

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

Wednesday, January 25, 2023
2-31 SAB
2:00 PM - 4:00 PM

ATTENDEES:

Karsten Mundel
Hollis Lai
Bishoi Aziz
Benjamin Cheung
Zachary Friggstad
Jana Grekul
Christine Hughes
Gurleen Kaur
Simran Kaur Dhillon
Jesse Luyendyk

Andrea MacLeod
Angie Mandeville
Christian Reyns-Chikuma
Gregory Thomas
Patrick von Hauff

Regrets:

Angela Bayduza
Shauna Wilton
Rachel Yang

Non-Voting Members:

Brad Hamdon
Mike MacGregor
Tommy Mayberry
Lara McClelland
Kate Peters

Staff

Faiza Billo

OPENING SESSION

Before calling the meeting to order, the Chair acknowledged the territory and spoke to the significance of the acknowledging the territory in his work, teaching and researching at the University of Alberta.

1. Opening

Presenter(s): Orest Zwozdesky, Indigepreneur and Chief Value Officer (CVO) of Orest Zwozdesky International

Discussion: The Chair began by reminding members about the ongoing work to understand their responsibilities set out under the *University Indigenous Strategic Plan - Brading Past, Present and Future*. He reminded members that the committee had discussed a desire to move this work forward and agreed to begin with an Indigenous practice of introducing themselves to promote good relations. He introduced Orest Zwozdesky, and invited him to lead the group in ceremony.

Members introduced themselves.

2. Approval of the Agenda

Materials before members are contained in the official meeting file.

Presenter(s): Karsten Mündel, Acting Vice-Provost (Learning Initiatives), Chair CLE

Discussion:

The Chair articulated a change to the agenda to remove the standing item of updates from University Libraries, Information Services and Technology and the Centre for Teaching and Learning. He noted that the proponents had agreed with the removal of the item and expressed a desire to bring forward items more intentionally for discussion in the future. He asked members if there were any concerns with this approach and hearing none, asked for a mover and a seconder.

Motion: The motion was moved and seconded.

THAT the GFC CLE Committee approve the agenda.

CARRIED

2. Comments from the Chair (no documents)

Presenter(s): Karsten Mündel, Acting Vice-Provost (Learning Initiatives), Chair CLE

Discussion: The Chair shared his intention to deepen the work to integrate Indigenous ways of knowing in the practices of the committee. He explained that he had worked with Indigenous colleagues to think through how the meeting could be managed in ways that are inspired by the First Peoples of this place. The chair emphasized that these approaches may feel uncomfortable and welcomed feedback between meetings. He expressed a hope that there would be an opportunity to think about how we carry this work forward at the end of this governance cycle. He thanked invited guests Orest Zwozdesky and Andrea Menard, for their support in conducting this meeting.

3. Approval of the Open Session Minutes of November 30, 2022

Materials before members are contained in the official meeting file.

Presenter(s): Karsten Mündel, Acting Vice-Provost (Learning Initiatives), Chair CLE

Motion: The motion was moved and seconded.

THAT the GFC CLE Committee approve the Open Session minutes of November 30, 2022.

CARRIED

DISCUSSION ITEMS

4. The Learning Environment and the Indigenous Student Success Survey (2021) Report March 2022

Materials before members are contained in the official meeting file.

Presenter(s): Andrea Menard, Lead Educational Developer, Indigenizing Curricula and Pedagogies, Centre for Teaching and Learning & Office of the Vice Provost, Indigenous Programming and Research; Karsten Mündel, Acting Vice-Provost (Learning Initiatives), Chair CLE

Discussion: The Chair invited members to take five minutes to read the report and indicated that he would be asking for volunteers to lead conversations on the report. Members reflected on the report and its description of the gaps in supports and services across the university. A member expressed an interest in looking into the sections of the report that look at the learning environment and the possibility of collaborating with A Menard to think about land-based learning. She spoke to the seven grandfathers teachings, and the value of taking small steps.

Members discussed:

- the value of being open and creating learning spaces where it was possible to learn with the heart;
- that staff members should be consulted because the experience of racism among staff members was statistically significant;
- how students were clearly indicating that they do not feel prepared for their course of study;
- barriers to land-based learning, including the administrative hurdles required;
- teaching about Indigenous topics as a non-Indigenous person and how this requires understanding and does not necessarily need to be led by an Indigenous person; and

- that Indigenous languages can integrate teachings from the land and that currently regulations prevent scholarship in different languages.

Members asked questions about issues flagged in the report, in particular the barriers to apply and navigate the admissions process, and whether there were supports that had been put in place. The Office of the Registrar committed to bringing an update to the next meeting.

5. Teaching, Learning and Evaluation Policy Revised Appendix A: Student Perspectives of Teaching (SPOT) Survey

Materials contained in file.

