ARTS AND SCIENCE COUNCIL MEETING

MINUTES OF THE ARTS AND SCIENCE COUNCIL held on Wednesday, October 16, 2019 at 9:00 am
in the Governing Council Chamber, Simcoe Hall

Present

Melanie Woodin (Dean)  Paul Deacon  John Marshall
Gillian Hamilton (Chair)  Andrew Dicks  Tirzah Meacham
William Watson (Vice-Chair)  Harry Fox  Aysha Mohammed
Keenan Krause (Vice-Chair)  Max Friesen  Nathalie Moon
Deborah Robinson (Secretary)  Austin Gaghadar  Jean-Olivier Richard
Thomas MacKay  Kanishka Goonewardena  Branden Rizzuto
Martha Harris  Daphne Goring  Atsuko Sakaki
Kevin Mak  Sandra Grande  Tatiana Smolyarova
Maria Belais  Franz Huber  Alexie Tchuyap
Donald Ainslie  Peter Jurgec  S. Trimble
Josie Alaimo  Evan Kanter  Shankeri Vijayakumar
Deirdre Baker  Gloria Kim  Marie-Anne Visoi
Christopher Ball  Pamela Klassen  Foti Vito
Dwayne Benjamin  Kyoungro Ko  Art Weis
Alana Boland  Peter Krieger  Ira Wells
Antje Budde  Poppy Lockwood  Runqun (Helen) Zheng
Samantha Chang  Brock MacDonald
Asher Cutter  Sheela Manek

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 9:07 am by the Dean, Professor Melanie Woodin as Chair pro tempore. She welcomed everyone and proceeded to read the Statement of Acknowledgement of Traditional Land.

1. Election of Officers of Council for 2019-20

The Dean called upon Mr. Thomas MacKay, Director, Faculty Governance, to conduct the election of Officers of Council for 2019-20. Mr. MacKay first explained the purpose and responsibilities of Proctors and called for nominations from Council. All four of the members nominated were acclaimed. The Proctors acclaimed were Sheela Manek from the Department of Physics, Arthur Weis from the Department of Ecology & Evolutionary Biology, Ira Wells from Victoria College, and Ryan Woolfrey from University College.

Mr. MacKay then described the purpose and roles of the Chair and Vice-Chairs and followed with calls for nominations. One nomination was put forth for each of the Chair, Vice-Chair (Teaching Staff), and Vice-Chair (Student) roles. Gillian Hamilton was acclaimed as Chair. William Watson was acclaimed as Vice-Chair (Teaching Staff). Keenan Krause was acclaimed as Vice-Chair (Student).

Next, Mr. MacKay explained the role of the Agenda Committee and called for nominations for three Council members, in keeping with the tradition that the three elected members would reflect respectively, students, administrative & technical staff, and teaching staff. The teaching staff member position was unfilled as there was no
nomination. Sandra Grande was acclaimed as the administrative & technical staff member, and Runqun (Helen) Zhang was acclaimed as the student member. The Agenda Committee will review the unfilled teaching staff member position and may revisit this at a future date.

Once the elections concluded, Gillian Hamilton took the Chair’s seat to resume the meeting.

2. Approval of Minutes of the April 17, 2019 Meeting of Council

The Chair called for a motion to approve the minutes, which was carried. There was no business arising from these minutes.

3. Report from the Dean

Dean Woodin expressed her enthusiasm to work with all members of Council, and thanked the newly elected Officers of Council for taking on the respective responsibilities. She stated the importance of involvement in the Faculty Governance process considering that Council members take on an advisory role to help recommend and improve academic policies. Input from both Council and the broader Arts & Science community enables the Dean’s Office to gather valuable feedback.

Addressing Mental Health Challenges:

The Dean acknowledged the recent death of a student member and its impact on the Arts & Science community. She made reference to the April 2019 Council meeting where former Dean, Professor David Cameron had offered remarks on the subject of mental health. The Dean found the feedback to Professor Cameron’s remarks in that meeting meaningful and helpful to consider the past few months.

This past spring, President Meric Gertler established the Presidential and Provostial Task Force on Student Mental Health, and the task force has been seeking feedback from all members of the U of T community to determine how to better offer supports. The University has recently erected temporary barriers at Bahen Centre, and plans are being finalized for more permanent solutions. The University is also looking at other places on campus where similar solutions would need to be provided. In recent interviews, President Gertler emphasized the need for the University to increase counselling services as well as share such important information with students across the Faculty. As counselling supports are provided at the campus level, the Dean and members of her team are in conversation with the President and the Vice-Provost to relay the Faculty’s needs.

