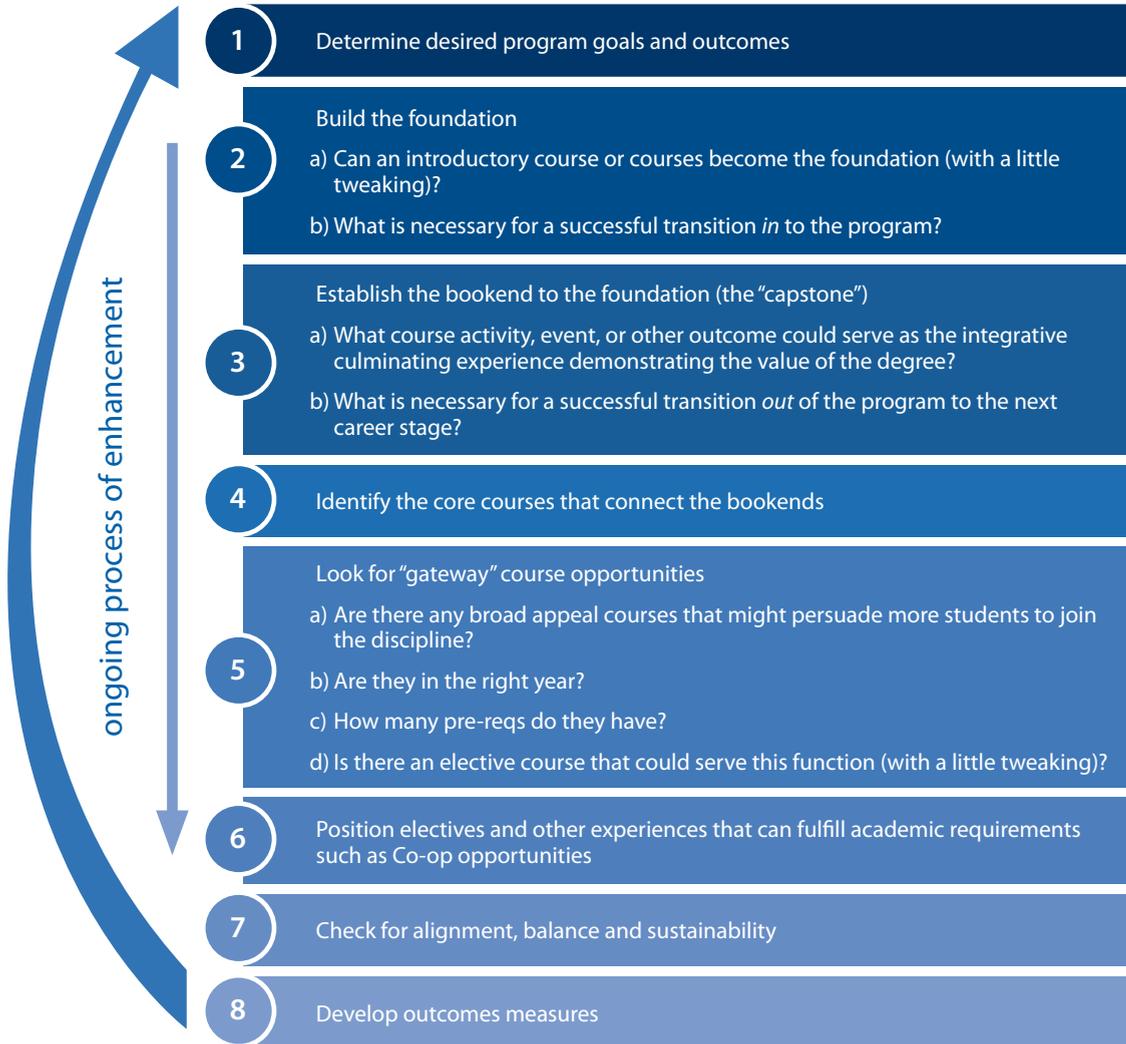


FIGURE 2

Recommended stages in program (re)design or review



Stages of program design (see figure 2)

