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Minutes of the Special Senate Meeting of Wednesday January 26th, 2022.

A meeting of the Senate of Acadia University occurred on Wednesday January 26th, beginning at 4:00 p.m., with Chair A. Kieft presiding and 43 Senators. This was a Teams meeting due to the University pandemic operations.

1) Approval of Agenda

The Chair called the meeting to order, noting that there was quorum at present and thanked Senators for meeting virtually.

Motion to approve the agenda. Moved by N. D’Amato and seconded by M. Lukeman.

The Chair asked for any amendments to the agenda. She noted that by approving the agenda, both items on the agenda would be discussed. These two motions had been received in a letter from nine Senators, which had initiated the special meeting of Senate.

The Chair responded to a question from a Senator regarding motion two, which related to the provision of masks. The Chair stated that she did not feel that this item belonged at Senate, and that it belonged in another forum. However, she was not going to block or remove the item from the agenda and intended to ask the movers of the motion whether they still wished for Senate to debate this motion.

MOTION TO APPROVE AGENDA CARRIED.

2) Announcements:

From the Chair

The Chair had received regrets from D. Keefe and L. Robinson. Both were involved in conciliation meetings related to collective bargaining between the Acadia University Faculty Association and the University that was underway. D. Keefe had asked the Chair to state the reason for his regrets. A. Pash had also sent regrets. D. Rice would arrive late.

3) New Business

Motion #1: that the Provost recognize the gravity of concern among faculty at having been directed to resume in-person teaching and

Motion #1: that the Provost recognize the gravity of concern among faculty at having been directed to resume in-person teaching and administer a policy that allows individual faculty the option of teaching in whatever mode they deem best for all concerned. Moved by V. Provencal and seconded by H. Teismann.

administer a policy that allows individual faculty the option of teaching in whatever mode they deem best for all concerned. (Moved by Vernon Provencal, Seconded by Holger Teismann.)

V. Provencal stated that the motion directed the Provost and VPA to set a policy and commented that this was coming to Senate as a result of the elevated levels of anxiety experienced by faculty, when faced with returning to in-person teaching. Issues had been raised around health concerns, student concerns, the need for medical exemptions and what mechanisms would be put in place.

V. Provencal suggested that individual faculty needed to decide which mode of delivery worked best for them at any given time. He felt that instruction was being offered in three different modes, all of which worked, some better than others. He acknowledged that this was an extraordinary time and that faculty had been greatly affected. V. Provencal pointed out that faculty were well placed to determine how best to carry out their job and he felt that the current University policy impeded faculty members' attempts to teach in the most effective way.

H. Teismann noted that he was personally pleased to be back in the classroom in-person but noted that anger had been expressed amongst faculty with the recent switch to in-person teaching following the start of the omicron wave of COVID-19.

H. Teismann discussed the experiences of students and their parents. Although the feedback showed the systems to be lacking, they found that interactions with Acadia staff and faculty resulted in positive feelings towards Acadia. He noted that the ASU had received a strong response from the students indicating that they preferred to remain online at this time; but that the ASU had received a minimal response from the Acadia administration and no indication that the directive for in-person learning would continue most recently.

H. Teismann felt that the Acadia spirit was being lost and concluded that faculty knew best what the students would find more comfortable for their learning.

D. Seamone thanked the movers of the motion for their comments. She noted that faculty were at the University because they cared about the students and the University, which was part of the Acadia spirit. She felt that this was now in peril.

D. Seamone supported the motion and found the directive to return to in-person classes tone deaf and a denial of the fact that Acadia was still in the pandemic. She also found this decision to be ableist, ageist, racist, and classist. This assumed that everyone had the same risk tolerance and life circumstances.

D. Seamone expected that if faculty were not able to choose their mode of teaching, mental health issues would increase for both faculty and students.

D. Seamone suggested that some courses would be more suitably taught online, such as in cases where courses contained discussions related to sensitive content. There were times when it was important to see student faces and online teaching allowed for this, compared to being masked in the classroom.

N. O'Driscoll stated that he had been asked to share the fact that the AUFA Grievance Committee expected that if teaching accommodations continued to be handled on a case-by-case basis, there would be a lot more grievances.

K. Pinder was teaching in-person but recognized that not all of her colleagues wanted to do this. As a result, she supported the motion. She noted that the pandemic affected every part of a person's life.

