



General Faculties Council
TEACHING AND LEARNING COMMITTEE
Approved Minutes

Special Meeting
October 8, 2021, 10:30 a.m.

By Zoom platform

Voting Members

Leslie Reid, Co-Chair
Fabiola Aparicio-Ting
Wendy Benoit
William Bridel
Barbara Brown – left at 11:30 a.m.
Tracey Clancy
Diane Gereluk
Yani Jazayeri
Hieu Ngo
Renzo Pereyra
Melanee Thomas – left at 12:00 p.m.
Jason Wiens – left at 12:00 p.m.

Non-Voting Members

Michelle Drefs
Natasha Kenny
Barb McCutcheon
Brenda McDermott
D'Arcy Norman
Justine Wheeler

Secretary and Scribe

Elizabeth Sjogren

Staff

Tasha Hodzic

Regrets

Susan Barker
Heather Ganshorn
Jennifer Markides
Fabian Neuhaus
Evaristus Oshionebo
Alex Paquette
Trevor Poffenroth
Mary-Jo Romaniuk
Amy Warren
Leighton Wilks

Guests

Andrew Estefan, Co-Chair, USRI Working Group – present for Item 2
Robin Arseneault, Teaching & Learn Project Coordinator, Taylor Institute – present for Item 2
Jacqueline Lambert, Institutional Analyst, Office of Institutional Analysis – present for Item 2

The Co-Chair called the meeting to order at 10:34 a.m. and confirmed quorum. The Faculty Association representative expressed concern about the Committee discussing the Universal Student Ratings of Instruction (USRI) Working Group's recommendation report while matters relating to the USRI are under grievance and requested that the discussion be postponed.

Following a recess, the Co-Chair called the meeting to order again at 11:02 a.m. and confirmed quorum, and reported that it has been determined that the Committee will discuss the report as planned. It was agreed that the Faculty Association representative would provide the Faculty Association letter of concern

so that it can be attached to the Minutes. (*Secretary's Note:* a Faculty Association letter was received on October 13, 2021 for inclusion as an appendix to these Minutes).

1. Approval of the Agenda

Moved/Seconded

That the Agenda for the October 8, 2021 Teaching and Learning Committee meeting be approved.

Carried

2. Universal Student Ratings of Instruction (USRI) Working Group Recommendation Report

Documentation for this item was circulated with the Agenda. Leslie Reid, Vice-Provost (Teaching and Learning), Andrew Estefan, Robin Arseneault, and Jacqueline Lambert presented this item.

Highlights:

- As background, the proponents reported that:
 - The USRI Working Group was struck by the Committee on November 22, 2018 and charged with considering and recommending changes to the USRI instrument questions and processes. How the instrument is used in academic staff member assessment processes is outside the purview of the working group.
 - The USRI instrument was launched in 1998 and has not undergone a full review since 2003
 - On December 12, 2019 the General Faculties Council (GFC) approved the removal of question #1 from the questionnaire, the removal of comparators from USRI reporting, and the replacement of means with modes in USRI reporting
 - In the time since the 2003 review, there have been learnings about course evaluation tools generally and about adaptations for disciplines, advances in technological platforms, and increasing awareness of systemic biases
- The proponents then reported that the USRI Working Group engaged in broad consultations in 2020 and a recommendations report was written in Summer 2021. It has been determined that an overhaul of the USRI system is needed, and key recommendations include:
 - The development of a new questionnaire with questions that focus on student learning experiences and not an assessment of teaching effectiveness
 - That the questions in a new questionnaire be modern, flexible and customizable to the learning context
 - The formation of a new committee to oversee the development of a new questionnaire and its ongoing maintenance
 - The adoption of a new technology platform to replace the current ClassClimate system
 - Ongoing communication on the importance of student feedback and the development of education materials that support students, academic staff and academic leaders in completing and using student feedback

- That equity, diversity and inclusion practices be embedded into all aspects of student feedback, and the raising of awareness of bias
- That Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Being be incorporated into student feedback practices
- The proponents expressed that initial feedback on the report's recommendations is currently being sought, and that it is anticipated that finalised recommendations will be brought to GFC for approval in early 2022
- Discussion included:
 - The plans to provide education on how to give and interpret feedback, and to allow flexibility across disciplines, are appreciated
 - Bias mitigation should be expanded to address bias mitigation and elimination, and explicit direction and training regarding bias will be needed
 - The new USRI questionnaire will need to be monitored after implementation to identify any issues with the questions
 - The current USRI system speaks to treating students respectfully, but there is no mechanism for students to express feeling marginalized in the classroom without feeling that they are risking being seen as complaining
 - Academic staff members and sessional faculty are considered the same in the current USRI reporting, but sessional faculty are different and the report should frame complexities such as that sessional faculty often teach courses that academic staff members cannot or do not want to. Sessional faculty may need mentoring in how to interpret the USRI results.
 - It is suggested that there be option to use the USRI midway through a course, especially a full-year course
 - Response rates may increase if students are given class time to complete the USRI and/or if the survey is conducted using different modalities
 - There are complexities to the USRI data, such as that some feedback may be given by students who have not attended classes or fully engaged in course work or by students who are feeling peer pressure or grumpiness on the day of the survey
 - The USRI is a snapshot of student feedback in one moment, and student feedback gathered over time might provide more meaningful information about a student's deeper learning experiences
 - It would be helpful if the USRI Working Group's report would elaborate about the use of the USRI in smaller classes
 - Graduate Teaching Assistants would benefit from receiving USRI feedback and mentoring
 - The USRI Working Group's literature review and examination of current course evaluation tools are valuable, but it is possible that there is bias in the research
 - An overhaul of the USRI system is a significant development task and it will take time to establish any changes for operationalizing
 - The USRI Working Group's report facilitates needed conversations about the USRI
- The Co-Chair indicated that the USRI Working Group's report and recommendations will be discussed again at the Committee's October 19, 2021 meeting

3. Other Business

There was no other business.

