

Office of the Senate Secretariat

Acadia University
Wolfville, Nova Scotia
Canada B0P 1X0

Telephone: (902) 585-1617
Facsimile: (902) 585-1078



Minutes of the special meeting of Senate on Monday November 16th, 2020.

A special meeting of the Senate of Acadia University occurred on Monday November 16th, 2020 beginning at 4:00 p.m. with Chair A. Kiefte presiding and 44 present and two guests. The meeting took place virtually using Microsoft Teams due to the COVID pandemic University operations.

1) Approval of Agenda

The Chair called the meeting to order, noting that there was quorum at present.

Motion to approve the agenda. Moved by M. Lukeman and seconded by L. Houck.

The Chair asked to add the item Announcements to the agenda.

MOTION TO APPROVE THE AGENDA AS REVISED CARRIED.

2) Announcements

The Chair announced regrets from R. Murphy, P. Arnold, C. Shields, B. Wilson and A. Quema. L. Narbeshuber would be leaving early.

The Chair noted that two guests were attending Senate: G. Gibson representing Biology and M. Tango representing Engineering.

3) Motion that Senate recognizes that the Fall 2020 term is not a normal term and has necessitated that courses be delivered in a manner that is outside the normal variations of course delivery. Senate endorses the fact that this may mean that some faculty will need to adapt course content and assessment as the term progresses. Any adjustments to content and assessment must be done in the best interests of students and in a manner advantageous to students' academic performance.

Motion Senate recognizes that the Fall 2020 term is not a normal term and has necessitated that courses be delivered in a manner that is outside the normal variations of course delivery. Senate endorses the fact that this may mean that some faculty will need to adapt course content and assessment as the term progresses. Any adjustments to content and assessment must be done in the best interests of students and in a manner advantageous to students' academic performance. Moved by D. Seamone and seconded by D. Keefe.

D. Seamone spoke in support of the motion and felt that it provided faculty with the freedom to make changes during the term which would give a student a better chance of success.

D. Keefe stated that these motions were coming forward from the A&AS (Policy) Committee and that this was an attempt to recognise that this was a very different term for the students. He recognised that some faculty were already making changes as the term proceeded.

M. Adam felt that faculty were already able to make adjustments to their course delivery if they had the 100% approval of the students in the course. He expected that these changes would always be made in order to advantage the students and never to disadvantage them.

The Chair agreed that this was also her understanding. If, for example, the date of a test had been altered, it was always the result of a discussion in class and needed complete agreement and consent of the students.

M. Adam commented that policy already existed to support the students and that this seemed to be muddying of the water and was in fact unnecessary.

The Chair felt that the intent of the motion was to make a formal statement in view of the circumstances this year.

M. Tango commented that P. Arnold supported the motion but had found that students who signed up for face to face classes were opting to no longer attend class in person. He requested that the wording of the motion be changed to include wording to encourage students to continue coming to class in person.

G. Whitehall stated that on page 38 of the Calendar under the Syllabus and Course Outline he did not see any information about requirements around changes to the course outline.

The Chair read out the Calendar entry and agreed that there was no specific wording.

M. Bishop agreed. He felt that past practice at Acadia could have been the requirement of 100% agreement by the students in the class.

C. Mutlu spoke in support of the motion but would have preferred to see the result of the student surveys before voting on the motion in order to understand the sentiment amongst the students.

D. Benoit felt that there was a difference between the wording of the motion and the general policy in the Calendar. The motion was really a statement and allowed a professor to make a change without the unanimous consent of the class. A faculty member could argue that the change was in the best interests of the students and the change could now be made even if a number of students were not in agreement.

D. Benoit believed that the motion allowed a faculty member to make significant changes such as introducing a final exam, which had not previously been planned, if the faculty member believed that this would be in the best interests of the students.

G. Whitehall also hoped to see the student survey data.

D. Keefe did not yet have the data from the student survey but noted that this was imminent.

S. Duguay stated that 80% of the students had indicated that the workload was considerably more than during their past year. They were also asked whether the current workload was reasonable and more than 50% found it to be beyond reasonable.

