

Attendance at FGSR Council – October 13, 2021

DEPARTMENT/UNIT FACULTY REPRESENTATIVES

Present:

Agricultural, Food & Nutritional Science	Ben Willing
Art & Design	Joan Greer
Biochemistry	David Stuart
Business (non-departmentalized) - MBA	Michael Maier
Business (non-departmentalized) - PhD	Trish Reay
Cell Biology	Richard Wozniak
Chemicals & Materials Engineering	Hao Zhang
Civil & Environmental Engineering	Selma Guigard
Civil & Environmental Engineering	Victor Liu
Communication Sciences & Disorders	Monique Charest
Computing Science	Greg Kondrak
Computing Science - Multimedia Program	Greg Kondrak
Dentistry (Medical Sciences)	Carlos Flores Mir
Drama	Stefano Muneroni
East Asian Studies	David Quinter
Educational Policy Studies	Darryl Hunter
Educational Studies	Douglas Gleddie
Electrical & Computer Engineering	Mahdi Tavakoli
Elementary Education	Trudy Cardinal
English and Film Studies	Mark Simpson
Health Sciences Education	Douglas Gleddie
History, Classics, and Religious Studies	Heather Coleman
Laboratory Medicine & Pathology	Jelena Holovati
Law (non-departmentalized)	Linda Reif
Library & Information Studies	Dinesh Rathi
Linguistics	Johanne Paradis
Mathematical & Statistical Science	Christoph Frei
Mechanical Engineering	Alexandra Komrakova
Medical Microbiology & Immunology	Edan Foley
Medicine	Nadia Jahroudi
Modern Languages & Cultural Studies	Irene Sywenky
Music	Michael Frishkopf
Nursing (non-departmentalized)	Dianne Tapp
Obstetrics & Gynecology (Medical Sciences)	Denise Hemmings
Oncology	Alan Underhill

Oncology	Gordon Chan
Pediatrics (Medical Sciences)	Sujata Persad
Pharmacology	Frances Plane
Pharmacy & Pharmaceutical Sciences (non-dept.)	Arno Siraki
Physical Therapy	Mark Hall
Physics	Craig Heinke
Political Science	Jared Wesley
Psychiatry	Allen Chan
Psychology	Chris Westbury
Radiology & Diagnostic Imaging (Medical Sciences)	Lawrence Le
Rehabilitation Medicine - Rehabilitation Sciences	Patricia Manns
Resource Economics & Environmental Sociology	Henry An
Secondary Education	Bonnie Watt
Surgery	Fred Berry
Women's and Gender Studies	Lise Gotell

Absent:

Anthropology
 Biological Sciences
 Biomedical Engineering
 Chemistry
 Communications and Technology (MACT)
 Digital Humanities
 Earth & Atmospheric Sciences
 Economics
 Educational Psychology
 Faculte Saint-Jean (non-departmentalized)
 Human Ecology
 Internetworking (MINT)
 Kinesiology, Sport, and Recreation (non-departmentalized)
 Medical Genetics (Medical Sciences)
 Medical Sciences Graduate Program - FoMD
 Native Studies (non-departmentalized)
 Neuroscience
 Occupational Therapy
 Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences (Medical Sciences)
 Philosophy
 Physiology
 Renewable Resources
 School of Public Health (non-departmentalized)
 Sociology

ASSOCIATE DEANS (GRADUATE) REPRESENTATIVES FOR DEPARTMENTALIZED FACULTIES

Present:

Arts	Kim Noels
Education	Doug Gleddie
Medicine & Dentistry	Greg Funk
Rehabilitation Medicine	Trish Manns
Science	Mark McDermott

Regrets Sent:

Agricultural, Life and Environmental Sciences (ALES) Leluo Guan
 Engineering Tian Tang

EX-OFFICIO REPRESENTATIVES

Present:

FGSR Dean & Vice-Provost (FGSR Council Chair)	Brooke Milne
FGSR Vice-Dean	Ali Shiri
FGSR Associate Dean	Andrea MacLeod
FGSR Associate Dean	Micah True
FGSR Associate Dean	Samer Adeeb
Vice-Provost and University Registrar (or Delegate)	Carlo Dimailig

Regrets Sent:

Vice-Provost and Chief Librarian (or Delegate)	Dale Askey
FGSR Associate Dean	Frances Plane

Absent:

President (or delegate)	-
Vice-President (Research) (or Delegate)	Laura Beard
Chair, FGSR Academic Appeals Committee*	Moin Yahya
Director, Centre for Teaching & Learning*	Janice Miller-Young

GRADUATE PROGRAM ADMINISTRATORS COMMITTEE (GPAC) REPRESENTATIVES

Absent:

Department of Neuroscience	Amber LaPointe
Department of Dentistry	Dalyce Barss

GRADUATE STUDENT ASSOCIATION (GSA) DIRECTLY ELECTED OFFICIALS (3) & GRADUATE STUDENT ASSOCIATION (GSA) COUNCIL (20) REPRESENTATIVES

Present:

GSA President	Anas Fassih
VP Labour	Jessica Grenke
VP Academic	Kathy Haddadkar
Neuroscience - Masters	Nicole Dittmann
Pharmacology, PhD	Nayiar Shahid
Oncology (PhD)	Andrew Locke
Nursing	Megan Sommerfeld
Internetworking	Shing Kit Lao
Psychology	Eamin Heanoy
Pharmacology	Julia Nichols
Earth and Atmospheric Sciences	Mohamed Ali
Paediatric	Sabrin Bashar

Absent / Alternates:

VP External (Alternate)	Mohd Tahsin Bin Mostafa
VP Student Services (Alternate)	Paresh Kumar
Nursing (Regrets Sent)	Sania Amiri-Ishani
Vacant GSA Council Members – 10 seats	

OBSERVERS – NON-VOTING

FGSR, HR & Operations Coordinator*	Medha Samarasinghe
FGSR Executive Assistant & Operations *	Andrea Riewe
FGSR, EA to the Associate Deans*	Dena Giroux
FGSR, Admissions & Program Services Supervisor*	Joyce Anderson
FGSR, Supervisor, Graduate Awards*	Amanda Brown
FGSR, Director, Professional Development*	Renee Polziehn
FGSR, Functional Analyst*	Justine Gill
FGSR Program Services Team Lead*	Kris MacManus
Chair - Occupational Therapy*	Shaniff Esmail
Executive Assistant, Faculty of Arts - History & Classics Dept*	Joanna Gye

*Non-Voting

FGSR Council October 13, 2021**1.0 Call to Order at 2:01 PM**

Vice-Provost and Dean, Brooke Milne, called the meeting to order. Members requiring further support with the virtual platform can reach out to Andrea Riewe for help. Those with voting abilities will have received an email with links. Voting members were asked to have this open and ready to go.

2.0 Approval of Agenda for Oct 13, 2021

Moved / Seconded: Heather Coleman/Kathy Haddadkar

Discussion / Questions:

- Item 8: Friendly amendment - The Chair proposed changing this from a voting item to a discussion item to enable more time for discussion.
- No further objections/changes to the agenda were raised.

Approved by consent.

3.0 Approval of Minutes of Sept 8, 2021

Moved / Seconded: Trish Reay/Doug Gleddie

Discussion / Questions: None; amended to include AD Norm Boule in the attendance.

Approved by electronic vote.

4.0 Matters Arising from the Minutes

No matters arising from the minutes.

5.0 Report from the Dean

Vice-Provost and Dean Milne advised Council members that the convocation list will be circulated to Voting Members in the coming days for a very quick review and response.

She informed members that COVID-19 continues to impact the campus community. There are resources available for students and supervisors on FGSR's website should they wish to consult them. The website will also have links to the most up to date information as we know this continues to be an evolving matter.

