



Minutes

42nd meeting of the Subcommittee on Teaching and Learning (STL)

of the Academic Policy Committee

Monday, 25 March 2013, 1:00pm – 3:00pm

James Administration Building, room 301

Present: Jeremie Abitbol, James Archibald, George Azmy, Jaye Ellis, Lucy Lach, Sarah Laimon, Sujata Madan, Sharon Roy, Doreen Starke-Meyerring, Nancy St-Pierre (Secretary), Carole Urbain, Cynthia Weston (Acting Chair)

Regrets: Nicole Allard, Lawrence Chen, Andre Costopoulos, Ian Henderson, Murray Humphries, Maggie Kilgour, Svetlana Komarova, Jana Luker, Morton Mendelson, Laura Nilson, Yvonne Steinert

Guests: Dean Ellen Aitken, Faculty of Religious Studies
Dr. Joel Deshaye, Academic Programs and Projects Officer, Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies
David Syncox, Graduate Education Officer, Teaching and Learning Services
Dr. Mariela Tovar, Academic Associate, Teaching and Learning Services
Dr. Laura Winer, Associate Director, Teaching and Learning Services

Professor Cynthia Weston chaired the meeting in the Deputy Provost's absence.

1. Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted as circulated.

2. Approval of the minutes of 29 January 2013

J. Archibald expressed concern that the minutes did not adequately capture the discussion surrounding the definition of a tutor. Professor Weston responded that the minutes did note that discussion ensued on several topics including the definition of roles.

There being no further comments the minutes were approved as circulated.

3. Business arising

3.1 Senate update - revised guidelines for the Principal's Prize for Excellence in Teaching: The members were notified that the revised guidelines were approved by APC in Senate's name at its meeting of 7 March and included in the APC report presented to Senate on 20 March. It was also announced that the call for nominations would be launched within the next 48 hours and that the guidelines and nomination forms were already available online.

3.2 Update: Undergraduate Outcomes Working Group (Guest: Dean Ellen Aitken, Chair of the Undergraduate Outcomes Working Group): Dean Aitken advised the members of STL that due to university budgetary considerations and the lack of resources, the Undergraduate Outcomes Working

Group has suspended its work. It is important to note that the Working Group will continue to meet once a semester to ensure continuity of the process and to share information. It was felt however, that this was an optimal time to suspend the project as the consultation process had not yet been launched (except for the pilot with STL).

Dean Aitken noted that the student representatives on the Working Group will be continuing their consultation process and that several pilot projects involving the Faculties of Religious Studies, Engineering and Law were continuing with TLS support. It is anticipated that these collaborations will feed into the Working Group once it is able to resume operations.

Dean Aitken promised to return to STL when the Working Group resumes its work and asked STL to advise APC of its temporary suspension.

Action: The Secretary will forward the information to APC for update at an upcoming meeting.

3.3 Update: Working Group on Distance Education: Professor Weston updated STL members on the discussion at APC regarding the Guidelines on Distance Education STL reviewed at its meeting of 29 January. Although the reception was positive several issues needing clarification were identified namely:

- clearly identifying the document as guidelines or regulations;
- how the documents are identified will determine how the university community will interpret these guidelines;

APC has established a working group to study the issues further and will return to both APC and STL with recommendations in due course.

3.4 Update: Assessment Working Group (Guest: Dr. Mariela Tovar, Teaching and Learning Services): Dr. Tovar reviewed the mandate of the Working Group and requested a one-year extension to allow it to complete its work. STL members were advised that the Working Group recently launched a questionnaire targeting instructors of large classes and that time is needed to analyze the data and identify best practices.

STL agreed to extend the mandate of the Working Group and Dr. Tovar will be invited back to STL in the Fall to provide an update.