The Chair asked whether all respondents were 2nd year and higher or were there 1st year students included in the data related to the question about year-to-year workload comparison.

S. Duguay responded that this was all undergraduate students and that 1st year students had not been separated from the data at this point.

S. Duguay stated that students were asked where they were struggling and the main areas proved to be time management, dealing with academic workload, and managing their academic time. He offered to report again to Senate once the data had been processed.

L. Houck spoke in support and stated that the ASU had consulted through their student faculty senators and had received information concerning student lack of motivation, general feelings of being overwhelmed, the workload level being higher than normal and unmanageable. She stressed the fact that even students who had been high achievers in previous years were now facing challenges.

C. Mutlu asked what informed the motions if they were not a response to the student surveys. He asked what data Acadia was reacting to.

D. Keefe stated that conversations with students, but also reports coming from faculty, the ASU, the Deans and Directors, and feedback from across the country. He noted that the feedback he was getting was quite different from any other previous year, while he recognised that this was at the best of times an extremely stressful time of year.

C Mutlu was not aware that other institutions were taking these sorts of measures.

D. Keefe confirmed that other institutions were passing similar motions, including Bishop's University.

P. Callaghan agreed with the intent of the motion but suggested that the wording of the final sentence be amended, and rather than stating “**Any adjustments to content and assessment must be done in the best interests of students and in a manner advantageous to students’ academic performance**”, that the wording be changed to read “**Any adjustments to content and assessment must be done in the best interests of students and in a manner *that does not disadvantage* students’ academic performance**”.

Amendment moved by P. Callaghan and seconded by C. Mutlu.

AMENDMENT TO THE MOTION APPROVED.

The wording of the main motion was now:

Senate recognizes that the Fall 2020 term is not a normal term and has necessitated that courses be delivered in a manner that is outside the normal variations of course delivery. Senate endorses the fact that this may mean that some faculty will need to adapt course content and assessment as the term progresses. Any adjustments to content and assessment must be done in the best interests of students and in a manner that does not disadvantage students’ academic performance.

MAIN MOTION CARRIED AS AMENDED. ONE AGAINST.

G. Whitehall asked where these changes would be reflected.

The Chair reminded Senators that Senate decisions are now being communicated to all faculty by the Registrar following each meeting. Also, Senate had decided in the Spring that any major changes as a result of the pandemic would be reported to Senate in December and June. The Senate minutes would be the formal place where this type of information would be reported.

G. Whitehall asked about changes that were made in March 2020 without being voted on by Senate.

The Chair responded that those decisions had been made at an administrative level at the time but that since April 2020 Senate had been fully engaged in decisions affecting the academic sector.

4) Motion that the deadline to withdraw from a course without receiving an F to be extended to the last day of classes, December 11th, 2020

Motion that the deadline to withdraw from a course without receiving an F be extended to the last day of classes, December 11th, 2020. Moved by D. Keefe and seconded by L. Houck.

D. Keefe explained that this change would provide a safety valve to allow a student to go to the end of term before dropping the course.

L. Houck pointed out that many students had dropped courses because they were worried about their future performance and the possibility that they might get an 'F' if they became overwhelmed at a later stage in the term.

The Chair read comments provided by Kinesiology Senators who were unable to attend Senate. They preferred to see the drop date moved to November 20th, 2020 rather than the end of term.

C. Rushton asked whether there was a policy in place that stated the deadline to withdraw from a course without receiving an 'F' grade.

The Chair indicated that there was a policy in place and noted that the current last day to withdraw from a Fall term course and receive a 'W' was Wednesday 18th November, 2020.

H. Teismann noted that the withdraw date had already been changed from the normal date.

D. Keefe agreed that the date had been changed from November 11th to November 18th as an interim change because this motion was coming forward to Senate to be debated. It had been discussed by the Registrar, the Provost and VPA, the Chair of Senate, and the Admissions and Academic Standing (Policy) committee to extend the date to 18th November so that students would have an opportunity to decide after the Senate meeting, when they would know if the withdraw date had been pushed back to the end of classes.

H. Teismann asked what would happen to students who had already withdrawn from a course and might want to reconsider if this motion passed through Senate.