FGSR is updating the language in offer letters to ensure that the UofA's vaccine directive is clearly noted. This allows students to have a clear sense of the requirements to attend the UofA before they accept admission.

Dean Milne noted that work continues on student services visioning among the central units under the Provost's portfolio, including FGSR. The Academic Leaders Task Group (ALTG) is also wrapping up its work and should be releasing a report in the coming weeks outlining some recommendations for the Provost to consider on how best to position academic leadership roles across units, faculties, and the colleges.

As conversations about restructuring continue, Dean Milne requested that Council members reach out to FGSR if their faculties and departments are planning any graduate program reorganization. These changes, which pass through governance, have impacts on the operational side of graduate administration, and advance notice is useful for ensuring there are no delays with the systems and processes.

The Supervisory proposals went before GFC on September 20th. Students, especially, spoke favorably towards the initiatives. The initiatives both passed with significant support. The adjunct academic appointment and training passed unanimously at the BHRCC (Board Human Resources and Compensation Committee) on September 28th. Should it pass the Board of Governors on October 15th the initiatives will be ready for implementation in January of 2022.

The Killam Trustees had their annual visit with the UofA this morning. The Killam Bequest has provided more than \$60 million to the University of Alberta between the three programs that the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (FGSR) administers: [Izaak Walton Killam Memorial Scholarship](#); [Dorothy J Killam Memorial Graduate Prizes](#); and, [Killam Award for Excellence in Mentoring](#). The meetings went well; UofA is seen as a strategic and visionary stewards of the endowments, and we remain grateful for their continued support.

Questions/ Comments: None.

6.0 GSA Monthly Report

GSA President Anas Fassih presented the monthly report as submitted. The GSA continues to advocate for financial supports for Grad Students due to the challenges of Covid-19. They are also working with the Dean of Students to encourage mandatory vaccination while also supporting students who require accommodations. The GSA has been advocating for grad student funding in alignment with the UofA's growth strategy. Graduate Student enrolment is connected to Undergraduate growth, and grad students play a key role in the UofA's core missions of teaching and research. Centralized funding would help to address current inequities that exist. Finally, they continue to advocate for fair tuition.

Questions/Discussion: None

7.0 Item 7.0: Proposal: SPH Comprehensive Exam Deletion

Dean Milne introduced Dr Norman Neumann - Vice Dean, School of Public Health.

Currently, SPH has mandatory comprehensive exams that must be completed by all PhD students. It was implemented years ago to ensure that PhD students had some competencies in public health; since that time there has been curriculum renewal. Now PhD students must take a series of core courses which help establish the competencies. The Faculty reviewed the need for the comprehensive exam requirement and have determined that this Faculty level requirement (SPH) is not needed. Dr. Newman noted that the candidacy remains an

institutional requirement for the degree. If approved, SPH would implement it immediately upon approval for all PhD students including current students.

Motion: Be it resolved that FGSR Council approve the elimination of the PhD comprehensive exams as a requirement for all PhD degrees within the School of Public Health (SPH), for implementation upon final approval, and inclusion in the 22-23 calendar.

Moved / Seconded: Ben Willing/ Sujata Persad

Questions/Discussion:

- A Council member asked what alternative ways students will have to demonstrate their knowledge.
 - Students are required to take mandatory courses which equip them to understand public health and practice it. There are also other specific courses that students have to take in order to prepare them. Some international students find the comprehensive to be quite challenging. It is a hurdle to many students who might not be amenable to this type of examination, whereas in a course there is more time to explore and demonstrate competence. Vice-Provost and Dean Milne reiterated that the candidacy is still required as a core competency within the degree.
- A Council Member noted that their own faculty was revising their candidacy exams. Has there been an impact on candidacy due to the proposed removal of comprehensives?
 - The comprehensives required students to reflect on their own work. Candidacy becomes a written proposal that will then be orally examined and the writing focuses the questions on to research and the research design.
- A Council member noted that his own department was also reconsidering their comprehensive exams. He asked how rare is it across other SPHs to not have comprehensives, both within the institution and within Canada?
 - Across Canada, the SPH is more competitive. UofA's SPH was the first one to be accredited in Canada by an accreditation body within the USA. Based on their requirements there is no requirement for comprehensives. They have foundational knowledge objectives that all students need to know and understand; they evaluate SPH course materials and content to ensure it maps onto the objectives. That is the main way to determine if the school is meeting accreditation objectives.
- Could there be a risk for accreditation by removing this requirement?
 - For degree programs accreditation is focussed on 12 learning objectives that must be taught across all degrees; each degree program specialization has to identify a minimum of 5 other competencies that students must meet. Unless the program specified that those objectives were being met specifically through the comprehensive exam, then the accreditation body would not be looking for them in that area.

Approved by electronic vote.

8.0 Discussion: Courses Extra-to-Degree

Vice-Provost and Dean Milne reiterated that the item is for discussion rather than approval. The calendar currently has language about when students may declare courses as extra to degree; however, there is no upper limit. The proposed language helps to keep students to focus on the completion of the requirements for the degree rather than meeting requirements for other degrees or an unrelated credential that is not part of the approved program

in which they are registered. The upper limit will also curb the practice of thesis based students taking courses and declaring them extra to degree but not paying for these courses. The GEFAC and PRC have discussed the issue.

Extra to Degree course grades are factored into awards GPAs. This is a standing practice and has been for some time (embedded in the forms for accepting awards). We are wanting to bring that information into the calendar for transparency and consistency. It is important that students are aware of these GPA implications. This information is currently in the Graduate Awards handbook but should be further clarified in the calendar language.

The only change is the institution of a cap to the courses that students can take that are outside of the requirements. The proposed cap is to permit up to 6 credits to be declared extra to degree. Additional details that are now included detail that students will have to pay the course fees associated including lab fees.

Questions/Discussion:

- A Council member voiced a concern about her program's language requirements. Students can fulfil this by taking first and second year language courses and completing 12 credits in order to meet the requirement. This is not specifically outlined within the calendar, yet the courses are needed towards meeting the degree requirements. She expressed concern that, under the proposed cap, students would have to pay extra for courses that are required as they work towards their degree.
 - Dean Milne noted that the language requirement should be clearly outlined in the calendar. The level of language proficiency that is required in order to perform the scholarship within the field of study successfully should be explicit in the calendar. The key is that language in the calendar reflects the degree requirements so that students are able to move through the program in a timely manner. Calendar changes might need to be made or adjusted.
- Does it matter if the courses are grad or undergrad level courses? Would undergrad level courses be counted as part of the GPA for awards?
 - Any courses taken for credit become part of the academic record and therefore would be included in the GPA calculations.
- A Council member asked for clarification on whether courses required for a grad embedded certificate would be considered extra to degree.
 - Dean Milne confirmed that they would not be considered extra to degree because there is a policy in place already that captures the scenario. She noted that she is working through a similar situation with Rehab Med wherein students are taking their certificates in lockstep with the master's program rather than declaring the courses as extra to degree once the Master's program is near completion. Ideally students are concurrently registered within the program and the certificate. This is the most transparent and efficient way to support this from an administrative standpoint.
- How are international students impacted by this new proposed policy?
 - Medha Samarasinghe noted that under Bill 19 all new international students are provided a total program tuition guarantee. If students choose to take courses outside of the ones that are necessary to meet the program requirements then they will be assessed the per course rate for the year in which they take the course.
- A council member asked for clarification on how audited courses and extra to degree courses are related to each other, if at all.

