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

Wednesday, April 29, 2020
Virtual Meeting by Video/Phone
2:00 PM - 4:00 PM

ATTENDEES:
John Nychka, Chair
Cathy Adams
Dale Askey
Radim Barta
Ivan Fair
Bora Kim
Pascal Lupien
Brian Maraj

Norma Rodenburg
Victoria Ruetalo
Jennifer Tupper
Mani Vaidyanathan
Christine Wiesenthal
Janet Williamson
non-voting:
Mike MacGregor
Yimmie Sonuga

REGRETS:
Joel Agarwal
Lorna Baker-Perri
Marion Haggarty-France
Janice Miller-Young
Milad Nazarahari
Amber Sayed

Staff:
Heather Richholt, Scribe

OPENING SESSION

1. Approval of the Agenda

Materials before members are contained in the official meeting file.

Presenter(s): John Nychka, Vice Provost (Learning Initiatives) and Chair of GFC Committee on the Learning Environment (CLE)

Motion: Williamson/Ruetalo

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

2. A. Approval of the Open Session Minutes of February 5, 2020

Materials before members are contained in the official meeting file.

Presenter(s): John Nychka, Vice Provost (Learning Initiatives) and Chair of CLE

Discussion:
A member asked to have some changes made to the February 5th minutes. The Chair noted that the changes would be made and the revised minutes would come back for approval at the next meeting.

B. Approval of the Open Session Minutes of March 4, 2020

Motion: Williamson/Maraj

THAT the GFC Committee on the Learning Environment approve the Open Session Minutes of March 4, 2020.
CARRIED

3. Comments from the Chair (no documents)

Presenter(s): John Nychka, Vice Provost (Learning Initiatives) and Chair of CLE

Discussion:
The Chair observed that the university was grappling with general budget challenges, centrally and in the faculties, and trying to find ways to move forward under these constraints. He noted the following areas of concern that the COVID 19 Public Health Response Team's (PHRT) Subcommittee on Academic Impacts was working on:
- strategies to enhance online learning;
- technology requirements;
- remote delivery pedagogy;
- fall 2020 planning;
- provision of resources for faculty and students; and
- experiential learning in the online model.

The Chair spoke about the Code of Practice for Student Learning Analytics, which was endorsed by GFC at their meeting of February 24, 2020. He asked members to consider how to implement this code in our community, how learning could be supported with this, and what policy and procedure would need to be put in place. He asked those members interested in participating in a task force to work on this over the summer to contact him.

The Chair noted that this was the last meeting for some members and thanked them for their engagement.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

4. Building Capacity in the Graduate Student Experience, Graduate Student Success, and Excellence in the Graduate Student- Supervisory Relationship

Materials before members are contained in the official meeting file.

Presenter(s): Brooke Milne, Vice-Provost and Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

Discussion:
Dr Milne gave an overview of the tools that had been developed and spoke to the pivotal significance of the student and supervisor relationship to the entire graduate student experience. Dr Milne also presented the consultation pathway and the target timelines for implementation.

During the discussion, members asked questions and expressed comments including but not limited to:
- the enthusiastic support of the Graduate Students' Association;
- concern with adding more work for supervisors to address a relatively small number of cases;
- whether or not this new process would solve the problems that exist;
- that the research shows that clearly outlined expectations at the beginning of the program improves the student and supervisor relationship;
- understanding that this initiative was a first step and improvements could be made;
- budget constraints and the importance to streamline the process to make it as efficient and successful as possible;
- the institutional risk of problems that were not addressed having the potential of escalating to legal action;
- strategies for addressing problems once they had been identified; and
- the importance of clear expectations as well as education and training for supervisors.

5.   University of Alberta Non-Credit Credential Framework

Materials before members are contained in the official meeting file.

Presenter(s): Tammy Hopper, Vice-Provost (Programs); Christie Schultz, Assistant Dean, Academic, Faculty of Extension

Discussion:
Dr Hopper and Ms Schulz spoke about the task force that was working on a Non-Credit Credential Framework for the university and the target of May 25, 2020 for approval at GFC. They pointed to the importance of an institution-wide, guiding framework to provide consistency. They explained that this work was meant to support the work of the Faculties and that consistency across campus offerings would streamline internal development and help to build the university's brand.

Members discussed:
- the capacity for central cataloging and registration of non-credit offerings;
- how best to facilitate a positive student experience;
- the wide range of certificates, diplomas, and micro credentials that were possible;
- revenue generation opportunities for Faculties;
- ensuring our offerings did not overlap with those of other post-secondary institutions in the city;
- advantages for staff who would like to use the Human Resources Development Fund; and
- the use of space and resources and the discretion of individual Faculties.

6.   Universal Student Ratings of Instruction (USRIs)

Materials before members are contained in the official meeting file.

Presenter(s): John Nychka, Vice Provost (Learning Initiatives) and Chair of CLE; Cheryl Poth, Associate Director, Centre for Teaching and Learning

Discussion:
The Chair spoke about the potential to recommend a spring term pilot of new USRI questions to GFC. Dr Poth noted that the 13 new questions would better map to the Framework for Effective Teaching and that this would be a step forward with reforming the USRI process.

During the discussion, members expressed opinions and asked questions including but not limited to:
- sensitivity that teaching excellence in USRI results may reflect popularity rather than actual excellence;
- that simplicity in phrasing and ideas was important;
- that USRI questions were a contentious issue and more time needed to be spent in development before a pilot could be launched; and
- the complications of the COVID-19 pandemic and remote learning.

The Chair concluded that this item would undergo further work and development before a recommendation was made to launch the pilot.

7.   Question Period

Presenter(s): John Nychka, Vice Provost (Learning Initiatives) and Chair of CLE

Discussion:
A member asked if online learning would continue at the university after the COVID-19 pandemic was over and whether courses would be in person in the fall 2020 term.

The Chair responded that it would make sense for the university to explore having some course components online where it made sense to do so but that the University of Alberta was an in person and experiential learning institution at its core. He also pointed out that there were many unknowns regarding fall 2020 term but that scenario planning was a priority and plans would be communicated with the university community as soon as possible.

8. Updates

A. Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL)

Presenter(s): John Nychka, Vice Provost (Learning Initiatives) and Chair of CLE

The Chair acknowledged the staff of CTL and all of the good work they were doing to support instructors with remote delivery. He noted that a task force had been established to determine changes that would be coming forward for the Centre.

B. Information Technology

Presenter(s): Mike MacGregor, Vice-Provost and Associate Vice-President (Information Technology)

There was no update.

C. Library and Museums

Presenter(s): Dale Askey, Vice-Provost (Library and Museums) & Chief Librarian

Dr Askey explained that the closure of the Winspear Business Library was due to budget cuts and that the collection would be divided up between the Rutherford and Cameron Libraries as well as the Archives. He noted that the staff would be reassigned to other areas.

D. General Faculties Council- Academic Governance Emergency Protocols: Decision Tracker Document

Presenter(s): Yimmie Sonuga, GFC Secretary and Manager GFC Services

Ms Sonuga pointed to the decision tracker document link in the agenda. She explained that the document would be updated to include academic governance decisions made in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

INFORMATION REPORTS

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

There were no items.

11. Information Items Forwarded to Committee Members Between Meetings

There were no items.

CLOSING SESSION

12. Adjournment

The Chair adjourned the meeting at 4:00 p.m.