

Item: Senate Minutes, February 2010

Call Number: Senate fonds, UA-5

Additional Notes:

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DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY
***Approved* MINUTES**
OF
SENATE MEETING

Senate met in regular session on Monday, February 8, 2010 at 4:00 p.m., in University Hall, Macdonald Building.

Present with Lloyd A. Fraser in the chair were the following: Adshade, Barker, Barkhouse, Barrett, Bennett, Blake, Boran, Camfield, Campbell, Canning, Ciabattoni, Cochrane, Croll, El-Hawary, Evans, Fanning, Frank, Gantar, Gassmann, Gilbert, Harman, Hughes, Hymers, Ibrahim, Karabanow, LeForte, McLarney, Pelot, Pinder, Ryan, Sadek, Saunders, Shaver, Shepherd, Simms, Thomas, Traves, Zimmerman.

Regrets: Cox, Crago, Cunningham, El-Masry, Kroeker, Maes, Marrie, MacLaren, MacLennan, Moore, Robinson, Ross, Sorge-English, Thorburn, Thornhill.

Sabbatical: McConnell, Milson, Singleton.

Absent: Couban, Farina, Lee, Leon, Macy, McClure, Mechoulan, Mitchell, Pegg, Rutherford, Shukla, Smith, Watters, Webster.

2010:013

Adoption of Agenda

The agenda was **ADOPTED** as circulated.

2010:014

Draft January 25, 2010 Senate Meeting Minutes

Approval

The draft January 25, 2010 minutes were **APPROVED**.

Matters Arising

There were no matters arising from the January 25, 2010 minutes.

2010:015

Dalhousie University Pension Plan Presentation

Mr. Fraser welcomed Mr. Ken Burt, Vice President, Finance and Administration, to the Senate meeting. Mr. Burt discussed the Pension Plan for Dalhousie employees, which has been in place since 1959. Given the recent economic crisis, in a February 2009 evaluation, it was determined that the worst-case scenario would require Dalhousie to top up contributions by \$48 million over five years. Since this assessment, the province has made some amendments to solvency plans which have allowed this estimated top up to be reduced to around \$17 million over ten years.

Mr. Burt noted that rising life expectancy, removing mandatory retirement, and increasing salaries are all issues that are putting added pressure on the financial health of the Pension Plan. Solutions have been discussed by the Advisory Committee on Pension Sustainability (ACOPS), an ad hoc committee of the Pension Advisory Committee, with the aim of finding scenarios that work best for everyone. ACOPS has lobbied the government to change Pension solvency plans, and has been working at ensuring that Dalhousie's plans are benchmarked with other Universities and Institutions.

During the discussion of the Pension Plan Presentation, the following points were noted:

- At other Universities and Institutions there are plans for cost sharing of the increased contribution, and the ad hoc committee has made note of these options. The current preference is to have Dalhousie cover 100% of the increased contributions; however, there is not a definite plan for where Dalhousie will end up yet.
- The evaluation deadline is June 30th, 2010, with whatever increase implementation plan is decided upon taking affect on July 1st, 2010.

Mr. Fraser thanked Mr. Burt for his report.

2010:016

President's Report

Mr. Traves stated that his report would focus on two points: the first point is the Pension Plan and the second is the Provincial Government review of Universities. Mr. Traves began by elaborating on the earlier discussion regarding pension. He noted that this is a major issue and if it is determined that the necessary finances to cover pension contributions need to come from the University Operating Budget, then this will mean cut backs for everyone; no Faculty will be exempt. However, there is interest in exploring other options other than the Operating Budget.

The plans and solutions for the financial crunch must be long term, as a rise in the stock market, even as soon as next week, could not erase these current and future financial challenges. A strategic plan will be distributed at the end of February, with time for feedback to be gathered from the entire University community. A revised plan will be presented to the Senate in March. Mr. Traves stated that he remains optimistic that Dalhousie can solve the Pension issues, and once they are settled, the University can change gears and move forward with new matters. Once Dalhousie has gotten past the immediate financial crunch, some long-term and multi-year plans can be created to protect finances in the future.