- These are not related. Dean Milne noted that she needed to rethink the structure around auditing so that it is going to work in terms of what programs need. The two issues are not tethered to each other.
- What is the timing for including this in the calendar, especially if there is a need to update program requirements in the calendar?
 - Dean Milne noted that this detail would have to be clarified and updated. If it were to move forward the calendar would need appropriate updating.
- Would students already admitted be grandfathered into the old system?
 - Yes, students who are already here would be able to continue as is meaning if they have courses declared as extra that exceed 6 credits, they could retain them going forward.
- For course based students who are not taking the courses with the intention of transferring, is there a different limit?
 - Not usually an issue since course based students pay on a per course basis. And, there are limits already for how many courses can be brought into a new program for transfer (i.e. up to ½).

9.0 **Discussion: Core Academic Requirements**

Vice-Provost and Dean Milne reminded Council that this first came to discussion at FGSR Council a year ago. She noted that former Associate Dean, Janice Causegrove Dunn, had led the preliminary work on the content for this item.

This initiative surfaced, in part, through a discussion with the Dean of Students office about the importance of defining core competencies for degrees to ensure that there is transparency and accountability as it relates to inclusivity and accessibility in graduate education. The aim is to define the minimum requirements, also known as bonafide requirements, that are necessary to successfully meet the requirements for each graduate degree offered.

She quoted from a 2014 report published by CAGS that has motivated consideration of how Bona Fide Academic Requirements can be defined and considered:

The issues identified by graduate administrators and student services staff as critical in working with this group of students include the interfaces between a student's accommodations, the nature of the essential requirements of their academic discipline, and the legislative and policy framework within which the institution operates

University of Manitoba calls this the Bona fide Academic Requirements (BFAR):

There is a sense of excitement surrounding the BFAR initiative, which represents a major commitment by the university to accessible, inclusive education. The University of Manitoba is one of the first universities in Canada to implement a BFAR process, and has been commended by the Province of Manitoba's Disabilities Issues Office for its strong action plan in support of barrier-free education.

*BFARs are the **minimum and essential knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes, and experiences** that a student must acquire in order to successfully graduate from a program.*

Carleton University calls theirs Essential Requirements:

Essential requirements is a specific term used in **human rights legislation**, referring to the *bona fide* requirements of a task or program that cannot be altered without compromising the fundamental nature of the task or program. **Determining what is an essential requirement and what is not is critical in distinguishing requirements that cannot be accommodated from what can and should be altered.**

The University of Alberta's existing policy and procedure on Duty to Accommodate would work in concert with the policy on core competencies. The policy would provide clarity on what elements of a graduate degree are requirements that cannot be waived or exempted in order to complete the degree. Reasonable accommodations may be granted up to the point of undue hardship; however the policy would establish the minimum requirements that must be completed to earn the credential. Having these core requirements in place allows the UofA to apply flexible approaches to accommodate students' needs while being aware of how they articulate with established minimum requirements in order to ensure student success in their respective grad programs.

The proposal has undergone some changes as a result of ongoing consultation with offices/groups such as the Office of Legal Counsel, Dean of Students, the Grad Program Support Team, and the Policy Review Committee.

She highlighted the major changes:

- The latest draft has removed PD as some programs hold exemptions - also, in the calendar, while it cites students must complete 8 hours, right below that there is a provision where exceptions can be requested to waive the requirement by the Dean of FGSR. This means it can still be cited as a requirement but it is not a true bona fide requirement as not every student has to complete it to be awarded the credential they are seeking.
 - PD is still a requirement for all students - that is not changing. However, with its current language in the calendar, it does not meet the threshold of a bona fide academic requirement (i.e. it can be waived, exempted, modified)
- We have included language around accommodations as suggested by UofA legal.
- Note that some of the items are overstated for a reason and that is to ensure the minimum core requirements are met, for every student, for every degree, program over program.
 - Individual programs may have additional core competencies but they are above these, which are institutional.

Questions/Discussion:

- A council member asked for clarification on what problem this policy is attempting to address?
 - The policy ensures that the institution has clear guidelines about what can be accommodated and to what extent, and what simply cannot be accommodated. The policy provides a backstop against accommodations going past what would be considered reasonable in order to confer a degree. The Duty to Accommodate policy sits with the Dean of Students and they, along with the Office of Legal Counsel, would be involved in determining accommodations to ensure we're in compliance with institutional policies as well as human rights legislation.

