

General Faculties Council
Council on Students Affairs (COSA)
Approved Open Session Minutes

Thursday, November 02, 2023
South Academic Building (SAB) 2-31
4:00 PM - 6:00 PM

ATTENDEES:

Verna Yiu, Chair
Christian Fotang (Vice Chair)
Hussain Alhussainy
Jun Hu
Saad Iqbal
Rija Kamran
Keith King
Adrian Lam

Brendan Pham
Tracy Raivio
Norma Rodenburg
Ravina Sanghera
Michael Schmidtke
Tuesday Young

non-voting:
Kate Peters

REGRETS:

Sarah Ejekwuipe
Taylor Good
John Lemieux
Malijha Moyan
Jennifer Passey
Prabhnoor Singh
Staff:
Faiza Billo, Committee Coordinator

OPENING SESSION

Before calling the meeting to order, the Chair acknowledged:

The University of Alberta resides on Treaty 6 territory and the homeland of the Métis. To acknowledge the territory is to recognize the longer history of these lands and our commitment to working in Good Relations with First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples.

The Chair began with a round table of introductions.

1. Approval of the Agenda

Presenter(s): Verna Yiu, Interim Provost and Vice-President (Academic) and Chair of COSA

The Chair welcomed members to the first meeting of the academic year and asked members to begin with a round table.

The motion was moved and seconded.

THAT the Council on Student Affairs approve the agenda.

CARRIED

2. Approval of the Open Session Minutes of September 7, 2023

Presenter(s): Verna Yiu, Interim Provost and Vice-President (Academic) and Chair of COSA

The motion was moved and seconded.

THAT the Council on Student Affairs approve the open session minutes of September 7, 2023.
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CARRIED

3. Comments from the Chair (no documents)

Presenter(s): Verna Yiu, Interim Provost and Vice-President (Academic) and Chair of COSA

Discussion:

The Chair made comments on the 2024-2025 Academic Schedule; the appointment of Tim Tang, Associate Vice-President (Student Experience); and welcomed Tracy Raivio, the newly appointed Vice-Provost and Dean of the Faculty of Graduate and Post-doctoral (FGPS) Studies.

N Rodenburg provided additional details on the changes to the exam schedule for the 2024-2025 academic year. She noted that there was a shortage of exam days and that going forward, there would be three instead of two exams per day. She explained that a policy will be put in place to ensure that students are not required to take three exams per day.

4. Student Updates

Presenter(s): Christian Fotang, President of the University of Alberta Students' Union (UASU); Rija Kamran, Vice-President (Academic) of the Graduate Students' Association (GSA)

Discussion:

The Chair noted this item had been deferred at the September 7th meeting and consequently been placed early on the agenda.

R Kamran provided an update on behalf of the President of the GSA, that included:

- The Report "Understanding Financial Realities: An Analysis of the Financial Condition among UofA Graduate Students Report";
- The work with the FGPS on a proposed operating standard for PhD Minimum Funding; and
- Support provided to students experiencing difficulties with visa processing.

C Fotang presented an update from the UASU noting:

- The work to support the Student Experience Action Plan;
- Advocacy for increased One-Card Access to buildings on Campus; and
- A visit to Augustana Campus and discussions with their student association about student academic issues.

Members asked questions about the access to buildings on weekends, especially the Humanities Building and the emphasis on leaving the "spine" or the system of pedways open as much as possible.

ACTION ITEMS

5. Student Experience Action Plan

Presenter(s): Melissa Padfield, Deputy Provost (Students and Enrolment); Sarah Wolgemuth, Assistant Dean, Strategic Initiatives, & Project Director, Student Experience Action Plan

Discussion:

M Padfield and S Wolgemuth presented on the Student Experience Action Plan (SEAP) including the formal next steps towards a launch; timelines for community engagement; the creation of a SEAP Accountability Framework; and the focus for short term initiatives. They spoke to plans to build an ecosystem to support implementation and asked members for feedback on student experience surveys and results.

Members provided feedback on surveys including how to prioritise communications and provide incentives to complete surveys. Members expressed an interest in supporting this by providing more specific feedback on draft communications.

In discussing the endorsement, members reviewed the accountability framework and consultations with the public on access to buildings; the needs of vulnerable populations; and accountability for student safety. Members provided feedback on how to ensure access to communications about SEAP, for example through a dashboard. They commented that consultation should continue and expressed concerns that this might not continue in light of the One University Strategy and that faculty-specific consultations should be prioritised.

The motion was moved and seconded:

THAT the GFC Council on Student Affairs endorse the Student Experience Action Plan Themes and Goals and key actions, as described in attachments.

CARRIED

DISCUSSION ITEMS

6. Tuition Briefing

Materials before members are contained in the official meeting file.

Presenter(s): Melissa Padfield, Deputy Provost (Students and Enrolment)

Discussion: M Padfield provided an update on proposals for 2024-2025 tuition and outlined the cost-drivers including consumer price index and inflation, revenue gaps, and a desire to maintain quality of instruction. She described the decreases in the University's revenue sources, through the provincial Operating Support Program Grant, through Federal and other government grants, and through decreases to investment income. She reminded members about the legislated tuition cap that leads to a funding gap, and noted the misalignment with other cost drivers. She described the model for 2024-2025 international tuition, and the program for grandparenting students in "Cohort 99", made up of students who were admitted starting in fall, 2020. She emphasised that different outcomes will be put in place for students based on context.