- 1) Determine the goals (learning outcomes) of the program**—what do you want your students to be able to do/think/value, etc., by the time they leave you? Alternatively, think of an ideal student graduating from your program—what characteristics does that student have?
- 2) Build the foundation**—what do you need to do in the foundation course for your program to set the stage for your students to gain the attributes they need to have (what they need to be able to do, etc.) when they leave the program? If a particular goal is considered to be core, then it must be rooted at the start and not introduced later as an afterthought. It is really important to note that foundation courses are not the same as introductory courses, though the quickest and easiest way to create a foundation course is often to take a mandatory introductory course and turn it into a foundation course. An introductory course is usually in first year and is usually content rich, as in, for example, an introduction to human geography. A foundation course might or might not be in first year and it serves to introduce students to the fundamental questions, values, interests and approaches of a discipline. It begins the task of teaching students how to think like an expert in that field. Since UVic allows for late program declaration and also has a considerable number of transfer students, many programs have a foundation later in the program or, perhaps, two foundations: one for students starting at first year and one for students transferring in later (say third year).
- 3) Establish the capstone**—if the foundation course is one bookend, what does the other bookend look like? What is the integrative (capstone) experience that brings the program together for students? How do students integrate their learning so that they see the value of their degree and so that they can then transfer what they have learned to the next stage of their life or career goals?
- 4) Identify core courses**—what are the core courses (pillars) in the intermediate years that hold the two bookends (the foundation and the capstone) together? There should be at least one course in each of these intervening years that maintains the originally established goals of the foundation and develops them through to the capstone at the end. Often these are methods courses or integrative design courses.
- 5) Look for gateway courses**—increasingly academic units are checking to make sure they have at least one gateway course in second and even third year. A gateway course characteristically has no or very few pre-requisites and is of broad appeal. It showcases attractive aspects of the discipline and the

program, allows students to meet the best scholars and teachers the program has to offer and generally is designed to acquire more majors for the program, or at least to encourage non-program students to take more courses in the discipline.

- 6) **Position electives and other academic experiences such as Co-op**—once all the main structural elements of the program are laid out, then the last step is to position electives and non-required courses, as well as other non-course academic opportunities that enhance the learning experience. These need to be positioned in order to meet student needs for credits, to allow for interest streams, if applicable, within a program and to balance offerings. An elective course can also, depending on content, be a good basis for a gateway course.
- 7) **Check for balance**—does the structure hold together? Are there any missing rungs in the ladder (a missing core course in year 2 for example that means students are lost to year 3 and beyond)? If there are interest streams, do they flow? Is there a clear stream for majors that meets their needs, as well as providing plenty of interest if this is a large service department? Are there easy ways into the program for students who may be interested? Are there any blockages or boundaries to successful flow-through?

- 8) **Develop outcomes measures**—finally, once all the above have been achieved (and this may take several years, taken in stages) there is the additional question of assessing whether the goals (#1) have been met. Program assessment measures are not usually part of the initial process at UVic, since steps 1-7 are significant in themselves. However, increasingly it is becoming important to think about the assessment aspect, particularly in the context of accreditation. This step requires the development of a variety of assessment measures that can be implemented (collectively) to “triangulate” (taken together can infer) whether the original goal has been achieved. This step is much easier if the program learning outcomes have been clearly set forth and have been agreed upon by all colleagues.

Suggested timeline and responsibilities for a typical retreat

TIME PERIOD	DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY	RESPONSIBLE
3 months ahead	Key academic leader contacts the LTC to initiate a retreat. ¹ ltcdir@uvic.ca.	Department Chair/School Director or Faculty Dean
2-3 months ahead	A mutually convenient date is schedule approximately 2-3 months ahead, and the room is booked. All colleagues from the academic unit who are to attend are invited by the academic leader and asked to mark the date in their calendars. A meeting is scheduled between the academic leader and the LTC facilitator to determine the goals for the day. The timeline is reviewed.	Academic leader. Please contact ltc@uvic.ca for scheduling.
Over the next month	As much relevant background material as possible is sent to the facilitator to allow for his/her immersion in the curriculum of the unit. This background might include: previous external reviews, any curricular committee reports or relevant meeting notes, pages of courses from the calendar, course descriptions, the unit's website as it pertains to students and programs, any accreditation standards (professional or national) as applicable, a list of questions or issues the unit considers paramount to address, and anything else the unit leader wishes to share or think might prove helpful. It is important to note that materials shared with the facilitator for the purposes of making the best possible use of colleagues' time at the retreat are treated in the strictest confidence. The more the facilitator knows about the program, the more effective the retreat will be. The academic leader provides as much data as possible to the facilitator by doing his/her best to answer the relevant questions in the attached checklist .	Academic leader

