# UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

## THE GOVERNING COUNCIL

## REPORT NUMBER 115 OF THE COMMITTEE ON

## ACADEMIC POLICY AND PROGRAMS

### May 11, 2005

To the Academic Board,
University of Toronto.

Your Committee reports that it held a meeting on Wednesday, May 11, 2005 at 4:10 p.m. in the Council Chamber, Simcoe Hall, at which the following were present:

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| Professor J. J. Berry Smith (In the Chair) | Professor Wayne K. Hindmarsh |
| Professor Cheryl Regehr, Vice-Chair | Professor Ronald H. Kluger |
| Professor Edith Hillan, Vice-Provost, | Ms Vera Melnyk |
|    Academic | Mr. Stefan A. Neata |
| Professor David Farrar, Deputy Provost and | Professor John Scherk |
|    Vice-Provost, Students | Miss Maureen Somerville |
| Professor Rona Abramovitch | |
| Professor Derek Allen | Ms. Karel Swift, University Registrar |
| Professor Pamela Catton | |
| Professor Mary Chipman | **Secretariat:** |
| Ms Maple Chong | Mr. Neil Dobbs |
| | Mr. Andrew Drummond, Secretary |

**Regrets:**

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| Professor Stewart Aitchison | Ms Leigh Honeywell |
| Ms Janice Bayani | Mr. Senai Iman |
| Professor Pamela Catton | Mr. Raza M. Mirza |
| Professor David Clandfield | Professor Robert Reisz |
| Professor Luc De Nil | Professor Barbara Sherwood Lollar |
| Dr. Inez N. Elliston | |

**In Attendance:**

Professor Vivek Goel, Vice-President and Provost
Professor Susan Pfeiffer, Dean, School of Graduate Studies

ITEM 3 CONTAINS A RECOMMENDATION FOR GOVERNING COUNCIL APPROVAL.  ITEM 4 CONTAINS A RECOMMENDATION FOR ACADEMIC BOARD APPROVAL AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE CONFIRMATION.  ALL OTHER ITEMS ARE REPORTED FOR INFORMATION.

## 1.    Report of the Previous Meeting

Report 114 of March 9, 2005 was approved.

2.      **Business Arising from the Report of the Previous Meeting**

A member questioned whether the task force on graduate admissions referred to in Report 114 had been struck.  Professor Hillan responded that it had not, and that it would be appropriate to await the results of the consultation process regarding the Graduate Education Task Force prior to forming the task force.

There was no other business arising.

3.      **Policy on Scheduling of Classes and Examinations and Other Accommodations for Religious Observances**

The Chair welcomed Professor Vivek Goel, Vice-President and Provost, and Mr. Nouman Ashraf, Student Affairs Officer, to the meeting.   Professor Farrar introduced the proposed policy, noting that it formalized the practice that had been in place for at least ten years.  The policy clarified expectations of accommodations that should be made for faith needs while ensuring that academic integrity and excellence remain the primary focus of scheduling.  He noted that, should the Academic Board recommend the policy for approval to the Governing Council, it would proceed for final approval at the same time as approval for the (proposed) multi-faith centre, demonstrating complementarity with other elements of religious accommodation.

During discussion, a member complimented the administration on codifying practice and solidifying it as policy.  He asked what measures would be taken if accommodating members of one religious group would disadvantage members of another group, citing an example where accommodation would lessen the stress of examination period if examinations were spread over a greater period than otherwise scheduled.  Professor Farrar responded that the practice in such cases had been to accommodate quickly; otherwise, the student would have to sit a different examination.  Furthermore, in cases of deferred examinations, not to sit an examination when scheduled would normally be considered a disadvantage. Professor Goel emphasized that the policy was consistent with normally applicable academic standards.

A member asked how many days of the school year in total would be affected by the policy's approval. Mr. Ashraf responded that the policy was not written with such an end in mind, given the wide range of faiths and calendars followed by students at the University of Toronto.  Because days requiring special accommodations varied so widely from faith to faith, it would be inappropriate to be prescriptive in such a manner.  Mr. Ashraf then noted that the most common accommodations were for Muslim and Jewish holidays, and that the multi-faith calendar formed the basis of the majority of potential accommodations.

