



UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE

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

Wednesday, April 05, 2017
2-31 South Academic Building (SAB)
2:00 PM - 4:00 PM

ATTENDEES:

Voting Members:

Sarah Forgie	Chair (Delegate), Provost and Vice-President (Academic)
Fahim Rahman (Delegate)	Member, Vice-President (Academic), Students' Union
Gerald Beasley	Member, Vice-Provost and Chief Librarian
Allen Berger	Member, Dean Representative
Janice Causgrove Dunn	Member, Associate Dean or Associate Chair, Teaching and Learning
Shannon Erichsen	Member, Support staff representative
Firouz Khodayari	Member, Vice-President (Academic), Graduate Students' Association
Glen Loppnow	Member, Associate Dean or Associate Chair, Teaching and Learning
Brian Maraj	Member, Major Teaching Award Recipient
Janice Miller-Young	Member, Academic Director, Centre for Teaching and Learning
Jeff Rawlings	Member (Delegate), Vice-Provost and Associate Vice-President, Information Technology
Norma Rodenburg	Member (Delegate), Vice-Provost and University Registrar
Carrie Smith-Prei	Member, Academic staff member and current serving member of GFC
Quinten Starko	Member, Undergraduate Student at-Large
Mani Vaidyanathan	Member, Academic Staff
Stanley Varnhagen	Member, Academic Staff

Presenters:

Sarah Forgie	Vice-Provost (Learning Initiatives) and Chair, GFC CLE
Fahim Rahman	GFC CLE Subcommittee to Explore Teaching Tenure Stream at University of Alberta, and President of the Students' Union
Francisco Vargas	Research Coordinator, Centre for Teaching and Learning
Norma Nocente	Associate Director, Centre for Teaching and Learning
Rebecca Best-Bertwistle	Research Assistant, Centre for Teaching and Learning

Staff:

Andrea Patrick	Acting Coordinator, GFC CLE
Amissa Jablonski	Scribe

OPENING SESSION

1. Approval of the Agenda

Materials before members are contained in the official meeting file.

Motion: Rahman/Erichsen

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

CARRIED

2. Approval of the Open Session Minutes of March 1, 2017

Materials before members are contained in the official meeting file.

Motion: Miller-Young/Erichsen

THAT the GFC Committee on the Learning Environment approve the Minutes of March 1, 2017.

CARRIED

3. Comments from the Chair

There were no comments.

ACTION ITEMS

4. GFC CLE Subcommittee to Explore Teaching Tenure Stream at the University of Alberta

Materials before members are contained in the official meeting file.

Presenter(s): Fahim Rahman

Purpose of the Proposal: To approve the White Paper of the GFC CLE Subcommittee to Explore Teaching Tenure Stream at the University of Alberta.

Discussion:

Mr Rahman explained the White Paper was an environmental scan that surveyed the current state of contract teaching faculty at the University of Alberta.

There was discussion about the potential impact of the forthcoming changes to the Contract Academic Staff: Teaching (CAS:T) agreement on the findings of the White Paper. In addition, members suggested revisions to the White Paper in order to address inaccuracies within it as well as the forthcoming changes to the Contract Academic Staff: Teaching (CAS:T) agreement.

Members discussed the difference between approving an item and accepting it, and a member suggested completing revisions to the White Paper before it advances within the governance structure. The Chair offered direction for next stages and suggested that the White Paper be forwarded to the GFC Academic Planning Committee for discussion.

A friendly amendment was proposed to change the title within the motion to match the one offered in the White Paper and the Chair asked that the Outline of Issue for the item be changed to reflect that it would be discussed, for feedback, at the GFC Academic Planning Committee.

Motion: Rahman/Miller-Young

THAT the GFC Committee on the Learning Environment (CLE) approve the White Paper: A Brief Analysis of Arguments For and Against Creation of Teaching-Only Stream, as contained in Attachments 1 and 2.

CARRIED

DISCUSSION ITEMS

5. Report of the GFC Committee on Learning Environment on Teaching and Learning and Teaching Evaluation and the Use of the Universal Student Ratings of Instruction (USRI) as an Evaluation Tool

Materials before members are contained in the official meeting file.

Presenter(s): Francisco Vargas; Sarah Forgie; Norma Nocente; Rebecca Best-Bertwistle

Discussion:

Dr Nocente and her team gave an overview of how the GFC motion was addressed. This involved:

- 1) A literature review on student rating systems previously presented in a 2009 University of Alberta report was updated (Evaluation of Teaching at the University of Alberta: Report of the Sub-Committee of the Committee on the Learning Environment). To answer the question: What does the research have to say about student rating systems? The literature review was presented in the fall.
- 2) A study on the use of USRIs and other methods of teaching evaluation at the University of Alberta. The qualitative project involved interviews with Department Chairs (or their equivalents in non-departmental Faculties) to answer the questions:
 - How are the tools used to evaluate teaching at the U of A?
 - What are the types of multi-faceted teaching evaluation?

The study showed:

- 1) Participants from almost all Faculties use USRI scores and comments
- 2) Two statements were commonly used to evaluate teaching: "Overall the instructor was excellent" and "Overall the quality of the course content was excellent."
- 3) Most chairs try to contextualize their interpretations of USRI results
- 4) For multifaceted evaluation, in-class peer observations were the most commonly used additional source of information, followed by individual instructor self reflections. Most participants obtain these results on a voluntary basis, only when professors agree to provide these supplementary materials. Some chairs have implemented yearly faculty audits in which a portion of their faculty's teaching is evaluated using additional metrics.
- 5) Even when chairs obtain additional multifaceted evaluations, not all report bringing them to FEC. When the information is used at FEC, it is used to inform their narrative and is only brought up when there is a challenge.
- 6) Most chairs voiced their need for additional supports to better evaluate teaching.
- 7) Chairs have identified some issues when evaluating teaching exclusively with USRI, and possible alternatives to supplement these scores, but still they hope the institution provides a solution for their concerns.

There was significant discussion about defining effective teaching and how that definition would drive the evaluation of teaching. The committee recognized the shortcomings of the USRI and that some of the questions were rooted in the evolution of the tool at the university. There was agreement that the USRI is one tool of many that can be used and noted that it required revision to be more informative and useful. The committee also noted that a definition of 'diverse teaching modes' was required to guide faculty evaluation. Members expressed interest in further information about other teaching evaluation tools and discussed the merits of additional formative evaluation during a course to provide instructors with feedback. Finally, it was noted that students were most satisfied when they understood how they were being assessed and that this is also useful for instructors.

The committee discussed how to proceed and struck a subcommittee to develop recommendations that would inform elements of CLE's workplan for next year; the Chair, Dr Varnhagen, Dr Vaidyanathan, Mr. Jeff Rawlings and Dr Miller-Young agreed to participate.

6. Discussion on Learning Outcomes

There were no documents.

Discussion:

This item was deferred due to time constraints.

7. Question Period

There were questions around the administration of USRIs. Adam Giraldeau and Jeff Rawlings discussed increasing the number of business days USRIs were offered to 7 days, and that they changed the method of emailing so each student would receive one email with links to each course within the email. Reminder emails were also provided. They will report back on the results of these changes in the fall.

INFORMATION REPORTS

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

There were no items.

9. Information Items Forwarded to Committee Members Between Meetings

There were no items.

CLOSING SESSION

10. Adjournment

The Chair adjourned the meeting at 4:05 p.m.