

5. Committee on Academic Policy and Programs, Planning and Budget Committee, and Academic Board: Terms of Reference Revisions Regarding Approval of Academic Programs

The Chair informed members that they were being asked to consider a proposal for revisions to the terms of reference of the Board and two of its standing committees. The proposal addressed the approval of academic programs. One section dealt with the Committee on Academic Policy and Programs (AP&P) terms of reference and had been considered by that Committee on April 5, 2011. The second part dealt with the Planning and Budget Committee (P&B) terms of reference and had been presented to the Committee at its meeting of April 6th. The third part concerned the terms of reference of the Academic Board. If the Board recommended the proposal, it would then be considered for approval by the Governing Council at its meeting on May 19, 2011.

Mr. Charpentier commented on the context of the proposal to amend the three terms of reference, noting that two processes had unfolded in parallel - the Task Force on Governance's comprehensive review, and the Council of Ontario Universities' (Ontario Council of Academic Vice-Presidents) review and restructuring of the quality assurance processes for undergraduate and graduate programs. The proposals for changes had been developed as a result of collaboration between the bodies involved. It was important to note that, because of the *University of Toronto Act, 1971*, decisions made by the Academic Board required confirmation by the Executive Committee of the Governing Council, as the Board was not composed of a majority of governors. However, it was also important to note that the Executive Committee's role was to assure itself that due process had been followed, rather than to re-debate decisions made by the Board.

Professor Regehr then highlighted the main components of the proposal. She explained that proposals for new academic programs, both graduate and undergraduate, would need to undergo a more uniform approval process, including an external review conducted prior to consideration by governance. As well, it was expected that broad consultation both with members of the University community and external stakeholders would take place. It was recommended that, if there were no budgetary implications arising from the proposal for units outside of the host division, approval of the program by P&B would no longer be necessary.

Professor McDougall said that APP had strongly supported the proposal. The Committee had been satisfied that the removal of certain steps in the process, such as those previously taken by the Graduate Education Council, would not reduce the opportunity for students to state their views, particularly since students were well represented on the divisional councils, at AP&P, and at the Academic Board. The divisional councils would assume greater responsibility, including the authority to approve program modifications. To discharge that responsibility, it was expected that the Councils would review and strengthen their constitutions. Professor Diamond reported that P&B had also supported the proposal. She noted that P&B would continue to be the lead committee in considering recommendations to establish or close academic units.

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Invited by the Chair to comment, Professor Emeritus Michael Marrus, a member of the Task Force on Governance (TFOG), said that the Governing Council had accepted the TFOG's recommendations that duplication within governance be reduced and that the flow of business be streamlined. There would be no diminution of the Academic Board's authority or that of its standing committees. The goal was for governance processes to function with greater efficiency than at present. The measure of achieving that would be that value would be added by each governance body that considered a proposal.

In response to a question, Mr. Charpentier replied that a number of matters would still require consideration by the Governing Council. Noting that the Board had been assured of appropriate consultation during the academic proposal development phase, the Chair asked whether or not such consultative processes would occur simultaneously. Professor Regehr explained that, in general, consultation occurred at all stages of development of a proposal and was carried out in a very efficient manner. A key element contained in a new template for program proposals was a section for the summary of consultations that had occurred. It was anticipated that feedback would be provided to the administration or the APP by members of the University community if sufficient consultation did not take place.

Professor Regehr said that the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance (Quality Council) was composed of nine representatives of various universities, a lay member, and a member from Alberta. Professor Regehr was a member of the Quality Council, and Professor Sandy Welsh, Acting Vice-Dean, Teaching and Learning, Faculty of Arts and Science, was a member of the Council's recently formed Appraisal Committee. Professor Misak commented that the University was fortunate to have representatives of the University and its sister institutions on the Quality Council.

A member observed that the approval process for the closure of an academic program would mirror that of its establishment, and the member asked whether closures would also require approval from the Quality Council. Professor Regehr said that only an annual report of program closures was required by the Quality Council. In response to a question, Mr. Charpentier stated, that if the Executive Committee considered a proposal to be controversial, it had the authority to forward the proposal to the Governing Council for its consideration.

5. Committee on Academic Policy and Programs, Planning and Budget Committee, and Academic Board: Terms of Reference Revisions Regarding Approval of Academic Programs (cont'd)

On motion duly moved, seconded, and carried

YOUR BOARD RECOMMENDS

- (a) THAT the proposed amendments to section 3, 4.1, 4.4, and 4.9 of the Terms of Reference of the Committee on Academic Policy and Programs, and the proposed amendments to the section of the Guidelines Regarding Levels of Approval dealing with academic program proposals, be approved;
- (b) THAT the proposed amendment to section 4.4.2 of the Terms of Reference of the Planning and Budget Committee be approved; and
- (c) THAT the proposed amendment to sections 5.3.1 and 5.3.2 of the Terms of Reference of the Academic Board be approved.