A member noted that, in the past, a memorandum from the Provost's Office detailed on what days the high holidays of several faiths occurred and asked administrators and faculty members to be sensitive and try to avoid tests and examinations on those days, if possible.  Professor Goel noted that that memorandum and list would continue to be distributed, but that faculty members were not prohibited from scheduling examinations on such days, but were requested to try to avoid doing so.  Many days of the year, he noted, fell on days that might be considered a high holiday of a faith which might apply only to a very small minority of students, and it would be unreasonable for the University to try to accommodate all possible faiths' holy days.  The policy was designed to clarify and assist individual instructors with instances when accommodation would be valuable, and the Office of Student Affairs would be available to assist instructors when accommodations were required.

A member asked if the Lunar New Year ('Chinese New Year') was considered a day that should be accommodated.  Mr. Ashraf responded that he had not seen a request for accommodation on that day, but would be prepared to assist instructors in determining if it was a sincerely held belief that the day was of religious significance and worthy of accommodation as a result.

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3.      **Policy on Scheduling of Classes and Examinations and Other Accommodations for**
        **Religious Observances** (cont'd.)

A member asked if the policy applied to faculty and staff members who observed faith traditions that
required accommodation.  Professor Goel responded that the policy covered classes and examinations for
students, and that staff and faculty arrangements for accommodation were covered under clauses of the
appropriate collective agreements.

> On motion duly moved and seconded,

> YOUR  COMMITTEE RECOMMENDED TO THE ACADEMIC BOARD

> THAT the Policy on Scheduling of Classes and Examinations and Other
> Accommodations for Religious Observances be approved, effective immediately.

4.      **School of Graduate Studies: Graduate Academic Appeals Board Amendment to**
        **Terms of Reference**

The Chair welcomed Professor Susan Pfeiffer, Dean, School of Graduate Studies, to the meeting.
Professor Hillan informed the Committee that the Graduate Academic Appeals Board had seen a
sustained  increase in the number of appeals coming forward, and that, in order to accommodate the
increase, the School of Graduate Studies was proposing to remove the 'alternate' members to allow
greater numbers of both faculty and student members to serve on the Committee at one time.  The change
would enable greater ease of scheduling appeal hearings.

During discussion, a member questioned how the School would determine whether Chairs were
'appropriately qualified'.  Professor Pfeiffer responded that members would require some level of training
with the language used in legal and quasi-legal settings, and that some members had to be legally
qualified in order to serve, though those individuals were not always faculty members.

A member, noting that he had recently agreed to serve on the Graduate Academic Appeals Board, asked
whether the increase in the number of appeals would result in additional workload for members.
Professor Pfeiffer responded by noting that the changes proposed were designed to ensure that members
of the Board would serve roughly the same number of cases.

> On motion duly moved and seconded,

> YOUR  COMMITTEE  RECOMMENDED TO THE ACADEMIC BOARD

> THAT revisions of the Terms of Reference for the Graduate Academic Appeals Board,
> articles 4(c), 4(d), 6(a), 6(b), 7(b), 7 (c), 10(b)(ii), 10 (b)(iii) and 11, be approved,
> effective July 1, 2005.

5.      **Faculty of Applied Science and Engineering: Deletion of Options within the Computer**
        **Engineering Program**

The Chair welcomed Professor Raymond Kwong, Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering, to
the meeting.  Professor Hillan informed the Committee that the options were being deleted because they
were no longer viable in the context of a new, more flexible curriculum.

A member asked what discussions had taken place to inform students about the proposed changes within
the Faculty, and in particular, what discussions had taken place with students.  Professor Kwong
responded that extensive discussions had taken place with all affected students fully a year before the

**5.      Faculty of Applied Science and Engineering: Deletion of Options within the Computer
             Engineering Program** (cont'd.)

proposal came forward.  No student indicated that the proposed change was inappropriate, and most had
wanted the flexibility that came with the revised curriculum.  The options had been set up to handle a
spike in demand in several fields that had since subsided.  Professor Kwong then clarified that the
enrolment figures in the material before members were for students in their fourth and final year of
studies, who would be graduating with the options.  Students in earlier years would still be able to
specialize in the areas defined by the options, but just not have the option noted on their transcripts.

> On motion duly moved and seconded,

> YOUR  COMMITTEE  APPROVED

> THAT the options in Communications Network, Computer Hardware Systems and
> Software Engineering within the Computer Engineering Program be deleted.

