

Graduate Diploma (GDip) in Accounting
Final Assessment Report & Implementation Plan
January 2025

Faculty / Affiliated University College	Social Science and Ivey Business School
Degrees Offered	Graduate Diploma (GDip)
Date of Last Review	N/A (first cyclical review)
External Reviewer	Dr. Camillo Lento, Faculty of Business Administration Lakehead University
Internal Reviewer	Dr. Elizabeth Webb, Associate Dean, Graduate Faculty of Science
Date of Desk Audit Initiation	September 17, 2024
Date Review Report Received	October 16, 2024
Date Program/Faculty Response Received	Program – November 21, 2024 Faculty – November 21, 2024
Evaluation	Good Quality
Approval Dates	SUPR-G: February 24, 2025 ACA: March 4, 2025 Senate (for information): March 14, 2025
Year of Next Review	2031-2032
Progress Report	June 2027

Overview of Western's Cyclical Review Assessment Reporting Process

In accordance with Western's Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP), the Final Assessment Report (FAR) provides a summary of the review process, internal responses, and assessment and evaluation of the Graduate Diploma in Accounting Program delivered by the Faculty of Social Science and Ivey Business School.

This FAR considers the following documents:

- the program's self-study brief;
- the external reviewers' report;
- the response from the Program; and
- the response from the Dean, Faculty of Social Science and Ivey Business School

This FAR identifies the strengths of the program and opportunities for program enhancement and improvement, and details the recommendations of the external reviewer – noting those recommendations to be prioritized for implementation.

The Implementation Plan details the recommendations from the FAR that have been selected for implementation, identifies who is responsible for approving and acting on the recommendations, specifies any action or follow-up that is required, and defines the timeline for completion.

The FAR (including Implementation Plan) is sent for approval through the Senate Subcommittee for Program Review - Graduate (SUPR-G) and ACA, then for information to Senate and to the Ontario Universities' Council on Quality Assurance. Subsequently, it is publicly accessible on Western's IQAP website. The FAR is the only document from the graduate cyclical review process that is made public; all other documents are confidential to the Faculty of Social Science, Ivey Business School, the School of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies (SGPS), and SUPR-G.

Executive Summary

The Graduate Diploma (GDip) in Accounting is a 13-week full-time course-based professional program. The first cohort of GDip students was welcomed in 2015. The GDip provides an opportunity for university graduates interested in pursuing their Chartered Professional Accountant (CPA) designation to acquire the necessary skills and competencies to meet the requirements of CPA Canada, and ultimately work as a professionally designated accountant. The GDip program consists of five required courses designed to bridge the knowledge competency between courses at an undergraduate level (typically in a management/ business degree) and what is required under CPA Canada's Professional Education Program (PEP) program.

Largely driven by a combination of the demand for, and interest in, the CPA profession, enrolments vary from year to year. Enrolment in the 2021-22 Ivey stream was 18, and 40 in the DAN stream.

The program's self-study was informed by the recent results of the CPA Ontario Accredited Performance Evaluation, regular student exit surveys, an alumni feedback survey administered in the spring of 2023 and a focus group with the 2023 GDip class led by an independent facilitator.

The reviewers shared a positive assessment of the Graduate Diploma in Accounting. They offer five recommendations with considerations for further enhancement.

Strengths and Innovative Features Identified by the Program

- The faculty leadership of the GDip program maintain strong relationships with CPA Canada and CPA Ontario to ensure that the GDip continues to meet expectations of the profession.
- Experienced faculty members who understand the CPA profession's needs and challenges; and, are engaged in continuous professional development with the aim of remaining updated with the latest industry trends.
- Close alignment with CPA enables the program to: 1) bridge the gap between undergraduate studies and the CPA Professional Education Program (PEP); 2) provide students with advanced standing in CPA PEP enabling faster completion of CPA requirements; 3) offer unique opportunities to leverage world class academic research and thought leadership; and 4) maintain strong ties with industry partners to ensure the program's continued adherence to industry standards, and provision of financial support for students.
- Strong focus on professional development enables student mastery of both technical and enabling competencies required by the CPA; and, prepare them for an increasingly complex and demanding work environment. For example, case competitions, alumni networking event, workshops, guest speaker series.
- Both the DAN and the Ivey stream CFE pass rates well exceed the provincial pass rate in each of the most recent three years.

- Throughout the program, a variety of guest speakers present to and engage with students. In the DAN stream, PhD guest lecturers who are experts in their fields join the GDip classrooms. In the Ivey stream, former Ivey students who are now in firms or industry share their experiences.
- Students report that they are well prepared to enter the CPA profession, and to complete the remainder of the CPA process. Students indicate the quality, diversity and quantity of cases they are exposed to in our program, although academically challenging, provided them with an advantage in writing CPA Canada's Common Final Exam (CFE).
- The overall program completion ratio since the program's inception in 2015/2016 is 96.7%.
- The program is examining recent material provided by CPA Ontario on Indigenous storylines to determine how these learning materials may be incorporated into the program.

