



MINUTES

Subcommittee on Teaching and Learning
Tuesday, April 13, 2021 (10:00pm – 11:30am)
Remotely through Zoom

Present: Peter Barry, Chris Buddle, María Sierra Córdoba Serrano, Adam Finkelstein, Nathan Hall, Rosalie Jukier, Roni Khazaka, Sujata Madan, Annette Majnemer, Douglas McNabney, Caroline Riches, Nancy St-Pierre (Secretary), Adrienne Tessier, Carole Urbain, Laura Winer (Chair), Glenn Zabowski

Guests: Jennie Ferris, Academic Associate, Teaching and Learning Services

Regrets: Angela Campbell, Darshan Daryanani, Miranda Hickman, Rosalie Jukier, Svetlana Komarova

1. **Administrative:**

- a) *Adoption of the agenda:* the agenda was adopted as circulated
- b) *Approval of the minutes, February 9, 2021:* the minutes were adopted as circulated
- c) *Business arising:*
 - o Update on Fall 2021 Planning:
 - Five scenarios for the return to Campus have been developed with most of the focus being on what are being called the *Realistic* and *Realistic +* scenarios. This means that courses with 150+ students will be held online, while those with less than 150 will be held in-person. The course calendar will include the delivery mode so students will know what the expectation is when registration opens on June 1st.
 - All educational technologies are being renewed for academic year 2021-2022. Due to privacy issues, Zoom should be limited to teaching and learning activities. IT, Procurement and TLS are working to streamline the process for software review and acquisition. Note that depending on the usage, specific software may require a different approval process. More information is available [here](#).
 - Discussions continue with some disciplines that have wet labs as capacity issues may be problematic; inter-faculty collaborations are being examined.
 - We hope that some instructors will see the return to campus as an opportunity to reflect on what types of assessments they may wish to maintain. While new strategies were developed for the remote context, the return provides us with an opportunity to review and decide what they may wish to continue.
 - For the Summer term, most Tier 1 activities are in-person. Chris noted that due to close proximity for students in Tier 1 activities, the University is advocating for vaccine prioritization, which is not currently the case.

2. Discussion

a) *Inviting feedback about the Course Outline (Guest: Jennie Ferris)*

The Subcommittee was asked to consider the following questions:

- I. Does the current Course Outline Guide provide an appropriate balance between prescription and flexibility to allow for Faculty, program, and individual requirements and preferences? (note that the Guide linked on the agenda was specific to remote teaching – going forward only one version will be available but it will cover various delivery modes)
- II. Should the Course Outline Guide be split into two documents?
 - a. A template that indicates required elements only
 - b. A template that indicates required elements and optional elements. Annotations would provide context/ideas for instructors to consider when preparing their course outlines.
- III. TLS regularly receives requests for new required statements to be included in the Course Outline Guide. What do you think that the guiding principles should be for statements to be required vs. additional (optional)? Note that any required statements must be approved by Senate.

In setting up the discussion, Jennie provided the following background: the Guide has evolved greatly over the years with the concept of including all information students might need for a course. This has made the document a bit unwieldy and perhaps not as useful as it could be. TLS is reviewing the Guide to get a better sense of the document's role, and how to best ensure that the information contained is relevant, and not overwhelming to consult.

Adrienne noted that there are both *required* and *optional* statements, and students/instructors may have different perceptions of the purpose of a course outline. She also questioned the effectiveness of the required statements.

Chris supported the idea of "one guide" with different options for those with specific teaching contexts. The outline serves an important purpose when things go wrong. When they do, the first action is often a review of the outline to see if expectations are (clearly) stated. When things go well, they serve as a framework re dates, expectations, and required materials. Glenn concurred with this Chris' statement. In addition, while some statements are symbolic, they are nonetheless important. Having one core guide with the flexibility to tailor it to each course might be a good direction in which to proceed.

Roni noted that a similar discussion was held in Engineering, and that some additional information was included in order to address issues such as accreditation. The Faculty also looked at the optional statements, and decided that none should be required. The more statements you have, the more it dilutes the content. Policies apply whether or not they are in the outline.

Nathan found the format of the document was a bit unwieldy. A few suggestions were to eliminate the colours, convert the document to an FAQ, or subdivide the document by section so that instructors can expand a particular section, and that the language be more colloquial. It was pointed out that some instructors prefer the Word format so they can write directly into it. The colours indicate optional sections, and the arrows assist those who are colour-blind in navigating the document.

