



FACULTY OF SCIENCE

COUNCIL OF THE FACULTY OF SCIENCE

Notice of Meeting

Tuesday, March 10, 2015

at 3:00pm - 4:30pm

306 Lumbers

Agenda

1. Call to Order and Approval of Agenda
2. Chair's Remarks
3. Minutes of February 10, 2015 meeting
4. Business Arising
5. Dean's Report to Council
6. Associate Deans' and Bethune Master's Remarks
7. Reports from Science Representatives on Senate Committees
8. Reports from Standing Committees of Council
 - Executive Committee
 - Executive Committee's Vacancies Report on Senate and FSc Committees (item for information)
9. Inquiries and Communications
 - Board of Governors Synopsis of the 437th meeting held on February 23, 2015
 - Presentation on the draft recommendation document by Jennifer Foster, Chair of the Sustainability Council (15 minute presentation)
10. Any Other Business
 - 10.1 Motion from the Department of Biology Teaching Committee: To review Anomalous Grades Policy
 - 10.2 Motion from Tamara Kelly: To seek to alter the start date of classes in January



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Minutes

Attendance: A. Mills, R. Jayawardhana, P. Cribb, E. J. Janse van Rensburg, S. Benchimol, M. Caplan, D. Hossain, B. L. Taylor, T. K. R. Kirchner, G. G. Lavoie, V. Tsoukanova, R. Tsushima, D. Wilson, J. Kreller-Vanderkooy, R. McLaren, S. Juris, B. Woodley, E. Hamm, W. Taylor, S. Siyakatshana (Assistant Secretary)

1. Call to Order and Approval of Agenda

The Chair of Council, Dr. Alex Mills called the meeting to order and the Agenda was adopted as presented.

2. Chair's Remarks

The Chair welcomed Council members to the meeting.

Dr. Mills introduced and welcomed Almira Mun-Shimoda, the new Assistant Dean, Strategic Enrolment Management and Science Engagement Programs to her first Council meeting.

3. Minutes of January 13, 2015 meeting

Minutes of January 13, 2015, were approved.

4. **Business Arising**

There was no Business Arising from the Minutes.

5. **Dean's Report to Council**

The Dean's report on the FSc submission to the Institutional Strategic Directions document: for Discussion and Input

Dean Ray Jayawardhana informed Council that the deadline for submission by all Faculties to the Institutional Strategic Directions document is March 2, 2015. The Vice-Presidents Gary Brewer and Rhonda Lenton will in turn provide the University's Board of Governors with the final report. He reminded Council of the need to deal with the Faculty's budget deficit. He also noted that this has been a consultative process that included input from faculty members, staff and students.

The Dean presented the working draft of the planning response document to Council for discussion and their input. He walked through the document explaining the following main components;

- Opportunities for revenue growth within the undergraduate and graduate programs through enhanced recruitment and conversion efforts among other things. This included renewal and innovation of programs offerings, as well as targeting high-performing students and broadening the applicant pool.
- Doing things differently; Renewal and innovation of program offerings, for example, reduce complexity, duplication. Seeking/leveraging opportunities for renewal of faculty complement.

With respect to recruitment and enrolment, the Dean reported that overall, the Faculty of Science ended up in a better position for 2014-15 as we experienced growth in terms of FTEs both

for domestic and international undergraduates compared to last year. He expressed his gratitude and thanks to the extra effort put in on conversions, and noted the growth resulting from math, physics and chemistry courses for Lassonde students. However, he reported with concern a 10% drop in our applications for this coming fall. He added that the Assistant Dean in consultation with Associate Dean for Students were making concerted efforts to improve recruitment and conversions so that next fall's enrolment does not end up with a significant drop, a situation that would be devastating and unsustainable financially. He also noted other efforts made across the faculty including various retention programs put in place by Bethune College.

A discussion ensued on this report and the Dean answered a few questions from the floor.

6. **Associate Deans' and Bethune Master's Remarks**

Associate Dean Cribb mentioned that three categories won AIF proposals already submitted. Besides the integrated science one, there is one from Biology in terms of early alert mechanisms to assist students in BIO 1000 and BIO 1001 courses. There was another one from Bethune College related to expanding peer mentoring systems through online services. These proposals were now before the Associate Vice-President for Teaching and Learning for approval.

