Academic Program Audit: A Quality Assurance Mechanism for Higher Education Programs in the University of Baguio

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Abstract

ISO/FDIS 9001:2015 QMS Standard requires an organization to determine and control the statutory and regulatory requirements applicable to its products and services. The Commission on Higher Education (CHED) is the regulatory agency for higher education and issues Policies, Standards, and Guidelines (PSG) for specific programs. In addition to the PSGs, CHED also releases relevant memorandums specifying additional requirements, addenda, or changes to previous issuances. This study aims to assess the compliance of the University of Baguio with CHED's Policies, Standards, and Guidelines using the academic program audits submitted by the different schools. Specifically, it seeks to evaluate the compliance of various programs in the area of administration. The study will serve as a guide for the university in creating and implementing relevant strategies, policies, and procedures to meet the minimum standards outlined in CHED's PSGs for each program. It will also help the Quality Assurance Office (QAO) assess the progress of the Institutional Development Plan (IDP). The researcher used the documentary analysis method for the study. The results indicate that the University of Baguio has fully complied with the educational qualifications required for a dean. However, improvements are needed to meet the minimum educational qualifications and teaching load requirements for program chairpersons. The University of Baguio should ensure these areas are consistently addressed, as they are essential for the accreditation of various programs.

Keywords: Compliance Audit, Academic Program Audit, Policy, Standards and Guidelines, Higher Education Quality Assurance, Quality Assurance

1. Introduction

Education is believed to be one of the foundations of success. It is the most efficient system for equipping people with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes essential for effective involvement in society. As Aristotle said, "The fate of empires depends on the education of the youth." This clearly suggests that, as a principal instrument of development, education must help create a good society with disciplined, production-oriented individuals who share the fruits of a good life. Various laws assert that the State is mandated to enhance the professional and personal attributes of teachers and ensure that teaching retains its rightful share of the best available talents (Saliendra, M., 2018).

The Academic Audit is a faculty-driven model of ongoing self-reflection, collaboration, teamwork and peer feedback. It is based on structured conversations among faculty, stakeholders and peer reviewers all

focused on a common goal: to continuously improve quality processes in teaching and learning and thus enhance student success (College System of Tennessee, n.d.). ISO/FDIS 9001:2015 QMS Standard requires an organization to determine and control the statutory and regulatory requirements applicable to the organization's products and services (Seshadri, P. 2015). Commission on Higher Education (CHED) is the regulating agencies for higher education. This agency issues Policies, Standards, and Guidelines (PSG) for a particular program. These PSGs are improved or changed from time to time; hence, educational institutions need to be aware of and comply with applicable changes. Apart from the PSGs, the agency releases other relevant memorandums specifying additional requirements or addendum, or changes in previous issuance(s). Adopting a Quality Management System (QMS) standard aligns with CHED requirements, ensuring systematic processes, continuous improvement, and accountability, thereby facilitating the university's goal of delivering high-quality education and meeting accreditation standards. The University of Baguio, as an autonomous institution, is expected to demonstrate exceptional, institutional quality and enhancement through internal quality assurance (QA) systems, demonstrate excellent program outcomes through a high proportion of accredited programs, the presence of Centers of Excellence and/or Development, and/or international certification. To attain this, the university evaluates its systems and processes vis-à-vis statutory and regulatory requirements to determine deficiencies and gaps. This strategy is reflected in the Institutional Development Plan (IDP) 2021-2025. Academic Program Audit is a process aimed at evaluating the different programs based on CHED PSG and other applicable CHED issuances and the requirements of accreditation, COD/COE, other relevant government agencies, and laws. These are reflected in its Institutional Development Plan (IDP).

The University of Baguio has twenty-seven (27) undergraduate degree programs, eleven (11) graduate programs, nine (9) short-term programs, a Kindergarten school, Elementary school, Junior High School, Senior High School, Junior Science High School, and a Senior Science High School. Ten (10) higher education schools house the different undergraduate and graduate programs offered by the University of Baguio, such as the following (University of Baguio Student Handbook, 2021 Edition):

1. School of Business Administration and Accountancy (SBAA) offers Bachelor of Science in Accountancy (BSA), Bachelor of Science in Business Administration (BSBA) majors in Financial Management, Human Resource Development Management, Marketing Management, and Operations Management, Master in Business Administration Non-thesis (MBA), Master in Business Administration with Thesis (MBA), and Doctor in Business Administration (DBA).