Members asked questions and made comments including, but not limited to:

- Whether funds from exceptional tuition increases and market modifiers in the Faculty of Engineering are being directed to local program improvements;
- Concerns that increases are compounded in faculties where exceptional tuition increases have been applied;
- How the University is planning to address the identified gap in revenues;
- That growth in some programs and courses has been exponential and that increases in tuition may not cover the need for increasing teaching staff;
- How restructuring from the Colleges may impact the distribution of revenues across the university and if there are savings being accrued from the new administrative structure; and
- An opinion that increases to class sizes do have an impact on quality of the student experience and that increases to tuition will decrease the value accrued by students.

The Chair noted that the SEAP is intended to ensure protection of the student experience in times of growth at the University. She challenged members of COSA to think about how the University can continue to maintain and enhance the student experience as the University grows.

Members expressed support for the increase in student financial supports and questioned why those funds are coming from student tuition revenue, not from the University. The Chair noted that students could discuss this further in the next item.

7. Moderate Standard of Living (MSoL) and Bursary Application Advisory Working Group Report

Presenter(s): Norma Rodenburg, Acting Vice-Provost and University Registrar

Discussion: N Rodenburg introduced C Fotang and R Kamran and spoke to their roles on the Moderate Standard of Living (MSoL) and Bursary Application Advisory Working Group Report (Advisory Working Group). She provided a high-level overview of the outcomes of the group's work and pointed members to the materials. C Fotang spoke to feedback received from the UASU concerning financial pressures on students, especially housing and food. He noted in particular the precarious situation faced by international students. R Kamran noted the deteriorating financial situation of graduate students, the specific needs of course-based students, and the need for targeted bursaries for students impacted by geopolitical situations.

She explained that the MSoL had been evaluated based on data from 2023-2024 and described potential impacts on students based on MSoL calculations. Presenters showed an example of the change to revenues that students would see based on changes made to MSoL. The University of Alberta Students' Union and the Graduate Students' Association expressed support for the outcome of the Advisory Group's work which will ensure that students access the equivalent to a living wage through student financial supports. They further noted the need for strategic partnerships to support students with the greatest financial need, such as the Campus Food Bank and communications to ensure that students don't self-disqualify from available financial supports. They noted that it was important to equip instructors, service providers and other members of the University Community to provide this information. In conclusion Advisory Group Members emphasised the importance of improving the student experience and that while this report marks the end of the working group, the support to students will continue.

Members discussed the presentation and noted the troubling statistics set out in the report, especially the high level of students experiencing homelessness.

8. Student Financial Support Annual Report To Our Community and Accompanying Overview

Materials before members are contained in the official meeting file.

Presenter(s): Norma Rodenburg, Acting Vice-Provost and University Registrar; Tracy Raivio, Vice-Provost and Dean, Faculty of Graduate and Post-doctoral Studies

Discussion: N Rodenburg and T Raivio noted that this was the first combined undergraduate and graduate report and pointed members to the documents available. She and T Raivio provided an overview of the report including:

- Total financial support;
- Merit, need, and hybrid supports for undergraduate and graduate students;
- Need-based spending;
- Bursary demand and total enrolment;
- Affordability initiatives including the recommendations from the Advisory Group on Moderate Standard of living and bursary applications and the guaranteed minimum PhD funding;
- Access and the increase in need-based awards through tuition offset revenue;
- Partnerships between government, the University and students;
- Equity, diversity, and Inclusion student survey data; and
- Strategic enrollment initiatives including undergraduate access awards, hybrid funding, graduate community engagement scholarship and FGSR Award for part-time Indigenous Students.

A member shared their story of looking to access financial supports as an international student. They explained that they had since been reluctant to seek financial support from the University because of their negative experience. They reflected that while offering services may be difficult for staff, it was important for them to act with humanity when interacting with students who may be facing very difficult circumstances.

The Chair reflected that there should be seamless access to supports and that each interaction should be respectful and leave students avenues to find solutions.

There were no other comments.

9. Understanding Financial Realities: An Analysis of the Financial Condition among UofA Graduate Students Report

Materials before members are contained in the official meeting file.

Presenter(s): Rija Kamran, Vice-President (Academic) of the Graduate Students' Association (GSA)

Discussion: R Kamran noted that the GSA had conducted their survey to understand the financial realities of students, and presented an overview of the report. She noted in particular:

- The profile of respondents, their family situation, and income;
- That 40.9% of the respondents had considered leaving their programs due to financial need;
- Comparative data between domestic and international students;
- Campus Food Bank utilisation, especially by international students, and important increases that are described in the data;
- Themes in qualitative responses including food security, financial assistance, budgeting and lifestyle circumstances, and impacts on emotional and psychological health.

Members thanked the GSA for their work.

10. Question Period

Presenter(s): Verna Yiu, Interim Provost and Vice-President (Academic) and Chair of COSA

Discussion: Members asked about the discrepancies between revenues within the university and asked about announcements from political leaders threatening equity, diversity, and inclusion offices within universities. Students expressed concerns about support for students.

The Chair made a distinction between the policy positions taken by a political party and the programming supported by the Provincial Operating Grant. She stated that she was proud of the ongoing work within the university and that she was optimistic that these statements would not lead to any impacts on students. She concluded by reiterating that she understood students' concerns.

Members expressed their support for Indigenous students and pointed to disparities between undergraduate and graduate funding.

CLOSING SESSION

11. Adjournment

- Next meeting of COSA: January 25, 2024
- Next meeting of GFC: November 20, 2023