



# UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

## UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE

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

Wednesday, September 30, 2020  
2-31 South Academic Building (SAB)  
2:00 PM - 4:00 PM

---

**ATTENDEES:**

John Nychka, Chair  
Dale Askey  
Benjamin Cheung  
David Draper  
Ivan Fair  
Simran Ghoman  
Bora Kim  
Janice Kung  
Pascal Lupien

Brian Maraj  
Abner Monteiro  
Cheryl Poth  
Sachiketha Reddy  
Norma Rodenburg  
Victoria Ruetalo  
Christine Wiesenthal  
*non-voting:*  
Cosette Lemelin  
Mike MacGregor

**REGRETS:**

Lorna Baker-Perri  
Brad Hamdon  
Kate Peters  
  
Staff;  
Heather Richholt, Coordinator

**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), Chair GFC Committee on the Learning Environment (CLE)

*Discussion:*

Before the Chair called the meeting to order, he acknowledged:

The University of Alberta is located on Treaty 6 territory, and respects the histories, languages, and cultures of First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and all First Peoples of Canada, whose presence continues to enrich our vibrant community.

The Chair noted that because neither the University Secretary nor the GFC Secretary were able to be at the meeting, Item 4 Committee Orientation would have to be deferred to the next meeting.

Motion: Draper/Ruetalo

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

**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), Chair CLE

Motion: Rodenburg/Wiesenthal

THAT the GFC Committee on the Learning Environment approve the Open Session Minutes of February 5, 2020.

**CARRIED**

B. Approval of the Open Session Minutes of April 29, 2020

Materials before members are contained in the official meeting file.

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

Motion: Ruetalo/Rodenburg

THAT the GFC Committee on the Learning Environment approve the Open Session Minutes of April 29, 2020.

**CARRIED**

3. Comments from the Chair (no documents)

*Presenter(s):* John Nychka, Vice-Provost (Learning Initiatives), Chair CLE

*Discussion:*

The Chair noted that on September 30, the university encourages everyone to wear an orange shirt to honour and remember the experiences and loss of the tens of thousands of children who were stolen from their families and placed in Indian Residential Schools.

In his comments the Chair touched on the following topics:

- the shift to remote delivery in March 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic;
- the significant cuts to the operating budget and the resulting institution-wide restructuring initiative, the University of Alberta for Tomorrow (UAT);
- the university's continuing commitment to teaching and learning; and
- the work of the Centre for Teaching and Learning to provide support for instructors and students in the remote environment.

The Chair informed members that much of the Committee's focus for the 2020-2021 academic year would be:

- Multifaceted evaluation of teaching;
- Student surveys of experience of teaching and learning; and
- Teaching Policy and Effective Teaching Framework.

The Chair welcomed new members to the committee and thanked Dr Brian Maraj for agreeing to serve as Vice-Chair for one more year.

**DISCUSSION ITEMS**

4. Updates (no documents):

A. Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL)

*Presenter(s):* Cosette Lemelin, Assistant Director, Centre for Teaching and Learning

*Discussion:*

Dr Lemelin noted the increased demands for support for teaching and learning which resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic and the move to remote delivery in March 2020. She spoke about : CTL website updates; blog posts on support for remote teaching; teaching and learning online courses; webinars; and continuing programming into the fall.

A member asked about staff changes in CTL and the Chair explained that increased demand combined with budgetary constraints meant that some reorganization was necessary to meet the changing needs of the university community.

### B. Information Technology

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

#### *Discussion:*

Dr MacGregor spoke about how the eClass infrastructure had been up-scaled to accommodate increased volume and demand by instructors and students because of the move to remote learning. He also noted an increase in the institutional license for Zoom, which allowed more space for online videos. Dr MacGregor also noted that Edmonton Public Libraries had excellent public wireless access available at all of its branch locations and encouraged members to pass that information along to those who could benefit from it.