Regarding the review of NS Universities, Mr. Traves has spoken with Mr. Tim O'Neill, an economist, who has been appointed to conduct a review for the Provincial Government. Mr. Traves suggested that after the review is complete, Mr. O'Neil's recommendations would likely come in the form of three or four large priority issues, rather than a series of more specific and smaller matters. After speaking with Mr. O'Neil, Mr. Traves noted that it seemed as though he did not have an agenda planned for the review, but instead that he is interested in listening and talking with members of the Universities about a series of complex issues.

Mr. Traves advised that Dalhousie must still plan for the future and actively move forward. If the recommendations from the review require that the plans made need to be changed, then these changes can be made when they come up. Dalhousie cannot just sit back and wait to see what the recommendations are.

Concern was noted over whether the University is facing a downward spiral in terms of research capacity. There are different ways of ranking how well a University is doing in terms of research, and one way of looking strictly at the number of research dollars, and in this sense Dalhousie may be slipping behind. Research expenses that may be covered by another University, instead at Dalhousie, may come out of a faculty member's grant money, which is decreasing annually. The big question of whether Nova Scotia has the capacity to support a research University may soon need to be addressed. It was noted that Dalhousie was ranked 15th in terms of research dollars, and over the last number of years, Dalhousie has always fallen somewhere between 14th and 17th, so from this perspective Dalhousie is not falling behind. Overall, Canadian Universities have seen an increase in research funding that goes beyond accounting for inflation, and Dalhousie has also experienced this increase. Over the last year and a half, this increase has seemed to plateau out across the country. Ranking Dalhousie as a research University is more than just

looking at the total research dollars. Looking at the impact and number of quality publications, in a weighted sample among Canadian Universities, places Dalhousie at a much higher rank.

2010:017

Chair's Report

Mr. Fraser addressed the Senate on two matters: one that will be coming up later in the agenda, and the second is highlighted for a future meeting. First he noted that the Senate would be hearing an updated report on the Student Rating Initiative Project at this Senate meeting. Second, the Strategic Planning report will be heard by the Senate at the next meeting that will likely be held on March 8th, as right now it looks as though the Senate meeting for February 22nd will be cancelled. This decision will be determined by the Senate Steering Committee soon.

2010:018

DSU President's Report

Ms. Shannon Zimmerman presented the Dalhousie Student Union (DSU) President's Report. She gave an overview of the recent leadership conference, "Brain's for Change", that was hosted by the DSU. This conference highlighted speakers from across North America who discussed a number of different interdisciplinary matters. From this conference a number of Action Projects have been identified and are presently being organized and worked on.

Ms. Zimmerman noted the change of staffing at the DSU; a new Society Coordinator has been hired, and the previous Society Coordinator has moved into another staff position within the DSU. The DSU will also be undergoing a website change. After numerous consultations, a website consultant has been hired, and a budget of \$30,000 has been allocated to updating the website. The DSU Charity Ball that was held raised \$2200, and the recent "Pulling for the Kids" engineering initiative brought in over \$7000. Both initiatives were raising funds for Camp Triumph, a summer camp for children who are living in families affected by chronic illness. Other events coming up include the International Student night, and the Tech Ball.

Ms. Zimmerman mentioned that she and the DSU Executive have been busy meeting with Members of Parliament both provincially and federally, through Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA) and Alliance of Nova Scotia Student Associations (ANSSA), to highlight the important issues facing Dalhousie students today. Mr. O'Neil, the provincial consultant hired to conduct the review of NS Universities, has contacted the DSU seeking a meeting to discuss the priorities and issues identified within the Dalhousie student body.

During the discussion of the DSU President's Report, the following points were noted:

- The International Students night is a social event where you can try different foods from around the world, and take in dancing, music and entertainment performances, from diverse cultures, ethnicities and countries represented by the students, faculty and staff of Dalhousie University.
- The process of hiring a website consultant involved reviewing submissions from different website consultant agencies, with the Board of Operations having the final say on which consultant was hired. While the total budget is \$30,000, they hope to spend less than this overall.

2010:019

Senate Nominating Committee- Nominations to Senate Standing Committees

On behalf of the Senate Nominating Committee, Mr. Fraser **MOVED:**

THAT Mr. Raphael Garduno, Faculty of Science, be appointed to the Senate Academic Priorities and Budget Committee for the term February 2010 – June 2012.