D. Keefe stated that this had not been discussed.

G. Whitehall asked what the rationale was for assigning an 'F' grade at this point and wondered whether this was a financial decision.

D. Keefe stated that this was not financial. He felt that the significance was in whether the 'W' or 'F' showed on the student transcript. The presence of an 'F' would affect the student GPA.

G. Whitehall asked why an 'F' would be given.

The Chair stated that it was common for universities to have a policy about courses dropped late in the academic term being assigned an F grade.

D. Keefe confirmed this and stated that in a normal term the student would have been in a course long enough for the course to remain on their academic record. It was not expected that a student should normally be able to remove a course from their academic record at a late stage in the term.

D. Seamone provided input from a faculty member who was opposed to the motion and felt that there needed to be consequences to failing a course, and that a student should not be able to convert an 'F' to a 'W'. It was felt that this removed the possibility of failure.

D. Seamone recognized that this was an exceptional time and hoped that this would not be a permanent change. She saw this as a compassionate change.

C. Mutlu noted that students on scholarships and student loans were expected to maintain a certain course load and believed that these repercussions needed to be considered.

D. Keefe responded that in view of the course load a student would receive a 'W' whether they withdrew on November 11th or at the end of classes.

C. Mutlu stressed that if a student withdrew from a course it ceased to be part of their load. If they fell below a certain courseload threshold they were no longer eligible for scholarships and financial aid.

M. Bishop confirmed that this was a correct interpretation and had financial implications for the student.

C. Mutlu was keen for students be informed about the implications of their actions.

H. Dahringer agreed that these were exceptional times for both students and faculty; both of which were under considerable stress. H. Dahringer read comments from the Department of Sociology in response to the motion. It was felt that the motion placed additional demands upon professors because it would not be clear whether a student planned to complete the course or not. H. Dahringer preferred to see an earlier withdrawal date than the last day of classes.

R. Seale had asked that the issue of burn out for students and faculty be raised at the end of the previous Senate meeting, but he had not expected to see the motions being discussed at this meeting. He and his colleagues felt that by adopting this motion at this time, it would send a message to students that Acadia had not managed to offer the Acadia experience adequately. He pointed out that there should be consequences to failing a course and he wondered how other students who were working hard for their grades would feel if the motion were to be approved. He felt that this sent the wrong message to students.

The Chair noted that R. Seale's topic had been raised and discussed at the last Senate meeting, but that it was not directly linked to these motions. These motions had come from the Admissions and Academic Standing (Policy) Committee.

P. Callaghan pointed out that there was no option to withdraw an 'F' grade.

L. Houck commented that students did not feel that Acadia or the Acadia faculty had failed in any way to support them during the Fall semester. She expected that students would see these actions as a validation of the challenges that they were facing. Some of these challenges were beyond the control of faculty and were general challenges of the semester such as isolation.

L. Houck did not feel that students seeing their peers getting the option to withdraw late from their courses would disadvantage themselves in any way. She noted that amongst the students there was a culture of all wanting to support one another and the motions were a continuation of that culture.

L. Houck noted that students receiving a 'W' did not get a credit for a course and this would really be a last ditch approach by a student. She did not expect that this option would be widely abused, nor did she think that a lot of students would take this option.

L. Houck agreed that good communication was essential with regard to scholarship and student loan requirements so that students understood the implications of their decisions. She had faith that students could make these decisions for themselves.

S. Duguay stated that students did not want to take advantage of this situation; the course would be lost whether they had a 'W' or an 'F'. Students working for 3.5 months definitely wanted to get credit for the course if at all possible.

S. Duguay noted that students who had adapted well to on-line learning were not the ones this motion addressed and he felt that this would support those students who had not adjusted so well. He noted that online learning had not proved equitable for everyone and this was a way to recognise the differing challenges that students faced. He was hearing the same concerns from other institutions across the country.

L. Hartman echoed L. Houck's comments and felt that students were supportive of one another.

D. Keefe reminded Senators that these were not normal times and that this was a compassionate approach to relieve some of the pressure that students were facing. This did not remove the failure option.