Concerns and Areas of Improvement Identified and Discussed by the Program

- Lack of dedicated space for the DAN stream of the GDip program.
- Administrative support is needed in the DAN stream to address the delays in processing applications and other administrative tasks; this has negatively impacted the experience for both current and prospective students.
- Some faculty members have shared that they are overwhelmed by the need for mentoring, office hours, and support beyond the classroom due to the intense nature of the program.
- Consider modifications to the structure of the first few classes to include additional review/refresher of critical topics from undergraduate studies.
- Due to significant competition from other post-secondary institutions offering similar programs, maintain high enrollment and performance metrics. The program needs to attract its own undergraduate students (in relation to the DAN stream).
- Fluctuating demand for the CPA designation results in unpredictable enrolment and make it difficult to accurately predict intake figures.
- For the DAN stream, permitting experienced faculty with a strong track record of securing high CPA examination pass rates to engage in overload teaching will relieve strain on faculty resources and help maintain accreditation with CPA Ontario. This will buy valuable time until the University is in a position to invest in new faculty.

Review Process

As part of the desk review of this stand-alone Graduate Diploma program, the review committee, comprising one external reviewer, and one internal reviewer, were provided with Volume I and II of the self-study brief in advance of the scheduled desk review.

Following the desk review, the reviewers submitted a comprehensive report of their findings which was sent to the Program and Deans Offices for review and response. Formative documents, including Volumes I and II of the Self-Study, the External Report, and the Program and Decanal responses form the basis of this Final Assessment Report (FAR) of the Graduate Diploma in Accounting. The FAR is collated and submitted to the SGPS and to SUPR-G by the Internal Reviewer with the support of the Office of Academic Quality and Enhancement.

Summative Assessment – External Reviewers’ Report

External reviewers shared that “*the program has been very successful, as evidenced by the initial accreditation, recent reaccreditation, and success rate of graduates at the CFE.*”

Strengths of the Program

- The faculty profile has a great mixture of practice and academic qualifications and augments the classroom experience with guest speakers from the community.
- Provides students with a rigorous and accelerated pathway to obtain CPA certification.
- High success rate of graduates in obtaining work and passing the CFE exam continue to strengthen the program’s reputation.
- Engages in ongoing evaluation (more frequently than this 7-year review), with CPA periodic performance evaluations and regular surveys for student and alumni feedback.
- Innovative in its development of a case competition, early incorporation of Indigenous content into the curriculum, and other student-based events (guest speakers and networking events).

Prospective Improvements for the Program to Consider

- A dedicated committee to review applications, rather than just the Director of each stream, would be ideal to promote the consideration of diverse applicants. (*Embedded in Recommendation # 3*)
- Consideration of program resourcing needed to ensure continued success.

- Faculty members that meet accreditation requirements already have heavy workloads. (*Embedded in Recommendation # 1*)
- Turnover of Limited Duties (LD) instructors impacts the consistency of teaching from year to year. Providing more teaching opportunities or converting L.D. to limited-term (L.T.) hires might entice instructors to commit to the program for several years. (*Embedded in Recommendation # 1*)
- Lack of administrative support is impacting the program's responsiveness. (*Embedded in Recommendation # 1*)
- The DAN stream could use dedicated classroom space and access to some common space in the Social Science building.

Summary of the Reviewers' Recommendations and Program/Faculty Responses

The following are the reviewers' recommendations in the order listed by the external reviewers.

Reviewers' Recommendation	Program/Faculty Response
<p>Recommendation #1: More resources are needed to support the program.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The DAN stream of the program needs administrative support.• Faculty meeting accreditation requirements are limited and are already in high demand to teach at both the graduate and undergraduate levels. Consider ways to further support instructional capacity.	<p>Program:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Effective October 1, 2024 a 1-year contract employee was recruited to support the DAN GDip stream.• Overload teaching would relieve the strain on faculty resources and help secure accreditation with CPA Ontario; however, overload teaching is not supported by the University.• Currently in the DAN stream, there is one LD faculty. This person has taught the course continuously since 2021. In the Ivey stream, there are presently two LD faculty, both have comparatively long-term appointments. <p>Faculty:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Dean's Office recently supported the hiring of a one-year contract employee to support the DAN GDip stream and will continue to support such appointments.• Unfortunately, the many financial pressures on Faculty budget preclude any support of overload teaching or the conversion of LD to LT hires. Should the Faculty of Social Science secure additional funding from the University in future years, the Dean's Office would be happy to consider increased funding of the GDip in Accounting.
<p>Recommendation #2: Early intervention for at-risk students.</p> <p>Implement a formal system to identify at-risk students early in the program and develop aids that the students can use to reduce their risk of failing the program.</p>	<p>Program:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• DAN stream: As a student progresses through the GDip, there are now several opportunities where permission to progress in the program is evaluated. Progress is evaluated after each assessment point, these are at 3 weeks, 4 weeks, 7 weeks, 8 weeks, 10 weeks, and 12 weeks. For any student at risk, they are required to meet with the program Director who will offer various supports.• Ivey stream: The midterm check has shown to be sufficient. No student has failed the program.