4. Adjournment

The October 8, 2021 Teaching and Learning Committee meeting was adjourned by consensus.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:03 p.m.

Elizabeth Sjogren
Meeting Secretary



October 8, 2021

Universal Student Ratings of Instruction Grievance Background Information for the Teaching and Learning Committee

The Faculty Association is concerned that the Teaching and Learning Committee has been provided with a submission related to the Universal Student Ratings of Instruction at a time when this issue is the subject of a grievance by the Faculty Association and is currently being negotiated at the bargaining table. Indeed, the call for the special meeting of the TLC was sent out the day after the Association provided a counteroffer to the Administration proposal to settle the grievance. We are concerned that the TLC is being used as a lever in the dispute between the Association and the Administration related to the grievance and to undermine the Association at the Bargaining Table. We are open to discussing the grievance with the Administration, as well as discussing the provisions at the bargaining table. Indeed, the Administration contacted us earlier this week to set up a meeting. If these discussions are not successful in resolving the issue, it will be a matter to be settled by an arbitration panel.

We support the use of student ratings as an important formative instrument for academic staff members to learn about the student experience. However, from that point, the Administration and the Association differ. We believe that it is essential for the TLC and GFC to know how the survey will be used before deciding matters related to the questions and collection of information. For that reason, we are encouraging the TLC to table any discussions related to the USRI.

The history presented as part of the discussion paper to TLC is incomplete and reflects on one component of the overall debate. For that reason, we are providing you with this paper to provide a more fulsome view.

History leading up to the grievance:

While the Association and others within the University (e.g. the President's Advisor on Women's Issues) had raised concerns about student ratings for many years, the Ryerson University Arbitration in 2018 was the first to establish the problems in a legal sense. In general, the arbitrator found that student ratings are not acceptable as measures of teaching effectiveness. He also found that the numeric use of student ratings was inappropriate and that the entire process was subject to inherent and systemic biases.

The arbitrator's decision can be found here:

<https://www.canlii.org/en/on/onla/doc/2018/2018canlii58446/2018canlii58446.html>

The Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Association's (OCUFA) analysis can be found here:

<https://ocufa.on.ca/blog-posts/significant-arbitration-decision-on-use-of-student-questionnaires-for-teaching-evaluation/>

Following the Arbitrator's decision, OCUFA set up a Working Group to analyze various components of the student rating system. Their recommendations/findings included that student ratings:

1. should be limited to formative purposes.
 2. should provide useful feedback for instructors.
 3. should be confidential except at the instructor's discretion.
 4. must seek informed and active consent from students
 5. should not be linked with other surveys
 6. should be part of a suite of tools if they are to be used as part of teaching evaluation.
- And finally,
7. That peer evaluation should be the norm and done by peers.

The report of the OCUFA Working Group can be found here: <https://ocufa.on.ca/assets/OCUFA-SQCT-Report.pdf>

Following the Ryerson Arbitration and the OCUFA report, there were a series of presentations at CAUT, CAFA, and other forums. This led our Association to try to engage our Administration on these matters. A Working Group of the GFC Teaching and Learning Committee had been established to review the USRI questionnaire. This Working Group included a Faculty Association representative (the Faculty Association President). He attempted to raise issues related to the processes of the USRI and the matters raised by the Ryerson Arbitration and the OCUFA Report, however he was told that the Working Group could only look at the questions in the survey, not any other matters.

We then raised the matter with the Administration directly. We met with representatives of the senior administration. At that meeting they refused to consider any changes to the current process and insisted that there were 'no equity issues'.

As a result, the Association decided to file a policy grievance. Following the filing of the grievance, the Faculty Association President decided to withdraw from further participation on the USRI Working Group.

The Association's grievance was filed on June 28, 2019.

Subsequent to our filing the grievance, the Administration made a number of changes to the USRI process. The paper by the USRI Working Group says that "the USRI working group recognized there were some immediate changes that could be made...". These seem to be the directly related to the matters we raised in our grievance.

The Provost subsequently denied our grievance on October 25, 2019; the Faculty Association Board of Directors approved proceeding to arbitration in November 2019.

As part of the discussions with the Administration to attempt a resolution, they committed to providing us with documents regarding the discussions that had been occurring with the Working Group. After we made repeated requests over many months and finally received an outright refusal to provide this information to us, we submitted a Freedom of Information (FOIP) request in July. Normally, FOIP requests are expected to be dealt with within 30 days. Three months later, we have still not received any information from the Administration related to the FOIP application.

We have been clear from the outset that we are not opposed to student ratings being used in a formative manner by the academic staff member and provided to the Head for the purposes of

mentorship. We would like to talk to you about our proposed remedies, but we feel it would be inappropriate to do that while we are engaging in *without prejudice* discussions with the Administration. It is for that reason that we believe their attempt to engage you in this discussion by putting this item on the TLC agenda is provocative and equally inappropriate.

It is unfortunate that the Administration has put us in the position of discussing this situation in a confrontation manner in front of the Teaching and Learning Committee; however, we think it is necessary for you to have full information regarding the current situation if you are going to proceed with such discussions. Again, our recommendation is that this be tabled until such time as the grievance issues are resolved, so you have the appropriate context for your discussions.