

EXEMPT STATUS

Assessment Report Workbook

Institution: **UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA**

Proposed Degree Level for Exempt Status:

**APPLICATION FOR EXEMPT STATUS TO THE
DOCTORAL LEVEL**

Quality Assessment Review Panel Member(s):

Dr. Dan Birch, Chair

Dr. Fred Hall

Dr. Ross Paul

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Overall Assessment Worksheet

Applicant Information:

Applicant

University of Northern British Columbia

Degree Level for Exempt Status:

Doctoral Level

Assessment Summary Table:

Criteria	Fails	Meets	Conditional
0. Prerequisite Criteria for Exempt Status	x		
1. Mission and Policies		x	
2. Governance, Faculty, Services and Facilities		x	
3. Accountability			x
4. Other	x		

Following its assessment of the organization, the Exempt Status Assessment Panel has determined that the organization:

- x *fails to meet the Exempt Status criteria*
 meets or exceeds the Exempt Status criteria
 meets the criteria for Exempt Status on the condition that the following required actions are undertaken:

Rationale for Determination:

Preface

Although the *Exempt Status Assessment Report Workbook* does not have a section dealing with what we are calling Prerequisite Criteria for Exempt Status, primarily the Prerequisite Time Period, this is a criterion that the Review Panel believes needs to be dealt with explicitly regarding the application from UNBC. The “Exempt Status Criteria and Guidelines” document identifies the criterion as follows.

“The prerequisite for an institution to be considered for Exempt Status is that the institution has, for 10 years:

- had approval to grant degrees in its own name up to a particular level;
- been successfully enrolling students in approved degree programs at that level
- and, has a ten-year history of granting degrees in British Columbia.”

We are not persuaded that UNBC meets this prerequisite. Certainly UNBC has had approval for more than ten years to grant the PhD degree; that is not at issue. The University received approval to award the PhD in Natural Resources and Environmental Science (NRES) in 1996, and a year later was authorized to offer a PhD in Psychology. Hence it has had the necessary approval for two PhD programs for at least 14 years. UNBC also received approval recently to offer a PhD in Health Sciences, but that is less than a year old and the first students were enrolled only in the fall of 2011, hence the PhD in Health Sciences does not enter into this discussion of programs more than a decade old.

The second part of the prerequisite calls for the institution to be “successfully enrolling students” in “programs at that level”. The use of the plural here twice would seem to call for multiple students in at least two programs. The enrolment data we were provided is replicated here in Table 1. There is not an issue with the NRES program. It has had multiple students for the last decade, with a general (albeit not steady) increase over the time period. (The data in the application from UNBC do not cover 2010-11, nor the current year’s enrolment.)

Table 1: PhD Student Enrolment (FTE) by Program and Year for the last 10 Years
(data effective May 2010)

Doctoral Degree Program	Academic Year									
	00/01	01/02	02/03	03/04	04/05	05/06	06/07	07/08	08/09	09/10
NRES		7.67	8.33	10.78	11.67	11.00	14.67	20.67	20.33	25.67
Psychology						22's	5.67	5.67	7.67	9.67
Total	22's	8.67	8.33	11.78	13.89	15.67	20.34	26.34	28.00	35.34

There is however an issue with the Psychology program. For two of the years in Table 1, there were no students enrolled, and for another two years there was only 22's. Only starting with 2004-5 did the program have more than 22's. Including this year (2011-12), there is then only an eight-year history of enrolling multiple students in this program. (Despite the lack of data from UNBC, we know from meeting and speaking with students in the program that there were multiple students last year, and are again this year.) Technically, then, UNBC does not meet this part of the prerequisite if it is taken literally.