	<p>Faculty: Both program streams have provided supporting information that indicates that current processes for identifying and supporting at-risk students are effective. The Dean's office supports the continued use of these processes.</p>
<p>Recommendation #3: Formalize an Admissions and/or Program Committee.</p> <p>Procedures to address EDI should be adopted for the admission process. This includes having a dedicated (and diverse) committee to review applications. A committee structure would also provide more support to the program director in program review, revision, and ongoing delivery, offer continuity during times of leave and holiday, build institutional memory, and prepare for succession.</p>	<p>Program:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The SGPS published a document entitled “Guidelines on Inclusive Excellence in Graduate Admissions.” in October 2024. Program Directors will review admission practices with these guidelines in mind.• Directors minimize unconscious bias by evaluating work ethic, resilience and ability to overcome challenges, oral communication, curiosity, ability to contribute as part of a team, community engagement, integrity, willingness to learn, written communication, critical thinking, and adaptability. These evaluations are based on the statement of interest and resume submitted by the student with their application.• As the Ivey stream only accepts students into the Ivey GDip stream that completed the Ivey undergraduate degree (HBA), as long as the student meets the minimum grade requirements, the student will be accepted (assuming no concerns over the student's HBA coursework). <p>Faculty: The program has noted its efforts to recruit equity-deserving students. The program also notes that admission to the Ivey stream is guaranteed, if the applicant meets GPA requirements, thereby reducing the opportunity for bias in admissions decisions to this stream. The Dean's office supports these ongoing efforts.</p>
<p>Recommendation #4: Incorporate more cross-program activities.</p> <p>Students and the faculty could benefit from more activities that span across the DAN and Ivey streams. Case competitions, peer-marking, or guest speaking of faculty across the two streams could further enrich the learning experience, especially if faculty have specific expertise in an EDID area that can be leveraged across both streams.</p>	<p>Program: In 2024, the DAN and Ivey streams hosted a joint networking event, a joint guest speaking session, and a joint case competition. Development is underway for a joint guest speaker for Ethics/EDID.</p> <p>Faculty: The Dean's Office supports the current and future activities planned for cross-program interaction.</p>

Recommendation #5: Consider the use of program milestones

Consider making the case competitions and workshop on professionalism more formal by labelling them as program milestones. Using program milestones may signal to students the importance of these requirements and formalize them as part of the program, with the option of having them appear on the transcript.

Program: The program has a formal policy requiring 100% attendance in classes and events (any exceptions must be preapproved by the Director). Therefore, no student has ever missed the workshop on professionalism or the case competition. Adding formal milestones to a program that is under resourced is not sustainable at this time, however further consideration will be made if a permanent administrator is available to support the program.

Faculty: The dean agrees with the program that establishing milestones would potentially prove burdensome and do not seem necessary to support adequate progress through G-dip coursework.

Implementation Plan

The Implementation Plan provides a summary of the recommendations that require action and/or follow-up. In each case, the Program Directors, in consultation with the SGPS and the Deans of the collaborating Faculties, are responsible for enacting and monitoring the actions noted in Implementation Plan.

Recommendation	Proposed Action and Follow-up	Responsibility	Timeline
Recommendation #1: More resources are needed to support the program.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Ensure continued administrative support for the DAN stream of the GDip.- Revisit ways of reducing strain on faculty capacity during future budget cycles.	Dean's Office	
Recommendation #2: Early intervention for at-risk students.	Assess processes for identifying and supporting at-risk students to ensure that they are effective.	Program Directors	
Recommendation #3: Formalize an Admissions and/or Program Committee.	Carefully consider the best practice of establishing a diverse committee to review GDip applications, as outlined in the <i>“Guidelines on Inclusive Excellence in Graduate Admissions”</i> document, as a way of minimizing any bias from a single person reviewing the suite of admission criteria/documents.	Program Directors	Revisit as part of progress report in June 2027
Recommendation #4: Incorporate more cross-program activities.	Develop continued plans for cross-program activities (e.g., upcoming joint guest speaker for Ethics/EDID).	Program Directors	
Recommendation #5: Consider the use of program milestones.	Consideration of additional formal milestones to a program will be explored should a permanent administrator be assigned to support the program (DAN stream).	Program Directors	