2. School of Criminal Justice and Public Safety (SCJPS) offers Bachelor of Science in Criminology (BSCrim), Bachelor of Forensic Science (BFSci), Master of Science in Criminal Justice with specialization in Criminology (MS Crim), Master of Crisis and Disaster Risk Reduction Management (MCDRRM), Doctor of Philosophy in Criminal Justice with specialization in Criminology (Ph.D. Crim).

3. School of Dentistry (SD) offers Doctor of Dental Medicine (DMD) and Master in Dental Education (MDE)

4. School of Engineering and Architecture (SEA) offers Bachelor of Science in Architecture (BSARCH), Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering (BSCE), Bachelor of Science in Electronics Engineering (BSECE), Bachelor of Science in Environmental and Sanitary Engineering (BSESE), and Bachelor of Engineering Technology major in Mechatronics (BET-Mecha).

5. School of Information Technology (SIT) offers a Bachelor of Science in Computer Engineering (BSCpE), a Bachelor of Science in Computer Science (BSCS), and a Bachelor of Science in Information Technology (BSIT).

6. School of International Hospitality and Tourism Management (SIHTM) offers a Bachelor of Science in Hospitality Management with a specialization in International Hotel and Business Operations (BSHM-IHBO) and Professional Culinary Arts (BSHM-PCA) and a Bachelor of Science in Tourism Management with a specialization in International Tourism (BSTM-IT).

7. School of Law (SL) offers Juris Doctor (Non-Thesis)

8. School of Natural Sciences (SNS) offers a Bachelor of Science in Medical Laboratory Science (BSMLS) and a Bachelor of Science in Physical Therapy (BSPT).

9. School of Nursing (SN) offers a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN).

10. School of Teacher Education and Liberal Arts offers Bachelor of Arts in Communication (BA Comm), Bachelor of Arts in English Language (BA Eng), Bachelor of Arts in Music (BA Music), Bachelor of Arts in Political Science (BA PolSci), Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEEd), Bachelor of Physical Education (BPEd), Bachelor of Science in Psychology (BSPsych), Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSEd) majors in English, Filipino, Mathematics, and Social Studies, Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) major in Development Education, Doctor of Education (Ed.D), Master of Arts in English (MA Eng), Master of Arts in Education (MAEd) major in Educational Management, and Master in Public Administration (MPA).

These schools are governed by an assigned Dean, with the assistance of the Program Chair of each program and a secretary.

Literature Review

The role of higher education institutions according to Kumar (2017) is reflected in its learning outcomes. The learning outcomes contribute to developing quality professionals by enhancing competency in subject knowledge and intellectual capability, grooming professionalism and employability skills. Academic Audit according to Telsang & Kulkarni (2011) is an initiative focused on improving academic quality without spending more money or abandoning other priorities. It is a self-sustaining cycle of academic quality improvement that is low cost, highly collegial, faculty driven, and uses structured conversation within the department and between department members and auditors to examine the possibilities for improvement and achieve commitment for change. In addition, according to Dill (2000), academic audits, like college or university accreditation, are directed at the institution level. Unlike accreditation or subject assessments, however, academic audits make no attempt to comprehensively review an institution's or program's resources and activities, nor to directly assess the quality of teaching and learning. Rather academic audits are focused on those processes by which academic institutions exercise their responsibility to assure academic standards and improve the quality of their teaching and learning. Also, in contrast to accreditation, program review, or student assessment initiatives, these audits look deeply into the heart of the academic enterprise.

Broadly speaking, an academic program review can be defined as an attempt to evaluate the performance of curricula, departments, faculty, and/or students at a degree-granting institution (Hanover Research, 2012). In standards-based systems, which are increasingly common across countries, governments set standards for student attainment, clearly defining the knowledge and skills students are expected to have attained at different stages of their education. The curriculum covers the objectives identified in standards,

and student assessments focus on attainment of standards (oecd.org, n.d.). They test whether institutions and their facilities in fact honor their public responsibility to monitor academic standards and improve student learning.

