

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

THE GOVERNING COUNCIL

REPORT NUMBER 153 OF THE COMMITTEE ON
ACADEMIC POLICY AND PROGRAMS

January 10, 2012

To the Academic Board,
University of Toronto.

Your Committee reports that it met on Tuesday, January 10, 2012 at 4:10 p.m. in the Council Chamber, Simcoe Hall, with the following present:

Professor Andrea Sass-Kortsak
(In the Chair)
Professor Douglas McDougall
(Vice-Chair)
Professor Cheryl Regehr, Vice-Provost,
Academic Programs
Professor Brian Corman, Vice-Provost,
Graduate Education and Dean,
School of Graduate Studies
Professor Robert L. Baker
Professor Katherine Berg
Professor Karen D. Davis
Professor Joseph Desloges
Mr. Cary Ferguson
Professor Robert Gibbs
Professor Rick Halpern
Professor Paul Kingston

Mr. Nykolaj Kuryluk
Ms Cecilia Livingston
Professor Heather MacNeil
Professor Michael R. Marrus
Dr. Graeme Norval
Professor Elizabeth Peter
Ms Judith C. Poë
Ms Helen Slade
Professor Suzanne Stevenson

Mr. Richard Levin, Executive
Director, Enrolment Services and
University Registrar
Ms Karel Swift, Assistant Provost,
Registrarial

Ms Mae-Yu Tan, Acting Secretary

Regrets:

Mr. Adnan Hussain
Professor Michelle Murphy
Ms Yuchao Niu

Mr. Kevin Siu
Professor Joseph Wong
Mr. Tony Han Yin

In Attendance:

Professor Angela Hildyard, Vice-President, Human Resources and Equity
Dr. Jane E. Harrison, Director, Academic Programs and Policy, Office of the Vice-
President and Provost
Professor John Scherk, Vice-Dean, Undergraduate, University of Toronto Scarborough
Professor Henry J. Mann, Dean, Leslie Dan Faculty of Pharmacy

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ITEM 3 CONTAINS A RECOMMENDATION TO THE ACADEMIC BOARD. ALL OTHER ITEMS ARE REPORTED FOR INFORMATION.

1. Report of the Previous Meeting

Report 152 (September 20, 2011) was approved.

2. Business Arising from the Report of the Previous Meeting

The Chair recalled that the September meeting had included the first part of the Committee's consideration of the reviews of academic programs and units. The compendium of those reviews, along with this Committee's Report #152, had been forwarded to: the Agenda Committee of the Academic Board, to the Academic Board itself, to the Executive Committee of the Governing Council and to the full Council. No concerns had been raised at any level. At least one member commented that the Committee on Academic Policy and Programs had done its job very well.

3. Grading Practices Policies

Professor Regehr said that the University currently had two policies governing grading practices: the University Grading Practices Policy, which applied to all students, and the Graduate Grading and Evaluation Practices Policy, which applied only to graduate students. Therefore, both policies applied to graduate students. Unfortunately, there were areas where the two policies differed from each other, and graduate students with concerns were not clear which policy took precedence. That situation was not a satisfactory one for the University: it failed to provide good guidance for faculty and it was highly problematic for the students concerned. A number of students had understandably taken their concerns to the University Ombudsperson, who had brought the issue forward in June 2010 with the recommendation that the Provost's Office bring forward revised policies in 2010-11. Professor Regehr and her colleagues had begun working on the policies in the summer/fall of 2010, but after consultations they had found that it was a larger undertaking than expected, requiring even further consultations.