4. Graduate Supervision: Website for supervisory resources (Guests: Dr. Joel Deshaye, Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies and David Syncox, Teaching and Learning Services)

Professor Weston welcomed Dr. Deshaye and Mr. Syncox to the meeting. Mr. Syncox introduced the members to several of the graduate education initiatives being developed through the partnership of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies and Teaching and Learning Services. Three of these initiatives are:

- a graduate resources website;
- the benchmarking of supervisor/supervisee support nationwide;
- the development of a suite of workshops beginning with the mental health alliance, to practical tips for supervisors/supervisees and graduate supervision best practices.

Dr. Deshaye, who is leading the website resources project, explained that website's purpose is to provide a guided tour of available services as well as specific tools and resources for supervisors/supervisees at the doctoral stage of the graduate education experience. A recent survey jointly conducted by GPS and PGSS found that 44% of supervisors reported difficulties with their students while 66% of supervisees felt that

their supervisors needed additional training. It is anticipated that the website will help direct supervisors and supervisee to useful resources.

The website launch is anticipated for June with the site being further developed in the coming year to adapt it to McGill's unique environment. It was noted that information sessions with Graduate Program Directors and departmental Chairs will be held before the launch to inform them of this new resource.

C. Urbain commented that one way to promote the website would be to inform librarians. She will communicate with Dr. Deshayé to invite him to speak to the Library Council.

Dr. Deshayé finished his presentation by asking STL members to complete a short survey.

5. Student concerns about teaching

5.1 Assessment Policy: G. Azmy reviewed concerns that students have brought to the attention of SSMU regarding the Assessment Policy. These include:

- that students are bearing the pressure of policing their instructors to ensure compliance of Clause 3.1.2.;
- that students are being penalized for absences during the add/drop period, particularly for courses that award grades for participation;
- that instructors are ignoring clause 6.1.3 which states that the maximum weight of a final examination shall be no more than 75% of the course grade unless students have been offered the choice in advance to write a final examination worth more than 75% of the course grade;
- that students be informed and aware of the course of action to take in cases of policy violation.

Members thanked the students for bringing their concerns to the table for discussion. It was noted that the modifications being proposed are more indicative of implementation and communication issues rather than policy issues. It was suggested that links to the policy be included in course syllabi as well as posted on WebCT/*myCourses*.

Action: It is STL's recommendation that the issue be referred to ESAAC for consideration and that SSMU separate the policy and implementation issues in their proposal.

5.2 Proposed changes to the Course Evaluation policy: SSMU is proposing two modifications to the policy:

- that the normal evaluation period be extended to the last day of exams and that the Dean's approval be needed to reduce the evaluation period to finish the day before exams start;
- that course evaluations results for the four core questions be made available by default, if the response rate threshold is met, unless the instructor indicates otherwise (opt-out).

Discussion ensued on the second bullet point with some members being concerned that instructors must be active participants in releasing the course evaluations data. It was noted although often inadvertent, instructors may have very good reasons for not releasing the data (instructor is new to the course, trying a new technique or approach...). In addition, we do not, at this time, know whether the data is not released because the instructor has not opted-in or because the course is below the threshold.

Action: STL has recommended that the proposal be referred to the Course Evaluation Advisory Group for consideration and returned to STL in the Fall term.

5.3 Managing courses outside of myCourses: The Deputy Provost brought to light concerns that students have voiced about instructors using an LMS outside of *myCourses* (whether it be for convenience or

philosophical reasons). Some discussion ensued with the student representatives echoing the Deputy Provost's concerns. S. Roy advised that focus groups with instructors are being planned to ascertain what tools are being used and how the software can be improved. She will report back to STL in the Fall.

6. Other business

Members may recall that at its meeting of 12 March 2012 L. Winer was asked to explore ways of using course evaluation results to recognize good teaching. The idea was to highlight instructors who consistently score 4.5 or higher on the four core questions by establishing a Faculty Honour Roll. L. Winer confirmed that this is feasible and asked for STL's approval to draft a model.

STL agreed with the proposal and asked that a model be returned to STL during the Fall term for consideration.

There being no further business the meeting was adjourned at 2:45pm.