Lastly, Academic audit according to Nitonde (2016) is a tool for examining and enhancing the quality of academic aspects of Higher Education Institutions. Usually, it is a systematic and scientific process. It lays emphasis on the designing, implementing, monitoring and reviewing the quality of services provided by the academic institutions. It aims at reviewing the performance of the academic inputs with respect to quality assurance.

The Plan, Do, Check, Act (PDCA) cycle is a dynamic cycle that could be implemented in each process throughout the organization. It combines planning, implementing, controlling and continual improvement. This applies to all kind of processes: management's review, corrective actions, product realization, resource management etc. The PDCA cycle is not one of the ISO 9001:2015 Standard requirements but the standard definitely promotes the approach of the PDCA cycle. It is an efficient tool for achieving its requirements, especially the requirement for chapter 10.3 Continual Improvement. Related to the quality management system, the PDCA cycle is a dynamic cycle that could be implemented in each process throughout the organization (Abuhav, 2014).
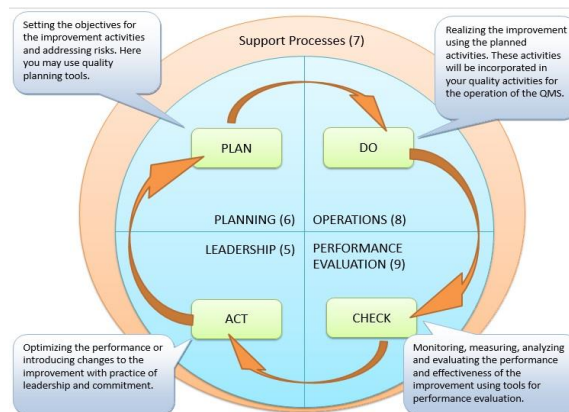
The PDCA cycle is one of the widely used methods of monitoring quality management systems and is applicable to international standards such as ISO 22301, ISO 9001, ISO 45001, and ISO 27001. It allows organizations to gather relevant information and use it as a well-grounded basis before deciding whether to proceed with the plan or improve it further. Through this data-driven method, organizations can work to continuously improve their processes, products, and services (Reyes, 2022).

The process approach to auditing incorporates Dr. Edward Deming's well-known Plan Do Check Act cycle is defining audit scope and criteria. This structure also guides the gathering of evidence to support process-based auditing. The four types of audit evidence that support the process approach include: (Fisher, 2017)

Plan = Adequacy

Do = Conformance

Check = Effectiveness

Act = Improvement

2. Methodology

Study Design

The study made use of document analysis to obtain the results. The data from the academic program audit was organized and combined to summarize the compliance as well as the gaps and deficiencies of the institution with the CHED PSG.

Sample of the Study

The data was collected from the academic program audit submitted by the schools to the Quality Assurance Office (QAO) for the School Year 2021-2022. The target submission was thirty-seven (37) program academic audits, but only thirty-four (34) program audit reports were submitted to the Quality Assurance Office (QAO).

Data Gathering Tools

The data was gathered through the program audit template provided by the Quality Assurance Office (QAO), which is based on the tool used by CHED CAR when evaluating schools who are applying for a Government Permit. The template comprises of five (5) columns wherein in the first column, the school will enter the section and standards or minimum requirements in the CHED PSG, second column is for the actual situation of the school, third column is for the school to check if complied or not, fourth column is for the school to identify actions to be taken if the school is not compliant, and lastly the last column is for remarks. The details about the different indicators in the Program Academic Audit were extracted from available sources such as the PSG of the program and the Manual of Regulation for Private Higher Education (MORPHE).

Data Gathering Procedures

The Program Audit templates were sent to the schools through email. The templates were also uploaded to the online repository of the university. The researcher collected the academic program audit reports submitted by the schools through email. After data collection, the researcher verified through the CHED website if the PSG used in evaluating the program was the PSG for the program. After that, the researcher organized the data using Google Sheets. The researcher used the MORPHE as a reference in analyzing and classifying the data provided in the Academic Program Audit report.

