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

Wednesday, December 03, 2014
2-31 South Academic Building (SAB)
2:00 PM - 4:00 PM

ATTENDEES:

Voting Members:

Robert Luth	Chair (Delegate), Provost and Vice-President (Academic)
Mikael Adolphson	Member, Associate Dean or Associate Chair, Teaching and Learning (or Equivalent)
Gerald Beasley	Member, Vice-Provost and Chief Librarian
John Boeglin	Member, Academic Staff
Scott Delinger	Member (Delegate), Vice-Provost and Associate Vice-President (Information Technology)
Shannon Erichsen	Member, Support Staff Representative (Category B1.0), Elected by GFC
Jacqueline Leighton	Member, Chair Representative, Selected by Chairs' Council
Glen Loppnow	Member, Associate Dean or Associate Chair, Teaching and Learning (or Equivalent)
Colin More	Member (Delegate), President, Graduate Students' Association
Ada Ness	Member (Delegate), Vice-Provost and University Registrar
Kathryn Orydzuk	Member, Vice-President (Academic), Students' Union
Fahim Rahman	Member, Undergraduate Student-at-large
Toni Samek	Member, Major Teaching Award Recipient, Staff Representative
Mani Vaidyanathan	Member, Academic Staff
Stanley Varnhagen	Member, Academic Staff

Presenter(s):

Scott Delinger	Information Technology Strategic Initiatives Officer, Office of the Provost and Vice-President (Academic)
Sheree Kwong See	Director, Centre for Teaching and Learning
Robert Luth	Associate Vice-Provost (Academic Programs and Instruction) and Chair, GFC Committee on the Learning Environment
Ada Ness	Associate Registrar (Enrolment Services), Office of the Registrar

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

OPENING SESSION

1.   Approval of the Agenda

Materials before members are contained in the official meeting file.

Presenter: Robert Luth, Associate Vice-Provost (Academic Programs and Instruction) and Chair, GFC Committee on the Learning Environment (CLE)

Motion: Loppnow/Varnhagen

THAT the GFC Committee on the Learning Environment approve the Agenda.
CARRIED

2. Approval of the Open Session Minutes of November 5, 2014

Materials before members are contained in the official meeting file.

Presenter: Robert Luth, Associate Vice-Provost (Academic Programs and Instruction) and Chair, GFC Committee on the Learning Environment (CLE)

Motion: Loppnow/Boeglin

THAT the GFC Committee on the Learning Environment approve the Minutes of November 5, 2014.
CARRIED

3. Comments from the Chair

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

A member enquired about the process of discussing student attributes and competencies with and within individual Faculties.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

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

There were no documents.

Presenter: Sheree Kwong See, Director, Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL)

Purpose of the Proposal: For discussion/information.

Discussion:
Dr Kwong See provided members with information on recent and upcoming activities hosted by CTL, including:

- November Launch of the 2014 Festival of Teaching
- The Formation of a Reading Group
- One-on-One Consultations and E-Mail Consultations
- Individual Workshops for Faculties
- 'Designing Your Blended Course'
- 'Teaching Sustainability through CSL and Undergraduate Research Workshop'
- 'Technology Tools to Support Active Learning in the Classroom'
- The Move of CTL to Fifth Floor, Cameron Library

- New Staff Members of CTL
- Updates Regarding the 'Learning Classroom' in Cameron Library

During the discussion that followed Dr Kwong See's update, members expressed a number of comments and questions, including, but not limited to: clarification on the status of the development of the 'Learning Classroom' situated in Cameron Library; clarification regarding the occupancy capacity of this new facility; and a suggestion to include additional training information during orientation sessions within the facility.

5.   Work Plan (2014-2015) for the GFC Committee on the Learning Environment (CLE) – Updates

There were no documents.

