



UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE

General Faculties Council
Committee on the Learning Environment
Approved Open Session Minutes

Wednesday, January 29, 2014
2-31 South Academic Building (SAB)
2:00 PM - 4:00 PM

ATTENDEES:

Voting Members:

Bill Connor	Co-Chair, Vice-Provost (Academic Programs and Instruction)
John Boeglin	Member, Academic Staff
Dustin Chelen	Member, Vice-President (Academic), Students' Union
Scott Delinger	Member (Delegate), Vice-Provost and Associate Vice-President (Information Technology)
Colin More	Member (Delegate), President, Graduate Students' Association
Sheree Kwong See	Member, Director, Centre for Teaching and Learning
Jacqueline Leighton	Member, Chair Representative, Selected by Chairs' Council
Brock Richardson	Member, Support Staff Representative (Category B1.0), Elected by GFC
Toni Samek	Member, Major Teaching Award Recipient, Staff Representative
Stanley Varnhagen	Member, Academic Staff
Nikki Way	Member, Undergraduate Student-at-large
Trevor Woods	Member, Academic Staff

Presenter(s):

John Boeglin	Chair, GFC Committee on the Learning Environment (CLE) Subcommittee on Fostering Pedagogy of Technology
Bill Connor	Vice-Provost (Academic Programs and Instruction) and Co-Chair, GFC Committee on the Learning Environment
Scott Delinger	Information Technology Strategic Initiatives Officer, Office of the Provost and Vice-President (Academic)
Sheree Kwong See	Interim Director, Centre for Teaching and Learning
Geneviève Maheux-Pelletier	Educational Developer, Centre for Teaching and Learning

Staff:

Garry Bodnar, Coordinator and Scribe, GFC Committee on the Learning Environment

OPENING SESSION

1. Approval of the Agenda

Materials before members are contained in the official meeting file.

Motion: Leighton/Boeglin

THAT the Committee on the Learning Environment approve the Agenda.

CARRIED

2. Approval of the Open Session Minutes of December 4, 2013

Materials before members are contained in the official meeting file.

Dr Kwong See noted the Vargo Chair is not supported by the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL), as set out in Minute 4.

Motion: Delinger/Boeglin

THAT the Committee on the Learning Environment approve the Minutes of December 4, 2013, as amended.

CARRIED

3. Comments from the Co-Chair

The Co-Chair commented on a number of relevant issues to members.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

4. Slash Courses (400/500) at the University of Alberta

Materials before members are contained in the official meeting file.

Presenter(s): Sheree Kwong See, Interim Director, Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL); Geneviève Maheux-Pelletier, Educational Developer, CTL

Purpose of the Proposal: Following the December 4, 2013 meeting of GFC CLE, CTL would like to further discuss this topic and decide on future action at GFC CLE. A review of the literature and of policies both internally and externally suggests that guidelines and policy around slash courses (400/500) are scarce, yet, they can represent a serious challenge for instructors and students alike. There is potential for development of recommendations and policy around such courses at the University of Alberta.

Discussion:

Dr Kwong See introduced this item to members, noting that CTL believed the topic warranted further discussion by GFC CLE following on its discussion on this matter at the Committee's December 4, 2013 meeting. Dr Maheux-Pelletier continued by asking members if they were willing to create a series of formal recommendations regarding slash courses for the benefit of teaching staff across the University; whether they were of the view this was an issue worth pursuing further; and, if 'yes', how they would like to engage in further action on the matter. She commented that, in her view, this was an issue for educational leadership, given the current silence that exists in the academy on the topic; she stated that there was an opportunity to provide valuable support to instructors on such course offerings.

During the ensuing discussion, members expressed a number of comments and questions, including, but not limited to: an expressed opinion that there does not appear to be a problem with such courses and uncertainty about the amount of resources that should be invested in this topic; commentary that CTL had done some solid research on the matter of slash courses and should be commended for the way in which they have brought this forward to GFC CLE for discussion; slash courses can be of concern for undergraduate students, primarily in the perceived differences between the grading for undergraduate

students *versus* graduate students enrolled in the same course; that slash courses serve to foster better relationships between undergraduate and graduate students and to enhance undergraduate student learning outcomes because of what it is they can learn from the graduate student cohort in these courses; that pairing non-traditional learners with more traditionally-bound students in the classroom provides valuable learning experiences; clarification about what it is GFC CLE is being asked to do as a result of today's discussion; the suggestion that this discussion could lead to the development of revolutionary, rather than reactionary, tools, such as pilot projects that provide for innovative, exciting learning outcomes; clarification that a possible outcome of today's discussion could be the development by GFC CLE of policies that address concerns with slash courses offered by the University of Alberta; an expression of confusion on how the Committee would engage in such policy development; and that there would be value in providing Faculties with guidelines (if not outright policy) for the development of slash courses.