It is the third part of the prerequisite, however, that concerns us the most. This requirement calls for a “ten-year history of granting degrees.” Table 2 replicates the data that we were provided on PhD graduates. There are three difficulties displayed in these data. First, for three of the eleven years shown, there were no PhDs awarded. There are only eight years in which PhDs have been granted, and only six consecutive years. Second, this same comment on numbers applies to the NRES program taken on its own. Not even this flagship UNBC PhD program has had a ten-year history of granting the PhD. Third, and perhaps most critical, is the fact that in only two years has a PhD in Psychology been granted, and then only to 22's each year. We have interpreted this DQAB requirement to mean that a university should show ten consecutive years of granting the degree, in more than just one program. UNBC does not

meet either part of that interpretation. Even using the most generous interpretation of the requirement (not consecutive years, only one program), there are still only eight years in which UNBC has awarded a PhD.

Table 2: PhD Graduates by Program and Year for the last 10 Years (data effective November 2010)

Doctoral Degree Program	Academic Year										
	00/01	01/02	02/03	03/04	04/05	05/06	06/07	07/08	08/09	09/10	10/11*
NRES											
PSYC											
Total											22 s

* anticipated PhD graduates in 2011.

At the risk of exceeding our mandate, we would like also to address the wording that calls for “successfully enrolling students” in a program. We have serious concerns in two respects as to whether the Psychology PhD program can be said to be successful in its enrolment of PhD students: enrolment numbers, and completion rates.

The first is the low admission numbers annually. Table 3 shows the admissions for the first entering cohorts (or possible cohorts – one year had zero students). Admitting 22 s per year does not make for a successful program. PhD students benefit greatly from compatriots in order to gain the most from a PhD program. While it is true that writing a dissertation can be a solitary endeavor for many, the course-work and candidacy part of a program are usually improved markedly from having student colleagues.

Table 3. Admissions during the first years of the Psychology PhD program

Academic year	99/00	00/01	01/02	02/03	03/04	04/05
Admitted						
Registered						22 s

Matters have not improved markedly in recent years, as shown in Table 4. In only two years did new student numbers 22 s. This current year, only 22 s was admitted and registered. The program has not really been successful in attracting students.

Table 4. Admissions during recent years of the Psychology PhD program

Academic year	05/06	06/07	07/08	08/09	09/10	10/11
Admitted						
Registered						22 s

The second aspect is the completion rate. All of the students shown in Table 3 have had 7 years to complete the program, which is the maximum time allowed by UNBC, but have done so. That is a completion rate of 22% or 33% of those admitted. This is considerably below national average completion rates for either science or social science doctoral students (which tend to be in the 50-70% range).

Overall, we would suggest that the UNBC PhD programs need more time to demonstrate the success that is the prerequisite for applying for exempt status for this degree. While we would not suggest waiting for ten years of successful graduates from the PhD in Health Sciences, we would certainly recommend waiting until that program has had several years of successful graduations. During that time period, the NRES program will almost certainly continue its successful graduations. Whether the Psychology PhD program will continue in its present form at UNBC is a matter for the University to decide, but the decision is not a foregone conclusion. Perhaps some aspects of it can be rolled into the new PhD in Health Sciences.

The Ministry's document, *Exempt Status: Criteria and Guidelines* begins by stating "The purpose of Exempt Status is to provide an expedited review process for institutions that have demonstrated:

- A history of successfully offering quality degree programs at a given level for at least ten years in British Columbia;
- An established organizational capacity for degree-granting (including faculty) sufficient to ensure that quality degree level education; and
- The establishment of rigorous, ongoing program and institutional quality assessment processes, both internal and external."

The first of these prerequisite criteria is addressed in the preface above. The second is addressed in section "2. Governance, Faculty, Services and Facilities" below, and the third is discussed in section "3. Accountability" also below.

