

MINUTES

Meeting of the GC Policy Committee Wednesday, 23rd September 2020, 12:30–13:55

Location: Zoom

Present: Jolanta Aleksejuniene, Thomas Chang, Teresa Dobson, Brett Eaton, Bhushan Gopaluni, Michael Hunt, Yousry El-Kassaby, Karin Mickelson, Susan Porter, John Ries, Jennifer Shapka, Laura Sly (Chair), Mark MacLachlan,

Staff: Max Read, Angela Steinberg (minutes)

1. Introductions and regrets

New members: Jolanta Aleksejuniene and Teresa Dobson

2. Adoption of the agenda

<i>All</i> } <i>That the agenda be approved.</i>
--

Carried

3. Minutes of the meeting held February 12th, 2020*

Minutes from the last meeting were unavailable due to closing of the campus and the physical notes being at campus.

BUSINESS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

4. Not applicable

BUSINESS

5. No new business to discuss

OTHER BUSINESS

Laura spoke about Western Deans Agreement. The Graduate Policy Committee had previously agreed on discontinuing being involved with the Western Deans Agreement but the Graduate Council had not agreed so the motion is not moving forward.

Susan called on the committee members to update the committee regarding the start of term, successes and challenges. In this term (and next), what are your experiences surrounding admissions, enrollment, funding, other?

Bhushan: Town hall have ben useful. Hiring has continued to the same degree (as pre COVID).

Tom: reported 3 deferrals that were all international and 11th hour.

Jolanta: Things are going well. We are doing as much online as possible and application have almost doubled.

Michael: reports no major issues, but that could be due to fatigue and/or issues being handled at a different level. Of 86 Courses, 78 are online, 70 were online last term. Medicine put out a survey to grad advisors and instructors asking, on a scale of 1 to 10, how much COVID impacted them. The median was 7. They also received feedback that there is a lot of redundant policy messaging but that it was understandable.

Mark: reported that Courses are at 2/3 occupancy. Challenges faced are dry labs access versus wet labs as there is little control over ventilation etc. and access is not essential to complete work like a wet lab. There was pressure to grant access to graduate students but they have resisted this to date.

There were 60 new students, who were not able to enter Canada.

There are concerns about how to pay RA's. Also TA'ships have been covered by other students but this is hard because moving to online has resulted in a higher need for TA's.

Quite a few grad student have delayed program start until Jan but they are now also concerned about January as it looks like the same issues will persist.

Regarding recruitment, campus visits day will be a challenge due to COVID restrictions, and these visits are key to many students choosing UBC and may make things challenging next year.

Susan asked what does the funding look like next year in terms of research? It is so hard to anticipate.

Mark said that he is not that hopeful and corporate sponsors are reducing their support.

Brett: There have been adjustments so that students can use online resources to conduct research. It is working but is not optimal. There are reduced interactions generally, not just interpersonal.

Emotional stress is starting to get to students. They need us (faculty) to kept any eye out for depression.

Arts has a new policy regarding site access. Aall faculty have access to their office a couple of days a week. The safety committee is thinking about allowing limited on campus visits with students.

International students have not been able come into the country. They have mostly defered in the hopes the to start in January, either online or at campus.

Many students cannot come to UBC and have deferred all of their core courses or are taking online courses.

Neither of his PhD or Master student are able to come to UBC. He has had to put the breaks on his recruitment because he feels it is important to have support resources "stock piled" to support existing students who are stuck; particularly international students.

There is an uneven distribution of impact and he suspects this will have an impact on recruitment especially for foreign students. They need more resources especially if they are not at site.

Mike: said he echo's the same observation/concerns, he has concerns about being able to adequately support students.

Also they are unable to commit or complete study because of day to day logistics because medicine needs study participants.

Matt: The issues that they are experiencing /foresee are not so much funding as site logistics.

Brett: All most all of the issues have been for international students. Some cannot even afford to fly home, we don't want them to become COVID refugees.

