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

Wednesday, December 05, 2012
2-31, South Academic Building
2:00 PM – 4:00 PM

ATTENDEES:

Voting Members:

Bill Connor	Vice-Provost (Academic Programs and Instruction) and Co-Chair, GFC Committee on the Learning Environment (and Chair, GFC Academic Standards Committee)
Emerson Csorba	Vice-President (Academic), Students' Union (Delegate)
Nathan Andrews	President, Graduate Students' Association (Delegate)
Scott Delinger	Vice-Provost and Associate Vice-President, Information Technology (Delegate)
Sheree Kwong See	Interim Director, Centre for Teaching and Learning
Ada Schmude	Vice-Provost and University Registrar (Delegate)
Rachel Milner	Academic Staff – Member of GFC
John Fontaine	Graduate Student-at-large
Nikki Way	Undergraduate Student-at-large
Brock Richardson	Support Staff
Lili Liu	Department Chair
Florence Myrick	Associate Dean, Teaching and Learning (Representative)
Deanna Williamson	Cross-Representative from the GFC Academic Planning Committee
Janet Scott Hoyt	Major Teaching Award Recipient

Presenter(s):

Nathan Andrews	Co-Chair, GFC Committee on the Learning Environment Subcommittee on Attributes and Competencies
Bill Connor	Vice-Provost (Academic Programs and Instruction) and Co-Chair, GFC Committee on the Learning Environment (and Chair, GFC Academic Standards Committee)
Emerson Csorba	Vice-President (Academic), Students' Union (Delegate)
Scott Delinger	Information Technology Strategic Initiatives Officer, Office of the Provost and Vice-President (Academic)
Steven Dew	Co-Chair, GFC Committee on the Learning Environment Subcommittee on Attributes and Competencies

Staff:

Garry Bodnar	Coordinator, GFC Committee on the Learning Environment
Andrea Patrick	Scribe

OPENING SESSION

1.   Approval of the Agenda

Materials before members are contained in the official meeting file.

Dr Connor asked that the Agenda be reordered to accommodate a guest presenter.

Motion: Williamson/Kwong See

THAT the GFC Committee on the Learning Environment approve the Agenda, as reordered.
CARRIED

2.   Approval of the Open Session Minutes of October 3, 2012

Materials before members are contained in the official meeting file.

Motion: Milner/Andrews

THAT the GFC Committee on the Learning Environment approve the Minutes of October 3, 2012.
CARRIED

3.   Comments from the Co-Chair

There were no comments from the Co-Chair.

Ms Way enquired as to the reason the November, 2012 meeting of GFC CLE was cancelled. Dr Connor replied that there had been no updates or pressing business at that time. In response to Ms Way's suggestion individual members be polled on items for meetings of the Committee, Mr Bodnar recommended GFC CLE repeat the process undertaken by members at its March, 2012 meeting to brainstorm with an aim to populate future agendas with relevant issues. Mr Bodnar noted that, for example, there is an agenda item on e-publishing that is planned for an upcoming meeting of GFC CLE at some point early in the new year—this item had been previously suggested by the Committee. Members agreed discussion on possible topics for future Committee meetings would be an appropriate one for the January 30, 2013 meeting of GFC CLE.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

4.   Universal Student Ratings of Instruction (USRI) – Continuing Discussion

There were no documents.

Presenter: Bill Connor, Vice-Provost (Academic Programs and Instruction) and Co-Chair, GFC Committee on the Learning Environment (and Chair, GFC Academic Standards Committee)

Purpose of the Proposal: For discussion/information.

Discussion:
Dr Connor updated the group about the recent activities of the Universal Student Ratings of Instruction

(USRI) Working Group. Dr Connor reported that he had consulted with an assessment expert recommended by Dr Fern Snart, Dean, Faculty of Education (and GFC CLE member), and he was able to ascertain that while not ideal, the USRI is not flawed enough to be discarded altogether.

Members expressed several comments and questions related to this item, including, but not limited to: whether the concern resided with the USRI instrument or with the deployment of that instrument; whether the USRI group was a "Subcommittee" or "Working Group"; what course of action should be taken as the next step(s); the suggestion a Department Chair should participate on the Working Group to represent the usage of the USRI as it relates to Faculty Evaluation Committee (FEC) processes; that USRIs are r allegedly being used as methods to bully instructors and professors; possible methods of providing instant feedback electronically and anonymously to instructors and professors (for example, through Moodle); the perception that students want to provide feedback throughout the course, not just at the end of the course; the issue of whether or not fear is a legitimate reason for students to be reluctant to provide feedback to instructors or professors; the idea that preparing young adults to be professionals includes preparing them to provide constructive feedback; that unprofessional and inappropriate student comments should be omitted from official reporting; that an Association of Academic Staff – University of Alberta (AASUA) survey on USRIs (and related matters) reflects that faculty members easily recall negative student comments, even if they occur rarely.