Signed:

Chair of the Exempt Status Quality Assessment Panel:



December 3, 2011

(Signature)

(Date)

Daniel R. Birch

(Printed Name)

Quality Assessment Panel Members:



December 3, 2011

(Signature)

(Date)

Fred L. Hall

(Printed Name)



(Signature)

(Date)

Ross Paul

(Printed Name)

Assessment Worksheets

1. Mission and Policies

Determination of the Panel

The Applicant:

- ☐ fails to meet criteria
☒ meets or exceeds criteria
☐ meets criteria on the condition that the following requirements are addressed:

Rationale for Determination:

Criteria for Assessment

Criteria	Comment
<p>To ensure degree quality and relevance, the institution has in place:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> an approved, clearly articulated and published mission statement reflecting goals that are appropriate to an academic institution of high standard; 	<p>The <i>University Plan, 2010</i> is an updated document, approved after much consultation within the University community and throughout the region. It includes clearly articulated values, vision, mission and goals entirely appropriate to a small research university committed to serving its region and the world through its research, its academic programs and its capacity for engagement with its communities. The mission statement identifies four substantive areas and one process area in which the University aspires to be among the best:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Environment and Natural Resources First Nations and Indigenous Issues Health and Quality of Life Northern Community Sustainability and Development Innovative Distributed Delivery of Programs

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • appropriate policies and processes concerning academic integrity and standards, including the admission and recruitment of students and the evaluation and awarding of academic credit; • policies and processes to ensure that the institution conforms to principles of academic freedom and responsibility; and, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ when students or staff are asked to sign or adhere to a statement of faith and/or a code of conduct that might constitute a constraint upon academic freedom, a policy in which the applicant: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - notifies staff and students as an initial step in the employment or admission process; and, <p>has adequate procedures in place to ensure the principles of natural justice are followed, in the event of alleged violations of any contractual arrangement concerning such required statement of faith and/or code of conduct.</p>	<p>The University Plan itself includes the statement, “UNBC embraces the principles of academic freedom, responsibility, education for its own sake, integrity, inclusion, respect for others, equity, fairness, operational efficiency and public accountability.”</p> <p>Expectations of faculty and students, with reference to academic integrity and standards are clearly articulated in the <i>Faculty Agreement</i>, University policies and the Undergraduate and Graduate Calendars. These policies include articulation of the consequences of alleged violations, the procedures for investigation, discipline and appeal. Similarly, principles related to academic freedom and responsibility are clearly articulated and available to all members of the University. Specifically, Article 2 of the <i>Faculty Agreement</i> describes both what academic freedom is and what it is not, i.e., members’ responsibility to respect the academic freedom and rights of others is emphasized.</p> <p>UNBC does not expect the members of its academic community to adhere to any statement of faith or code of conduct that might constitute a constraint upon academic freedom.</p>
<p>The institution publishes the policies noted above and makes them available to students in an academic calendar or other publication.</p>	<p>The policies noted are published and available to students, both in hard copy and on line.</p>

2. Governance, Faculty, Services and Facilities

Determination of the Panel

The Applicant:

_____ fails to meet criteria

 X meets or exceeds criteria

_____ meets criteria on the condition that the following requirements are addressed:

Rationale for Determination:

Criteria for Assessment

Criteria	Comment
The institution has a governance structure and administrative capacity appropriate to an academic institution of high standard, with an acceptable level of faculty involvement in governance.	Under the <i>University of Northern British Columbia Act</i> of 1990 and subsequently (since 2000) under the <i>University Act of British Columbia</i> , UNBC has the same governance provisions as the other three research universities in the Province, i.e., a Senate with primary responsibility for academic governance and a Board of Governors with primary responsibility for fiscal, business and organizational governance. Faculty members are represented on the Board and hold the majority of seats on Senate.
The institution has appropriate faculty, services and facilities sufficient to ensure the quality of the degree programs for which it has consent/approval.	UNBC has faculty, services and facilities appropriate to maintaining high quality in the PhD programs it has approval to offer. This is an important consideration in the development of new PhD programs and their submission to DQAB for Ministerial consent. The University has a complement of approximately 170 full-time tenured and tenure track faculty (more than 90% of whom hold doctoral degrees) complemented by more than 240 sessionally-appointed faculty. The University's application