K. Pinder pointed out that the provincial state of emergency had been in effect since March 22nd, 2020 and that this was expected to continue until at least February 6th, 2022. She commented that the health risk from Covid was only one of the consequences of living with the pandemic for two years. Students and faculty experienced stress, anxiety, illness, grief, burnout, and brain fog; none of which were optimal for faculty to teach at their best. She felt that whatever could be done to allow faculty to teach at their best, should be adopted.

K. Pinder stated that the term had begun online and that faculty had not been told until one week prior, that they would be returning to teaching in-person. Faculty had already developed classes that worked well online and it made pedagogical sense to continue if faculty felt it to be the best choice.

K. Pinder noted that there was a possibility that faculty could be asked to pivot back to online teaching, as Covid remained unpredictable.

K. Pinder noted that the Provost and VPA had indicated on January 24th that faculty could teach courses in a hybrid modality if needed, but that this was the most difficult and least effective mode of teaching. It was often better to be fully online rather than running a hybrid class, especially when the class was discussion based.

R. Newman pointed out that a 'one size fits all' approach did not work and failed to recognize many negative emotions experienced by people. She noted that the Canadian Mental Health Association was reporting that anxiety and depression had never been higher and that young people were particularly vulnerable. While it was true that being in-person could alleviate the isolation experienced by students, some were not ready to return to normal in-person classes.

R. Newman felt that as she was teaching in-person she wanted to provide a safe environment for students. She felt that the University communications were not acknowledging the harm to faculty and students.

N. D'Amato echoed comments made previously and noted that workplace related stresses impacted the way in which faculty members could teach effectively. For the whole of the previous academic year he had taught online and had made it work, and he felt that faculty needed to decide how to do their jobs in this context.

M. Adam asked the Chair how this discussion would be relayed to D. Keefe.

The Chair stated that this had not been discussed but that she would be sending the results of the motions to D. Keefe as soon as possible after the meeting. She would also offer to meet with D. Keefe to discuss Senator comments. She also noted that President Ricketts and all but one of the Deans were present and could also relay information to D. Keefe.

C. Mutlu spoke in favour of the motion. He asked a number of questions posed by faculty from the Faculty of Arts.

C. Mutlu also pointed out that restaurants and other establishments had limited capacity so why was the campus not adopting a limited capacity approach. He noted that not every member of the Acadia community felt safe or confident about the procedures that were in place, and that faculty needed to be able to make their own risk assessment.

The Chair asked C. Mutlu to add his questions to the 'chat' so that these could be relayed to D. Keefe following the Senate meeting. C. Mutlu subsequently included the text of the questions and comments in the Teams meeting chat as follows.

- How many covid cases are there on campus? Who knows these cases? The administration needs to think of ways of being transparent about the active case load on campus.
- Given that faculty and students were asked to provide proof of vaccination. What are up-to-date the vaccine rates on campus? These need to be shared.
- We are asked to teach in classrooms designed for 50 students for classes that have 50 students in them. Without a strong mask mandate, it puts everyone in those rooms at risk. Especially given the questions I asked above, this undermines students' and faculty's ability to make accurate risk assessments and undermines their freedom to choose what is the safest and most inclusive mode of delivery that keeps classrooms safe for faculty and students. For these reasons, I endorsed the motion, and will vote in favour of the motion.

The Chair asked President Ricketts if he would like to address any of the questions at this time, but the President felt that these should not be answered 'off the cuff'.

D. Benoit did not feel that the current approach was working for students. Students living on-campus and finding themselves to be close contacts of others that had Covid were finding that they had to attend class in-person at a time when they would have preferred to isolate and study from their room. Unlike the general population where people were able to go home at the end of a day, students in residence were not able to go home because there were many other students sharing bathrooms and so on.

D. Benoit supported the idea of faculty teaching online or in-person, but not hybrid or in-person only. In his view, these were the only approaches that made sense at this time.

P. Callaghan applauded the original directive that went out in mid-December because it provided certainty and allowed him to communicate clearly to students regarding their options. However, it did result in a lot of accommodations being necessary and by January 10th, 2022 the situation had changed. It would be difficult to communicate to students clearly at this stage of the semester.

D. Seamone referenced the challenges for people at risk and noted that medical exceptions were not always possible. Those with hearing disabilities were experiencing difficulties with in-person classes and the use of masks. She felt that teaching online was a solution and made a class flow more successfully. D. Seamone felt that there was no pathway to acknowledge these sorts of challenges even though the University was talking about equity and inclusion as something to aim for.