Dr Connor clarified that he was more concerned with the use of the instrument. Dr Milner added that the ten GFC-mandated questions for USRIs are considered to be meaningless, according to the AASUA survey.

Mr Andrews explained that the group should be classified as a "Working Group" and that they would benefit from having Terms of Reference as well as a timeline for action. Mr Bodnar clarified for members that a Subcommittee of a GFC standing committee traditionally has a more formal approach, including clear Terms of Reference. Dr Connor stated that, at the present time, this is a "Working Group."

Dr Liu commented that the USRIs are factors in FECs but noted they need not be if another model emerges. She volunteered to ask members of the Chairs' Council Executive (CCE) if anyone on that committee would be interested to join the USRI Working Group.

Dr Delinger stated that there are several electronic methods of providing feedback, but the issue always returns to anonymity. Professor Myrick pointed out that a "Critical Incident Questionnaire" has been developed by an education professor, which is a method of providing feedback after every class, and has been adopted by many post-secondary institutions worldwide. Mr Richardson stated that the notion that there is only one way to provide feedback is not accurate and that there are many appropriate methods and opportunities to do so.

Mr Bodnar added that Section 111 of the GFC Policy Manual should be reviewed and possibly revised as part of the Working Group's mandate. Dr Liu supported this option.

Dr Connor thanked members for their feedback and added that the next meeting of the Working Group will be set up shortly.

5.   Grading and Assessment – Update

There were no documents.

Presenter: Bill Connor, Vice-Provost (Academic Programs and Instruction) and Co-Chair, GFC Committee

on the Learning Environment (and Chair, GFC Academic Standards Committee)

Purpose of the Proposal: For discussion/information.

Discussion:
Dr Connor stated that he has a meeting scheduled to establish a grading website that will include all of the grading information currently made available by and through the Office of the Registrar. He will look at making that material more accessible and will inform the community of its existence through Deans' Council as well as other bodies.

Members had several questions and comments related to this issue, including, but not limited to: whether or not professors and students are aware of grading policy changes and whether or not the academic community is adhering to that current policy; the perception that individuals across campus are aware that policy and process changes were made but are not aware of what the changes are specifically; the idea of GFC CLE taking the lead to educate the community about changes; the impact of the new grading policy post-implementation, especially as it relates to large first-year classes.

Dr Connor replied that while he cannot guarantee that all professors are following the new policy, they should be aware it, as it was approved in June, 2012 and was passed down through Faculties' senior administrative layers. Dr Connor clarified that educating the community is not the purview of this committee, noting the Faculties must take the lead. Central Administration can also send out reminders to the wider University community.

Members suggested that both instructors and students have been known to misinterpret grading policies.

Dr Connor said that there will be updates on this issue at future meetings of GFC CLE.

6.   GFC Committee on the Learning Environment (CLE) Subcommittee on Attributes and Competencies Draft Report for Discussion

Materials before members are contained in the official meeting file.

Presenters: Nathan Andrews, Co-Chair, GFC Committee on the Learning Environment Subcommittee on Attributes and Competencies; Steven Dew, Co-Chair, GFC Committee on the Learning Environment Subcommittee on Attributes and Competencies; Emerson Csorba, Vice-President (Academic), Students' Union (Delegate)

Purpose of the Proposal: To update GFC CLE on the GFC CLE Subcommittee on Attributes and Competencies' progress and to discuss the proposed list of attributes developed by the Subcommittee.

Discussion:
Dr Dew introduced himself to members and reviewed the Attributes and Competencies Draft Report before them, explaining that this report represented the net result of 18 months of work that has culminated in the final seven attributes contained therein. He stated that the Subcommittee would appreciate members' feedback, with the goal of drafting a final report.

Mr Andrews stated that the Subcommittee views implementation as the next step, possibly by April, 2013. Mr Csorba (representing Mr Dustin Chelen, Students' Union Vice-President (Academic) and Co-Chair of the GFC CLE Subcommittee on Attributes and Competencies at this meeting) added that this discussion is important and that he has been impressed with the work of this Subcommittee on which he served in the

past.

Members expressed several comments and had various questions related to this issue, including, but not limited to: whether "Leadership" should replace "Confidence" on the list; that the list might be interpreted as being prescriptive; whether the list applies to University of Alberta graduates or graduates in general; that the concepts associated with "Research" appear hidden within the list; possible ways to utilize the list; the process of narrowing down the list to seven items; the possibility of adding a few sentences to succinctly describe each item within the list; that the list reflects several areas of employability; how employers can verify attributes listed on graduates' resumes; that the report is an excellent representation of the values of the University of Alberta; and that the list mirrors what is being taught across campus currently.