- A Council member noted a concern around course based programs that are course heavy. Maintaining course currency, especially in areas like SPH, where there is rapid change would mean that the courses would need to change and having the option to have equivalent courses would be important
 - In practice, the core competencies should not conflict with approved program requirements. Every unit had the option of defaulting to the minimum approved core competencies, or write their own requirements that are above and beyond the minimums to reflect the needs of accreditation or the change pace of the discipline. Each unit could write their own in order to capture the nuances.
- A Council member raised the issue that the proposed wording gets rid of any flexibility. For example, Masters and PhD students in Law take the same course, but in practice it can be waived with the requirement to replace it with an equivalent; the wording, as is, would prevent that kind of swap because there isn't couching language in the calendar. She noted that some language to address the issue of course identities would help with flexibility, or else many programs will find themselves needing to update the calendar language.
 - Dean Milne noted that the issues raised are ones of program structural design issues, not related to the policy on core requirements.
- A Council Member noted that she was pleased to see the language stating that in thesis-based doctoral programs the student must successfully defend their thesis in real time, as determined by the examining committee. She noted that her unit had a request to not complete her oral exam in real time.
- Do the descriptions in the calendar even need to be changed or can these details live in the grad program manual?
 - If the numbered courses are detailed in the calendar then they must be updated. If it's a change to the approved coursework requirements in the Program then these changes must be reflected in the calendar.
- A Council Member noted that the policy does not sufficiently account for different world views. It is important to ensure the policy is inclusive.
 - Dean Milne noted that was not the intent, and she would be grateful to hear suggestions or perspectives on how to add language that would alleviate those concerns.

10.0 Discussion: Graduate Requirements Changes

Dean Milne noted the two detailed items in the package with proposed calendar change around course requirements and exemption changes, and academic standing and academic probation.

The two items form a unified whole when looking at expectations around coursework. For example, it is important to review how we are dealing with failed grades. What do we do with failed courses? In these cases often students are unable to get out from under the impact of a failed grade on their GPA. The proposal is to remove the failed grade from the calculation of the program GPA, once it has been remediated, and use the new course grade. The failed grade remains on the transcript as a record but it is not included for academic standing once it is remediated.

Questions/Discussion:

- A Council member asked how many failed courses will be allowed under this policy?
 - 6 credits, as is the same as with the extra to degree policy. It will also be important to set parameters around how many attempts there should be to remediate a failed course.

- If a student fails a grad course and then takes undergrad courses as preparation in order to pass the grad course, how will this scenario impact the courses extra to degree?
 - Dean Mile noted that the scenario is more an issue of a student not having the foundational knowledge in order to be successful in the grad program. It is a case where the student should probably have been admitted as a qualifying student.
- A Council member noted that he supports the idea of excluding the failed grade once it has been remediated. From his program perspective, it can be very difficult for students to get out from under the failed grade and maintain a 3.0 GPA.
 - This provides a more equitable way for students to navigate one bad grade rather than putting in more effort, time, and money to balance out the failing grade.
- A Council member asked about the wording on page 42. There is an inconsistency between thesis and course based language.
 - Dean Milne said there are some programs that do have the distinction of being able to take some senior undergrad courses as part of the program requirements. Individual academic unit regulations can have that clarity.
- A Council member suggested that the word “calendar” is used somewhere if appropriate for the regulations that are approved within the calendar. That way it’s clear that if it’s in the calendar then it has been approved through the appropriate channels. This might help clarify the issue.

11.0 Questions

A Council member inquired if there were any details about the Winter term.

Dean Milne noted that conversations were underway with the public health response committees, and that we expect to have more details in the coming weeks.

12.0 Adjournment

Vice-Provost and Dean Milne thanked Council members for their attendance and participation.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:46 PM.