¹ Please note that for the purposes of this guide I am assuming that the academic unit is working with the LTC to conduct the retreat. Using a trained external facilitator could work just as well. If that is what your unit is doing please just substitute your external facilitator when the LTC facilitator is mentioned.

TIME PERIOD	DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY	RESPONSIBLE
One month ahead	<p>The facilitator sends a draft agenda and pre-retreat questionnaire to the academic unit leader based on the facilitator's reading of the information received and the initial conversation regarding the goals of the retreat. A sample questionnaire is provided in Appendix A.</p> <p>The academic leader reviews and responds with feedback.</p> <p>The facilitator then sends out the pre-questionnaire to all colleagues attending the retreat to ask them to prepare their thoughts for the day and asks them to respond by a particular deadline. All answers are treated in confidence by the facilitator and only reported back in the aggregate. This allows issues to emerge that may need to be addressed without the usual power relations sometimes inherent in open meetings. Responses are then used to finalise the agenda and activities for the retreat. If by any chance key colleagues are unavailable on the day of the retreat, then the questionnaire is also sent to them ahead of time in order that their views and perspectives might be fully represented on the day.</p>	Facilitator (with input from academic leader and all unit colleagues)
3 weeks ahead	<p>The academic leader provides the names of three or four students and their contact information to the facilitator for the student panel, which is the focusing event for the day. He/she alerts the students they will be contacted by the facilitator and explains the context. The students should have a variety of backgrounds, contexts and perspectives. For example there is usually a diversity of gender, and students are usually from different years in the program (ideally one has just finished first year and one is in 4th year or has just graduated).</p> <p>The LTC pays for small tokens given to the students to thank them for their hard work (we like this to be a surprise if possible). This therefore requires that the academic unit provide VOO numbers for the panelists.</p>	Academic leader Admin assistant in the academic unit usually provides VOO numbers to ltc@uvic.ca.
2 ½ weeks ahead	The facilitator then follows up, connects with the students and meets with them to prepare them for the panel.	Facilitator, LTC office and students

TIME PERIOD	DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY	RESPONSIBLE
2-3 weeks ahead	Catering is ordered (and paid for) by the academic unit and is scheduled to arrive as indicated by the agenda. Usually this involves continental breakfast, lunch and an afternoon tea/coffee snack. Retreats are usually held in HHB 128 unless the group is too big, in which case we ask that the academic unit make the booking.	Academic unit administrator
2 days ahead	The facilitator refines the agenda and sends it out with the reminder to all participants.	Facilitator

On the day

On the actual day, the retreat usually follows an agenda that, while tailored differently for every group, may look something like the sample shown in **Appendix B**.

The LTC regrets it is unable to provide extensive written reports or feedback on the retreat day due to limited personnel and resources.

As a result, if a unit wishes detailed notes they might wish to arrange for a note taker. In addition, a small digital camera can be used to take snapshots of the working on the white boards for easy record keeping.

At the end of the day, duties and responsibilities for follow up actions are assigned by mutual agreement.

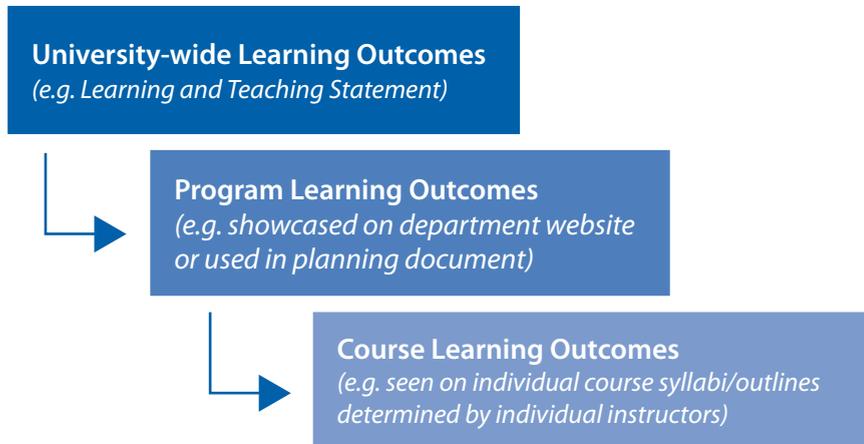
Common enhancements resulting from a retreat