Documentation is attached hereto as Appendix "A".

6. *Policy on the Student Evaluation of Teaching in Courses*

The Chair noted that the proposal for the *Policy on the Student Evaluation of Teaching in Courses* had been forwarded to the Academic Board by the AP&P. If the Board recommended the proposal, it would then be considered for approval by the Governing Council at its May 19th meeting.

Professor Regehr provided an overview of the proposed *Policy*, which outlined the principles and parameters that should guide the evaluation of teaching in courses at the University. She noted that the details of the course evaluation process and administration would be contained in the *Provostial Guidelines for the Student Evaluation of Teaching in Courses*. A draft of the *Guidelines* had been made available to members of the Board for their information. Once the *Guidelines* had been fully developed, they would be provided again to AP&P for information.

Professor McDougall reported that, overall, AP&P had been supportive of the *Policy* and members had been pleased that the proposal would establish a process that would be consistent across the University. During the Committee's discussion, some concern had been expressed that the use of online evaluations would reduce participation rates. However, it had been noted that the response rates for paper surveys were already low in some cases, particularly in large classes. The University was planning to implement strategies that had proven successful in improving participation in other institutions. Some Committee members had been apprehensive of permitting individual instructors the right to opt out of releasing data from the evaluations. AP&P had been assured that such action was not the norm. Some faculty members did hold a principled belief that information from course evaluations should be private. Allowing them to opt out of

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releasing data would be important to secure broad buy-in for the *Policy*. There had also been some concern that teaching evaluations would provide data that was not strong enough to serve as a factor in personnel decisions such as promotion and tenure. While a great deal of consultation had been conducted to ensure accuracy of data, it should be noted that, according to the *Provostial Guidelines for Developing Written Assessments of Effectiveness of Teaching in Promotion and Tenure Decisions*, course evaluations were just one aspect of the evaluation of teaching.

At the invitation of the Chair, Mr. Gavin Nowlan, President of the Arts and Science Students' Union (ASSU), addressed the Board. Mr. Nowlan acknowledged that ASSU had been consulted throughout the development process of the proposed *Policy* and had had an opportunity to raise questions with the Course Evaluation Working Group. However, there were still some aspects of the *Policy* which, in ASSU's view, needed further consideration. Students would prefer that all data collected be released. However, if it were necessary to retain the opt-out feature, it would be preferable for instructors to be permitted to do so only at the beginning of the process. They should not be able to opt out after having seen their evaluation results. Mr. Nowlan said that ASSU would like to see greater information regarding the use of an online system in the *Guidelines*. It would be important to ensure that response rates did not decline as a result of implementing an online evaluation system, especially given the widespread use of evaluation results by the student body. Mr. Nowlan closed by emphasizing ASSU's desire to ensure that it fulfilled its responsibility to the students while also continuing to work with the administration in the development of the *Guidelines*. Professor Misak praised ASSU's role in the current teaching evaluations process in the Faculty of Arts and Science. She said that it was the University's desire to replicate the systematic manner in which ASSU had administered the evaluations. At present, response rates varied dramatically across divisions. The *Policy* was designed to increase response rates and encourage the timely release of data by all divisions. It would, however, be necessary to accommodate the individual wishes of some faculty members by maintaining the opt-out clause in the proposed *Policy*.

Professor George Luste, President of the University of Toronto Faculty Association (UTFA), was then invited by the Chair to speak. Professor Luste outlined the concerns and comments of some members of the UTFA. Noting that teaching was an important part of the University's mission, he pointed to the significance of the evaluation of an instructor's teaching. Such an evaluation could have an impact on the career of a faculty member, particularly with respect to tenure, promotion, and merit decisions. Professor Luste said that overlap of the current and proposed evaluation systems was necessary, and he explained that when considering grievances, it was often helpful to compare current and past data related to a faculty member's teaching. He also noted that the Board was being asked to approve only the more general *Policy*, not the *Guidelines*. In his view, the latter contained the more consequential material. There also seemed to be a need for greater distinction between the concepts of teaching evaluation and course evaluation within the *Policy*. As well, questions had been raised regarding the role that

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statistically significant data versus qualitative data would serve in the analysis of the evaluation results. In closing, Professor Luste recommended that the proposed *Policy* be referred back for further discussion and consideration. In response, Professor Misak again clarified that course evaluation was only one component of teaching evaluation conducted at the University. Both qualitative metrics, including letters from students, and quantitative metrics were used.