The discussion continued, with members raising the following: commentary questioning where the academy would be prepared to stop at course development, given that all courses, regardless of methodology, should be held to a standard of excellence and, if this standard cannot be achieved, such courses should then not be offered at all; that the issue should be seen as one presenting opportunities rather than strictly as a problem to be fixed; that CTL may be in the best position to develop policy in this area; that policy, if developed, should not be too prescriptive in nature, but, instead, should allow for flexibility and creativity; commentary that good instructors recognize there is a continuum in the classroom and, as a result, are prepared to deal, adapt, and create based on the diversity they face and rise to challenges confronted in that milieu; and the suggestion that CTL could prepare guidelines on slash courses, given that the unit is intended to be an institutional 'force' on teaching and learning issues.

Dr Connor thanked members for their thoughtful discussion on the issue and stated this appeared to be an evolving topic that could warrant future investigation and discussion.

5. University of Alberta's Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL): Update from the Interim Director

There were no documents.

Presenter: Sheree Kwong See, Interim Director, Centre for Teaching and Learning

Purpose of the Proposal: For discussion/information.

Discussion:

Dr Kwong See reported to members on recent and upcoming activities sponsored by the University's Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL). In particular, she commented on upcoming Festival of Teaching events; peer consultation and mentorship programming; professional development activities and opportunities; and a range of other programming offered under the auspices of the Centre.

A member asked if work carried out in the past by GFC CLE, *via* its subcommittees and the reports generated by these bodies (and subsequently approved by GFC CLE), helped inform the activities of CTL. Another member raised the issue of the rights and responsibilities of instructors with regard to the use of social media and guidelines for the use thereof. Further, there was some discussion regarding work undertaken by the now-defunct Provost's Teaching, Learning and Technology (TLAT) Council on the latter subject. It was noted that TLAT Council had prepared a one-page document to raise awareness in the academy of where Council had landed on this issue as result of its review. Professor Samek, Dr Varnhagen, and Mr Chelen volunteered to investigate this matter further and, upon doing so, prepare something for discussion at an upcoming GFC CLE meeting—Professor Samek indicated she would be pleased to take the lead on this but was clear she was not advocating the development of a comprehensive institutional policy on the deployment of social media in and by the academy.

6. GFC Committee on the Learning Environment (CLE) Subcommittee on Fostering Pedagogy of Technology: Update

There were no documents.

Presenter: John Boeglin, Chair, GFC Committee on the Learning Environment (CLE) Subcommittee on Fostering Pedagogy of Technology

Purpose of the Proposal: For information/discussion.

Discussion:

Dr Boeglin noted that work by the Subcommittee on Fostering Pedagogy of Technology continued apace and that, as a result of consultation undertaken through January, 2014, this group would be developing a second draft of the survey questions to be deployed as part of its data gathering process. He also stated that the work of the Subcommittee had the full (including financial) support of Dr Duane Szafron, the Vice-Provost and Associate Vice-President (Information Technology).

7. Electronic Universal Student Ratings of Instruction (eUSRI) – Update

There were no documents.

Presenter: Scott Delinger, Information Technology Strategic Initiatives Officer, Office of the Provost and Vice-President (Academic)

Purpose of the Proposal: For information/discussion.

Discussion:

Dr Delinger stated that he and colleagues were working on (proposed) revisions to existing University policy to provide for the implementation of electronic Universal Student Ratings of Instruction (eUSRI). He noted that the current eUSRI pilot project continues and that the open-ended questions used with eUSRI appear to be working well.

During the ensuing discussion, members expressed a number of comments and questions, including, but not limited to: a member commented that, in his experience, eUSRI appear to be working well; commentary that there appeared to be difficulties with the open-ended questions to which students responded in French—the responses were incomprehensible because of the students' use of accents, *et cetera*, which were translating into other characters and consonants; that students continue to have concerns about the confidentiality associated with eUSRI and that a clear disclaimer regarding confidentiality addressing such concerns would be both beneficial and helpful to students; and commentary that some faculty members are concerned students who do not regularly attend classes will submit negative responses to the eUSRI and, further, that individuals other than the students concerned will be completing online assessments and, in doing so, engage in negative, destructive behaviour, all of which would suggest a move back to paper-based USRI would be welcome.

STANDING ITEMS

8. GFC Academic Planning Committee (APC) Update

There were no documents.

Purpose of the Proposal: For discussion/information.

Discussion:

There was no discussion.

9. GFC Academic Standards Committee (ASC) Update

There were no documents.

Purpose of the Proposal: For discussion/information.

Discussion:

There was no discussion.

10. GFC Facilities Development Committee (FDC) Update

There were no documents.

Purpose of the Proposal: For discussion/information.

Discussion:

There was no discussion.

11. Question Period

There were no questions.

INFORMATION REPORTS

12. Items Approved by the Committee by E-Mail Ballots

There were no items.

13. Information Items Forwarded to Committee Members Between Meetings

- PowerPoint Presentation Provided by Dr S Kwong See at the December 4, 2013 Meeting of the GFC Committee on the Learning Environment (CLE) [E-Mailed to Members on December 16, 2013]
- CLE Pedagogy and Technology Surveys [E-Mailed to Members on December 19, 2013]
- CLE Pedagogy and Technology Surveys [E-Mailed to Members on January 7, 2014]

CLOSING SESSION

14. Adjournment

The Co-Chair adjourned the meeting at 4:10 pm.