i) Nested learning outcomes

- The unit undertakes to document its program learning outcomes and to commit to these publicly in a variety of ways: website, review documents, discussion in first year and repeated in subsequent core courses, strategic planning, learning outcomes initiatives reporting, etc.
- In addition, the unit often begins the process of “nesting” its learning outcomes, both “up” to the university-wide teaching and learning statement of general undergraduate goals, and “down” to the individual course outline learning outcomes (figure 3).

FIGURE 3

Nesting Learning Outcomes at UVic



Please note: every course does not and should not try to address every university-wide learning outcome. Rather, collectively, the elements of a program (both in-course and extra-curricular) should collectively combine to address agreed-upon learning outcomes and the university-wide learning outcomes.

ii) Curricular changes—Sometimes, as a result of the retreat, curricular changes might result that are communally agreed to. For example a course might change its name or the level at which it is taught. Other courses might not have been taught for years and might need to be “cleaned up.”

iii) Curricular development—Often as the result of improved program structure, cohesiveness and alignment, colleagues might identify one or two “holes” that need addressing. Most often this involves the need for a foundation course, a capstone experience, an intermediate core course and/or a gateway course. The best approach is not to try and tackle this all at once, but to have a plan and then prioritise one innovation at a time. Once an individual (or ideally a pair or small team) has been identified as willing to be responsible for developing this curricular innovation on behalf of the unit, they can then apply for an “Implementing Curricular Review Recommendations” (ICRR) grant to do so and receive funds, resources, expertise and support to help them www.ltc.uvic.ca/scholarships/ltgrants.php (please scroll to number 4, first set).

iv) Improved communications—Very often a large amount of value can be added to a program simply by communicating more effectively about its structure and goals to students, without necessarily any curricular changes being required. A re-consideration of the unit’s website (the

portion that relates to undergraduate programs) often naturally results from a retreat. An examination in terms of the site’s content, tone, audience and images can be invaluable.

v) Increased integration of Co-op in curricular design—Academic units often discover that several of their program learning outcomes could be achieved very successfully by Co-op. Once Co-op elements are “mapped” as part of the program, they become visible, which allows for more seamless integration of the in-class vs. experiential components of the student learning experience.

vi) Request for follow-up refresher—Strange as it may seem to those entering into this new and sometimes intimidating terrain of the curricular retreat, at the end of the process units often request a follow-up refresher. Once the initial retreat has been undertaken, this becomes much easier to do. Usually only a morning or afternoon is required, and it is often used to consider additional innovation or to tackle the next iteration of change, once the initial structure has been determined. More than anything such refreshers are an opportunity to re-connect, reaffirm values and continue the momentum.

vii) Use of documents generated to support unit goals—The ideas and documents generated from the retreat are entirely at the disposal of the academic unit. They often prove useful in helping a chair, director or dean to

write self-studies for an external review, to complete strategic planning visioning or to provide the basis for funding requests.

viii) Generation of program learning

outcomes—Learning outcomes for programs usually fall into two categories: a) learning outcomes that are general and overarching and common to most programs (e.g. the ability to think critically in the discipline, a sense of civic engagement and responsibility, global citizenship, excellent communications skills, and so on), and b) learning outcomes that are specific to a particular program in a particular discipline at UVic. It is always important in the latter case both to give a sense that the program is well-rounded (if possible) as well as to be really clear what is unique about this program at UVic. Why would you want to study this here? I maintain that, if they are to have any meaning, such unique learning outcomes can only be generated by the teachers within the program themselves and in a community setting. Colleagues have to come together and agree on what attributes they want graduates from their program(s) to have (at least in a general sense) if they are to have meaning for them as they articulate them in their own very different ways in their courses. Such outcomes in other words must come from within if they are to impact students positively, and all colleagues must be consulted and involved if they are to be adopted and internalised. For this reason the campus-wide learning outcomes initiative is wisely broad and

flexible enough in its structure to allow for the individuality of programs to shine through, as well as being consistent enough for external reporting purposes.