Presenter(s): Robert Luth, Associate Vice-Provost (Academic Programs and Instruction) and Chair, GFC Committee on the Learning Environment (CLE); Scott Delinger, Information Technology Strategic Initiatives Officer, Office of the Provost and Vice-President (Academic); Sheree Kwong See, Director, Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL); Ada Ness, Associate Registrar (Enrolment Services), Office of the Registrar

Purpose of the Proposal: For information/discussion.

5.1 GFC CLE Subcommittee on Fostering Pedagogy of Technology
The Chair reminded members that the survey questions deployed by this GFC CLE subcommittee this past summer were recently re-distributed to members *via* e-mail. He stated that the Subcommittee will be in a position to provide members with a summary of the survey results over the next six weeks. The Chair provided members with information in relation to the composition of the Subcommittee and noted an effort would be made to bolster this group's membership to provide it with the type of representation it had at the time of its inception.

During the discussion surrounding this matter, members expressed a number of comments and questions, including, but not limited to: clarification with respect to the appropriate skill-set for members of the Subcommittee; clarification surrounding the objectives of the Subcomittee; and a comment that a representative from CTL would be willing to participate on the Subcommittee.

5.2 Learning Spaces
The Chair provided members with an update regarding the topic of learning spaces at the University of Alberta. He reported that, in consultation with the Chair of the GFC Facilities Development Committee (FDC), Dr Olive Yonge, it was suggested that the University Architect be invited to a meeting of GFC CLE to discuss learning spaces and related issues and to provide members with a better understanding of the processes of planning and design for such spaces at the University of Alberta.

Members provided a number of comments and questions in relation to this item, including, but not limited to: support for inviting the University Architect to the next meeting of GFC CLE; that GFC CLE should have a voice in learning space planning at the University; clarification regarding the desired outcome from consultation with the University Architect; that consultation surrounding this issue should include the involvement of a wide range of instructors who represent differing teaching methodologies and classroom engagement; that the University Architect can provide a very broad perspective on learning spaces at this institution; that there needs to be better planning surrounding special requirements sessional instructors may have, including something as simple as the availability of more electrical outlets in individual classrooms; and a query whether there has been consideration of the costs of providing additional access to electricity at the University of Alberta to cover the increasing demands being made of the institutional power plant by instructors and students, alike.

The Chair thanked members for their commentary and confirmed that the University Architect would be invited to the next meeting of GFC CLE.

5.3 Digital Learning Strategy
The Chair reported that the Provost's Digital Learning Committee (PDLC) would be reporting their latest findings to GFC CLE, possibly at the January 28, 2015 meeting.

5.4 Universal Student Ratings of Instruction (USRI) and Electronic Universal Student Ratings of Instruction (eUSRI)
Dr Delinger provided members with an update regarding the recent launch of the eUSRIs (ie, electronic Universal Student Ratings of Instruction) at the University of Alberta, noting that, while there is not yet data on final response rates, his team continues to focus on refining the processes involved in administering the eUSRIs across the institution.

During the discussion of this issue, members provided a number of comments and questions, including, but not limited to: clarification regarding students' access to eUSRIs; commentary that instructors' reinforcement with respect to the students' completion of the eUSRIs in the classroom is important; that first-year students may not understand the process and importance of completing the eUSRs; whether there is a preferred browser that would resolve the continuing skewed appearance of accented words in and resulting from the eUSRI system; that the mobile site crashes at times; and that reminder e-mails to students regarding their completion of eUSRIs are sent too close together and that such reminders should be better coordinated to ensure, in turn, better completion rates.

Dr Delinger also updated members regarding the future usage of Instructor Designed Questionnaires (IDQ) in relation to formative evaluations.

Discussion continued regarding this issue, with members noting: that it is crucial that the processes related to formative evaluations be clear; clarification regarding how the data would be reported; clarification regarding the recipients of the data; whether such evaluations require ethics approval; that the Association of Academic Staff – University of Alberta (AASUA) may raise concerns about the usage of formative evaluations; whether these will be available to all categories of staff; clarification regarding which questions are allowed on such evaluations and a comment that they can result in more work; that the Students' Union (SU) is supportive of this initiative; clarification regarding implementation; and whether baseline data would be available and when.

