



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

Wednesday, December 02, 2015
2-31 South Academic Building (SAB)
2:00 PM - 4:00 PM

ATTENDEES:

Voting Members:

Sarah Forgie	Chair (Delegate), Provost and Vice-President (Academic)
Gerald Beasley	Member, Vice-Provost and Chief Librarian
Shannon Erichsen	Member, Support staff representative (Category B1.0), elected by GFC
Roger Graves	Member, Director, Centre for Teaching and Learning
Jacqueline Leighton	Member, Chair Representative, selected by Chairs' Council
Glen Loppnow	Member, Associate Dean or Associate Chair, Teaching and Learning (or equivalent)
Luis Marin	Member, Graduate Student at-Large
Fahim Rahman	Member, Vice-President (Academic), Students' Union
Scott Delinger (Delegate)	Member (Delegate), Vice-Provost and Associate Vice-President of Information Technology
Norma Rodenburg	Member (Delegate), Vice-Provost and University Registrar or Delegate
Toni Samek	Member, Major Teaching Award Recipient, Staff Representative
Harsh Thaker	Member, Vice-President (Academic), Graduate Students' Association
Mani Vaidyanathan	Member, Academic Staff
Stanley Varnhagen	Member, Academic Staff

Presenter(s):

Sarah Forgie	Vice-Provost (Learning Initiatives) and Chair, GFC CLE
Anne Bailey	Director, Internal Communications, Office of the Vice-President (University Relations)
Amy Dambrowitz	Strategic Development Manager, Office of the Provost and Vice-President (Academic)

Staff:

Meg Brolley, 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.

Motion: Rahman/Leighton

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

CARRIED

2. Approval of the Open Session Minutes of November 4, 2015

Materials before members are contained in the official meeting file.

Discussion:

The Chair acknowledged two editorial changes to the Minutes.

Motion: Erichsen/Graves

THAT the GFC Committee on the Learning Environment approve the Minutes of November 4, 2015, as amended.

CARRIED

3. Comments from the Chair

The Chair invited members to consider volunteering for the TLEF (Teaching and Learning Enhancement Fund) Adjudication Committee. She also noted the call for nominations for the 2016 University of Alberta GFC Awards for Teaching Excellence; letters have been sent to all Deans and more information is available on the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) website.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

4. Discussion Paper - Building the Next Institutional Strategic Plan (ISP)

Materials before members are contained in the official meeting file.

Presenter: Sarah Forgie, Vice-Provost (Learning Initiatives) and Chair, GFC CLE; Amy Dambrowitz, Strategic Development Manager, Office of the Provost and Vice-President (Academic); Anne Bailey, Director, Internal Communications, Office of the Vice-President (University Relations)

Purpose of the Proposal: The GFC Committee on the Learning Environment (CLE) has responsibilities in relation to the University's Academic Plan. GFC CLE is being consulted at this stage to allow for discussion and to contribute to the drafting of the next Institutional Strategic Plan.

Discussion:

The Chair reported to members that several forums have been recently organized to discuss the institutional strategic planning process and that additional input from members of GFC CLE would be highly valued.

Dr Dambrowitz provided an overview of the process, the consultation thus far, and further noted that the strategic planning process will result in a single guiding document for the institution with a draft document to be released around February 2016. She reminded members that there is still time to provide feedback before Christmas and in the New Year, and added that individuals may also contribute via the website.

During the subsequent discussion, the committee noted: the importance of ensuring good foundational skills in communication and writing; the need for institutional support for experiential learning; and a focus on teaching quality and excellence.

Concern was raised with respect to the employment status of some instructors and the possibility of a teaching tenure track to address this situation.

Recognition for the important role that non-academic staff play in research and student experience was considered important with the suggestion of more awards and professional development opportunities for this group.

It was noted that the University has a role to play as a leader in the province with respect to a research focus and that this focus is important for both undergraduate and graduate students. The importance of having research questions come from the wider community was also emphasized. It was noted that this is in alignment with the University's motto: *Whatsoever Things Are True*.

There was a general discussion on how the University sees itself and what it wants to be known for, what makes it unique. It was suggested that the ISP should focus on specific institutional priorities, and not try to cover all areas.

It was proposed that the ISP should clearly identify the value and culture of teaching and learning. Learning outcomes and competencies were also raised. A member suggested a specific section within the document entitled, "The Learning Environment". For graduate students, the importance of mentorship, not just supervision, was acknowledged as it helps them prepare for a career inside or outside of academia. A member suggested that the ISP should position the University's role within society to seek the truth.

One member expressed concern about combining the academic plan and the strategic plan into a single document noting that there is something unique and special about having a separate academic plan. Dr Bailey noted that a single strategic plan for the institution provides clear direction for the University, and that the Comprehensive Institutional Plan (CIP) would continue to be developed.

There was a discussion on the impact of revenue generation within units. One member noted a change in focus for academics from teaching and learning to business incubation and that the skills and expertise that non-academic staff play in such initiatives should be acknowledged. It was recognized that revenue generation has various impacts on individuals and units and also that the trend in government cut-backs is not an issue which will go away.

5. Challenges for CLE - Topics for Discussion

Materials before members are contained in the official meeting file.

Presenter: Sarah Forgie, Vice-Provost (Learning Initiatives) and Chair, GFC CLE

Purpose of the Proposal: To provide potential topics for Committee focus.

Discussion:

The Chair noted that seven topics had been submitted and opened the floor for discussion. The discussion included the potential of combining the three submissions involving Universal Student Ratings of Instruction (USRIs), and that the discussion of the institutional strategic planning process could be relevant to identifying topics for Committee consideration.

After a discussion of the submitted topics, it was agreed that the topics would be ranked through an email survey and discussed at the next meeting.

6. Question Period

There were no questions.

INFORMATION REPORTS

7. Items Approved by the Committee by E-Mail Ballots (non-debatable)

There were no items.

8. Information Items Forwarded to Committee Members Between Meetings

There were no items.

CLOSING SESSION

9. Adjournment

The Chair adjourned the meeting at 3:45 p.m.