After the requisite three calls for further nominations and hearing none, Mr. Raphael Garduno was declared elected to the Senate Academic Priorities and Budget Committee. Mr. Fraser added that there is still one vacancy on this Standing Committee and that nominations for this vacancy are being accepted.

2010:020

Senate Academic Priorities and Budget Committee- Senate Review of the College of Continuing Education

Mr. Fraser welcomed Mr. Fred McGinn, Chair of the Senate Review Committee, and Mr. Andrew Cochrane, Dean, College of Continuing Education (CCE) to the Senate meeting to discuss the Review of the CCE. Mr. McGinn thanked his colleagues for their hard work in preparing the Review, and noted that this was the first Review of the CCE since it was established in 2004. After meeting with senior administration at the CCE, it was clear that the CCE has a disconnected relationship with the Senate and with the administration at Dalhousie. There is strong interest to bring these two bodies together and to formalize a healthy working relationship between the Institutions. A strategic plan needs to be developed to establish this relationship as well as to define a vision and mandate for the CCE. One aspect of this strategic plan must address that the CCE and has low visibility within Dalhousie, and that CCE students are not treated as Dalhousie students.

From the Review, Mr. McGinn determined that the faculty and staff at the CCE are committed to the mission of the programs offered at the CCE. Some key market partnerships provide some success to the CCE; however, the lack of recognition of CCE students within Dalhousie must be addressed, as this in reality is a lost opportunity on a number of fronts including business gains. A number of further challenges were discovered in the Review; including the notion that faculty do not want to take sabbatical out of fear of the health of their program. This challenge, and the others identified bring us back to the main issue of the need to establish a formal relationship between the CCE and Dalhousie through cohesive and complimentary strategic plans.

Mr. Cochrane thanked Mr. McGinn and the Review committee for their hard work. Mr. Cochrane explained that over the course of an academic year, the Dalhousie College of Continuing Education services approximately 18,000 students and CCE is 1/3 of this number. These students are non-credit students and thus are not treated as students in the traditional sense. This is an issue that he hopes is on the Senate's radar, and while he does not recommend universally acknowledging them all as students, something needs to change. The Review was a helpful process for illuminating some of the complexities of the lesser-known challenges faced by the CCE. It has highlighted to the University what the CCE does, who they are, and how they relate to the daily functions of Dalhousie. Mr. Cochrane encouraged the Senate to be diligent of this Review and its recommendations, and given that the process began in 2006, it is only being brought to Senate now in 2010, and he hopes that the Review will not fall off the Senate's radar.

During the discussion of the Senate Review of the College of Continuing Education, the following points were noted:

- There has been a changing nature of the student population at Dalhousie, the CCE, and at Universities and Continuing Education programs across Canada. While the CCE is experiencing a typical change in demographics, the experience is on the other hand unique because of the separate relationship between the University and the CCE, which means the CCE is financially independent, and currently in financial deficit.
- If the CCE reaches a position of surplus, and can establish a formal relationship with Dalhousie, then this surplus can be distributed among different areas of the University.
- There are currently plans to create a summer program for individuals from the United Arab Emirates, which would be mutually beneficial for both parties. International strategy plans of the CCE are assisted by the positive reputation that Dalhousie holds globally.

2010:021

Senate Committee on Academic Administration- Briefing on Student Rating of Instruction Project Initiative

Mr. Fraser welcomed Ms. Susan Spence Wach, Associate Vice-President, Academic Programs, Mr. Grant MacDonald, Chair of the Senate Committee on Learning and Teaching, Mr. Alan Shaver, Vice- President, Academic & Provost, and Mr. Rob LeForte, Student Senator, to discuss the Student Rating of Instruction (SRI) Project Initiative. Mr. LeForte began by giving some background on the Initiative. He noted that the SRI Project Initiative is rooted in years of requests from students for a more transparent practice of evaluation, and specifically through having access to the previous SRI data. In the past the DSU had conducted their own instructor evaluations where results were released to students; however, this was eventually eliminated due to concerns over redundancy. Thus now students are in the dark regarding the results of the feedback they provide. The current SRI Project Initiative seeks to remedy this, and also to provide feedback to the Faculty to create better teaching environments.

