

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

THE GOVERNING COUNCIL

REPORT NUMBER 126 OF THE UNIVERSITY AFFAIRS BOARD

February 22, 2005

To the Governing Council,
University of Toronto.

Your Board reports that it met on Tuesday, February 22, 2005 at 4:30 p.m. in the Council Chamber, Simcoe Hall, with the following members present:

Dr. Robert M. Bennett, In the Chair
Mr. Ari D. Kopolovic, Vice-Chair
Professor David Farrar, Deputy Provost
and Vice-Provost, Students
Ms Mubarka Alam
Mr. Christopher M. Collins
Dr. Claude S. Davis
Ms Margaret Hancock
Ms Shaila R. Kibria
Professor Bruce Kidd
Dr. Joel A. Kirsh
Mr. Chris McGrath
Dr. John P. Nestor
Ms Teresa Pun
Mr. Tarek Saghir
Ms Rebecca Spagnolo
Ms Maggy Stepanian

Non-Voting Assessors:

Ms Susan Addario, Director, Student Affairs
Mr. Louis R. Charpentier, Secretary,
Governing Council
Professor Vivek Goel, Vice-President and
Provost
Ms Marilyn Van Norman, Director,
Student Services
Professor Ian Orchard, Vice-President and
Principal, University of Toronto at
Mississauga
Professor Ronald D. Venter, Vice-Provost,
Space and Facilities Planning

Secretariat:

Mr. Neil Dobbs
Mr. Andrew Drummond

Regrets:

Ms Katherine Anne Boyd
Mr. Shaun Chen
Ms Anne E. MacDonald,
Director, Ancillary Services

Ms Preet Viridi
Dr. John Wedge

In Attendance:

Ms. Holly Andrews-Taylor, member, the Governing Council
Ms. Françoise Ko, member, the Governing Council
Mr. Stefan Neata, member, the Governing Council
Mr. Timothy Reid, member, the Governing Council
Mr. Mahadeo Sukhai, member-elect, the Governing Council and President, Graduate Students' Union
Ms Murphy Browne, President, Association of Part-time Undergraduate Students and former member, the Governing Council
Mr. Brian Burchell, President, University of Toronto Alumni Association, and former member, the Governing Council
Ms. Karen Lewis, former member, the Governing Council
Mr. Jim Delaney, Assistant Director, Student Affairs

REPORT NUMBER 126 OF THE UNIVERSITY AFFAIRS BOARD – February 22, 2005

Ms. Sheree Drummond, Assistant Provost
Mr. Howard Tam, Vice-President, University Affairs, Students' Administrative Council
Ms. Mary Ward, University Ombudsperson

ALL ITEMS ARE REPORTED FOR INFORMATION

1. Report of the Previous Meeting

Report Number 125 (January 18, 2005) was approved.

2. Business Arising from the Report

There was no business arising from Report 125.

3. The Student Experience: First Report by the Vice-Provost, Students arising from *Stepping UP*

The Chair noted his satisfaction that the administration was presenting this important report to the University Affairs Board as the entry point for governance discussion of the very important initiative, under the *Stepping UP* academic plan, to improve the student experience. He expressed his hope that the presentation and ensuing discussion would assist the administration in continuing its strong efforts to improve the student experience at the University of Toronto. He expressed his gratitude that so many guests were in attendance, and welcomed all guests to the meeting.

Professor Farrar informed the Board that the current framework for academic planning, known as *Stepping UP*, had as one of its highest priorities the improvement of the student experience. In order to plan effectively for that improvement, it was essential to have excellent baseline information from which to build. To that end, the University had participated in the Indiana-based National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), which was a well defined survey tool used throughout the United States to examine the student experience. In conjunction with seven other Canadian Universities (most of which were the University's national peers in the 'Group of Ten' (G10), the University's involvement in the survey represented the first time the tool had been used in Canada.

Professor Farrar provided a brief overview of the University of Toronto. Noting that it was an extremely large University, possibly the largest in North America, its current enrolment was approximately 67,000, with 55,000 of those undergraduate and 12,000 graduate. Of the undergraduate students, approximately 8,000 were part-time, and of the graduate students, approximately 7,000 were in the PhD program. The enrolment in the PhD represented 43% of all the PhD students in the Ontario system. Over half (58%) of the students were female, and 75% were from the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Although approximately one-quarter of the PhD students were international, 7% of the total enrolment was. The average debt of the 41% of students who applied for financial aid was approximately \$16,000. The average age of students was 21 years, and part-time students were on average 28 years old. One-sixth (16%) of students were in residence, with another 4% living within walking distance. A large majority of students, therefore, commuted to the University, a proportion that had significant implications for planning for the student experience. As a last element of Professor Farrar's backgrounder on the University, he noted that 1,400 students were registered with AccessAbility Services.

Professor Farrar then informed the Board that there were already in place numerous programs to improve the student experience both inside and outside the classroom; in particular, he cited the 'Vic 1' program

3. The Student Experience: First Report by the Vice-Provost, Students arising from *Stepping UP*
(cont'd.)

REPORT NUMBER 126 OF THE UNIVERSITY AFFAIRS BOARD – February 22, 2005

at Victoria University and the first-year learning communities, both designed to address the first year experience and mitigate the sense of hugeness that new students might face. He noted that the development of student activity space continued to be a major challenge, although the recent opening of the Sidney Smith expansion, and the New College Commuter space represented recent successes.