Dr Kwong See provided members with a brief summary related to GFC CLE's previous involvement in reviewing USRIs at the University, adding that the GFC CLE Subcommittee on the Status of Universal Student Ratings of Instruction (USRI) presented a final report to members during the Committee's June, 2013 meeting and noting that members, at that time, voted in favor of endorsing the report. She clarified that the Subcommittee had concluded that the USRI tool, itself, was not problematic but that the problem, instead, was with how it is used.

She reported that a Working Group charged with following up on recommendations contained in the aforementioned Subcommittee report was now being struck—it would be concerned with the evaluation of teaching, the usage of the eUSRIs, and transitioning relevant policy from the GFC Policy Manual into the University of Alberta Policy and Procedures Online (UAPPOL) environment. She suggested that composition of this group include herself, a staff member from the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL), a member of the Students' Union (SU) and a member of the Graduate Students' Association (GSA), a member of AASUA, members from GFC CLE, and a representative from Chairs' Council.

During the continuing discussion, members expressed a number of comments and questions, including, but not limited to: clarification of how any resulting information can be assessed against existing Faculty Evauluation Committee (FEC) guidelines; that GFC CLE can play a critical role in this area; that there are new styles of teaching emerging; that learning, instead of just teaching, should be included within this discussion; that the language used within this context is extremely important in the process; a suggestion to consider the issue of teaching conditions; that there is existing space within certain Faculty Annual Reports for instructors to include information about teaching conditions; clarification regarding the definition of a 'multi-faceted evaluation'; whether outcomes could be reviewed against a multi-faceted evaluation; that Faculties with external accreditation already have considered many of these issues; a suggestion that someone from an accredited Faculty should be included in this Working Group, along with an individual from a non-accredited program; support for including a Chair on the Working Group; and the suggestion to draft Terms of Reference for this Working Group for discussion at the next meeting of GFC CLE.

5.5 Grading and Assessment
Ms Ness provided members with an update regarding policies on institutional grading and assessment, most notably, the approval of the University of Alberta Policy and Procedures Online (UAPPOL) Assessment and Grading Policy in 2012, and she stated that, since this time, several issues have been addressed, including the implementation of a longer term withdrawal date and additional feedback from instructors.

She reported that the Office of Strategic Analysis provided GFC CLE with data on the results of the implementation of this policy last academic year and asked members to consider whether this office should return to report further.

Members, during the discussion in relation to this topic, offered a number of comments and questions, including, but not limited to: support to continue to review the data generated on grading assessments by the Office of Strategic Analysis; clarification on how Departments have managed the administration of this policy; that a review of this data within the Faculty of Arts over a six-year period shows some instances of grade inflation; that instructor responses to the cited UAPPOL policy vary; that there are other important parts of this topic, including pedagogical questions; that GFC CLE should continue to follow-up on this issue over time; that the operationalization of the policy, by Department, could result in the utilization of different grading guidelines, thereby creating confusion for students; commentary that compiling grading data was easy to organize in the Faculty of Arts; clarification as to what Chairs do with the annual grading data supplied by the Office of the Registrar; and whether the Simon Fraser University (SFU) report on the assessment of grading at that institution, as mentioned during discussion of this item, contains data by Faculty.

The Chair stated that he would check in with the Office of Strategic Analysis regarding last year's grading distributions.

6.   Question Period

There were no questions.

INFORMATION REPORTS

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

There were no items.

8.   Information Items Forwarded to Committee Members Between Meetings

   - CLE Pedagogy of Technology Survey Questions [E-Mailed to Members on November 7, 2014]

CLOSING SESSION

9.   Adjournment

The Chair adjourned the meeting at 3:45 pm.