### C. Library and Museums

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

#### *Discussion:*

Dr Askey noted that the physical libraries remain closed but that parts of Cameron Library, special collections, and archives were available by appointment. He mentioned the closures of the Education and Business Libraries due to budget cuts, and noted that the Bookstore was facing challenges due to late requests and supply chain issues. Dr Askey also announced that the University of Alberta was an early signatory to the Open Access 2020 initiative, which aimed to open access to scholarly journals: <https://oa2020.org/>

### D. General Faculties Council

*Presenter(s):* Heather Richholt, Assistant Secretary to General Faculties Council

#### *Discussion:*

Ms Richholt provided highlights of the first GFC meeting of the academic year and the first meeting with University President and Vice-Chancellor Bill Flanagan in the Chair, including:

- The Board Chair's message about the importance of GFC's role in academic restructuring;
- An approved extension of the use of the Duolingo English Test (DET) for admissions;
- The presentation and discussion on University of Alberta for Tomorrow (UAT); and
- A motion submitted by a member and passed by GFC, to recommend to the Board that the Service Excellence Transformation (SET) process follow the Academic Restructuring process, with GFC being given all of the SET data, consultant recommendations and rationale so that they could give an informed recommendation on SET to the Board.

Ms Richholt also noted that UAT and Academic Restructuring would be discussed at the October and November GFC meetings.

### 5. General Faculties Council Committee Orientation

The item was deferred.

### 6. Conduct of Examination Guidelines

Materials before members are contained in the official meeting file.

*Presenter(s):* John Nychka, Vice-Provost (Learning Initiatives), Chair CLE; Tammy Hopper, Vice-Provost (Programs); Carlo Dimailig, University Calendar Editor, Office of the Registrar

*Discussion:*

Dr Hopper explained that the current exam guidelines in the *University Calendar* were in need of revision to reflect the remote delivery and online assessment model that the university had shifted to due to the COVID-19 pandemic. She explained that there was more work to be done on *Calendar* regulations but that the exam guidelines needed to be clear.

Mr Dimailig noted that there were other regulations in need of updating and revision, and that some needed to be moved to other sections of the *Calendar* as well.

Members discussed whether the changes to exam regulations would be temporary or permanent, the need for regulations to address both online and in-person assessment, and that appropriate changes to regulations should be approved as needed. Members also discussed the future of online learning at the university, increased accessibility, and how some subject matter and assessment methods were more suited to remote and online formats than others.

## **ACTION ITEMS**

### 7. Protection and Recourse for Students in Experiential Learning

Materials before members are contained in the official meeting file.

*Presenter(s):* David Draper, Vice-President (Academic), Students' Union; Katie Kidd, Vice-President (Student-Life), Students' Union

*Discussion:*

Mr Draper explained that the Students' Union wanted to address a gap in the university's policies related to the protection of students in work-integrated learning placements and experiential learning opportunities.

Ms Kidd shared some experiences of students who had been in uncomfortable and harmful situations and felt unsure of the university's support, and that to speak up or ask for help would damage their careers.

During the discussion, members asked questions and expressed opinions, including but not limited to:

- that approving policy was only the first step and that action was necessary to enforce it;
- how partnerships with outside businesses or organizations needed to include explicit statements of tacit assumptions;
- Faculty of Education practicum policies;
- the need to be clear to students about where they go for support in these cases; and
- looking across campus and other universities to see what was working and to integrate those ideas into the proposal.

### 8. Student Assessment and Evaluation of Teaching (SAET)

Materials before members are contained in the official meeting file.

*Presenter(s):* John Nychka, Vice-Provost (Learning Initiatives), Chair CLE

*Discussion:*

The Chair explained that the committee had engaged in some rich discussions about student surveys of instruction in past meetings and that he was creating an ad hoc task force to investigate how to obtain student survey data on teaching and learning that was reflective of the Framework for Effective Teaching.

During the discussion, members asked questions and expressed opinions, including but not limited to:

- that some institutions train students in how to effectively evaluate teaching;

- that students felt like their feedback did not have an impact so were less likely to want to take the time to do the evaluations;
- that current Universal Student Ratings of Instruction (USRIs) were high stakes for instructors but questions were not very useful and interpretation was not necessarily very accurate;
- that the current USRI instrument was never validated;
- the importance of retaining the value and richness of the free text response;
- the use of USRIs by Faculty Evaluation Committees (FECs);
- the importance of balancing the burden on administrators;
- that the data collected should help instructors to improve their teaching;
- that there should be some value to students for doing the work;
- whether we could provide information to students so they did not rely on websites such as "Rate my Professor";
- that a mid-semester evaluation could be more useful to instructors; and
- that creative ideas were needed to improve the system.

The Chair asked that those interested in serving on the task force contact him.

### **DISCUSSION ITEMS**

9. Question Period

There were no questions.

### **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

- Next Meeting of CLE: October 28, 2020
- Next Meeting of GFC: October 19, 2020

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