D. Seamone asked whether an earlier date than the last day of classes would be preferable.

D. Keefe stated that the committee had not discussed the particular date in detail but they felt that in the next two weeks there could be a lot of students that might make a decision to withdraw prematurely. D. Keefe was prepared to look at an earlier date.

D. Benoit raised the fact that many classes were online and were not having a formal examination. He noted that by December 11th, 2020 students many classes would have completed all of the work and would have a good idea of

their expected final mark. Students could therefore decide whether to take a 'W' or an 'F' grade. He felt that the date should be a week or two earlier, or a week or two later, so that those students writing a final examination had the same information when making the decision.

D. Benoit felt that faculty needed to reduce the workload in order to take the pressure off students. Giving these options to the students might discourage faculty from reducing the workload.

V. Provencal spoke in favour of the motion.

Amendment to the main motion that the deadline to withdraw from a course without receiving an F be extended to December 1st, 2020. Moved by D. Seamone and seconded by H. Dahringer.

D. Seamone was looking for some middle ground.

H. Dahringer had found in her experience that most students seeking a 'W' in a course had not completed the required components of the course. She felt that December 1st, 2020 provided ample time to make that decision.

L. Houck felt that the December 11th, 2020 date had been more in keeping with the spirit of the motion. She noted that a student would not be getting a credit for that course.

P. Callaghan pointed out that if the date moved to December 1st, 2020 this became problematic for group work being carried out by students.

AMENDMENT TO THE MAIN MOTION FAILED. FOUR ABSTENTIONS.

Discussion returned to the main motion.

D. Looker asked whether the wording was clear that this would be just for 2020.

The Chair felt that because the date with year was included that it was sufficiently clear.

Motion that the deadline to withdraw from a course without receiving an F be extended to the last day of classes, December 11th, 2020.

MAIN MOTION CARRIED.

5) **Motion: A student who receives a passing grade in a particular course may, within one week of final grades being released by the registrar's office, request to have the grade replaced by a P grade. Approval of the student's major program director/coordinator/head is required for such a grade change. The program**

Motion: A student who receives a passing grade in a particular course may, within one week of final grades being released by the registrar's office, request to have the grade replaced by a P grade. Approval of the student's major program director/coordinator/head is required for such a grade change. The program director/coordinator/head will advise the student of the academic ramifications of the grade change. D. Keefe and seconded by A. Vibert.

D. Keefe stated that the committee wanted to ensure that a student received academic advising through their academic unit when taking this move, because there were ramifications to a decision to change a grade to a 'P' grade. There was a desire that students be fully informed of possible consequences for

director/coordinator/head will advise the student of the academic ramifications of the grade change.

future degree requirements, application for professional schools and graduate schools for example.

D. Looker requested that an amendment be made to include the wording 'for the Fall 2020 term only'.

As mover and seconder, both D. Keefe and A. Vibert were agreeable to the amendment.

Motion: For the Fall 2020 term only, a student who receives a passing grade in a particular course may, within one week of final grades being released by the registrar's office, request to have the grade replaced by a P grade. Approval of the student's major program director/coordinator/head is required for such a grade change. The program director/coordinator/head will advise the student of the academic ramifications of the grade change.

A. Vibert pointed out that the Registrar had confirmed that it was not possible to identify all courses that required a 'B' grade in various programs and it was therefore important for the student advisor to oversee any decision to change a numerical mark to a 'P' grade, so that the student understood all possible future implications.

The Chair now read out comments from the Kinesiology Senators. Neither were in favour of the motion. The Chair also read comments from another Senator that expressed a concern about how unit heads were to interpret the 'P' grade since there had been inconsistency during the winter of 2019-2020.

A. Vibert pointed out that the Head or Director would be the individual explaining to the student that if their course required a 'B' or above they could not have a 'P' grade accepted.

D. Benoit stated that in the case of transfer credits a 'P' was a C- or higher. This had been discussed in February 2020 at Senate.