Professor Farrar reported that the establishment of the Centre for Community Partnerships would enable students to develop meaningful interactions with various communities and would also improve the links between the University and its communities. Other examples of actions taken by the administration to improve the student experience were the Office of Teaching Advancement, the development of a comprehensive research experience program, and a student portal project. Professor Farrar expressed his strong confidence in the academic programs available to students, noting that he had recently sat on both the Sedra and Moss Scholarship Committees, the experience of which illustrated the excellence of many of the students in attendance at the University. He further noted that two of the three Lilly Award winners in Organic Chemistry were formerly University of Toronto students, and that, as Chair of Chemistry, he had tried to recruit the third as a faculty member.

National Survey of Student Engagement

Professor Farrar then proceeded to outline the NSSE data for the University of Toronto. NSSE, whose current configuration was based on decades of research, was used at over 400 Universities in the United States annually, mostly on a biennial basis. Its indicators generally represented good analogues to program quality. It was conducted on first-year and senior-year undergraduate students on all campuses, and run in the Spring of 2004. Several questions were slightly ‘Canadianized’; in addition, the University participated in the ‘experimental’ questions. A response rate of 53% of 4,483 students was achieved. NSSE developed benchmarks in five discrete areas: academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, enrichment of experience, and supportive environment. These benchmarks would provide comparisons to other participating G10 Universities (Queen’s, Western, British Columbia, Alberta, Waterloo, McGill and McMaster), as well as participating doctoral-intensive Universities in the United States, and all participating NSSE institutions.

Approximately three-quarters of all students evaluated their overall educational experience as ‘good’ or ‘excellent’. Professor Farrar noted that his preference would be to increase that proportion substantially. Moreover, 82% of first-year students would ‘probably’ or ‘definitely’ attend the University of Toronto if they could start over, dropping to 70% in the senior year. However, in terms of direct faculty-student contact, only 10% of commuter students had ever worked with a faculty member directly outside regular classroom and office hour contact; more than 20% of resident students (including those who lived within walking distance) had done so.

For activities outside the classroom, commuter students did not become as involved in co-curricular activities as resident students. However, even though commuter students were not as engaged in co-curricular student life, they were equally satisfied with their overall student experience.

On the topic of enhancement of student services, Professor Farrar reported that approximately 80% of students felt that students ‘[had] to run around from one place to another to get the information or approvals they [needed]’ while only 60% of first-year and 45% of senior-year students felt that the University provided needed support for academic success. Obstacles to academic success, especially as students’ university careers progressed, tended to be caused by pressures related to finances, work and

3. The Student Experience: First Report by the Vice-Provost, Students arising from *Stepping UP*
(cont’d.)

family. One-third of senior-year students reported that family members and friends were advising them academically.

REPORT NUMBER 126 OF THE UNIVERSITY AFFAIRS BOARD – February 22, 2005

One of the sets of measures that NSSE had developed was of skills development. Professor Farrar reported that the University did not seem to be providing sufficient development for students in solving complex real-world problems, assisting students in developing their values or ethical codes, contributing to the welfare of the community, developing a sense of spirituality, or involving them in any sort of political life. Two-thirds of all students had said that while at University, they had never expressed any opinion on a political issue.

Professor Farrar reported that two-thirds of students entered University wanting a clinical experience from their programs, but only one-third of senior year students actually received it. Furthermore, 53% of students spent no time at the University but outside their classroom. Professor Farrar noted that these figures were significant pointers to possible future directions in improving the student experience.

Professor Farrar then noted that one particular measure was particularly perplexing: in an extremely diverse University environment, set within one of the most diverse cities in the world, one-third of respondents reported that they had not had serious conversations with members of ethnic groups other than their own. Professor Farrar noted three possible explanations: first, students at the University of Toronto might be so used to diversity, or they might not understand the intent of the word ‘serious’ in the question, that the question might not mean to them what it meant to the NSSE; secondly, the University might have so many members of many ethnicities, that it would be possible to pass most of the time among members of one’s own ethnic grouping; third, because of different approaches to race issues in the United States, students there may answer the question differently. In any case, the question was overweighted in calculating the benchmark on student involvement and sense of community, which resulted in an extremely low score for the University overall.

The responses to questions on the quality of relationships students have with other students, with faculty members, and with administrative personnel were also perplexing; positive responses about students’ relationship with other students was not as high as at other Universities, were similar to other Universities’ students in scoring quality of relationships with faculty members, and were more appreciative of administrative staff than at other Universities. Professor Farrar noted that the score could be improved through better student-faculty ratios, which were very high at the University of Toronto because of perennial underfunding.

Lastly, Professor Farrar summarized the next steps involved in improving the student experience at the University of Toronto: to enter into a discussion at the Faculty and College level; to hold a conference in May 2005 entitled *Measuring UP*, which would have as a keynote speaker the director of NSSE, and to conduct the NSSE survey again in 2006 and on a biennial basis thereafter.

