General Faculties Council
Committee on the Learning Environment
Open Session Minutes

Wednesday, January 20, 2016
2-31 South Academic Building (SAB)
2:00 PM - 4:00 PM

ATTENDEES:

Voting Members:

Sarah Forgie	Chair (Delegate), Provost and Vice-President (Academic)
Shannon Erichsen	Member, Support staff representative (Category B1.0), elected by GFC
Roger Graves	Member, Director, Centre for Teaching and Learning
Jacqueline Leighton	Member, Chair Representative, selected by Chairs' Council
Glen Loppnow	Member, Associate Dean or Associate Chair, Teaching and Learning (or equivalent)
Luis Marin	Member, Graduate Student at-Large
Fahim Rahman	Member, Vice-President (Academic), Students' Union
Jeff Rawlings	Member (Delegate), Vice-Provost and Associate Vice-President of Information Technology
Norma Rodenburg	Member (Delegate), Vice-Provost and University Registrar
Harsh Thaker	Member, Vice-President (Academic), Graduate Students' Association
Mani Vaidyanathan	Member, Academic Staff
Stanley Varnhagen	Member, Academic Staff
Quinten Starko	Member, Undergraduate Student at-Large

Presenter(s):

Sarah Forgie	Vice-Provost (Learning Initiatives) and Chair, GFC CLE
Roger Graves	Director, Centre for Teaching and Learning

Staff:
Meg Brolley, Coordinator, GFC Committee on the Learning Environment
Andrea Patrick, 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 December 2, 2015

Materials before members are contained in the official meeting file.

Discussion:
A member noted that, on the Institutional Strategic Plan discussion, his specific commentary of the role of the University to seek the truth was not captured.

Motion: Loppnow/Marin

THAT the GFC Committee on the Learning Environment approve the Minutes of December 2, 2015 as revised.

CARRIED

3.   Comments from the Chair

The Chair welcomed all to the New Year and invited members to introduce themselves.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

4.   Centre for Teaching and Learning: Update

There were no documents.

Presenter: Roger Graves, Interim Director, Centre for Teaching and Learning

Discussion:
Dr Graves reported that 'Concepts in Course Design' was developed and ready to be offered. He noted that the program is comprised of 5 self-study modules on creating a course which would be offered as a cohort model. Dr Graves further reported on a Campus Alberta developed course, 'How to create an online course', which was currently being reviewed for appropriateness in the university context.

5.   MOOC Oversight Committee

There were no documents.

Presenter: Sarah Forgie, Vice-Provost (Learning Initiatives) and Chair, GFC CLE

Discussion:
The Chair reported that a new committee had been struck to oversee Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and would be chaired by Dr Nat Kav, Vice-Provost (Academic Programs and Instruction). She invited members to volunteer for the Committee by contacting her.

6.   Challenges for CLE - Topics for Discussion

Materials before members are contained in the official meeting file.

Presenter: Sarah Forgie, Vice-Provost (Learning Initiatives) and Chair, GFC CLE

Discussion:

The Chair provided a brief summary in regards to the methodology behind selecting topics for review by the committee and the survey results in relation to the selection of topics. The committee discussed the constraints posed by the number of meetings remaining in the year, the use of ad hoc sub-committees to work between meetings and report back to CLE, alignment of topics with respect to the Institutional Strategic Plan, and the value of focusing on a couple of short term topics and one longer term topic which would continue past the end of the year. The committee agreed to focus on: formative feedback, universal classrooms, and teaching tenure stream. After a lengthy discussion, it was agreed to approach a portion of the USRI topic as outlined below.

Formative Feedback – It was noted that this topic would have an impact on the learning environment and was a well defined problem with clear outcomes. There was a discussion on how software packages such as Moodle could be used voluntarily by instructors as a communication tool between instructors and students ensuring that the comments come from registered students while allowing for these students to provide comments anonymously. This would allow the opportunity for instructors try new methods and strategies, and receive feedback from students, on an ongoing basis, in order to improve teaching. This would also provide feedback not related to current concerns with FEC. Dr Graves agreed to look at the software available and report back to the committee.

Universal Classrooms – It was recognized that teaching occurs in many settings including traditional classrooms, laboratories, field placements, and hospital examination rooms. An examination of universal classrooms should include definitions in recognition of this. It was agreed that the focus of this topic would primarily focus on the classroom with identification of basic elements, and a recommendation for future classrooms. Elements to be considered included: ensure that basic needs identified will not become obsolete in the next 5 to 10 years; discipline specific needs; accessibility; architectural constraints (accoustics, larger classrooms, etc); use of active learning; and the balance between instructor needs and the learning environment of the student. The role of the Office of the Registrar in assigning space and classroom scheduling should also be considered. Dr Vaidyanathan and Mr Thacker agreed to participate in this topic; Dr Graves noted that CTL would be able to put a survey on the website and collect data. Dr Vaidyanathan was invited to attend the regular meeting of the Associate Deans Teaching and Learning to discuss this topic and conduct a needs assessment.

Teaching Tenure Stream – It was agreed that this was an important topic to get started on and that it would continue beyond the current year. It was suggested that the scope be broken down into short, medium and long term pieces and that it not focus on the associated labour issue; the focus should remain on what it would mean for the learning environment. A member noted that there are a lot of models of this currently in use. It was agreed that a subcommittee be formed and the scope be refined to give this subcommittee a clear mandate. Members were encouraged to send pressing issues and comments to Mr Rahman who would draft a document for the March meeting.

Mandated Questions on the USRIs for Project Based and Online Courses - The committee discussed how the mandated questions for the USRI may not be the most suitable assessment tool for project based or online courses; for instance, the quality of supervision of students is not assessed. It was confirmed that questions can be added to the current 10 requried courses, that instructors can develop their own questions, and that the USRI can be used midterm for formative feedback. The committee agreed that the USRI is, and will continue to be, a topic of interest. It was agreed that the committee would narrow the focus of current attention to an examination of the mandated questions for project based and online courses. Dr Vaidyanathan will consult with colleagues and provide the committee with an update on project based courses; Dr Samek will be asked to provide more clarity on the issue for online courses.

7.   Question Period

There were no questions.

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 3:50 p.m.