He reminded Council that there was a Neuroscience Speaker Series through the Toronto Public Library going on at that moment. They were planning ahead for another Speaker Series for the fall and were in the process of brainstorming for ideas or a theme that is broad and will attract the general audience. He welcomed ideas from Council members that can be promoted to Toronto Public Library and other libraries as well.

Associate Dean Tsushima informed Council that the call for the YUFA Minor Research Grant and the YUFA Faculty Fund would

be going out this week. He added that there had been a delay by the Faculty Relations Office because of the union negotiations currently going on. For the Minor Research Grant, 10 awards for \$3500 were offered and these will be adjudication based on merit and financial need.

7. **Reports from Science Representatives on Senate Committees**

There were no reports.

8. **Reports from Standing Committees of Council**

Council noted the Executive Committee's Vacancies Report on Senate and FSc Committees.

9. **Inquiries and Communications**

- Council noted the Senate Synopsis for meetings held on: November 27, December 11, 2014 and January 22, 2015

10. **Any Other Business**

The RA Jarrell Book Prize in Science and Technology Studies' (item for information)

Professor Hamm noted the misprint above and stated that it should read, **The RA Jarrell Scholarship in Science and Technological Studies**. He reported that it had reached endowment and that funding will be an ongoing scholarship of about \$1000 - \$2000 and it will be offered to an outstanding student in STS 2411.

He also announced the STS Day on February 24th - Explores Research and the Social Life of Spacecraft, featuring a key note

guest, Professor Janet Vertesi from Princeton University. He invited all to attend.

A. Mills, Chair of Council

B. Mun-Shimoda, Secretary of Council

S. Siyakatshana, Assistant Secretary of Council

2014 - 2015 Executive Committee Report of Vacancies on Senate and FSc Committees

Vacancies still outstanding as of February 27, 2015

Science Curriculum Committee

1 vacancy for an elected member

Committee on Examinations and Academic Standards

- 1 alternate vacancy for Chemistry
- 1 alternate vacancy for Student Representative

Appeals Committee

1 vacancy for STS

Committee on Teaching and Learning

- 1 vacancy for STS
- 1 vacancy for Physics & Astronomy
- 1 vacancy for a graduate student

Please note that for the **Committee on Research and Awards**

- V. Tsoukanova replaced J. Chen who is on Maternity Leave

York University
Board of Governors
Synopsis of the 437th Meeting held on 23 February 2015

Remarks

The President spoke to the following matters:

- The 2014 President's Report, distributed at the meeting
- The annual meeting of Ontario universities' Student Affairs Directors hosted by York on 20 February, which the MTCU Minister attended to participate in the discussion of sexual violence on university campuses
- The COU *Change Agent* report on *Ontario's Universities: Transforming Communities, Transforming Lives*
- The status of the Academic and Administrative Program Review (AAPR) initiative

Appointments

- Dezso Horvath's term as Dean of the Schulich School of Business was extended from three years to five years, concluding 30 June 2018.

Approvals

- The University *Policy on Sexual Assault Awareness, Prevention and Response*
- The establishment of the *James and Joanne Love Chair in Environmental Engineering*, housed in the Lassonde School of Engineering
- A \$74 million capital project to build a new Student Centre, financed through a student levy and an external loan to the York University Student Centre; with the construction project managed by the University

Reports / Presentations

- A presentation by the Vice-Provost Students on the University's mental health strategy
- Each of the Academic Resources, Executive, Finance & Audit, Governance & Human Resources, Land & Property and Marketing, Communications & Community Affairs committees reported for information on matters discussed in their recent meetings.

The agenda for the meeting is posted on the Board of Governors website.

For further information on any of the above items contact the University Secretariat.

Maureen Armstrong, Secretary

From: the Department of Biology Teaching Committee

Motion to Faculty Council: That the Faculty of Science review the current anomalous grades policy (and final grade approval process) with a mind to updating it, basing it on sound pedagogical evidence, aligning it with other Faculties within York and across Canada, and reflecting the Faculty's commitment to improving teaching and student success.

Rationale:

1. The current anomalous grades policy is anomalous. We conducted an informal survey of other Faculties within and outside of York University, to determine whether our current policy and approval process is within existing "norms" for other Faculties. The results are presented in Table 1. Based on the information received we found no other Faculty that treats first and fourth year courses the same regarding expected grade distributions and no other Faculty that appears to hold back grade reporting until Faculty-level approval has been granted. Further, of those who responded, no Faculty outside York has a policy for defining anomalous grades at all, though some provide guidelines. In Faculties that do approve grades, in most cases approval seems to occur at the unit level.