The Chair then invited Professor Goel to speak to the Board. Professor Goel reiterated that the highest priority of the *Stepping UP* process was the improvement of the student experience, and that the NSSE data represented a very good and reliable starting point. He anticipated that all Ontario Universities would be taking part in NSSE in future years as a result of the recommendations of the Rae Review of Postsecondary Education, which called for NSSE to be used. He noted, however, that the NSSE was extremely reliable for use as a tool in the United States, but it might not be appropriate to weight indicators in Canada in the same way; the expansion of NSSE into Canada would provide the opportunity to develop even better benchmark indicators. He thanked Professor Farrar and his staff for their

3. The Student Experience: First Report by the Vice-Provost, Students arising from *Stepping UP*
(cont’d.)

extensive analysis of the data, and he invited Board members to provide suggestions on how to move forward with the objectives in *Stepping UP* to improve the student experience.

REPORT NUMBER 126 OF THE UNIVERSITY AFFAIRS BOARD – February 22, 2005

The Chair then opened the floor to questions and comments. A member asked for clarification of the definitions of ‘community service’ and ‘service learning’, which Ms. Fisher provided. He then noted that the single most problematic element of the student experience was the lack of communication and the lack of ability to communicate, and he urged the administration to remove barriers that would enable students to reach other students better. Professor Farrar agreed that communication methods needed to be improved, and expressed his hope that the portal project would assist students in doing so.

Another member agreed that the undergraduate experience was critical, and he complimented the administration in undertaking to gather the NSSE data, which would point to critical areas needing improvement. He noted, however, that the report presented a negative picture in many respects, and that the University of Toronto was behind both G10 and American peers in many indicators. He noted concern that commuter students were not gaining access to the wide variety of programs aimed at improving the student experience, and they required innovative ways of engaging them in University life. He noted his concern that obstacles around finances or work were troubling.

Another member noted that the administration should take note that the amount of time students spent on campus was directly proportional to the quality of their student experience. She noted that tuition increases had a negative effect because of the requirement to earn sufficient money to pay for the cost of schooling. She then noted that both the Students’ Administrative Council (SAC) and the Association of Part-time Undergraduate Students (APUS) had urged that teaching quality had to improve also. For commuter students’ benefit, she felt that a student centre for St. George campus would be an excellent solution, and would provide a space for different groups to have their needs met. In particular, she cited the need for more, larger prayer space. She urged the addition of bus routes, especially for the Scarborough and Mississauga campuses, and the continued improvement of equity issues.

A member noted that although the results cast elements of the University in what appeared to be a bad light, he commended the University administration for making the report public. He urged caution in interpreting results for large Universities in downtown urban centers, which would likely score lower, and he noted the direct link between underfunding and the quality of experience. He urged the improvement of the Career Centre, and he urged the Board not to look at the results of the survey as a failure.

A member thanked Professor Farrar for the report and asked if the data would be broken down to deal with Faculty-by-Faculty issues. Some Faculties’ students were so busy (as a function of curriculum design) that even if a student wanted to be more active on campus, it might not be possible to do so without neglecting sleep or studies.

Professor Farrar responded that Faculty issues were indeed the next step, and that each division would be expected to tailor its experiential offerings differently to address needs. He noted that, indeed, there were many challenging curricula, and asked members to consider whether the University should cut back the level of challenge to students; he stressed, however, that students who were more engaged tended strongly to perform better academically also.

3. The Student Experience: First Report by the Vice-Provost, Students arising from *Stepping UP* (cont’d.)

A member noted that the University’s participation in NSSE was very valuable, because it enabled discussion about the need to fit together the curriculum and the co-curriculum in ways that enhanced both and resulted in better students overall.

The Chair thanked members for their valuable comments.

REPORT NUMBER 126 OF THE UNIVERSITY AFFAIRS BOARD – February 22, 2005

4. Report of the Senior Assessor

Professor Farrar briefly summarized his written report. The Chair thanked him for keeping a focus on the University's policy on Freedom of Speech during recent events. A member noted that Professor Farrar had stated that, a recent event, while allowed to go ahead, had resulted in several investigations of individual actions. He asked whether the results of the investigations would be reported to the Board. Professor Farrar responded that internal investigations would be conducted. Professor Goel added that individual cases were not reported, but the Code did require annual statistical reporting.

5. Date of Next Meeting – Tuesday, March 29, 2005 at 4:30 p.m.

The Chair noted that the next meeting would be primarily devoted to consideration of the operating plans of Student Affairs, Student Services, Ancillaries, Hart House, and Athletics and Recreation.

6. Other Business

Mr. McGrath informed the Board that the University of Toronto at Mississauga was hosting a gala on the evening of March 10, 2005 in order to raise funds for twenty-five students to make a trip to Guatemala as part of an exciting outreach program. He informed the Board that the trip represented an important element of UTM's community service efforts, and was the first time that this type of outreach had been contemplated at the Mississauga campus.

The meeting adjourned at 5:55 p.m.

Secretary

Chair

February 28, 2005

33146