Treatment of Data

Upon receipt of the Audit reports, the researcher verified through the CHED website if the PSG used in evaluating the program is the PSG for the program. Thereafter, the researcher determined the common sections in the PSGs, and clustered the data based on the identified sections through the Google Sheet. One of the common sections in the PSG is the administration which consists of the minimum qualifications to the dean and program chair. To get the percentage of compliance of the University of Baguio with the regulatory requirements, the researcher computed the average per section and the general average.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher analyzed the available data with the approval of the Vice President for Academic Affairs through the Research and Development Center (RDC). The researcher did not mention any school or the names of the auditor in doing the study for confidentiality. The data was solely based on the program audit reports. The researcher also did a verification of some of the data through a phone call with the concerned dean. The findings of the study were disseminated to the concerned officers during the meetings.

3. Results and Discussion

The University offers thirty-eight (38) higher education graduate and undergraduate programs. Two (2) of

which do not have a CHED PSG, namely BA Music and Juris Doctor (covered by the Legal Education Board (LEB)). Among the thirty-six (36) programs with CHED PSG, only thirty-four (34) or 94.44% program audit reports were submitted until March 30, 2022. Table 1 presents the list of programs.

Table 1.

Summary of programs with or without submitted program audit based on CHED PSG.

Programs		Policies, Standards, and Guidelines
	Bachelor of Science in Business Administration	CMO No. 17, Series of 2017
	Bachelor of Science in Accountancy	CMO No. 27, Series of 2017*
	Bachelor of Science in Criminology	CMO No. 05, Series of 2018 CMO No. 37, Series of 2010 CMO No. 104, Series of 2017
	Bachelor of Forensic Science	CMO No. 48, Series of 2012
	Doctor of Dental Medicine	CMO No. 03, Series of 2018
	Bachelor of Science in Electronics Engineering	CMO No. 101, Series of 2017
	Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering	CMO No. 92, Series of 2017
	Bachelor of Science in Environmental and Sanitary Engineering	CMO No. 98, Series of 2017
	Bachelor of Engineering Technology major in Mechatronics	CMO No. 86, Series of 2017
	Bachelor of Science in Architecture	CMO No. 61, Series of 2017
	Bachelor of Science in Hospitality Management	CMO No. 62, Series of 2017 CMO No. 104 Series of 2017
	Bachelor of Science in Tourism Management	CMO No. 62, Series of 2017 CMO No. 104 Series of 2017
	Bachelor of Science in Computer Engineering	CMO No. 87, Series of 2017
	Bachelor of Science in Computer Science	CMO No. 25, Series of 2015
	Bachelor of Science in Information Technology	CMO No. 25, Series of 2015
	Juris Doctor	LEBMO No. 01, Series of 2011*
	Bachelor of Science in Nursing	CMO No. 15, Series of 2017
	Bachelor of Science in Medical Laboratory Science	CMO No. 13, Series of 2017
	Bachelor of Science in Physical Therapy	CMO No. 55, Series of 2017
	Bachelor in Elementary Education	CMO No. 74, Series of 2017
	Bachelor of Secondary Education	CMO No. 75, Series of 2017
	Bachelor of Physical Education	CMO No. 80, Series of 2017
	Bachelor of Arts in English	CMO No. 24, Series of 2017
	Bachelor of Arts in Communication	CMO No. 35, Series of 2017

	Bachelor of Arts in Music	No CHED PSG
	Bachelor of Arts in Political Science	CMO No. 51, Series of 2017
	Bachelor of Science in Psychology	CMO No. 34, Series of 2017
	Master in Business Administration Academic Track	CMO No. 15, Series of 2019
	Master in Business Administration Non-Academic Track	CMO No. 15, Series of 2019
	Master in Dental Education	CMO No. 15, Series of 2019*
	Master in Public Administration	CMO No. 15, Series of 2019
	Master of Arts in Education	CMO No. 15, Series of 2019
	Master of Arts in English	CMO No. 15, Series of 2019
	Master of Science in Criminal Justice	CMO No. 15, Series of 2019 CMO No. 47, Series of 2006
	Master of Crisis and Disaster Risk Reduction Management	CMO No. 15, Series of 2019
	Doctor of Business Administration	CMO No. 15, Series of 2019
	Doctor of Education	CMO No. 15, Series of 2019
	Doctor of Philosophy in Criminal Justice	CMO No. 15, Series of 2019 CMO No. 47, Series of 2006
	Doctor of Philosophy major in Developmental Education	CMO No. 15, Series of 2019