Susan asked what the committee thought about a continuing fee waiver. Considering up to 2/3 of students will have their program delayed, she is drafting a proposal that UBC waive the "continuing fee" for students who take longer than average to graduate due to the impact of COVID as we don't want to be profiting from this situation. This has already been approved for a professional masters degree. This is intended for research programs for people that have a required element that could not be completed due to COVID.

Yousry said yes this would be a good gesture and go a long way.

Mark has a fairly large research group of 20 and many of them are international. He decided to not take any new students in the coming term as current are students delayed. He worries about the loss of momentum.

He has two PhD students that can't complete their research because the scanning electron microscope is broken. Due to travel/quarantine restrictions, technicians coming from the US have to charge so much that the department can't afford to fix critical equipment. All equipment repairs are slow.

Tom was having similar issues in unexpected areas. He also has a concern about the pressure on junior faculty and that this is potentially transferring to students.

John: Sauder is lucky as they have work arounds for lab access. Almost all of their students are Canadian, which has helped limit the negative impact of COVID, and the PhD numbers are relatively small (approximately 12).

The biggest issues to date have been the professional programs, which rely on permits to enter Canada. They are planning to pivot to a hybrid program which will be 100% on-line to start and then a mix of online and in person with social distancing on campus. The on-campus may not improve the quality of instruction but is required to get permits to enter the country.

Teresa: Gave kudos to G+PS. They have done a good job handling communication etc. Overall her department has done a good job> There has been progress with the Kinesiology department but it is operating at a reduced capacity.

Yousry: The majority of graduate students are not coming and many are AWOL, which is worrying.

He noted that those faculty members with young children are having issues around childcare and sick children.

They have 3 programs running on campus but they don't know what to do if they have a positive case. There is no plan.

Recruitment is greatly reduced.

He noted that young faculty would be negatively impact in their career progression.

They have been administering one comprehensive exam per week; things are moving, but very slowly.

Karin: The School of Law is doing everything online and the saving grace has been changes to the student permits for short term programs. Students have been very concerned about library access; physical space is the limiting issue currently.

Susan mentioned that she was advised that Barber Library was going to be opening new space and that there was more access to digital items than previously.

Assessors outside of the academia

Susan asked members for their feedback on the idea of incorporating additional assessors from outside of the academy for doctoral exams. This is in the interest of expanding the concept of scholarship and research; in particular in multidisciplinary studies that are perhaps more impactful in a tangible sense. The intention is to ensure that all elements of a dissertation are evaluated.

Students may do something incredible. However, the people reviewing their work don't have a full understanding of its value. One example is a documentary film.

We are exploring the idea of having someone outside academia but an expert in the field, an assessor rather than examiner, to help ascertain if these unconventional works are PhD worthy.

Robyn, Max, and Laura have been working on what this would look like. Will providing an assessment of the area and feedback on the merits be beneficial and how should influence the final assessment?

Laura: One of the concerns we had was what if they give an unfavourable review? Perhaps we have to have very prescriptive questions. Don't give them the option to say oh that's horrible but ask more specific questions about its contribution to society.

Max: There can be issue because if this person is making suggestions only at the final stage, it can create a great deal of work. Susan agreed point pointed out that it was also true of traditional scholarship and students should have support during the process to minimize this risk.

Mike: The majority of students will not continue in academia so this could be a good mechanism to expose them to other fields and employment opportunities. Will these people be paid?

Susan: I'm not averse to them being paid we have done so in the past but it is an administrative strain.

Jolanta: Asked about the 50% rule, can we count outside Prof. from outside UBC towards the registered 50% of G+PS members?

Susan: The idea of the G+PS rule is not about expertise in the field but understanding the PhD requirement for UBC.

Max: You can always request an exception to the 50% rule. We do make exceptions but we need a guarantee that the student will receive the support to meet the UBC standards that they need to succeed.

Susan: Asked Laura to speak about current requests for assessing contributions outside conventional scholarship.

Laura: Often people have expertise or mentors outside of the academy and are already asking if they can have a non- academic person act as an external examiner. We struggle with this. With this policy, we can protect the academic integrity of the process and structure but help provide students with assessors that they feel are appropriate and rigorous assessors of the contribution they are making.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 1:55pm.