2. The current policy is administratively burdensome given modern grade submission processes. Over the past decade at York the grade approval and submission process has changed dramatically. To improve student service, grade deadlines have become increasingly compressed. Course instructors upload grades to SIS directly and they are immediately available to students. The Faculty's procedures, however, were established when grades were submitted by hand, there was ample time to review and approve grades at both the department and Faculty level, and all grades were released by the University several weeks after the exam period.

The current approval process can delay grade upload for affected courses by weeks and generates added workload for instructors, administrators and staff. Instructors must fill out forms and generate rationales, department and Faculty staff must monitor and collect this paperwork, department and Faculty committees must meet to review and approve them (or not approve them, which escalates the time involved). Grades are approved after the online grade submission has closed, and thus they must be sent from department to Registrar, creating work for administrative staff at both ends and further extending the delay.

3. The current process is not in the best interests of students.

- Students awaiting grades for transcripts (typically our best students who are applying to graduate schools and professional schools) are delayed and stressed out by missing grades. In our department this problem is most common at the fourth year level as most of the anomalously high grades occur in fourth year courses, which is not surprising as the fourth year courses are filled with our best

senior undergraduates (see University of Toronto guidelines in Table 1). These delays hurt our best students and create added administrative work dealing with worried students and providing special letters explaining the delay and/or missing grade.

- In cases where a course is a prerequisite to the next term's courses, the delay in grade reporting results in students not knowing what course they should be in (and administrative staff being unable to complete de-enrolment exercises) until courses have already begun. This hurts our weakest students the most, as they have the greatest need for stability, clarity and direction.
- Students who have their grades lowered to meet defined distributions feel angry and cheated, reflecting negatively on the student experience.

4. The current policy sends the wrong message to faculty and students and impedes rather than supports institutional goals to improve teaching and learning.

The institution and the Faculty have identified enhanced teaching and greater student success as overarching goals. A logical indicator of better learning and higher student success is higher grades. (Here we are not referring to "grade inflation" but rather better grades that reflect improved learning produced by more effective teaching and learning support). Yet the message instructors receive via the current policy (>30% A/A+ = anomalous) and how it is being applied is that high levels of student success are frowned on, deemed "anomalous" and should be avoided. This is particularly true for our newer teaching colleagues, some of whom experience enormous apprehension when students appear to be doing well in their courses and grades are high. We have had colleagues fearing it will hurt them in the T&P process; postdoctoral fellows worry that strong student performance will lead to their being passed over for future courses, etc. Underpinning the entire process is a message of distrust – that faculty members are incompetent to set and assess learning outcomes within their courses; that departments are not to be trusted to set and oversee academic standards for their units. The policy appears to discourage rather than celebrate high achieving instructors and students. At a time when the university and our Faculty are concerned about retention and reputation, this approach may be counterproductive.

5. The goal of the policy can be achieved without the current disadvantages. Table 1 indicates that there are many ways to oversee grades. Policy can be designed to be constructive and facilitate rapid grade reporting. Some suggestions for consideration:

- Conduct a comprehensive review of policy and process at other institutions and the literature in order to determine best practices and identify evidence-based approaches that would be effective at encouraging high quality teaching and greater student success.
- Move grades approval to the unit level, with process to be determined by the unit and permitting fast upload by instructors (for example approval by Chair or UPD or post-upload review by committee rather than approval per se). Oversight at the Faculty level, if desired, could continue but in a different format. For example, a subcommittee of CEAS and COTL could continue to review grades

year over year, with an eye to identifying courses that may require support to improve student success, and sharing successful strategies from courses that have sustained high rates of student success.

- Replace policy with guidelines, tailored to course level and class size.
- Exempt all fourth year courses (this could happen immediately within the current policy) and courses smaller than 40.

Table 1. Grade Distribution Policies and Procedures at other Canadian Institutions.

Colleagues at other institutions were contacted and asked to provide information regarding the process for final grades approval within their Faculty as well as any existing policy with respect to acceptable grade distribution profiles. This information comes from colleagues rather than directly from administrative offices, and thus there may be some errors/omissions.