V. Provencal was offering a hybrid modality for his classes. He stated that he had been asked to craft the motion by other Senators and supported the concept that each faculty member choose the modality that worked best in their courses and for their circumstances.

V. Provencal expected that the Provost and VPA would need to consult with AUFA and create an MOA to recognise that all three teaching modalities could be used at the discretion of the faculty member. He stated that there was a small group of faculty that wished to continue teaching online.

M. Adam appreciated the conversation. He noted that in the School of Music there had been huge challenges during the context of COVID-19. In sending out clarifications about the University policies he had already had faculty and students bring great concerns and found that they had needed to make tough decisions. He pointed out that there was a gap between returning to in-person classes and the timing for faculty and students to get their booster vaccinations.

M. Adam pointed out that the University should not need to make blanket statements with respect to a return to in-person teaching format and he felt that an online option would be helpful.

P. Callaghan had every faith that faculty members would choose the best modality to offer their courses.

MOTION CARRIED. 10 ABSTENTIONS.

Motion #2: that whereas other universities are supplying suitable masks to faculty and students to ensure the optimal resistance to the spread of Covid as an air-borne disease, that the Provost administer the same

The Chair stated, as she had at the beginning of the meeting, that in her opinion the second motion did not belong at Senate but belonged in another forum. She asked the mover and seconder of the motion whether they still wished to make the motion.

V. Provencal and H. Teismann both wished to bring the motion to the floor of Senate.

policy at Acadia University. (Moved by Vernon Provencal, Seconded by Holger Teismann.)

Motion #2: that whereas other universities are supplying suitable masks to faculty and students to ensure the optimal resistance to the spread of Covid as an air-born disease, that the Provost administer the same policy at Acadia University. Moved by Vernon Provencal and seconded by Holger Teismann.

V. Provencal felt that this would be the best policy and would alleviate concerns. He pointed out that this issue had come up at the Task Force and he felt that it was being seen as merely a financial issue. He felt that the masking policy affected faculty in the classroom so should be seen as an academic issue. V. Provencal noted that at the Task Force meeting D. Keefe had noted that Acadia had provided masks previously and that they had not been taken up in high numbers by employees.

V. Provencal believed that this issue belonged at Senate. He cited the bicameral nature of the Board of Governors and Senate and their different obligations. He felt that faculty were being asked to police mask wearing in the classroom whereas if everyone had the same mask it would be much easier to teach. He understood that there would be financial implications for the University in supplying masks to all students and faculty. V. Provencal stated that while it was up to the Administration to make the policies, it fell on the faculty to carry out the policies.

H. Teismann stated that teaching was affected by the mask situation since masking was now required for everyone in the classroom.

D. Looker commented that as a Lay Person she was expected to look at the role of Senate and she noted that in the past the Board of Governors had overstretched its mandate and had begun to encroach on areas that were the purview of Senate. She felt that asking the University to pay for specific types of masks fell within the purview of the Board of Governors and not the purview of Senate.

N. D'Amato stated that there would be no point in having a mask mandate without requiring that masks to be of N95 type. He pointed out that these were difficult to find in shops but felt that the University would be able to purchase masks in bulk. This would help support and enforce the mask mandate. He felt that faculty and students would feel more at ease and would also feel that the administration cared about them.

Motion to extend the meeting to 5:45 p.m. Moved by D. Seamone and seconded by C. Mutlu.

MOTION TO EXTEND THE MEETING CARRIED. ONE ABSTENTION.

K. Pinder agreed with the motion because in June 2020 Senate endorsed the different modalities to be adopted for the following year. That motion included the following wording: "subject to the most rigorous interpretation of Provincial Health and Safety Regulations". She felt that this motion was in line with previous motions.

K. Pinder noted that many people did not have access to N95 masks and that many people would like to have them as safety equipment to enable them to teach effectively.

D. Benoit supported the idea of the University supplying suitable masks to the faculty and students. He did not support the requirement for everyone to wear the mask provided by the University in that instance though because he would then be put in the position of having to ask a student to leave his class if they were not wearing a N95 mask. He cited a similar case with a Canada Post employee recently.

D. Benoit was concerned that Senate was asking the Provost and VPA that everyone needed to wear the same mask that the University provided, and he did not agree with that approach.

MOTION CARRIED BY ONE VOTE. TWO ABSTENTIONS.

4) Other Business

There was no other business.

5) Adjournment

Motion to adjourn at 5:36 p.m. Moved by V. Provencal.

ORIGINAL SIGNED

R. Hare, Recording Secretary