M. Lukeman noted that there was confusion about what a 'P' meant since it was unclear whether it meant a 'D' or higher and whether it should be the same as the transfer credit requirement of C-. He noted that Heads of departments change and also that students change their programs. He was looking for clarity and felt that the 'P' grade should be exactly the same as for transfer credits.

P. Callaghan assumed that a 'P' would be a C- or better. He felt that if a student requested a 'P' rather than receive a 'B' grade that would be at his discretion but he noted that hundreds of students could be requesting meetings to review grades.

H. Teismann presented comments from his department and noted that the department felt pedagogical qualms about this approach. He also felt that it would be impossible to meet the one week deadline.

K. Pinder noted that in English a student needed a C- in any upper level English course and it was not clear whether the student's home program would agree to a 'P' grade or the English department.

H. Dahringer noted that the Head of the home department would be the person to determine whether a 'P' grade could be granted. She also felt that this could prove to be a violation of Article 5 (Academic Freedom).

D. Benoit spoke against the motion. He stated that Senate had clarified earlier in the year that a 'P' meant a C- or above when it passed the motion regarding transfer credits. Giving a 'P' grade for a D would complicate the job of advisor and Head/Director. He anticipated various scenarios and expected that this would cause problems for the following four years when looking at transcripts.

C. Mutlu requested a thorough review of the proposal. He felt that this motion undermined the previous motion.

The Chair noted that it was now 5:55.

Motion to extend the meeting to 6:20 p.m. Moved by C. Rushton and seconded by M. Adam.

MOTION TO EXTEND THE MEETING CARRIED.

A. Vibert agreed that good points had been made. She was more used to the 'P' option than some others since she was from Education. She stated that 'P' grades were not included in GPA or considered when assessing for scholarships. A. Vibert stated that a 'P' would mean a pass in whatever the course required.

A. Vibert did not think that there would be large numbers of students requesting this and any student doing well would want to take their mark rather than a 'P'. Faculty would still be assigning the grade but the student would have the option to request a 'P'.

S. Currie agreed that there needed to be a universal definition of the 'P' grade.

S. Currie stated that a student would need to meet with the Head/Director in order to understand possible consequences of taking the 'P' grade. She did not expect that the Head/Director would be providing advice on a course from a program other than their home program.

S. Currie suggested that the motion be withdrawn.

The Chair placed text from the email that the Registrar had sent out to all faculty on April 1st, 2020 into the Team Chat, noting that this had not been discussed by Senate during the Winter term.

As the use of a P grade, while within the established academic grading scheme, is potentially new for many students and faculty members, clarification has been requested for its use and interpretation.

- 1. The full grading system is possible to use at an individual faculty member's discretion and authority. This includes all alpha grades, of which a P is an option. The use of one does not exclude the use of others.*
- 2. A grade of P means satisfactory performance or better as per the expert assessment of the faculty member.*
- 3. A grade of P should be considered as meaning that, with respect to the given course, the student has met any and all requirements for the student's discipline and/or program.*
- 4. A grade of P does not count towards the GPA.*

R. Seale felt that a lot of 'P' grades could be requested and believed that this would be a large workload for Heads/Directors. He also felt that this could be a violation of Article 5. He commented that this motion took the discretionary use of 'P' grades out of the hands of the faculty.

B. MacNeil reminded Senators that the original intent of the motion was to give students an option to continue with their studies rather than quitting a course and suffering the GPA consequences of that decision. He acknowledged that faculty and students had done well in transitioning to on-line teaching but noted that not many institutions had been able to do this in a way that was conducive to success. B. MacNeil asked that this be kept in focus. He expected that without a Pass/Fail option students would be likely to withdraw or hold onto permanent lower grades.

D. Keefe offered to withdraw the motion and return it to the Admissions and Academic Standing (Policy) Committee for further discussion.

As seconder, A. Vibert also agreed to withdraw the motion.

THE MOTION WAS WITHDRAWN.

6) Motion: That failing grades earned during the Fall 2020 term will not be included in SGPA calculations used to assess academic standing.

Motion: That failing grades earned during the Fall 2020 term will not be included in SGPA calculations used to assess academic standing. Moved by D. Keefe and seconded by J. Banks.