Professor Regehr recalled that the original Grading Practices Policy had been approved in 1975-76. The 1998 revisions of the Policy had allowed for divisional adaptations of the policy to be approved by Faculty Councils, to meet the particular needs of the division. The revised Policy had also encouraged the development of regulations to apply the Policy within each division. There was, therefore, an understanding that there would be some differences in practices across the University. The Graduate Grading Practices Policy was first approved in 1993 and then revised in 2004. Very shortly thereafter, it had become apparent that there were aspects of the two policies that were not congruent, and suggestions had been made that the Graduate Policy be rescinded and the overall Policy revised. For a number of reasons, that step had not been taken until this

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time. Professor Regehr and Professor Corman had taken up the task in 2009, consulting with Vice-Deans, Registrars and the Ombudsperson to determine which aspects of the policies had proven problematic and forming a Working Group in the Provost's Office to examine the early feedback and to review policies at other universities. An initial conclusion had been that the Grading Practices Policy included two matters that were usually dealt with in separate policies: academic transcripts and disruptions of academic programs. Arising from the University's experience with the SARS and H1N1 influenza outbreaks and the experiences of sister universities with other disasters, it had also become apparent that it was very important to move beyond a policy on disruption and to have a broader policy dealing with academic continuity – steps that would be taken to ensure that students were able to complete their courses. The outcome was the drafting of three separate policies. Extensive consultation had taken place on the drafts, beginning with their distribution to the Offices of the Deans, Chairs and Registrars, with the request that they identify any technical problems, and then continuing with the distribution of the revised drafts very broadly in the University. The policies were published on the web, and comments were invited from Principals, Deans, Academic Directors and Chairs; members of the Committee on Academic Policy and Programs; student union presidents, and members of the University generally. The proposed policies were placed on the agenda of a number of divisional councils. The advice arising from this process was reviewed and the policies amended as appropriate, leading to the proposal now before the Committee.

- The provisions concerning transcripts were removed from the existing Policy, and they are proposed to form a separate Policy. The provisions of the new Policy did not differ greatly from those in the existing Policy.
- The provisions concerning academic disruptions were removed from the existing Policy and included in a proposed new Policy, which included strategies to plan for continuity.
- The provisions concerning grading practices in the two policies were combined, with the conflicts between the policies resolved and the wording streamlined.

A wide-ranging discussion took place which included discussion of the consultation process* and also included suggestions for minor corrections / changes in the drafting. Among the substantive matters that arose in discussion were the following.

* In the course of the discussion on the consultation process, a member said that sending memoranda to Principals, Deans, Academic Directors and Chairs (P.D.A.D.&C.) did not ensure that rank-and-file faculty received the information contained in those memoranda. Professor Regehr undertook to ask the Vice-President and Provost to raise the concern at the next meeting of P.D.A.D.&C.

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(a) Release of marks / grades to students. In response to a question, Professor Regehr referred to section 3.2 of the proposed University Assessment and Grading Practices Policy which provided that “final grades for undergraduate and graduate courses will be reviewed and approved . . . according to divisional review procedures.” Grades could not be released to students until those procedures were complete. The wording of the provision allowed for the differences in practices that existed among divisions and among courses, for example small-enrolment graduate courses and very large undergraduate courses. Similarly, practices varied among divisions for the release of students’ marks on final examinations.

(b) Undergraduate and graduate-student grading in courses primarily offered at the other level. A member referred to section 4.1 of the University Assessment and Grading Practices Policy which provided that where undergraduate students completed a “fully graduate course,” the student would receive a grade on the appropriate undergraduate grade scale, and where a graduate student completed a fully undergraduate course, the student would receive a grade on the graduate grade scale. In response to the member’s question, Professor Corman agreed that the reference to a “fully” undergraduate or graduate course excluded cross-listed courses. In any event, the grading scale used would depend on the status of the student rather than that of the course.

(c) Timing of assessment of term work. A member referred to section 1.5 of the proposed University Assessment and Grading Practices Policy, noting that there was a requirement that assessed term work, worth at least 10% of the final grade in the course, be returned to students prior to the last date for withdrawal from the course without academic penalty. There was no such requirement in graduate courses, except that students be advised early in the course that there would be no assessed term work returned before the withdrawal deadline. The member took the view that the requirement for the return of assessed term work before the withdrawal deadline should apply in all courses. Professor Corman replied that there was a substantial difference of opinion on the matter.

