



Minutes

45th meeting of the Subcommittee on Teaching and Learning (STL) of the Academic Policy Committee

Tuesday, 29 October 2013, 10:00am – 12:00pm

McLennan Library Building, room MS-74

Present: Jeremie Abitbol, Lawrence Chen, Andre Costopoulos, Ollivier Dyens (Chair), Jaye Ellis, Sam Gregory (for Haley Hatch-Dinel), Ian Henderson, Svetlana Komarova, Sara Laimon, Jana Luker, Ronald Morris, Sharon Roy, John Silvius, Nancy St-Pierre (Secretary), Carole Urbain, Laura Winer

Regrets: James Archibald, Haley Hatch-Dinel, Murray Humphries, Lucy Lach, Sujata Madan, Laura Nilson, Yvonne Steinert

Guests: Eva Dobler, Teaching and Learning Services
Adam Finkelstein, Teaching and Learning Services
Susan Murley, Director, Communications
Marcy Slapcoff, Teaching and Learning Services
Mariela Tovar, Teaching and Learning Services

1. Administrative:

a) Adoption of the agenda

The Chair proposed that item 4a) Assessment Working Group be moved up for presentation ahead of item 3c) Open discussion on communication strategy.

The agenda was adopted as modified.

b) Approval of the minutes, 17 September 2013 (STL2013-10-08)

There being no comments, the minutes were adopted as circulated.

c) Business arising:

Andre Costopoulos confirmed that the first meeting of the Radical Speculations Group will be scheduled shortly and that Yammer access has been provided for members to begin sharing ideas.

2. Discussion/Information:

a) McGillX update

Laura Winer presented an update on the McGillX Initiative. Three courses have been selected for development:

- World of Chem - Food for Thought (David Harpp, Ariel Fenster and Joe Schwarz)

- Natural Disasters (John Stix and John Gyakum)
- Rebalancing Society (Henry Mintzberg and Leslie Breitner)

The fourth course will be selected at the end of January 2014.

Registration for the first course, Food for Thought (<https://www.edx.org/school/mcgillx/allcourses>), opened on October 22nd with over 1000 registrants so far. Students represent 70 countries and, to-date, have an average age of 34. The course will begin on January 22, 2014 and will run for 13 weeks. Laura Winer did point out that although registrations topped 100,000 for early edX courses, a much more typical registration is 5,000-10,000.

Members were provided with a brief overview of the activities being planned. It was noted that students will be expected to invest 5-6 hours/week in order to complete the week's material. Students having completed a pre-determined number of assignments will be awarded a certificate of completion.

In response to a question posed by the Chair, Laura Winer advised that the announced collaboration between Google/edX is expected to produce a more sophisticated platform to meet ever evolving pedagogical needs.

b) Nexus update

Guest: Marcy Slapcoff, Teaching and Learning Services

Marcy Slapcoff provided the members with an update on the recent activities of the Nexus Working Group. In addition, she posed a question: should we find a way to scale it up and make a difference to the university?

The Inquiry Working Group which leads the Nexus initiative was established by STL in 2009, and was a direct outcome of the Boyer Commission which called for improvement in undergraduate education. A roadmap on moving the recommendations from the Boyer report forward was needed and the Initiative was born out of this need. The goal of the initiative is to use coursework to reach all students and improve their understanding and engagement with research. This means that we would teach our students to think like researchers by helping our students to:

- develop an awareness that knowledge is dynamic, not static;
- become familiar with methods used to gather, organize, analyze, interpret, and evaluate data and source material;
- use discussion and writing to develop critical thinking skills and communicate ideas.

It was noted that in order to move the initiative forward several recommendations were developed by the Inquiry Working Group, namely that the University should :

- provide instructors with additional support;
- focus efforts and departmental and Faculty level;
- create a university-wide interdisciplinary structure to support undergraduate research;
- provide leadership at the local, national and international level.

It was noted that the Nexus initiative did have support from Senior Administration; however, with the budget crisis, financial support waned. TLS has now reached its limit on the current sustainability of the project. To move it forward would require a renewed enthusiasm and support.

Discussion ensued with following points being raised:

- André Costopoulos suggested that this be proposed as a topic for an upcoming Academic Leadership Forum (ALF) session. The intended audience is the support-base needed.
- André Costopoulos suggested that one course per Faculty be used as a pilot to demonstrate that this is not as difficult as may be thought. This would also provide evidence of effectiveness and of deeper engagement in research and learning.
- There is a concern among faculty that this would bring additional workload especially for junior faculty and that there is a disincentive to take the risk of trying something innovative.
- Research/innovation is not viewed with the same lens in professional schools (e.g. Dentistry).
- It was noted as important that students develop the ability to understand research and why it is important.
- Marcy Slapcoff did confirm that a 5-year plan has been developed. The Chair asked that the plan be forwarded to him so that he can review them.

The chair thanked Ms. Slapcoff for her presentation.

c) Assessment Working Group

Guest: Dr. Mariela Tovar, Teaching and Learning Services

Status report and requesting feedback

Due to a lack of time, this item will be postponed to the next meeting of the STL with Dr. Tovar being invited back.

3. Open discussion on communication strategy

Guest: Susan Murley, Director, Communication Services

The Chair thanked Susan Murley for joining the meeting. It was explained that this was a general discussion on communications and how the group can better improve communication at all levels with students and instructors.

Discussion ensued on why instructors do not respond/react to emails (perceived increase to workload, Faculty-based cultural issues...) and ways to increase this responsiveness. Highlights of the discussion included:

- the need to lower barriers for access to information by posting more information on the TLS website, be it in the form of short tutorial videos or 30-minute quick-fire workshops addressing specific questions;
- developing FAQs and resources to order to provide basic information to instructors;
- focused communication with departmental Undergraduate Student Societies;
- increase TLS visibility
- ensure that the role of teaching is present in the identity of McGill

Developing and improving our communication is an on-going topic; the discussion will continue at a subsequent meeting.

There being no further items for discussion the meeting was adjourned at 12:00pm.