
Minutes of the meeting of the Academic Policy and Planning Committee held on 18th September 2003, from 3:00 to 5:00 p.m. in Room 609, James (Administration) Building

Present: L. Vinet (Chair), J. Beheshti, A. Bryan, V. Choy, M. Crago, G. Demopoulos, Ph. Depalle, M. Dowsley, J. Galbraith, M. Graham, F. Groen, W. Hendershot, H.G. Leighton, A.C. Masi, J. Zucchi, H.M.C. Richard (Secretary to the Committee)
Regrets: C. Bushnell, E. Cooper, H. Knox, M. Kuan, S. McDougall, L. Proulx, R. Roy
Guests: L. Smith (item 6)

Document circulated at the meeting:

03-APPC-09-06 Reopening the debate on adoption of the A+ Grade

02.01 **Proposed agenda**

Accepted as circulated.

02.02 **Minutes of meeting held on September 4, 2003**

Adopted as circulated.

02.03 **Business arising**

None.

02.04 **Report on Senate decisions (meeting on September 17, 2003) on 353rd APPC Report to Senate**

Senate approved :

- the B.A.; Minor Concentration in Jewish Law;
- the B.A.; Minor Concentration in Philosophy & Western Religions;
- the B.A.; Major Concentration in Philosophy & Western Religions;
- the B.A.; Honours in Philosophy in & Western Religions;
- the B.A.; Joint Honours – Philosophy & Western Religions Component;
- the Change in degree designation from B.Ed. in Kinesiology to B.Sc. (Kinesiology) for which a motion to amend the University Statutes will be necessary;
- Research progress tracking guidelines and model forms.

It was noted that the new format for submitting proposals to Senate facilitates their review.

02.05 **Africa Field Study Semester**

Memo from Dean Shaver, Faculty of Science, Sept. 2, 2003 (03-APPC-09-04)
and Background - excerpt from 346th APPC Report to Senate

It was noted that APPC on December 5, 2002, and Senate on January 15, 2003 had approved the Africa Field Study Semester (AFSS) proposed by the Faculty of Arts, the Faculty of Science, and the Faculty of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences “for as long as it (the Canadian Field Study in Africa Program, CFSA, of which the AFSS is part) is administered by Langara College” and that “further approval will be required if and when McGill takes over its administration.”

The Dean of the Faculty of Science has now given notice that “this year the Faculty of Science intends to operate the CFSA (Canadian Field Study in Africa) semester in partnership with Langara College” and “will assume administrative and academic responsibility for running the CFSA semester” and therefore requests authorization “to offer the AFSS within it.” McGill will use the same academic personnel, seconded from Langara College to the Faculty; it will lease all of the field equipment in Africa from Langara College, and “the program will be run with the same administrative personnel, structures and security measures as the Faculty presently uses to operate the Panama Field Study Semester.” Tuition fees will remain unchanged.

On motion by Professor Demopoulos, seconded by Ms Choy, **APPC approved the offering of the AFSS within the CFSA which will be operated in partnership with Langara College and for which the Faculty of Science will assume administrative and academic responsibility, with the understanding**

that the administrative responsibility assumed by the Faculty of Science includes budget responsibility. It was noted that APPC could not request that the Faculty of Science should report back after a year in order for APPC to review the budgetary implications, as APPC does not deal with resources and budgets. (*APPC approval will be reported to Senate for information in APPC's 354th Report to Senate*).

02.06 **Second SCTP Report on meeting held on May 29, 2003 (03-APPC-09-05)**

- D.C.L. in Law (0 cr.)
- LL.M. in Law; Non-Thesis (45 cr.)
- LL.M. in Law (45 cr.)
- LL.M. in Comparative Law; Non-Thesis (45 cr.)

Associate Dean (Graduate Studies and Research) Lionel Smith joined the meeting. He explained that the process which resulted in the four program proposals began two years earlier when an ad hoc Review Committee of the Faculty of Law was mandated to conduct a thorough review of the graduate programs in Law; faculty members, and current and former students were consulted.

1) Currently all graduate students are registered in the Faculty's two institutes, the Institute of Comparative Law (ICL) and the Institute of Air and Space Law (IASL). All students whose research does not fit either ASL or CL are registered in the ICL. The proposed generic D.C.L. in Law and LL.M. in Law will make it possible for those students who do not have a clear affinity with the two existing institutes to be registered in the Faculty of Law.