**6.      Annual Report on Student Awards Established, Amended and Withdrawn: July 1, 2003 to
             June 30, 2004**

Ms. Swift referred members to the report, noting the large number of newly-established awards and the
very small number of discontinued awards.  During discussion, the Chair requested that, in future years,
the report include trend graphs on the expansion of new awards.  Ms. Swift noted that the number of new
awards per year had been relatively stable, which meant that the overall number of awards was growing at
a consistent rate on an annualized basis.

**7.      Items for Information**
      (a) Ibero-American Studies Name change to 'Latin American Studies'
      (b) School of Graduate Studies: Proposal from the Department of Curriculum,
           Teaching and Learning for a Flexible-Time Ph.D. Program Option in the
           Curriculum Program
      (c) School of Graduate Studies: Proposal from the Department of Curriculum,
           Teaching and Learning for a Flexible-Time Ph.D. Program Option in the
           Second Language Education Program
      (d) School of Graduate Studies: Regulation Change – Transfers for Flexible-Time
           PhD Options
      (e) School of Graduate Studies: Name Change of the PhD in Industrial Relations
           to the PhD in "Industrial Relations and Human Resources"

The above-noted items were presented for information.  There was no discussion.

**8.      Reports of the Administrative Assessors**

Professor Hillan reported that the subcommittee of the Academic Appeals Committee that had been struck
in order to review the divisional guidelines for academic appeals was preparing its report, and that, once a
draft was complete, it would be circulated for comment.  Following revisions, the report would be
circulated to the Committee along with any proposed changes in the policy.

Professor Hillan then reported that the discussion paper on the Graduate Education Task Force had been
circulated in April, 2005 for comment, and that its authors were in the process of drafting
recommendations on the basis of comments received.  The Committee could expect to receive the final
report in the fall of 2005.

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**9.      Date of Next Meeting**

The Chair informed members that the next meeting, which had not yet been scheduled, would take place in the first two weeks of June, 2005.  Its purpose would be to discuss reviews of academic programs and units.

**10.      Other Business**

The Chair informed members that the Committee was required to examine reviews of academic programs and units as a key element of the University's commitment to accountability.  This examination would take place at a meeting to be scheduled for June, 2005.  As in previous years, the number of reviews was very high.  The Committee had increasingly avoided examining the reviews themselves, instead examining only an administrative digest prepared by the Provost's Office.  Although the examination of the digests was efficient, he felt that the Committee should be prepared to go more in depth and assign each member the task of reading several and being prepared to comment in detail on the contents of the reviews and to flag any issues that would require the Committee's scrutiny.  Although the entire Committee would receive all the digests, each member would be asked to read two or three full reviews, and each review would have three members reading it.

During a lengthy discussion, members asked about the logistics and the desirability of proceeding in this manner.  In particular, members queried whether they should meet as groups to examine the reviews in detail and prepare a report to the Committee, whether there should be a 'lead' reviewer, and whether the Committee should be asked to read the entirety of the reviews at all.

The Chair and other members indicated that the accountability framework in which the University operated required some greater examination than just reading the digests, that the Deans or other relevant officials were present and had been (in previous years) very willing to discuss issues that had arisen from reviews, and that the level of formality did not require members of each review group to meet.  To ask all members to read in detail all the reviews was unrealistic, but not to read them at all was inappropriate.  The proposed measures represented a balanced approach that would be tried.

In response to a point that some divisions under review were outside the expertise of committee members, a member noted that the key accountability for the Committee was to ensure that the reviews were done properly and that the University was responding to them, not to second-guess the review recommendations themselves.

Following the discussion, the Chair summarized the process agreed to by the Committee:

- Each review would have three members assigned to read it;
- One member of each group would be assigned the 'lead' responsibility to speak to the review at the Committee meeting, though the others had to be prepared to do so as well;
- Each group was able to meet prior to the meeting, but was not required to; contact information would be circulated;
- The Provost's Office would supply guidelines on what members were expected to look for and respond to;
- Members who were unable to attend the meeting were asked to let the Secretary know as soon as possible after its time was announced.

The Chair thanked members for their comments and suggestions.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:30 p.m.

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Secretary                                                              Chair

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