Tools to help you

In the process of working with academic units on their program and curricular planning, we have developed a number of resources at the LTC that may be of assistance.

- **The curricular alignment matrix**—enables units to check for the developmental attainment of key learning goals throughout the program and identify in which courses/activities they take place:
www.ltc.uvic.ca/initiatives/index.php
- **A curricular mapping program**—jointly developed with Jason Siefken of Mathematics and Statistics, this online mapping program allows curriculum committees to experiment with program curricular design. The program links to Banner and shows pre-requisites, co-requisites, etc., allowing for the generation of a visual map of the suggested best-path program structure. By experimenting with the mapping

Summary

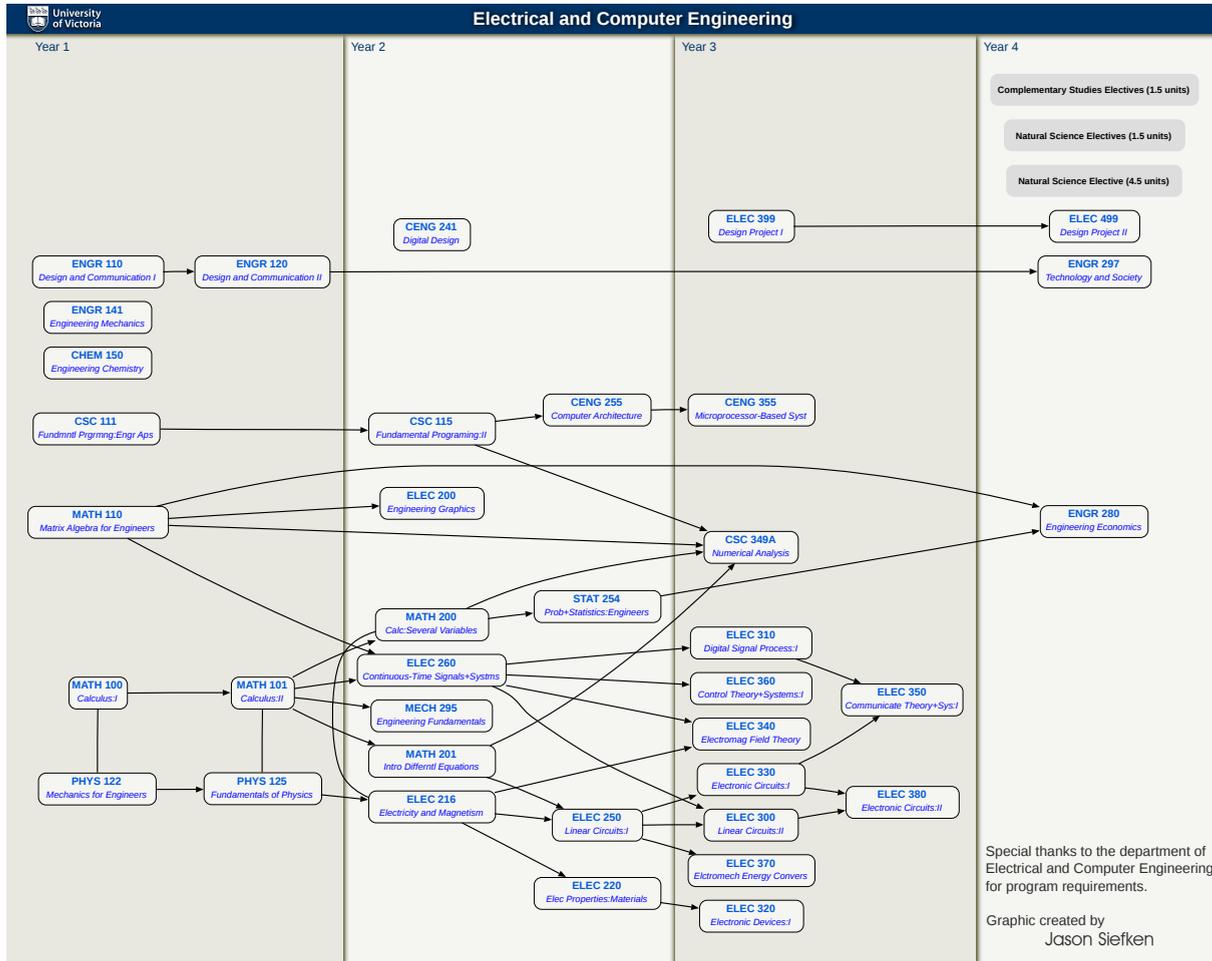
At time of writing, over half the university's academic units have trusted me to help with their curriculum planning and have undertaken a retreat process akin to the one described here; six more retreats are already scheduled. My hope is that this booklet will help to make the