2) The ad hoc Committee took the view that the LL.M.'s large clientele was composed of two identifiable constituencies: 1) practicing lawyers intending to go back to the practice of law and interested in course work essentially (making up the majority of LL.M students), and 2) students who intend to go on to doctoral studies and academia (a smaller group) and for whom a substantial thesis and fewer courses would be necessary. Hence the proposal for two options in the LL.M in Law options, with and without thesis, and of a non-thesis option in the LL.M in Comparative Law. The need to strengthen the identity of the Comparative Law offering led to proposing revisions to the LL.M. in Comparative Law with thesis. No substantial revisions were recommended for the LL.M. in Air and Space Law.

3) The ad hoc Committee recommended changes to the doctoral program, so that students should be exposed to a high level of pedagogy and legal scholarship. It is proposed that a comprehensive examination and a four-credit required course in Theoretical Approaches to Law should be added.

In the discussion, it was noted that the program titles were somewhat redundant ("Doctor of Civil Law in Law") but could not be otherwise. This was a situation in which generic degrees in Law were being created as options, departing from a specialized degree in Comparative Law in this case; this procedure circumvents a lengthy external evaluation process. Asked about enrolment forecasts for the different options, Professor Smith responded that it was expected that students would continue to come either to Comparative Law or Law, all of the options being sufficiently differentiated; about three-quarters of the students now at the ICL may go to Law; anyone interested in international trade law for example would no longer fit in the ICL. It was noted that had the Faculty not created institutes, the Faculty would have been offering a generic doctorate and master's in law. It was thought that the specialized nature of the Faculty's existing graduate degrees could be due to the Faculty having been considered as a professional Faculty in which institutes were the locus for graduate degrees. It was stated that professional Faculties have different traditions and if this situation reflects the Faculty's reality, making it conform to the order of other Faculties should not be attempted; having generic degrees and specialized degrees side by side should be acceptable.

Questions dealing with resources were also raised, in particular regarding what could be viewed as a shifting of resources from the undergraduate program and thesis supervision, to new non-thesis options in the LL.M. in Law and the LL.M. in Comparative Law. On the subject of the adequacy of library resources, it was noted that Faculty members would be reluctant to direct students, should supervisory and library resources for a chosen thesis topic not be available. The needs expressed in the report on library requirements for the proposed programs were duly noted. The provision of such resources was not viewed as a requirement for the programs to be offered and it was ascertained that the University would work with the Administrative Librarian to make sure that the Faculty had what it needed to support its programs.

The proposed programs were approved for submission to Senate.

02.07 **A+ Grade (03-APPC-09-06)**

The Committee discussed whether or not to reopen the debate on the advisability of adopting the A+ grade. At the outset it was noted that the University should not let technology (Banner) determine the

answer, and it was observed that Faculties in their opinions were equally split on the issue. The Committee on Student Affairs, APPC, and Senate previously debated the issue at length, and APPC in January 1999 defeated a motion to recommend to Senate the adoption of an A+ grade on a 4.0 grading scale; given this context it was feared that requests to reopen the issue would keep being made until the desired result were obtained. Yet a number of difficulties prevail. The inability to nuance a 4.0 has led to difficulties in awarding scholarships; an A+ grade would allow identification of the very top students, lifting the top while not downgrading the rest. Interuniversity programs offered by universities with different grading systems raise the difficulty of having half the students able to get A+ while the other half cannot. McGill students were said to be disadvantaged with respect to graduate and medical school admissions and graduate fellowships because As are routinely downgraded to 3.9.

It was argued that there was more to a student's dossier than the GPA; performance is not assessed solely on the basis of a student's record but on letters of reference, interviews etc. It was added that the A+ grade does not make a difference in the allocation of fellowships because juries know how universities grade and McGill has the reputation of having meaningful grades. It was however acknowledged that there had to be a difference between a low and a high A, but while high achievement was not reflected in the transcript, an instructor would have numeric % grades to refer to when asked for a letter of recommendation. It was noted that there would always be variability in the system; instructors make up their own rules - which is fine as long as students are made aware of them - and adjustments can also be made to the grading pattern of a class. It was also suggested that it may be desirable to have McGill send signals similar to those sent by its peer institutions regarding student performance and that it may be useful to survey the Association of American Universities (of which University of Toronto and McGill are members) and G10 universities in order to determine which and how many use the A+ grade.

In their lengthy discussion, APPC members were not enthusiastic about reopening the debate on the issue of the A+ grade. It was clear that only if new and compelling information from top class institutions were to be produced would the APPC consider reopening the debate in the next academic year. On motion by Professor Zucchi, seconded by Mr Bryan, APPC unanimously approved the following motion, with one abstention:

APPC is not willing to reopen the debate on the A+ grading scheme in this academic year. It would be willing to reopen it next year (September 2004) if it could be shown that McGill were out of step with the AAU and G10 university institutions.

02.08 **Other business**

None.

The meeting adjourned at 5:00 p.m.