(d) Distribution of grades. A member referred to section 4.4.2 on the distribution of grades, which stated that the distribution of grades in any course or item of academic work “must not be predetermined by any system of quotas.” However, divisions could “provide guidelines to instructors setting out a reasonable distribution of grades in the division or department.” The member was concerned that there was no consistency across the University in the distribution of grades. Many students perceived that it was easier to obtain good grades, or more likely to obtain bad grades, in courses in particular parts of the University. Professor Regehr replied that there was substantial variation across the University, with some divisions using honours/pass/fail or high honours/honours/pass/low pass/fail scales more frequently than others and some using percentage scales more

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frequently. There was particular variation between the large Arts and Science divisions and the professional faculties. Some divisions did issue guidelines with respect to grade distributions and others did not.

Another member added that while divisions might provide guidelines, it was clear that they were not permitted to set a pre-determined distribution. Notwithstanding that rule, some faculty, teaching assistants and students perceived that there was an expectation that grades would fit a predetermined distribution. That was erroneous, and her division had to work very hard to correct that misperception.

On motion duly made, seconded and carried

YOUR COMMITTEE RECOMMENDS

THAT the proposed University Assessment and Grading Practices Policy, the proposed University of Toronto Transcript Policy, and the proposed Policy on Academic Continuity, copies of which are attached hereto as Appendices “A”, “B” and “C”, be approved, effective for the academic year 2012-13, replacing the University Grading Practices Policy approved by the Governing Council on March 25, 1993 and amended most recently by the Academic Board on April 9, 1998, and replacing the Graduate Grading and Evaluation Practices Policy approved by the Committee on Academic Policy and Programs on May 12, 2004.

4. University of Toronto Scarborough: Specialist Program in Mathematics and its Applications - Closure

Professor Regehr said that the proposal for closure of the B.Sc. Specialist Program in Mathematics and its Applications was more a part of the reorganization of the programs in Mathematics than simply a closure. While the closure required the approval of the Committee on Academic Policy and Programs, the other aspects of the reorganization had been approved by the Scarborough Council and would be reported to this Committee at its final meeting as part of the annual report on major modifications to programs. Over the years, across the University, there had been a proliferation of highly specialized programs in particular disciplines. When students chose one of those highly specialized programs, they were forced down a very narrow path beginning at a very early stage. The reorganization of the overall Specialist Program in Mathematics would enable students to choose particular areas of specialization, including Mathematics and its Applications, but they could do so at a later stage and with less restriction on their early course selection.

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4. University of Toronto Scarborough: Specialist Program in Mathematics and its Applications – Closure (Cont'd)

A member observed that it would be very valuable for the Committee to see both program modifications and program closures from particular divisions at the same time. That would provide a much better picture of what was happening in the division. Professor Regehr undertook to consider the suggestion for the next cycle of curriculum changes. Professor Halpern said that the full range of the reorganization was described in the original document from UTSC; however, the summary sheet lacked the details. He stressed that the number of students currently registered in the program was small and they were well known to the faculty in Mathematics. They would be able to complete the program before its final closure. By streamlining the overall Mathematics specialist program, UTSC hoped to make navigation through it easier for current students and more attractive to potential future students.

On motion duly made, seconded and carried,

YOUR COMMITTEE APPROVED

The proposed closure of the Mathematics and its Applications B.Sc. Specialist Program, as described in the proposal from the University of Toronto Scarborough dated August 22, 2011, with an effective date of Fall 2012 for the closure of admissions and an anticipated program closure date of Summer 2017.

5. Date of Next Meeting

The Chair reminded members that the Committee's next meeting was scheduled for Tuesday, February 28, 2012 at 4:10 p.m. The Calendar of Business included for that meeting the annual reports on student financial support and on student awards. The Committee's assessors had advised that they expected future meetings to include a number of proposals for new programs, arising in part from the University's growth.

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6. Other Business

Elections to the Governing Council and Academic Board

The Chair said that nominations were currently open for election to membership of the Governing Council and to teaching-staff and librarian seats on the Academic Board. She urged members to consider standing for election or to encourage other excellent individuals to do so.

The meeting adjourned at 4:50 p.m.

Secretary

Chair

January 18, 2011