program, curricular committees and/or whole units can save enormous amounts of time by being able to see the impacts of proposed changes before making them. Maps of programs provide many other helpful insights during the retreat day. Please see figure 4 for an example of a program map in Engineering. In addition, maps can be used to communicate to students what the program looks like and how they might ideally navigate through it. "Streams" of interest can also be shown. For access to the mapping program and instructions on using it, please see: www.ltc.uvic.ca/initiatives/index.php

- **Workshops and materials on generating individual course learning outcomes**—these can be found at: www.ltc.uvic.ca/initiatives/index.php as well as regularly on our events calendar: www.ltc.uvic.ca/index.php

process transparent, provide some resources and help save everyone time. Since the process is extremely flexible, it can be tailored to almost any situation. I welcome your feedback for how I can improve this booklet in the future.

FIGURE 4
Example of a curricular map from Electrical and Computer Engineering



CHECKLIST

Some useful questions for chairs and faculty deans to think about ahead of the retreat

Many of the answers, as well as other very useful background data, can be found on the university's Institutional Planning and Analysis website <http://www.inst.uvic.ca/default.htm>. For example, there are over ten years of Student Outcomes reports for students who graduate with degrees from UVic. They are all available here: <http://www.inst.uvic.ca/uvicso.html>. Just scroll down the page and you'll see the section for your faculty and unit. Each report is seven pages long and covers a wide range of outcomes information - student satisfaction, quality of instruction, skill gain and then outcomes: further education, employment etc.

You can compare your results to other departments at UVic or, if you wish, from other programs at BC universities. For those reports, just go to this site: <http://outcomes.bcstats.gov.bc.ca/BGS/BGSTupcReports.aspx> and choose from the "CIP Name" the appropriate program – you will see which universities offer them and the various survey years.

How many undergraduate students do you graduate a year?

Where do your students come from? National? International? Local (BC? Island?)

What proportion are direct entry from high school?

How many (if applicable) transfer in? In which year? From where? Do you know your feeder schools/colleges well? How often do you visit them?

How many students in first year are potentially "yours" (and, hence, what, if anything, do you do to "convert" students into degree completion students)?

Another way of saying this is "How steep are the sides of your enrollment pyramid by year/level?" Please provide the number of students enrolled in <your department/ school/ faculty> courses by year.

When do the majority declare as your program students?

Based on this, where should the "foundation" of your degree be?

Do you want more or fewer or different students?

Where, if applicable, do you lose students? Any idea why?

Do all your major students have an integrative or capstone experience?

Where specifically do your students go after they graduate? Which sectors? But also what kinds of jobs (are they leadership positions)? What proportion go to graduate school? What are some of the potentially diverse careers they enter (including "surprise" fields)?

What does this suggest about the kinds of learning they might need in the program?

What are the top learning outcomes that your professional society says an undergraduate from a program in your field should have? Is there a professional society report that everyone could read on this matter?

How do you measure up to this? Where do students acquire, practice and master these skills as well as content areas, during your program?

Is there a program curricular map that you can show students and use to help them (and you) plan the curriculum?

What key skills/attributes/academic strengths do employers or graduate schools to whom you send your undergrads say your undergraduates have? Do they ever make any suggestions? How do you respond to them?