D. Keefe pointed out that the spirit of this motion was very much in line with the other motions that had been debated earlier. He expected that grades received from the Fall term would not be true reflections of student academic performances.

D. Keefe explained that 'F' grades would not be included in calculations of GPA for academic standing in the Spring of 2021.

The Chair asked the Registrar whether this action would be easy to implement using the current EDEN system.

M. Bishop responded that it would not be easy but that a query could be modified to make it possible.

D. Benoit anticipated a scenario whereby a student could get a D- for an elective but come back and ask for an 'F' grade instead since the 'F' grade would not be counted.

D. Benoit agreed that this made sense if the mark referred to a Core course.

H. Teismann noted that there were different interpretations of what a failing grade meant, depending on the program.

H. Dahringer felt that the wording of the motion lacked clarity and referred to the Collective Agreement, Article 5, and stated that this violated the academic freedom of faculty members and the way in which they assign grades.

H. Dahringer referred Senators to Article 5.30 and questioned whether the Registrar's Office would have the authority to change grades that had been assigned to students.

D. Keefe responded that there was no intention to change assigned grades. The motion merely stated that an 'F' grade would not impact a student's GPA for their academic standing with respect to whether or not they were placed on probation or dismissal or obtain good academic standing, which would influence their registration for the following academic year.

H. Darringer stated that this was about changing grades because it would change the GPA standing of a student.

The Chair asked the Registrar to confirm that SGPA was used for academic standing assessment but that this action would not impact a student's overall cumulative CGPA.

M. Bishop confirmed that this was correct.

M. Bishop stated that the query on EDEN would be done at the end of the session but this would have no bearing on the CGPA calculation in the broader sense.

Motion to extend the meeting to 6:30 p.m. Moved by M. Adam and seconded by L. Houck.

M. Adam appreciated L. Houck and B. MacNeil's comments and noted that they had been very helpful. M. Adam was concerned that it could appear that faculty were not being compassionate towards the students.

M. Adam felt that the last three motions were all trying to address a certain problem but that the lack of clarity amongst the motions questioned a number of things that faculty were taking very seriously. M. Adam felt that faculty had been extremely available during this semester and had worked to bring clarity and flexibility to the work and assignments. M. Adam did not feel that there was any lack of desire for compassion towards the students, but that despite the amount of work that faculty were doing, this could be written off at the stroke of a pen and he was unclear who might do this.

M. Adam had concerns about passing this motion until the wording was more clear. He stated that students could now withdraw from their courses at a date after which teaching evaluations had been completed.

L. Houck pointed out that the only way a student would receive an "F" in a class would be if they chose not to opt for the 'W' option at the last day of classes. She expected that this would be a very small number of students.

M. Lukeman felt that the intent of the motion was to not include failing grades and he suggested not including grades to assess academic standing instead.

D. Seamone asked about a student receiving for 'F' grades and noted that if this was about the concern of whether a student could return the following year or not, Senate needed to focus on that problem rather than the GPA.

The Chair reminded Senators that last spring Senate had passed a motion to create a temporary process for 2019-2020, the Declaration of Intent to Return process. This process allowed a student on Dismissal to complete a questionnaire to request to have their Dismissal academic standing changed to Probation academic standing.

President Ricketts pointed out that many other Universities had already passed and approved the type of initiatives that were being brought to Senate. Many universities had adopted the 'P' option for students in March and were maintaining this in the Fall term.

President Ricketts stated that this was an unusual year and that it was not possible to apply the normal rules of grading. They would not work well or recognize the compassionate approach.

President Ricketts urged Senators to support the motion and address the 'P' motion at a later time.

Motion to extend the Senate meeting to 6:40 p.m. Moved by C. Rushton and seconded by C. Mutlu.

D. Benoit suggested that it was not possible to vote for this motion without knowing what the previous motion would mean. He preferred that the University take the same action as last year with a modified process for students with Dismissal standing.

MOTION FAILED. FOUR ABSTENTIONS.

7) Adjournment

Motion to adjourn at 6:35 p.m. Moved by H. Dahringer.

ORIGINAL SIGNED

R. Hare, Recording Secretary