	<p>for exempt status to the doctoral level notes library and research resources including those on regional campuses and specialized research facilities, e.g., The Dr. Max Blouw Quesnel River Research Centre. Also noted are the administrative services available from the Offices of the Dean of Graduate Programs and the Registrar. The University's submission lists a dozen areas of non-academic service and resources available to students.</p>
<p>The institution has appropriate internal processes for developing and approving new degree programs.</p>	<p>There is as yet no formal process for developing and approving new PhD programs, but the existing informal process seems to be appropriate and working effectively. Initial discussion for the development of new doctoral programs takes place between members of the program area, the Dean of Graduate Programs, and the Provost. Once a proposal has been developed, it is considered by and requires the approval of the College, the appropriate Senate committees, Senate and the Board of Governors. The very small number of existing approved programs heightens the likelihood of careful analysis and consideration before institutional approval.</p>

3. Accountability

Determination of the Panel

The Applicant:

_____ fails to meet criteria

_____ meets or exceeds criteria

 x meets criteria on the condition that the following requirements are addressed:

Rationale for Determination:

Criteria for Assessment

Criteria	Comment
The institution can demonstrate that it has a policy and process for the quality development of new programs that require peer / external review by appropriate experts.	UNBC has developed and implemented only one new doctoral program (PhD Health Sciences) in the past 14 years. It is currently in the initial stages of considering three potential new doctoral programs. While there is widespread consultation across the University and within its primary catchment communities for such program development, there does not appear to be a formal commitment to external peer review. The University should ensure that such a commitment is built into all doctoral program development processes.
The institution can demonstrate that it has rigorous, ongoing program and institutional quality assessment processes, both internal and external. <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Program review usually includes:<ul style="list-style-type: none">- A self-study undertaken by faculty members and administrators of the program based on evidence relating to program performance, including	UNBC's laudable commitment to inter-disciplinarity has resulted in academic program review processes that pose challenges to the panel in interpreting the application of the DQAB criteria for exempt status. External reviews are of academic units rather than of specific academic programs so that undergraduate and

<p>strengths and weaknesses, desired improvements, and future directions;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An assessment conducted by a panel consisting of experts external to the institution that normally includes a site visit; - A report of the expert panel assessing program quality and recommending any changes needed to strengthen that quality; and, - A formal institutional response to the recommendations in the report. <p>○ Exempt Status implies that <u>all</u> of an institution's operating degree programs have been reviewed periodically by a panel of independent experts, the majority of whom are senior academics. The Board expects such a program review process to be in place in institutions applying for Exempt Status, and may request to review associated documentation for any of the programs to be offered by the institution in British Columbia.</p>	<p>graduate components are reviewed conjointly rather than separately. Where the entire program is in a single academic unit, as is the case for Psychology, it is possible to extract considerable information about the PhD program from the overall review but it is difficult to do this in the case of the NRES which encompasses a number of disciplines across several academic units.</p> <p>As a result, while the standard university mechanisms and processes for academic program review are well established at UNBC, there have not been, to date, any independent reviews of either of the existing PhD programs (NRES, Psychology). It is useful to examine further what has been done in each case.</p> <p>There was a formal review of Psychology in 2011 which includes the PhD program but only in the context of an overall review of the bachelor's, master's and doctoral programs in the field. The review identified a number of concerns and challenges and made some significant recommendations which have been on hold pending the arrival of a new department head in January, 2012. The university needs to decide if it can afford to give more faculty support to the program in light of flagging enrolments, poor completion rates and concerns about student support from at least some of its participants.</p> <p>With respect to the NRES, components of which are contained in many academic units, the review challenge is even more complex. Since NRES embraces a wide spectrum of</p>
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	<p>disciplines in both the Arts (Environmental Studies, Tourism, Geography) and Science (Biology, Environmental Science, Geography, Forestry, Recreational Resource Management), there are a number of disciplinary reviews that include some commentary on bits of the PhD program, but there has been no specific assessment of the program during its 15 years of existence. At the same time, some of its component parts have been thoroughly reviewed. Most notably, a comprehensive review of the Ecosystem Science and Management Program (ESM) was conducted by four external examiners in 2010. The review reinforces the panel's perspective of a successful program component which will almost certainly be reflected in a full review of the entire PhD program. Furthermore, UNBC has recently completed a comprehensive and systematic external review of its overall graduate program structures and processes. While the resulting report was tabled with Senate in 2010, it has not yet been acted upon and there are differing opinions as to what should be done. This initiative was timely and important but it also raises questions about current practices that underline the relatively fledgling status of graduate programming, especially at the PhD level.</p>
<p>The institution can demonstrate that it has an established and ongoing institutional and program planning cycle and process to assess the effectiveness of its educational programs and services, and for continuous growth and improvement.</p>	<p>As noted above, in the material provided both with the application and in response to the request of the reviewers, it has not been demonstrated that UNBC's "practice of ensuring that all academic programs</p>