What challenges do you face in your department? Yes, budget, but what else? Retirements? Mismatch in areas to teach vs. expertise? Too many or too few courses at particular points? Are there any bottlenecks to student flow-through? Major areas missing?

Do you have an active student society? How is it integrated into your program? What role do they play?

How do you and your colleagues communicate to your students your goals for them?

Why do students choose your program? Do they get what they expect?

What do they say about your program (before and after they graduate)?

How does your website reflect your goals and your values? How does it address student needs? What role does your website play in your communications strategy to students?

How do the results of your Course Experience Surveys at each year level compare with those in your Faculty as a whole?

Do you have a strong connection with your alumni in case you wanted to contact them to ask them more questions about the program and get their feedback?

How is research integrated into teaching in your department? How do you showcase this? Who were your Jamie Cassels Undergraduate Research Awards (JCURA) students last year?

How (using what principles) do you make decisions about course/teaching allocations?

What other data do you need or could you collect before the retreat that would help you to make good decisions about the student experience in your program and the quality of the program you offer?

Appendix A

Sample pre-retreat questionnaire for the facilitator to send to colleagues in the unit

<Your Department/School/Faculty>
Curricular Retreat on <DATE>

Some questions to consider ahead of time

I am really looking forward to seeing you on <DATE> and learning more about your goals for the <YOUR UNIT> program. In order to help me prepare for the retreat, I would really appreciate it if you would send me your thoughts to the following questions ahead of time. Please just resave this document with your name at the front of the file and then reply to this note to tdawson@uvic.ca and reattach the file putting your name in the subject heading so I can sort them easily. Thank you.

Teresa Dawson, Director—UVic Learning and Teaching Centre

1. How would you (briefly) describe <YOUR SUBJECT> a) as a discipline, b) as an academic unit, and c) as a UVic undergraduate/graduate program to a colleague from a different institution?
2. How would you define a “successful student” in your academic program?
3. Please complete the following sentence. “When students leave our program, I would like them to be able to.....”
4. What do you enjoy most about teaching in the <YOUR UNIT> program?
5. What are the most distinctive aspects of the program from your perspective?
6. Anything else you would like to share—concerns about the program or challenges to teaching in it?

Appendix B

Sample Academic Unit Curricular Retreat Agenda

Department of <YOUR UNIT>:
Curriculum Review Retreat

10:00 am - 5:00 pm, <DATE> (including lunch),
Learning and Teaching Centre, HHB 128

*Facilitator: Teresa Dawson,
Director—Learning and Teaching Centre*

- | | |
|----------|---|
| 10:00 am | Welcome (Chair). NOTE: coffee will be available from 9:45 am |
| 10:05 am | Introductions and discussion of goals (Facilitator) |
| 10:20 am | Who are our students?: A panel and discussion
Select graduates from a variety of backgrounds to speak to their experience of taking a <PROGRAM> degree, what it taught them, and how they have applied those skills to what they are doing now. |

11:15 am	Some key supporting facts and figures from the surveys and elsewhere (Chair/Chair of Curriculum committee)	3:00 pm	COFFEE BREAK
11:30 am	COFFEE BREAK	3:30 pm	Designing the elements Based on our earlier discussions we will break into working groups to begin the design and outcomes process. For example, groups may work on a foundation course, a second-year gateway, a capstone experience, or linking core courses. They might also work on finalising the programs' learning outcomes statement and/or developing a communications plan for the website.
11:45 am	Brainstorming around Program Goals Reflections on student panel discussion in the context of their perspectives on the goals of the academic unit, as well as their individual goals.		
12:30 pm	Summary of discussion and presentation of a suggested model for program design and evaluation (Facilitator)	4:15 pm	Presentation and discussion of results
1:00 pm	LUNCH: Thinking about communication	4:35 pm	Bringing the pieces together: Next steps and implementation plans (all)
1:45 pm	Program-level evaluation and design workshop Given the identified goals, how can we improve program cohesion? What is missing and what might we do differently at the program level? We will use an analytical alignment matrix to help with this process and consider issues such as: the disciplinary foundation, capstone or culminating courses, and courses maintaining disciplinary coherence in the intervening years.	4:55 pm	Wrap up—the retreat will adjourn by 5:00 pm
2:30 pm	Presentation and discussion of results		

