

**Subcommittee on Teaching and Learning  
of the Academic Policy and Planning Committee**

**Minutes of the 19th meeting, held on Tuesday 15 April 2008,  
from 10:00 to 12:00 in room 310 James Administration Building**

**Present:** M. Mendelson (Chair), A. Angus, J. Clark, A. Costopoulos, D. Starke-Meyerring, J. Everett, S. Franke, d. Harris, M. Kreiswirth, H. Sleiman, C. Urbain, J. Wapnick, C. Weston, Y. Steinert, A. Ippersiel (Secretary to the Committee)

**Regrets:** B. Baker, A. De Motta, A. Jaeger, T. Kirby, J. Luker, K. Oberer, T. Wheeler, S. Tran,

**Guest:** S. Roy for item #4a

**1. Adoption of the agenda**

The agenda was accepted as circulated.

**2. Approval of minutes of the SCTL meeting held on 11 March 2008**

The minutes were approved as circulated.

**3. Business arising from minutes of previous meetings**

a) Mandate of SCTL: going to next APC meeting

**4. Committee members' reports**

**a) Office of the CIO**

Professor/student satisfaction with myCourses (WebCT):

Sylvia Franke identified several issues about myCourses (WebCT) within the McGill community such as: 1) Faculty find the system is inflexible, not well-designed and difficult to use; 2) they are increasingly demanding access to social networking tools and the ability to make their course public and searchable but there are privacy laws; 3) faculty feel that they are being forced to use the system students express issues with the interface and speed of uploading/downloading. 4) Students express issues with the interface and speed of uploading/downloading.

A multi-level approach to these issues has been developed. *Tools for developing courses:* a set of templates has already been developed to help professors make effective use of various features in WebCT. Tools are being pilot tested by Teaching Technology Services (TTS) during April and May 2008. This includes user- evaluations, testing public aspects of WebCT with Continuing Education, and follow up focus group with students. *A redesigned workshop series:* TTS in collaboration with TLS will pilot a newly developed series of workshops geared to facilitating the use of various features of WebCT. This series of workshops will be given to faculty from May to Dec 2008. *Options for addressing the proprietary software issues:* WebCT is a proprietary software so McGill cannot make changes to the system, however ISR will help with Blackboard to see what changes might be made. In December 2008, a committee will be struck to evaluate the potential of the soon-to-be purchased Content Management System and to consider open-ended solutions, if appropriate..

In the discussion that followed, several issues were raised by members of the committee. Do these solutions address professors' needs? It was emphasized by several members that there is a need for more human resources to support professors. It was pointed out that the previous version was better. There is a need to improve grading aspect. Could pressure be put on the company? Can an explanation be provided as to why the system was changed? The CIO explained that the old version wasn't robust enough to handle the increased traffic. She will provide the company with the "top 10 pain points" with the new system and possibly consider open source solutions. Regarding support for professors, Tier 1 & 2 support is available to handle these needs. In response to a query as to whether it is a good time to

transfer to WebCT, the CIO responded that it is safe to migrate to WebCT as the Content Management System will not replace WebCT soon.

**Action:** The CIO will communicate with the community to explain why the system was changed. Further, there should be ongoing emails to communicate to professors about what is happening with WebCT.

***b) Dean of Students***

Advising as teaching:

Professor Everett focused on the issue of advising as teaching. Studies show that people who advise students, whether faculty or professionals, get very little training (sometimes ad hoc). There are no training programs in Canada; they are developed in States. The Dean of Students wants to help departments and Faculties take advantage of available resources and is requesting insights from this committee. An advising admission statement was developed and this will be going to APC next week. After that, a recommendation will be brought forward to Senate.

The resources that are available are anchored by web projects. Some of the work includes templates for specific faculties; best practices, categories of advisors, definitions of advising, information about training modules with HR. By next winter, the first of the training modules will be in place.

The Dean of Students is looking for commitment from units, requesting that Chairs make someone available to help. A number of initiatives will be launched over the next year; there will be information seminars and web seminars.

In the discussion that followed, members mentioned that there is presently much reliance on institutional memory therefore it would be important to help units develop structures that ensure continuity. Some members wondered if there could also be sharing of resource materials, developing and strengthening network of advisors. There seems to be a mixed reaction to professional advising in some faculties as some professors want to keep to keep their advising role. There is a need for flexible solutions. Are there some common important problems that could be identified in order to assist advisors in dealing with them? Is there a possibility of developing checklists?

***c) Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (GPS):***

Plans for increased graduate student development

Professor Kreiswirth, Associate Provost (Graduate Education), discussed plans for increased graduate student development. Graduate Studies is quite decentralized. GPS will conduct a survey to find out what is presently available on campus in order to identify best practices, and to find out what can be done centrally.

It is intended that graduate student development be used as a good recruitment tool. This would involve skill development at McGill such as pedagogical training, IT, tech transfer, entrepreneurship, language writing, and issues of academic integrity. The first part of this plan is being implemented through a program on the pedagogical preparation of graduate students. Teaching and Learning Services (TLS) has been very helpful and offered the first workshop in March 2008 which was very successful. GPS would like to offer four workshops next year and has put this in the budget request. The second part of the plan involves Supervisor/supervisee training. At present, there is a workshop for graduate supervision for faculty but there also needs to be parallel training of the supervisee. The third part of the plan would be advanced academic integrity training.

*e) Teaching and Learning Services (TLS:*

Mercury report (Fall 08)

The Director of TLS, Professor Weston presented the Fall 2008 Mercury report which includes courses evaluated from Sept-Dec 2007. There were 3,094 courses evaluated with an overall average response rate of 48%. We have to work on improving student response rate; of the 79 departments involved, only 40 departments had 50% or more average response rates. Student response rates seem to change depending on number of courses. Only 56% of the 1,851 instructors evaluated granted permission to publicize their results; work needs to be done to increase instructor participation. There is concern in particular for pre-tenure professors as shown by the low response rates (42%).

In the discussion that followed, several suggestions were made to improve student response rates such as allowing access to registration a day earlier for students who complete course evaluations. However, this would only work in the fall semester since students usually register at this time for both fall and winter semesters. The question arose whether “clickers” (Student Response System) could be used to improve response rates. This has been piloted in Faculty of Medicine. It was also suggested that the Continuing Education results should not be part of this Mercury Report. If they were deleted, what would be the average be for all the faculties?

**Action:** TLS will compare previous data with this Fall 2008 report to see how we are doing (cumulative for each report). For example, 48% this semester whereas the previous semester the average response rate was 46%

**5. Diversity initiatives**

The Dean of Students, Professor Everett, reported on progress on diversity initiatives. From time to time, TLS is requested to do workshops from particular groups such as SEDE (Social Equity and Diversity Education) and Queer McGill (subcommittee of Senate). Rather than disjointed workshops, it seems that a systematic approach would be more beneficial; there should be a vision to bring the various aspects of diversity together. Meetings have taken place between the Dean of Students, Executive Director of Student Services, TLS, and SEDE to identify needs related to diversity. A review of all resources currently available has also been undertaken. Everything is scattered and not easily accessible.

In the discussion that followed, it was suggested that learning how to deal with students with disabilities, minority populations etc. might be part of academic advising. It was also mentioned that diversity needs to be part of graduate preparation. It is important to give not only Teaching Assistants but all students the mechanisms to cope with a diverse classroom. Are workshops the best way to provide this information? The importance of an “access point” was mentioned –either phone number or website.

**6. Other business**

**7. Adjournment:** 11:30

Andree Ippersiel 2008-08-29