	are subject to external review every five to seven years” is being fulfilled.
The institution can demonstrate that it has appropriate accountability mechanisms functioning for both the academic programs and research activities.	The University has in place all the normal and appropriate policies and mechanisms for accountability in its research, including a strategic research plan, a general research policy and specific policies on research ethics including research involving human subjects, animal subjects, and biohazard material.

4. Other

Determination of the Panel

The Applicant:

- ☒ fails to meet criteria
☐ meets or exceeds criteria
☐ meets criteria on the condition that the following requirements are addressed:

Rationale for Determination:

Criteria for Assessment

Criteria	Comment
Where there are partnerships or collaborative arrangements with other institutions, the institution has clearly articulated and appropriate policies and processes in place.	The joint offering with UBC of a degree program in environmental engineering is accomplished under a formal agreement that takes into account accreditation requirements and UNBC's participation in medical degree expansion through the Northern Medical Program is governed by a formal agreement and the joint appointment of a senior academic administrator.
The institution has in place programs that can be appropriately integrated with the provincial post-secondary system in program transfer and articulation.	Provision for transfer and articulation are primarily at the undergraduate level where UNBC is an active participant in the BC transfer system under the aegis of the BC Council on Admissions and Transfer. Professional master's programs offered at regional campuses make substantial use of videoconferencing technology and, to the extent that local experts are given sessional appointments, their credentials are vetted appropriately.
The institution has the financial stability and resources appropriate for an institution seeking Exempt Status.	Like the other universities in the Province, UNBC's fiscal health is subject to review under the aegis of BC's Auditor General and its financial

	<p>stability is not in question. In addition to its operating budget of more than \$65 million, it has achieved admirable success in earning competitively awarded research awards.</p>
<p>Any other information or condition the board deems necessary to determine the organizational capacity of the institution.</p>	<p>Other: Conclusions</p> <p>In summary, the DQAB panel has concluded that, while UNBC has an enviable track record in research intensity (indeed, it can be considered the Canadian leader among small universities), and although it has some very creative approaches to graduate education, it does not yet meet the accountability criteria set out in section 3. Hence, the application for exempt status to the doctoral level is premature. UNBC should be encouraged to resubmit its application when it has addressed the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Successfully completed an external review that is focused entirely on the NRES PhD program. The self-study and report of external reviewers could incorporate the results of the component academic program reviews already completed and the overall review of graduate programming. 2. Implemented some of the key recommendations for the PhD program in Psychology. 3. Initiated policy for the external reviews of its PhD programs that takes the above concerns into account and which will be applied to the PhD in

	<p>Health Sciences which took in its first students in 2011.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Implemented some of the key recommendations in the graduate program review most pertinent to the three current PhD programs. 5. Ensured consultation of appropriate external expertise in the development of all new PhD programs.
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