Institution	Policy	Approval Process
York Faculty of Science	A course is considered anomalous if the grades profile at either A+/A or E/F (excluding DNWs) exceeds 30% and the enrolment is >15. A statement of explanation for any anomalous grade distribution in your course must be submitted to CEAS.	Grades cannot be uploaded until approval by the Faculty is granted at the end of the grades exercise.
York Faculty LAPS	<p>The following are characteristics of courses with profiles considered to be anomalous for grade review purposes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Courses with a grade point average above 6.5; or 2. Courses with 75% or more grades of B or better; or 3. Courses with 50% or more grades of A or better; or 4. Courses with a grade point average below 3.5; or 5. Courses with 20% or more failing grades (Note: this includes grades of E and F; for the purpose of calculating the percentage of failing grades, no distinction is made between “earned” failures and “did not withdraw” failures); or 6. Courses with large differentials in grade point averages across sections/tutorials (refer to Note 2) of the same course (i.e., a difference of 1.0 grade point or more). <p>Courses at the 4000-level and courses with 30 or fewer students enrolled are exempt from this legislation.</p>	
York Faculty Health	Responsibility and policy is at the department level. The Faculty does review	Departmental level -designated

	<p>the anomalous grades rationales, but not for approval (post upload).</p> <p>4000-level courses smaller than 25 are exempt.</p>	<p>signatory will: review all grade distributions during the incremental release of grades, due to online GAM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • _identify significant grade distribution anomalies, and request rationales • _forward completed anomalous grade distribution rationales to CEAS concurrent with, or following, the sign-off process
York Former Faculty of Fine Arts	none	none
York Glendon Campus	none	none
University of Toronto, Faculty of Arts and Science	<p>Guidelines only:</p> <p>For a larger first- or second-year course, the proportion of As in any given offering of the course might reasonably vary from 15% to 35%. Courses with marks consistently at the lower or upper end of this range should be reviewed to determine whether changes are needed to the course content, prerequisites, or assessment mechanisms. At the other end of the scale, the proportion of Fs in a first- or second-year course should generally not exceed 10%.</p> <p>These guidelines can help instructors gauge the fairness and consistency of their proposed marks in a course. Instructors proposing a percentage of As outside the range of 15-35% in first- and second-year courses should review the marks to ensure that the assessments used in the course were fair and consistent with disciplinary practice. Similarly, instructors proposing a percentage of Fs greater than 10% should consider those grades carefully. An individual instructor should reflect on</p>	<p>None – Grades may be reviewed by Chair or Associate Chair.</p>

	<p>whether the assessments have been scaled appropriately. A unit head seeing a consistently higher percentage of Fs in a course over time might conclude that the course has inappropriate prerequisites or requires some restructuring, or that additional student supports need to be put into place.</p> <p>Since courses with fewer than 40 students, as well as courses in upper years, show much greater variation due to individual factors, detailed expectations of distributions of grades are less useful. However, we can state some general guidelines on third- and fourth-year courses. Specifically, we expect student marks in upper year courses to shift towards the higher end of the scale (with more As and many fewer failures) as students adjust to university-level work and as they pursue courses in their chosen areas of interest. Distributions with 30-40% As (or even more) would not be unusual in 300- and 400-level courses, while even 5-10% Fs at these levels would be worthy of attention.</p> <p>(Tri-Campus Deans' memo August 2009)</p>	
Ryerson, Faculty of Science	none	none
Wilfrid Laurier	none	none
McMaster (Biology)	At McMaster, we do not have an anomalous grades policy for our Biology courses, the mark earned by the students is calculated according to that stipulated in the course outlines (no bell-curving, the mark they get is the mark they achieve)	
U Ottawa (Science)	<p>Faculties must take appropriate measures to ensure that members of the teaching staff assign marks which accurately reflect the definitions of student performance established in the official grading system.</p> <p>When a faculty deems that the assignment of marks in one or several courses is not</p>	

	in accordance with the official grading system or with the faculty guidelines for its implementation, the faculty can take any corrective action required, provided however that no such measure result in a mark lower to that previously communicated to a student.	
University of British Columbia (Science)	No formal policy, but courses with consistent high failure rates do receive attention and support to improved student outcomes.	
University of Manitoba, Faculty of Science	none – though grade profile is submitted to department head	none
University of Calgary, Faculty of Science	None: typically, Department Heads (or delegates) will just look at the class, the level and compare it to what historically has happened in the class. If they feel that the grades are too high or too low, they will talk with the faculty member directly.	none
Simon Fraser University (Science)	Informal guidelines provided to Assoc. Chair	Associate Chair
Mount Royal University (Science)	none	none
MacEwan University (Science)	none	none