Note: with * are those without program audit submitted

ADMINISTRATORS

Dean

Out of twenty-seven (27) programs that have a specific qualification for the dean based on the submitted program audit, all have fully complied with the educational qualifications. The programs that do not have specified requirements identified in the program audit for Dean are:

1. Bachelor of Science in Electronics Engineering;
2. Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering;
3. Bachelor of Engineering Technology major in Mechatronics;
4. Bachelor of Science in Nursing;
5. Bachelor of Science in Medical Laboratory Science;
6. Bachelor of Science in Physical Therapy; and
7. Bachelor of Science in Psychology.

The general qualifications of a Dean for a Bachelor of Science in Architecture do not apply to the program because the school is not specific to the architecture program. It includes engineering programs. The general requirement of the dean to provide general administration, leadership and direction to the architectural education program of the institution has been complied with. For schools with graduate programs, there is a need to verify the compliance of deans with the requirement – research publication in a refereed research journal.

Program Chair

Out of twenty-four (25) programs with available qualifications of program chair/head/coordinator based

on the submitted program audit, sixteen (16) or 64% of the programs fully complied with the minimum qualifications of the program chair/head/coordinator. The programs that do not have specified requirements in the program audit for Program Chair are:

1. Bachelor of Science in Criminology;
2. Doctor of Dental Medicine;
3. Bachelor of Engineering Technology major in Mechatronics;
4. Bachelor of Science in Nursing;
5. Bachelor of Science in Medical Laboratory Science;
6. Bachelor of Science in Physical Therapy;
7. Master of Science in Criminal Justice;
8. Master of Crisis and Disaster Risk Reduction Management; and
9. Doctor of Philosophy in Criminal Justice.

Prevailing qualifications or requirements that most of the programs did not meet are the aligned master's degree and appropriate license applicable to the program. The University of Baguio assists its employees to pursue further studies. This includes a 100% tuition fee and miscellaneous waiver if the employee will enroll in the Graduate School of the University of Baguio. In addition, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) offers the Staff and Instructors' Knowledge Advancement Program (SIKAP) Grant for Full-time and Part-time Study to applicants who can qualify for the eligibility criteria and meet the terms and conditions of the scholarship. Thus, the faculty members concerned must take advantage of these opportunities. However, maintaining academic quality was the main identified issue and challenge in higher education leadership, according to Drew, 2010. A major challenge identified in the study was finding balance around the business model, a more regulated environment with increased administrative demands, and academic quality. Another concern mentioned is resource constraints in the face of high academic workloads, and increased monitoring and reporting requirements were an issue for most of the academics interviewed. In addition, according to Calisoglu & Yalvac, 2019, the major problem experience in terms of attendance to the graduate courses is the distance between the school and the university. It was also seen that the conflict between schedule in the school and the graduate education causes problems in terms of attendance. For the University of Baguio, some graduate degree programs aligned to the field of specialization of the program chairpersons are not offered in Baguio City (https://www.finduniversity.ph/). Examples are a master's in computer engineering and forensic science.

Regarding teaching load, only the program chair of the Bachelor of Science in Computer Engineering complied with the maximum teaching load required for a program chair. This situation arises due to the inadequacy of faculty members in the department and the number of students enrolled. The program chairpersons at the University of Baguio are granted a release time of twelve (12) units, with six (6) units being output-based and payable through an honorarium. Table 2 summarizes the details of qualifications or requirements not complied with, based on the PSG.

