



# UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

## UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE

---

General Faculties Council  
Executive Committee  
Approved Open Session Minutes

Friday, April 26, 2013  
2-31 SAB, South Academic Building  
2:00 PM – 4:00 PM

---

### **ATTENDEES:**

#### Voting Members:

Martin Ferguson-Pell (Delegate)	Acting Provost and Vice-President (Academic) and Chair, GFC Executive Committee (delegate)
Colleen Skidmore (Delegate)	Vice-Provost and Associate Vice-President (Academic)
Gerry Kendal	Vice-Provost and University Registrar
Dustin Chelen	Students' Union Vice-President (Academic)
Nathan Andrews	Graduate Student Association Vice-President (Academic)
Ed Blackburn	Academic Staff, Member of GFC
Lise Gotell	Academic Staff, Member of GFC
Wendy Rodgers	Academic Staff, Member of GFC
Chris de Gara	Academic Staff, Member of GFC
Anita Molzahn	Academic Staff, Member of GFC
Duncan Saunders	Academic Staff, Member of GFC
Kaori Kabata	Academic Staff, Member of GFC
Adam Woods	Undergraduate Student, Member of GFC

#### Presenter(s):

Martin Ferguson-Pell	Acting Provost and Vice-President (Academic) and Acting Chair, GFC Executive Committee
Indira Samarasekera	President and Chair, General Faculties Council (GFC)

#### Staff:

Garry Bodnar	Director, General Faculties Council (GFC) Services and Secretary to GFC
Marion Haggarty-France	University Secretary
Andrea Patrick	Scribe

### **OPENING SESSION**

#### 1. Approval of the Agenda

Materials before members are contained in the official meeting file.

Motion: de Gara/Rodgers

THAT the GFC Executive Committee approve the Agenda.

**CARRIED**

2. Comments from the Chair and President, General Faculties Council (GFC)

Dr Ferguson-Pell reminded members to check for updates on the Change@Ualberta website regarding the impact of the Provincial Budget and the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) (previously called the "Letter of Expectation") between the Ministry of Enterprise and Advanced Education (EAE) and the University of Alberta.

Dr Ferguson-Pell reported that the tuition increase for the 2013-14 academic year, approved by the Board of Governors, was recently disallowed by the Ministry of EAE and that there will be resulting difficulties if the University of Alberta is no longer allowed to increase tuition when necessary.

He noted that Faculty-specific budget letters will be forwarded to each Dean shortly.

Dr Ferguson-Pell reported that Central Administration is currently revising the institutional budget, and it will be available for review by the May 22, 2013 GFC Academic Planning Committee (APC) meeting.

Dr Samarasekera briefed members on the meeting between the Ministry of EAE and the 26 Alberta post-secondary presidents held on April 11, 2013. She noted that the presidents met separately on the morning of the meeting and, at that time, items for discussion included the shared sentiment that post-secondary institutions were blindsided by the funding cuts announced within the Provincial Budget.

She stated that the subsequent meeting with the Ministry was a success, citing frankness and openness in the messaging from the presidents to the Ministry. She reported that those messages related to the negative impact of the budget cuts on Campus Alberta initiatives, issues related to duplication, and the joint impact of receiving sudden, significantly reduced funding as well as losing the ability to increase tuition when necessary. She added that the presidents attempted to dispel myths at the meeting.

Dr Samarasekera noted that further negotiations at the meeting led to the conversion of the Letter of Expectation into an MOU format, with additional time to make appropriate revisions extended to September, 2013.

Dr Samarasekera reported that the presidents met on April 15, 2013 in Red Deer, and there was agreement to create a council of presidents. She noted that each president will draft a position paper on certain relevant issues including the re-opening of the *Post-Secondary Learning Act (PSLA)*, funding framework, tuition, and Campus Alberta.

Dr Samarasekera stated that she continues to push for long-term investment in the University of Alberta. She explained that the major problems within Alberta's post-secondary educational landscape relate to access and quality, and that these problems are evidence-based.

She reported that Mr Thomas Lukaszuk, Minister of EAE, has offered to continually meet with presidents, board chairs, and students and that she hopes the messaging towards all three groups will be consistent. She noted that she has a meeting with the Minister next week.

Dr Samarasekera briefed members on the Board of Governors' Strategic Retreat, held from April 16-19, 2013. She stated that the timing of the Retreat was beneficial considering the recent challenges faced by the University of Alberta, however purely coincidental as it was planned approximately one year ago.

She reported that the Board of Governors committed unanimously to being one of the best universities in the world and that they requested short- and long-term plans from her, as President. She stated that the Retreat provided clear direction in terms of excellence and reinforced the need to look internally as an institution into processes and practices that ensure excellence and that a sustainable budget is created around excellence, as well.

During the ensuing discussion, members expressed several comments and questions in relation to these issues, including, but not limited to: whether the Deans will have unilateral authority to determine Faculty core cuts; why there was not a request for staff to take a salary cut; clarification about the Ministry's idea that Campus Alberta equalizes all institutions; that professors are being improperly identified as the source of the budget problem at the University of Alberta; and speculation into scenarios next year, in relation to funding.

### **DISCUSSION ITEMS**

#### **3. Academic Governance: Moving Forward**

Materials before members are contained in the official meeting file.

*Presenter:* Indira Samarasekera, President and Chair, General Faculties Council (GFC)

*Purpose of the Discussion:* To engage the GFC Executive Committee and General Faculties Council (GFC) in a discussion with regard to the role and responsibilities of GFC and its standing committee system and to discuss the striking of a task force to review the Terms of Reference and activities of each GFC committee and provide recommendations for reform.