Members offered congratulations to the authors.

Mr Andrews stated that although the Subcommittee did not intend to define one specific graduate or student group with the list, he added that this document should pertain to University of Alberta graduates in order to assist them to stand out and to assist them with regard to their employability. Mr Csorba stated that this list serves to distinguish a University of Alberta graduate. Dr Dew added that the attributes should be viewed, in part, as the University's values. He continued by noting that the Subcommittee attempted to establish a common set of terms that would apply to both undergraduate and graduate students—to that end, "Research" had been placed under "Scholarship." He clarified that the Subcommittee discussed research extensively. Further, Dr Dew suggested that Faculties should look to see how individual programs could utilize this list, although the list does not apply to every program. He added that it might be beneficial to try and measure these attributes in some way but that, ultimately, the individual Faculties would determine the best ways to make use of the list. He stated that it could be deployed to assist programs that are accredited and reviewed by external authorities. He explained that the Subcommittee's intention was to formalize the list, not suggest methods for implementation.

Finally, Dr Dew said the objective of the work undertaken by this subcommittee was to create a short list of the most meaningful and applicable attributes—the Subcommittee, he noted, encountered difficulty in capturing everything. Mr Andrews stated that if any of the attributes fit into another category, it could be collapsed further.

Mr Bodnar suggested that the Subcommittee carefully and critically consider their next steps in terms of formal approval and implementation of this list of competencies and attributes.

Dr Connor thanked the Subcommittee for their hard work and Committee members for their feedback. He suggested that GFC CLE consider methods to publicize the report.

7. <u>Joint Subcommittee on the GFC Committee on the Learning Environment (CLE)/Teaching, Learning and Technology (TLAT) Council Fostering Pedagogy of Technology Report: Update</u>

There were no documents.

Presenter: John Boeglin, Chair, Joint Subcommittee on the GFC Committee on the Learning Environment/Teaching, Learning and Technology Council Fostering Pedagogy of Technology

Purpose of the Proposal: For discussion/information.

Discussion:

Dr Connor stated that Dr Boeglin was not able to attend today's meeting but that an update on the work of this subcommittee would be presented at the GFC CLE meeting scheduled for January 30, 2013. He noted that Subcommittee members continue to work in the interim.

8.   Working Group on Online Course/Teaching Evaluations: 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 discussion/information.

Discussion:
Dr Delinger reported that this group has met once. The Faculty of Extension approached Vice-Provost and Associate Vice-President (Information Technology) Duane Szafron to run a pilot tool called "Blue." The University's Academic Information and Communication Technologies (AICT) is looking at a different program called "Course Eval." To date, there have been 13 courses run in Course Eval, with 11 to go in the Fall Term. He noted that his Office has hired a second Information Technology (IT) Strategic Initiatives Officer due to the volume of ongoing projects.

STANDING ITEMS

9.   GFC Academic Planning Committee (APC) Update

There were no documents.

Presenter: Bill Connor, Vice-Provost (Academic Programs and Instruction) and Co-Chair, GFC Committee on the Learning Environment (and Chair, GFC Academic Standards Committee)

Purpose of the Proposal: For discussion/information.

Discussion:
There was no discussion.

10.   GFC Academic Standards Committee (ASC) Update
There were no documents.

Presenter: Bill Connor, Vice-Provost (Academic Programs and Instruction) and Co-Chair, GFC Committee on the Learning Environment (and Chair, GFC Academic Standards Committee)

Purpose of the Proposal: For discussion/information.

Discussion:
There was no discussion.

11.   GFC Facilities Development Committee (FDC) Update

There were no documents.

Presenter: Bill Connor, Vice-Provost (Academic Programs and Instruction) and Co-Chair, GFC Committee

on the Learning Environment (and Chair, GFC Academic Standards Committee)

Purpose of the Proposal: For discussion/information.

Discussion:
There was no discussion.

12. Teaching, Learning and Technology (TLAT) Council Update

There were no documents.

Presenter: Bill Connor, Vice-Provost (Academic Programs and Instruction) and Co-Chair, GFC Committee on the Learning Environment (and Chair, GFC Academic Standards Committee)

Purpose of the Proposal: For discussion/information.

Discussion:
There was no discussion.

13. Question Period

There were no questions.

INFORMATION REPORTS

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

There were no items.

15. Information Items Forwarded to Committee Members Between Meetings

There were no items.

CLOSING SESSION

16. Adjournment

The Chair adjourned the meeting at 4:00pm.