Mr. Shaver continued the discussion by adding that following the student request to the Senate it was determined that there is no formal Senate policy on instructor evaluation. Furthermore, the majority of the G-13 Universities provide students with access to the evaluation data, and this precedent was seen as an important consideration for Dalhousie. As well, while many courses at Dalhousie are using the SRI question model, there are still a large number that are using other methods of evaluation or none at all. There is interest in having one required set of evaluation questions that are robust and research informed.

Mr. MacDonald added that the Senate Committee on Learning and Teaching (SCOLT) has been working on the specifics of the evaluation process in order to bring something solid to Senate that can be made into policy. These plans include considerations for both full-time and sessional faculty. The policy plans being discussed are ones that are comparable to other Institutions that already release SRI data to their students. When the policy is finally formalized, they are confident it will be sensitive to the faculty concerns and will help engage students in the SRI process.

Ms. Spence Wach discussed that after an extensive literature review conducted by the working group; the Initiative Plan was developed in the fall, with the end goal of establishing a Senate Policy on SRI practices. One of the current challenges to giving students access to SRI data is the IT capacity to do so. Presently the Initiative Plan is seeking early Faculty adopters to establish a trial run. They are encouraging a lot of feedback regarding issues that arise, and are hopeful that September 2010 can be the implementation date for the new SRI process.

Ms. Spence Wach described the four-pillar plan to create a Senate Policy. First, there will be an established SRI process where feedback is collected and then results will be released to students. There may be some exceptions made for small classes where evaluation is not required in order to ensure confidentiality. The second pillar addresses the need for a universal evaluation instrument with researched-based core questions. These core questions will be quantitative measures, but there is interest in constructing a customizable qualitative component to the SRI evaluations. The third pillar is to provide secure online access for students to review the SRI data and for faculty, the process of having the SRI data available will be done through an opt-in process. The final pillar is that the Senate Policy will be focused on getting good feedback, and this requires an element of education. Faculty will need to discuss with students the importance of filling out the evaluations, and educate them on interpreting the results they will see.

During the discussion of the Student Rating of Instruction Project Initiative, the following points were noted:

- Student access to SRI data can assist them in class selection because rather than determining which instructor to take a class from based on what one person may say about that Instructor, they can

access a database of formalized results to assist in the decision making process.

- Electronic evaluations may help improve feedback rates, and there was a brief comment that students could be required to submit an evaluation before being able to access their grades.
- There is a strong interest to eventually move the evaluations to an online process, but first the goal is to establish the universal usage of conducting evaluations, and specifically the SRI instrument that will be selected. It is important to get the best feedback possible, and right now research shows that when evaluation moves online, participation rates drop.
- Evidence supports asking students to complete evaluations within the last few weeks of the class, and if the evaluation is given after grades have been released there is worry that feedback will be colored by the grade received.
- Some faculty ask students to provide feedback before the midterm, which then gives the instructor time to adjust their teaching. Once a class is finished, the feedback given by students is lost on them; they do not benefit from giving feedback because the class is over.
- When a student does not have a choice between different Instructors, there is the hope that the evaluation process will encourage better teaching practices across the board; if there is a cultural acceptance of the practice of evaluation then this will influence others to take part and to improve their teaching.
- The data that will be released to students will be just the first set of eight core questions.
- The opt-in option has been established to fit with the collective agreement.
- There is concern over how this may encourage certain individuals to try and “win a popularity contest”, by giving high marks, for example, so they get good evaluations or a higher response rate. What needs to be emphasized is that the best courses are often those that are most challenging, and that grade inflation already occurs and is recognized when evaluations are not be completed.
- The Medical School has a 100% response rate because students are required to fill out evaluations online before they receive a placement. While this is something that would take a lot of cultural change and years to accept, it is something to keep in mind for the future.
- Right now, classes with enrolment numbers below 5 do not receive evaluations. There will be a minimum enrolment number put into the policy, but this number has yet to be determined.
- The use of the word “fairness” in the text of the question labeled “fairness” seems redundant.

2010:022

Other Business

There was no other business.

2010:023

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 6:05 pm.