*Discussion:*

Dr Samarasekera noted that as President and Chair of General Faculties Council (GFC), she is interested in reviewing the GFC Standing Committee Terms of Reference, governance structure, and processes, as well as the general scope of purview for each GFC Standing Committee in relation to administrative issues and responsibilities.

She noted that, first, there needs to be an effort to introduce debate into GFC, citing the value of large-scale, academy-wide discussions surrounding timely and relevant issues such as the re-opening of the *Post-Secondary Learning Act (PSLA)*. She suggested that perhaps such issues could be identified by the GFC Executive Committee initially and then placed on each GFC Agenda for debate and deliberation by Council members. She added that a significant portion of time at GFC is spent approving routine items.

She reported that, secondly, the structure of the GFC Standing Committees contribute to onerous duplication of presentations and that there needs to be an effort to streamline the approval process for proposals moving through the governance system. She noted that the private sector utilizes "consent agendas" and suggested that this might be an appropriate amendment to current practices at the University of Alberta.

Dr Samarasekera stated that, thirdly, there needs to be a review of each individual GFC Standing Committee's Terms of Reference to ensure that there is a distinction between governance and administration.

Dr Samarasekera reported that her proposal to address these issues includes striking a GFC Task Force, comprised of a small group of governance experts, who will review the current GFC Standing Committee

and GFC Terms of Reference, as well as their activities, to suggest reforms where necessary to invigorate and enrich the scope of the governance environment and ensure that there are effective processes and practices in place at a time when changes are imminent at the institution. She added that the group could work over the summer and present its findings and recommendations to full GFC membership at the first Council meeting in the academic year 2013-2014.

Mr Chelen was invited to present a Students' Union (SU) proposal, distributed for members' review, entitled, "GFC *ad hoc* Subcommittee on Collegial Governance, Terms of Reference," and he explained that the proposal reflects a joint effort between the SU and the Graduate Students' Association (GSA).

In relation to Dr Samarasekera's comments, Mr Chelen noted that students have arrived at similar conclusions about the governance process and structure, although his proposal suggests a broader task force membership and a timeframe for the project which is longer to allow thorough review and University-wide consultation.

Mr Woods stated that GFC should be a forum to discuss and freely debate a large scope of issues and that no decisions should be made by a few people privately.

Mr Andrews suggested that students should be represented within the membership of the GFC Task Force.

Dr Samarasekera stated that the purpose of the GFC Task Force is to provide a blueprint of how to take administration out of governance and to review in a clinical fashion the GFC Standing Committees, adding that timely, expert advice is essential in the current financial climate, to prove to the Board of Governors that internal processes remain effective and efficient. She explained that once this 'audit' is completed, GFC members will decide how to proceed.

Ms Haggarty-France reported that the last external review of the governance process and structure occurred in the early 2000s and that, at one point in the mid 1970s, there were 32 GFC Standing Committees, as opposed to 11 currently. She stated that the University of Alberta has one of the leanest academic governance committee structures in Canada. She stated that with the replenishment of the Assistant GFC Secretary position in University Governance, there has been increased opportunity to be more strategic and effective. She stated that it will be beneficial to review governance processes and practices and that this may provide further opportunity to educate the community about the different roles within governance and why each GFC Standing Committee has a distinct and separate mandate.

During the ensuing discussion surrounding this issue, members expressed several comments and questions, including, but not limited to: clarification about how internal Department-level, Faculty-level, and senior administrative committees add to the perception of a prolonged governance course; the methods and outcomes of the last GFC Standing Committee Terms of Reference review; that proposals seem overly vetted within the current governance structure; discussion about the proposed timeframe of the GFC Task Force; that due to over-exposure during the governance process, proposals and items for discussion seem 'fait accompli' when presented at GFC meetings; that summer might not be the ideal time for the GFC Task Force to complete their work; that students should be part of the review process; that perhaps a small group, viewing things through an administrative lens, could review the GFC Standing Committee Terms of Reference and then present a report for consultation within the governance structure; that the GFC Standing Committees require individual delegated authority to avoid duplication; that trust between the governance committees is a key issue; that certain GFC Standing Committee functions could be placed on-line; that the forum of GFC should include contentious debate, as currently practiced at Students' Council; that GFC lacks discussion on divisive issues and that Council votes are predictable; clarification about

whether the GFC Task Force will be considered Presidential in its origin or rooted within the GFC Executive Committee and/or another entity of the GFC Standing Committee reporting structure and the implications of either entity of origin; that members of the individual GFC Standing Committees are the best group of experts to review the GFC Standing Committee Terms of Reference; that though there is room for more enriched discussions at GFC, the main mandate of GFC remains reviewing and/or approving items that have been refined through the existing governance processes; that the GFC Terms of Reference should be reviewed prior to selecting topics for debate and discussion; that institutional support of this endeavor will require updates to members over the summer; and that there are too many GFC Standing Committees with complex Terms of Reference.

Dr Samarasekera concluded that the GFC Task Force will be a Presidential task force and that she will therefore begin to recruit members immediately. She added that the subsequent report will be presented at the first GFC Executive Committee meeting of the 2013-2014 academic year. She instructed members to continue to discuss issues that could be added to GFC Agendas for debate and discussion including the re-opening of the *PSLA* and Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Ministry of Enterprise and Advanced Education (EAE) and the University of Alberta, as well as other relevant academy-wide issues.

4. Question Period

There were no questions.

**INFORMATION REPORTS**

5. Items Approved by the GFC Executive Committee by E-Mail Ballots

There were no items.

6. Information Items Forwarded to Committee Members Between Meetings

There were no items.

**CLOSING SESSION**

7. Adjournment

The Chair adjourned the meeting at 3:45 pm.