Carole noted that Librarians find the course outlines very useful as it contains all the needed course information, and helps them select the appropriate resources.

Annette suggested having two options for the guide: a web-based version with clickable sections, and a downloadable version of the full document. Jennie responded that both versions have been available in the past, but it proved challenging to ensure both versions were accurate. TLS is now considering two versions – one would have just the basics, and the second version would be much more detailed.

Adrienne asked for the goal of the template: is it from a concern that instructors won't include required text, or to nudge them to include optional text? Having two templates might make things clearer but there is a risk that instructors will not include optional text.

Nathan suggested that the Guide is likely more useful to new instructors. Those who've been around a few years likely adapt a previously used template. He did add that having two version may cause confusion and increase the risk of one or another template not being updated.

Laura asked if Faculties found the nudging role useful. How often are instructors including even required elements?

Pete noted that while he doesn't see many course outlines, this usually comes up when a student has a specific question; e.g., how are they being graded, or how much is the supplemental exam worth.

Douglas noted that as outlines go to the Chairs, he does not see them. He would be happy to check with the Chairs and report back if needed.

Annette added that their professional programs have additional statements required for accreditation purposes; both methodology and pedagogical approaches need to be very clear. She asked if required statements were included to protect the instructor. Glenn responded that some required statements protect both students and instructor, but having too many may mean that they lose their effectiveness.

Laura agreed with Glenn that having too many required statements may be overwhelming. Having the optional statements allows instructors to personalize their outlines.

Chris added that it is very important students read the outlines as it sets up the expectations. More statements can become problematic, but he would be in favor of foundational statements.

Jennie pointed out that there are only two required statements. The rest are optional and provide instructors with the flexibility to reframe the outline as they wish.

Chris stated that there is a need for clarity around assessments. What are the required statements, components, and what are the additional ones you want included based on your teaching context. Laura agreed with Chris that a distinction between components and statements needs to be made. Are there any other statements that should be required? Some suggestions were:

- Basic needs clause: food, shelter, mental health. Including this in the Guide however would require instructors be trained to respond to student inquiries. Jennie pointed out that an optional statement about mental health has been added, but we do not provide a statement around other basic needs.
- Given the legal and privacy issues requiring students to use specific software, should this be included in the Guide? Jennie suggested that a link to the Cloud Directive could be placed within the required materials section. This exists in the remote teaching version of the Guide but not the in-class version.

- Pete suggested additional fees such as field schools or lab fees could be included given students often look at outlines before registering, and additional fees could be a considering factor. Adrienne added that fees for field schools are often included, but not for labs.
- Roni asked how this guide might be used – perhaps it should include a checklist of required statements.

Adam questioned whether the outline is a contract or a statement. The Guide points to required elements but they are not necessarily in the document itself. Links to policy should not be included but perhaps referenced otherwise we run the risk of turning the outline into a legal contract. Laura responded that as we do have a duty to inform, there needs to be some cross-referencing. The document could link to the Student Charter, for example, but should not repeat the information. Of special note, is that there is no statement that the assessment can be changed if everyone agrees; this is being discussed during the USAP review.

In referring to the tension between clarity and concision, Jennie asked how the document can be made clearer without overwhelming students and instructors.

Annette asked if feedback had been received from students regarding understandability, readability...on the outlines they are receiving. Jennie responded that we have not, but if anyone would like to share outlines that have been useful or problematic, they would be appreciated. Adrienne agreed that many students will review the outline to see if they need to purchase textbooks, and thought the idea of sharing outlines that are good or helpful was a good one. Students could also be asked to comment about layout or readability.

For his part, Douglas thought the document was complete and thoughtful, though it could do with a bit of editing.

Laura closed the discussion by stating that members should reach out to Jennie before the end of April to share additional feedback. She thanked everyone for their comments, and was gratified that there is no great outcry for additional required statements.

b) *Update on Peer coaching program*

Laura advised that there is an openness in the Provost's Office to revisit the program, and to expanding how evaluation of teaching is done. This includes peer coaching and how it fits into peer evaluation of teaching. We are hopeful that a working group will be created to move this dossier forward, and noted that the Peer Coaching in Medicine program will help provide a starting point. This is an important formative process in professional development.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:15am.