At the Faculty level, two key areas are being focused: education and training on mental health, and a review of existing academic policies and procedures.

Ms. Caroline Rabbat, Director of Critical Incidents, Safety & Health Awareness, is chairing the Faculty’s Mental Health Advisory Committee. The Dean took the opportunity in the most recent meeting to listen to students directly so that the Faculty could readily address their issues and subsequently translate the committee’s input into actions. As challenges differ for different academic units, Ms. Rabbat is also running workshops locally to provide tailor-made supports. The Dean also encouraged Council members to get in touch with Ms. Rabbat to work with their units. Furthermore, a Mental Health Officer has been hired to provide additional supports. Last month’s Minds Redefined Mental Health & Wellness Conference featured a number of sessions that were guided by Vice-Deans and various experts. The well-attended conference confirmed the need for the Faculty to have continued dialogue and forum around mental health.

The Faculty recognizes the stress experienced by students as they move through their degree. Through the guidance of Ms. Deborah Robinson, Faculty Registrar & Director of Undergraduate Academic Services, the Faculty has identified a number of policies that are good intentioned but unnecessarily challenging for students to navigate.
Modifying these policies would require discussions and examinations of unintended consequences. An item would be raised at next month’s Council meeting to establish a Special Committee on Academic Policy. The Dean encouraged Council members, especially teaching staff members to get engaged in this process and with the work of the Agenda Committee.

**Modifications to Computer Science Programs:**

The Dean stated that access to Computer Science programs has become a challenge for students. Over the past five years, Computer Science programs have attracted intense demand such that high school students admitted to the Computer Science admission stream would often need to attain a first-year average of high 80s to mid-90s in order to get admitted to their program of study.

Under the pilot being developed, a smaller group of high school students would be admitted to the Computer Science stream, and they would take a newly developed set of courses and meet progression requirements that would be clearly stated. It is expected that the vast majority of the students will progress from stream to program. In addition, a new broad-based admissions process, developed in collaboration with the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO), would see students applying for admission in first year completing a supplemental application containing questions aimed to evaluate eight non-cognitive variables. Furthermore, the Faculty would ensure student success in first year by making use of an embedded learning strategist and creating specialized tutorials to serve these first-year students. Moving forward, the Faculty will determine if the specialized arrangements will be expanded to the whole Computer Science student population.

Dean Woodin also noted that Professor Poppy Lockwood, Vice-Dean, Academic Planning is currently leading the academic planning exercise on behalf of the Faculty. The academic plan serves to collectively define the vision and priorities of the Faculty for the next five years. As a result, input from the Arts & Science community is important. While the Faculty’s strategic priorities were already stated last year, there will be more consultation opportunities in the next six months.

The Chair solicited questions from Council members.

A member suggested that the Faculty could consider providing a resource or a set of guidelines that members could either print or put in front of them when helping students or other members of the Arts & Science community manage and navigate difficult circumstances pertaining to mental health. Dean Woodin acknowledged that there was inadequate support for students last year, and that there is also the need to assist faculty members who work with students closely affected by the death of a fellow student. She noted that when the word suicide has not been used publicly in such cases it is to respect the explicit wishes of the family. Ms. Caroline Rabbat is currently working on developing reference sheets to ensure faculty members who have direct interaction with students affected get the necessary support.

A member described experiences as part of a committee that has had responsibility for terminating an international graduate student, and asked about the appropriate steps to take when a student becomes unreachable by normal methods of communication. Dean Woodin replied that at the undergraduate level, the Director of Critical Incidents, Safety & Health Awareness, the College Principal or Registrar, and the Vice-Dean, Undergraduate would work together to determine the appropriate next steps. At the graduate level, the member could alert the Chair of the department and the School of Graduate Studies to express concerns about a student’s well-being. Reaching out to Ms. Caroline Rabbat would ensure members are connected to the proper supports. Ms. Deborah Robinson, Faculty Registrar & Director of Undergraduate Academic Services, suggested including in a correspondence something along the lines of “we would contact the police if we do not hear from you within the next 24 hours” to allow the student an opportunity to respond.

A member asked what would happen if a high percentage of first-year Computer Science students have managed to attain competitive grades under the new pilot program. Dean Woodin responded that there should be no
competition since students who meet the progression requirements would be admitted to their program of study after first year.

A member commented that the Faculty can do a better job of keeping people informed as opposed to leaving them in the dark with respect to student mental health issues.