Professor Regehr said that staff in the Centre for Teaching Support and Innovation (CTSI) were in the process of testing some of the proposed questions together with questions from current evaluation forms with a few groups of students. In their view, it would not be prudent to require all divisions to administer two sets of evaluation forms; it was feared that this would definitely result in a drop in response rate. It would be possible, however, to compare results from the proposed evaluation system with those from the past system, as divisions already collected evaluation data in a systematic manner. As well, reports which could be generated quickly in the proposed system, would allow for comparisons using varying criteria such as the size or year of a course. Divisions that wished to participate in a Summer 2011 pilot phase or in the Fall 2011 implementation would be identified and provided with support.

Among the matters that arose in questions and discussion were the following.

a) Online Evaluation and Response Rates

Members asked whether the response rates would be affected by a shift from a paper survey to an online tool. Professor McDougall said that that question also had been raised at the AP&P meeting. Members had been of the view that students might be more likely to respond to an online evaluation, as they would have the choice of using a range of electronic devices. As well, students could complete the evaluation outside of the classroom; such improved access might lead to an increase in response rates. Professor Regehr noted that, at the University, paper response rates typically ranged from 40% to 65% in most divisions. However, response rates as low as 12% occurred in some large courses. She noted that the response rate at Penn State had increased approximately 15% (to 85-90%) after an online evaluation tool had been adopted. One possible means of combining both evaluation models would be to ask students to bring their devices with them and allot time for the evaluation to be completed during class. The Working Group was continuing to explore the best means of administering the evaluation tool.

A member suggested that the response rate for an online evaluation system would be less representative than the current system. Currently, the respondents were those students who chose to attend class. With an online system, the respondents might self select such that only those with more extreme opinions (positive or negative) might choose to complete the evaluation form. Professor Naylor commented that a question on the evaluation form asking whether or not the student regularly attended class might be

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a) Online Evaluation and Response Rates (cont'd)

helpful. Professor Misak noted that discussions had taken place with some divisions regarding self-report questions that addressed the frequency of attendance.

In response to a question, Professor Misak said that it was not the intent of the Working Group to hold the final marks of students who had not completed the evaluation. It was possible that students would receive an electronic reminder to consider completing the evaluation form before they accessed their grades. However, participation would not be mandatory.

A member stated that, in her view, it was imperative that the transition to online evaluations be made as soon as possible, given the ecological implications of continuing to use paper surveys.

b) Gender Bias

In response to questions from a member, Ms Gravestock stated that issues regarding gender bias in course evaluation had been considered and current literature in the field had been reviewed. The Working Group had shaped its framework with the findings of the research in mind. The Chair reminded the Board that it was being asked to consider only the *Policy*, not the *Guidelines*.

c) Teaching Evaluation

A member commented that it was important to give students an opportunity to provide meaningful feedback on teaching. In her view, such input was more likely to be obtained after students had had time to reflect on an instructor's teaching, rather than from a questionnaire completed quickly in class. Professor Misak said that letters from students carried significant weight in the teaching evaluation process. No change to that process was being contemplated.

A member expressed concern that instructors undergoing tenure review during the period of transition to the new evaluation process might be at a disadvantage. The member suggested that the *Policy* should state that course evaluation data should not be used as the sole measure of teaching effectiveness; a similar statement was included in the draft *Guidelines*. The member also suggested that pre-tenure or pre-promotion (teaching stream) instructors be given the option of using the existing method of evaluation if they were of the view that more data would then be available for their assessment. Lastly, the member suggested that the *Policy* should define the period during which the evaluations must be conducted, as the timing could influence the outcome of the evaluations. Professor Misak reiterated that course evaluations were only one mode of evaluation outlined in the Provostial guidelines on assessments of effectiveness of teaching.

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d) Opt-out Feature

A member suggested that instructors should have the choice to “opt-in” to share their evaluation data with students, rather than being offered the choice to “opt-out”. Professor Misak replied that some individual faculty members and, she believed, the UTFA, felt very strongly that the clause be opt-out, not opt-in.

On motion duly moved, seconded, and carried

YOUR BOARD RECOMMENDS

THAT the proposed *Policy on the Student Evaluation of Teaching in Courses*, a copy of which is attached hereto as Appendix “B”, be approved.