Presenter(s): Karsten Mündel, Acting Vice-Provost (Learning Initiatives), Chair CLE

Discussion: The Chair provided background on the proposed student perspectives of teaching (SPOT) survey questions and noted that CLE was responsible for moving the questions forward to GFC for final decision. The Chair reminded members that CLE would be asked to recommend GFC approve the questions at their next meeting on February 8, 2023.

After presenting the materials, he asked members to proceed in discussion in a round table format but noted that anyone could pass their turn to take the floor.

Members and invited guests made comments, asked questions, made suggestions and expressed opinions, including:

- How to interpret the percentage of students who had indicated that they had experienced racism;
- The use of evaluation questions and how the questions may reflect structural barriers in the learning environment and in society at large;
- Whether the questions are appropriate for the broad diversity of learning environments in the University and their appropriateness for process-based learning experiences;
- That the questions are instructor focused;.
- That students should be able to suggest a question and provide an answer to ensure students have agency;
- That the learning environment and classroom climate are not captured in the questions;
- That because not all the data from each section of the survey will be available there are limits to how useful the data will be;
- That the Framework for Effective Teaching was developed for typical courses and explicitly indicates that this tool may not be useful in all of the broad diversity of program designs;
- Whether Chairs should be given guidance on how to interpret the new scores;
- That, from the perspective of clinical training, the word "competency" is absent;
- That the questions diminish student agency and suggest that the instructor is a holder of knowledge which is something that we may want to move away from in the context of decolonization;
- Whether the order of the questions could help to diminish a perception that the survey is centred on the role of the instructor;
- That while the use of Likert scales makes sense and while the use of the Framework is theoretically sound, the use of the final scores could be used in a reductive way
- An opinion that the character maximum is problematic because it limits students' ability to story their experience;
- That there is no way to interpret scores by isolating characteristics such as gender, gender expression, or cultural background and that without a question that would allow for this regression analysis, these questions are no different than the existing USRI questions;

- That the questions are ready to go and that the conversation is very important and relevant to the broader context of the Framework for Effective Teaching;
- That the questions as set forth offer a good starting point and the need to move the survey forward and improve as it gets rolled out;
- That the questions do give agency to the student and that these questions will support the evolution of the learning environment;
- That response rates are low in some departments so, as the survey is implemented, it would be valuable to think about incentives for students and to ensure instructors are encouraged to provide class time to complete the survey; and
- That changes in the collective agreement since the policy has been approved, have had an impact on the FEC process and that training is coming for FEC committees to ensure they use the scores as set out in the agreement.

Upon completing this first circle of feedback, the Chair paused and asked members to reflect and respond in a second turn of the circle as to whether the questions had moved forward enough to be put forward to GFC for decision. In the second round, members made the following comments:

- That statistics are a colonial construct;
- Whether the invitation to make longform comments could be made more explicit and welcoming;
- That, in the spirit of moving this forward, GFC needs to focus on section D of the survey and remember that the survey no longer asks students to evaluate aspects of the learning environment that are beyond the instructor's control;
- An opinion that it would be better to make it mandatory for all students to complete the survey;
- A response that while it isn't possible to mandate completion, the policy does suggest that instructors give 15 minutes to students to complete the survey because of the protections for academic freedom; and
- The current format is a great improvement over the previous USRI's.

In conclusion, the chair noted that once approved, these questions can come back to CLE for revisions.

6. Update on University Teaching and Faculty Excellence Awards (no documents)

Presenter(s): Karsten Mündel, Acting Vice-Provost (Learning Initiatives), Chair CLE

Discussion: Noting that time was limited, the Chair provided a quick summary on plans to move forward with Teaching and Faculty Excellence awards. He reminded the committee that CLE has broad responsibility over excellence in teaching and that work the GFC committee responsible for Teaching Awards had been replenished. He committed to bringing an item back to CLE to discuss their progress. He also explained that work continues to relaunch Faculty Excellence Awards and that the Office of the Provost will soon be announcing revised award details and process for the University Cup, University Distinguished Professor and Vargo Teaching Chair in early February with a deadline of May 1.

7. Provost's Task Force on Artificial Intelligence and the Learning Environment (Backgrounder Article for context, no documents)

Presenter(s): Karsten Mündel, Acting Vice-Provost (Learning Initiatives), Chair CLE

Discussion: The Chair reported that he had been asked to pull together a Taskforce to facilitate a series of University wide conversations and to bring forward a set of recommendations by the end of this academic year. He emphasized that CLE will be an important partner in this work and asked members willing to support in some way to contact him outside the meeting.

8. Question Period

Presenter(s): Karsten Mündel, Acting Vice-Provost (Learning Initiatives), Chair CLE

Discussion: There were no questions.

CLOSING SESSION

10. Adjournment
 - Next Meeting of CLE: Special Session, February 8, 2023
 - Next Meeting of GFC: January 30, 2023