Another member asked how the Faculty could better convince students of alternative pathways available to them. Dean Woodin responded that the Faculty does need to do a better job when communicating with students. A possibility being considered as part of the academic planning exercise is the idea of a new Bachelor of Arts and Science degree that would leverage the Faculty’s interdisciplinary strength. In addition, to address students’ concerns about career paths, the Faculty’s Office of Experiential Learning and Outreach Support is rolling out plans for expanded work-integrated learning and co-op opportunities. She also suggested that it would be useful to send students who are having challenges to their College Registrars so that these issues could then be forwarded to the Faculty Registrar.

The Chair thanked Dean Woodin for her report.

4. Abbreviated Orientation for Council Members

Mr. Thomas MacKay, Director of Faculty Governance returned to conduct an abbreviated orientation for Council members. He made reference to the Constitution and By-Laws, two key documents published on the Faculty Governance website that set out the powers of Council, terms of reference, as well as rules and procedures.

He also provided a distinction between the Dean and the Council and its delegated responsibilities, and spoke briefly about each of the standing committees. The Committee on Admissions plays an important role in examining policies pertaining to admissions, as well as developing a better understanding of how changes to enrolment requirements would impact different academic programs.

Mr. MacKay emphasized Council members’ roles as governors, that they come together with different perspectives to determine what is best for the Faculty. He encouraged members to ask questions and exercise their democracy. In addition, he highlighted the importance of quorum to ensure Council matters are presented, discussed, and voted in a responsible manner. Voting members can indicate in the RSVP form sent to them by the Arts & Science Governance team if they would need to name an alternate from the same constituency to attend a meeting on their behalf.

Finally, Mr. MacKay encouraged Council members who would like to propose items for consideration by the Agenda Committee to contact the Arts & Science Governance team at their new email address: ofr.governance@utoronto.ca.

5. Membership Update (Elections and Appointments) for Arts & Science Council and Standing Committees

Mr. Thomas MacKay explained that elections take place twice a year to fill positions on both Council and its standing committees. Each standing committee contains student representation, and teaching staff members are normally appointed to standing committees for a three-year term. A couple of positions on Council and on the Humanities Curriculum Committee have remained unfilled even after the Fall round of Council elections. This is an item of business to be considered by the Agenda Committee.

Council membership has representation from the academic leadership of Arts & Science departments, colleges, and extra-departmental units (EDU:A), as well as teaching staff, administrative and technical staff, graduate students and undergraduate students. Very often, departments would send their Associate Chair or Undergraduate Coordinator
to fill the teaching staff positions. Currently, more than half of teaching staff positions are filled, and they are important for quorum.

The Dean asked for clarification on who would be considered a member of the teaching staff. The Constitution of the Arts & Science Council provides a broad definition for “teaching staff.” Section II-3 of the Constitution states that

“Teaching Staff” means any member of the Faculty of Arts and Science who holds an academic appointment, and who holds the rank of Professor; Associate Professor; Assistant Professor; Professor, Teaching Stream; Associate Professor, Teaching Stream; Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream; Senior Lecturer; Lecturer; Senior Tutor; Tutor; Assistant Professor (Conditional); or Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream (Conditional). This includes those who hold such ranks at the colleges of the federated universities and are involved in the delivery of Faculty of Arts and Science programs.

The student voting turnout varies depending on the specific standing committee, but the Committee on Standing has developed a reputation as always interesting, humbling, and fascinating.

6. Academic Planning Update

Professor Poppy Lockwood, Vice-Dean, Academic Planning delivered an update on the Faculty's academic planning exercise.

Last year, the Faculty undertook a provostial review that consisted of a site visit by three external reviewers. A report was presented by the external reviewers in January 2019, and the Faculty submitted its administrative response to the Office of the Vice-Provost, Academic Programs earlier this month. The Committee on Academic Policy & Programs will review this report on October 30.

Based on the A&S Priorities Discussion Paper 2018, eight working groups were established to develop recommendations to the various topics and areas of focus. Reports from each group were submitted to both the Dean and the Faculty’s Academic Plan Advisory Committee. The different Vice-Deans are in the process of conducting parallel consultation with student groups. In addition, the Faculty will be reviewing different sections of the draft 2020-25 Academic Plan the next few months. It is expected that the draft will be shared for feedback in Spring 2020.

No questions were raised.

7. Other Business

There was no other business.

8. Adjournment

Meeting was adjourned at 10:07 am.

Minutes prepared by Kevin Mak, Governance and Curriculum Specialist, Faculty of Arts & Science