Table 2: Summary of not complied qualifications/requirements of Program Chair/Head/Coordinator

Program	Qualification/ Requirements	Actual Situation	Action to be Taken
Bachelor of Arts in Communication	**Teaching Load:** The department chair, head or coordinator shall be allowed to teach, provided the regular teaching load shall not exceed 9 units per semester or term.	The program chair currently has 33 units of teaching load.	
Bachelor of Arts in Political Science	The head of the department offering the BA PoS program must have at least a master's degree in Political Science.	The Program Chair is a holder of MA-Social Studies and a Doctorate Degree in Philosophy major in Development Education.	The qualification of having at least a master's degree in Political Science shall be considered.
Bachelor of Science in Architecture	The teaching load of the Vice/Assistant Dean/Head shall be an internal policy of the institution but shall not exceed seventy-five percent (75%) of the regular teaching load of the full-time faculty.	The regular teaching load of a faculty is 24 units. The Program Chair is loaded with a minimum of 24 units per semester.	Hiring additional qualified faculty members to cover for the spill-over subjects.
Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering	Shall be a holder of a Master's degree in civil engineering	The program chair finished 30/36 units in Master's degree.	The program chair must finish the degree in the Master's degree.
	The maximum teaching load must be 50% of the regular teaching load.	Teaching load of the program chair is 100% of the full-time teaching load, which is 30 hours.	Reduce the teaching load of the program chair and add release time so that he/she will perform his/her duty effectively.
Bachelor of Science in Electronics Engineering	Holder of master's degree in electronics engineering, engineering education, management engineering, mathematics, sciences or allied related fields as defined in the CMO.	The program chair is not a master's degree holder of electronics engineering, engineering education, management engineering, mathematics, sciences or allied related fields, as defined in the CMO.	To appoint/hire a program chair that qualifies with this requirement.

Bachelor of Environmental and Sanitary Engineering	Shall be a holder of a baccalaureate degree in sanitary engineering.	The program chair is a graduate of BSCE	The program must have a program chair that fits to the qualification-based form the PSG.
	Shall be a holder of a Master's degree in allied programs.	The program chair is yet to finish the degree in the Master's degree.	The program chair finished 30/36 units in Master's degree.
	Shall be registered sanitary engineer with valid PRC license.	The program chair is a graduate of BSCE.	The program must have a program chair that fits to the qualification-based form the PSG.
	The maximum teaching load must be 50% of the regular teaching load.	Teaching load of the program chair is 100% of the full-time teaching load, which is 30 hours.	Reduce the teaching load of the program chair and add release time so that he/she will perform his/her duty effectively.
Bachelor of Science in Computer Engineering	Shall be a Professional Computer Engineer, if applicable; Shall be a holder of any of the following Master's degree: Master of Science in Computer Engineering Master of Engineering in Computer Engineering Master of Engineering Education in Computer Engineering Master of Engineering Program Major in Computer Engineering Master of Science in Engineering Major in Computer Engineering; and Shall have a minimum teaching experience of not less than three (3) years,	The Program Chair is a holder of MS in Information Technology. She has 27 years of experience in teaching and been an administrator for the past 13 years in different positions. She is a holder of a Professional Electronics Engineer license.	The university should hire a Program Chair that complies with the requirement.

	preferably with industry practice.		
Bachelor of Science in Computer Science	For the Program Chair, his/her teaching load should not exceed twelve (12) contact hours per week.	Teaching load of program chair for the 1st semester, SY2021-22: 29 units (30hrs).	Reduce the teaching load (contact hours) of the program chair.
Bachelor of Forensic Science	A full-time department head must be a holder of a Bachelor's and Master's degree in any of the following: Law, Medicine, biology, Molecular Biology, Genetics, Chemistry, Dentistry, Anthropology, and Psychology.	The department head is a holder of a Doctoral Degree in Criminology.	The PC needs to be specialized in Forensic Science related training.

4. Conclusion and Recommendation

Conclusion

The audit process has revealed that while most academic programs at the University of Baguio comply with the minimum qualifications for the area of administration, there are some gaps that need to be addressed, particularly concerning the minimum academic qualifications of the program chairpersons. Moving forward, it is crucial for the concerned deans and program chairpersons to address these gaps in order to help the university achieve the goals outlined in the Institutional Development Plan (IDP) and maintain its reputation for academic excellence.

Recommendation

The following recommendations should be addressed by the concerned schools and offices:

1. Revisit the "Actions to be Taken" in the Program Audit Report.
2. Evaluate the effectiveness of previously implemented strategies to comply with CHED standards and requirements.
3. Develop new strategies or improve existing ones to address the identified deficiencies.
4. Collaborate to effectively implement the identified strategies.
5. Regularly monitor the implementation of strategies to ensure they are carried out as planned and on time.

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