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## MINUTES

Subcommittee on Teaching and Learning

Tuesday, October 26, 2021 (12:00pm – 1:30pm)

Remotely through Zoom

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**Present:** Manuel Balán, Veronique Brule, Andrea Creech, Didem Dagdeviren, Claire Drummond (acting Secretary), Adam Finkelstein, Nathan Hall, Rosalie, Jukier, Roni Khazaka, Atagün Kejanlioglu, Sarah Leu, Sujata Madan, Annette Majnemer, Divi Maheshwari, Caroline Riches, Laura Winer (Chair), Glenn Zabowski

**Regrets:** Chris Buddle, Angela Campbell

### 1. **Administrative:**

- a) *Welcome and introductions*
- b) *Adoption of the agenda:* the agenda was adopted as circulated
- c) *Approval of the minutes, April 13, 2021:* the minutes were adopted as circulated
- d) *Revised composition and membership for 2021-2022:* new members were welcomed to the committee
- e) *Business arising:* no business arising was identified

### 2. **Action (5 min)**

- a) *STL annual report of activities for 2020-2021*  
The annual report was submitted to APC after email approval from STL members. Note that the report will be presented to Senate as part of APC's annual report.

### 3. **Discussion (60 min)**

- a) *Future approaches to course formats and modalities*

This is intended to be a forward-looking conversation, looking to the time when we will have autonomy over our decisions and not have to factor in the public health concerns that have so dramatically shaped our actions since March 2020.

**Context:** Since the pivot to remote teaching, we have seen creative approaches to teaching that have resulted in positive experiences for both instructors and students, and we would like to include these in the expanded vision of teaching modalities to go beyond the binary in-person/online.

In brief, the questions are:

- At what point is a course an in-person course, at what point is it blended, and at what point is it online? Do we want to use the 0-30% is face to face, 31-79% is blended, and >80% is online? Do we want to distinguish courses that are 100% online?
- Do we want to subdivide the blended category?
- At what point does the format of the course change sufficiently to warrant/require signalling this formally through the course approval process?

- How much autonomy should the instructor have in making that decision, and changing it from one term to the next? Or even between sections?

The Ad Hoc Senate Committee on Academic Planning Committee has also articulated principles to guide decisions about the teaching options:

- Program and accreditation requirements are met;
- Core student learning outcomes, experiences, and/or competencies that require in-person activities are maintained or enhanced;
- Synchronous course contact hours are met through an appropriate balance of remote or in-person, depending on the context/discipline;
- Unless programs are specifically designed as online, the proportion of online courses in a Department/Unit should be a minority and courses depending on experiential learning components should remain at least in part in person;
- Decisions are based on pedagogical value – that is, there is evidence that the course will be as good or better with a remote component.

This framework, however, still leaves a lot of room to discuss the parameters that define blended learning on the continuum from purely in-person to purely online. McGill has few examples of the two extremes, as almost all in-person courses have an online component with myCourses and there are very few courses or programs where students are never expected to be on campus.

Rosalie asked if this discussion is part of the activities of the Working Group on New Models of Academic Delivery. Given that there appear to be multiple groups working on this topic, there is concern about a lack of coordination. Laura responded that she is on APC and that this discussion will be shared with the group. Although it is not possible to coordinate completely between these silos, efforts will be made to ensure that what emerges is a coherent and consistent approach.

It was noted that there is a lack of consistency and shared understanding of terms such as “blended or hybrid”/online/remote. One focus will be to establish shared definitions. It was suggested that “hybrid” be avoided as it seems to cause the most confusion. Members were referred to the definitions articulated by the Ad Hoc Senate Committee on Academic Planning ([https://www.mcgill.ca/senate/files/senate/minutes\\_2021-10-15.pdf](https://www.mcgill.ca/senate/files/senate/minutes_2021-10-15.pdf)); see Appendix A for easy reference.

Several themes emerged from the discussion:

### 1) Rationale for changing from status quo:

- a. Annette pointed out that the silver lining of the pandemic is that we were forced to learn new ways of teaching, which added tools to the toolbox. It will be important to obtain the student perspective given that the goal is to optimize the learning experiences for them.
- b. Online learning tools could be used where there is a clear advantage, otherwise, in-person learning should continue;
- c. Online classes are more accessible to students whether they have disabilities or not. If lectures are available outside of class time, students with conflicting schedules can still attend. Lastly, there is a lot of tension concerning fully in-person classes and students really appreciate online teaching tools such as myCourses and Zoom;
- d. When can learning tools add value and enhance the student experience? There is a need to think beyond clear delineations between online and in-person. How can we best use

these tools (Quiz tools, Zoom, and collaboration tools for example) to enhance both learning environments? Some scenarios where online tools may be beneficial were provided:

- i. A course that's being organized by experts from different universities
  - ii. Guest lecturer
  - iii. Lab demo in a lab that is too small to accommodate all the students
  - iv. Breakout rooms may be easier to facilitate online
- e. Students need some sort of in-person, on-campus experience as it enhances their student experience. While there are some instances where online learning can be appropriate, it is difficult to say whether using technology tools is beneficial. Perhaps guidelines could be created to allow Faculties some autonomy in making the final decisions concerning the course delivery mode;
- f. Atagün inquired as to the rationale for not offering courses completely online versus in-person. Given that there seems to be a tendency to avoid completely online, what are the reasons for one or the other, apart from pedagogical reasonings? What benefits are we trying to address?
- g. Adam noted that the real question to be addressed, is what the specific "blend" should be. This would include how many courses, and how much time is devoted to either mode of delivery and that this should be program dependent. He added that neither is better or worse than the other, but that it depends on what the instructor is trying to do. Almost universally, students have said that they prefer some degree of combination between the two; it will take time however to understand what combination works best.
- h. Rosalie added that lack of student interaction and informal learning opportunities, Zoom fatigue, disengagement are all concerns to take into account. A lot of students have expressed being much happier in person this year, so we would really lose a lot if we switched to fully online.
- i. Laura noted that the question concerning what we are gaining or losing is very important to think about in moving forward.

## 2) Oversight:

- a. A central issue for discussion is who will be responsible for deciding on the mode of delivery. Guidance will be needed whether it's at the central, Faculty, or faculty level. Rosalie shared that the Faculty of Law has confirmed that individual faculty members may determine how they deliver their courses. For ease of reference, here is the resolution passed by Faculty Council: *BE IT RESOLVED THAT: Faculty Council affirms its jurisdiction to oversee the design and mode of delivery of courses by recognizing instructor discretion to teach through various modes, including hybrid, blended and alternative methods, during the COVID-19 pandemic.*
- b. Oversight will be needed to ensure that students have a consistent learning experience. One question that will need to be addressed is where the approval comes from? Rosalie suggested a small group headed by the Associate Dean and the Dean to ensure a more streamlined approval process. This should include ensuring pedagogical rigour, while divvying up the online/in-person course offerings so that students have more agency in choosing their learning path;
- c. The approval structure should require curriculum committee approval and a programmatic analysis of how the delivery of the program is working, and how the multiple pieces operate with one another;
- d. Some decisions should be made at the local level since different Faculties have different needs. For example, some Faculties have a large number of part time teachers; this

could lead to an inconsistent experience for students since the online/in-person options could be fractured;

- e. Nathan provided the process used in the Educational and Counselling Psychology to determine which courses could be delivered online:
  - i. Applications to teach in an online/flipped/blended/etc. manner were due 1 month prior to the term and approved by the Chair based on "contact hours", pedagogical rationale provided, etc.

### 3) Principles:

- a. It was noted that the university is heading in the direction of providing general principles. Two components that should be included in the principles are:
  - i. Being explicit about what it means when you choose to have something fully online, and what are the mechanism by which we decide it is appropriate to do so;
  - ii. Providing examples of where online or in-person teaching would be most appropriate as it's not very clear.

### 4) Accreditation concerns:

- a) One key metric used in accreditation is contact hours, however asynchronous online teaching, for example, doesn't count towards contact hours (Engineering). While there are alternate ways to calculate contact hours, they are labour intensive as a detailed analysis is required for each course to ensure that graduate attributes and learning objectives are achieved - having hourly expectations per week may be a better way to measure contact hours as it relates to accreditation;
- b) Concept of contact hours:
  - a. Different programs have varying needs regarding contact hours, but those hours should be meaningful. Thought needs to be given to contact hours as an interaction between instructors and students rather than random times in a classroom - learning hours and contact hours are two different things;
  - b. Courses within the MATL program are offered in-person as well as online to accommodate in-service teachers. It's planned so that there is one online course per semester. In terms of contact hours, accreditation is built into how many hours students are expected to be working on a class per week – work expectations compensate for or include those contact hours;

### 5) HyFlex:

- a. Nathan suggested that the messaging surrounding hyflex teaching not being *supported* be made clearer as some colleagues have understood this to mean that it is not permitted (despite several faculty doing this on their own initiative).
- b. Roni noted that he's teaching a Hyflex course this semester where some students are online and some are in-person. There have been some challenges however, such as not being able to use a blackboard, slides need to be very detailed, and trying to listen to students online and in-person at the same time can be very distracting; in short it is a lot of extra work to teach this way, and Roni is not sure he will continue to do so long-term.
- c. Adam added that many of the universities that have tried Hyflex modalities have experienced issues with the technology itself. Students may experience disadvantages if they are asking a question online in an in-person class. Classrooms need to be built properly to do this well, however proper infrastructure needs to be in place.

**Next steps:**

- It was noted that not enough data exists at the moment to make an informed decision of whether students actually prefer being online or in-person; it was further suggested that the student body be surveyed about their learning experience over the past 1.5 years;
- It was suggested that, should an instructor use online components, a question be added to the course evaluation to gather more data specifically concerning online learning. It may also be helpful to get feedback from instructors on how they feel online teaching went so that the feedback can be evaluated, and used in forward planning.
- Laura noted that data would be very important moving forward. **Members were asked to let Laura know if they had ideas about what data we should be using to inform the discussion.** These suggestions will be brought forward to the Working Group.

Laura thanked everyone for their comments. There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 1:15pm.