

Minutes of the Special AFC Meeting
June 14, 2021 at 3:15pm
Held by Zoom

PRESENT: A. Abdou; J. Allan; S. Asselin; R. Baker; K. Bessant; C. Boulton; D. Combet; K. deForest; J. Dolecki; R. Dwivedula; R. Elliott; J. Forsythe; R. Gasse; S. Grills; P. Harms; D. Héту; R. Hinthier; E. Holland; L. MacKay; M. Malainey; C. Mason; A. McCulloch; K. McKenzie; L. McLachlan; E. Mihelakis;; J. Naylor; K. Noll; S. Petrella; D. Ramsey; W. Robles; L. Robson; K. Saunders; C. Schneider; D. Smid; K. Spice; B. Strang; D. Taylor; E. Varley; H. Venema; D. Winter; K. Wong; L. Wood; L. Xu; F. Zehtab-Jadid; D. Eberts (Science); C. Kazakoff-Lane (Library); M. Milosevic (BUSU); L. Murray; S. Mott (recorder); R. Kramer (Chair).

ABSENT: B. Ashton; D. Klonowski; D. Lakevold; H. Liu; M. Malazdrewicz; A. Marshall; M. Massi; C. Mattes; V. Maud; L. Mayer; H. Murphy; B. Rose

REGRETS: C. Dupuis; A. Hanemaayer; S. Medd

ON LEAVE: D. Racine; H. Zhuang

GUESTS: D. Docherty (President); M. McCormick (Physical Plant)

This is a special meeting regarding both the Dean of Arts search and safety concerns for partial re-opening/return to campus for fall term. Meeting is recorded for purposes of minutes and recording will be deleted once minutes are approved by AFC.

1.0 Welcome to Mike McCormick, Director of Physical Plant, who will speak on details of the partial campus re-opening this fall and to Dr. David Docherty, who will address both the re-opening and the Dean of Arts search.

2.0 Approval of the Agenda

MOTION: (Malainey/Grills) THAT the Agenda be approved.

CARRIED.

3.0 Dean of Arts Search

Dr. David Docherty: President referred to an email that was to be sent Friday or Monday to Arts Faculty. Email had not been sent or seen by faculty but was forwarded during the meeting. Email message stated that questions arising from the Dean of Arts search process were addressed in due diligence by a third party review. It was decided that the work of the search committee has been completed and the committee will not be meeting again. A new Dean of Arts search will commence in the fall.

A request was made for the recommendations of the third party report to be made shared with faculty and BUFA to ensure that policy changes will be implemented. Dr. Docherty was not prepared to go into any details but confirmed that the recommended changes were policy changes for search committees.

Faculty members shared their perceived injustices in the failed Dean of Arts search. Due to confidentiality, Dr. Docherty could not comment on these points.

Dr. Docherty requested a copy of the recorded meeting to ensure follow through.

A question was raised as to whether the recommendations would be shared with faculty in some sort of component. Dr. Docherty will not share report in order to “respect confidentiality” but promises the recommendations will show themselves in the changes to process/policy. Without saying too much, Dr. Docherty assures that recommended changes will see their way into policy. A further question was raised as to how faculty will know that these changes have been addressed. Dr. Docherty appreciates the points made but cannot comment. A discussion ensued regarding a possible motion to ensure changes have been addressed, but no wording or motion was decided on.

A question was raised regarding how trust and relationships will be repaired with faculty. Dr. Docherty agreed that transparency and communication could have been better, especially during COVID. The Administration tried their best to share information at many university committees while still respecting confidentiality.

A new Dean of Arts search will begin once new Vice-President Academic and Provost, Dr. Kofi Campbell, is on-board. Dr. Docherty will discuss this in detail with Dr. Campbell before he takes the lead on the search. There is uncertainty if the new search will be an internal or external search, but leeway will be given to Dr. Campbell.

A member questioned why the first search was external but the second was changed to an internal search. Dr. Docherty acknowledged the point but could not comment and is not prepared to answer at this time.

MOTION: (Petrella/Holland) -- THAT the Faculty of Arts ensure that the policy revisions outlined in the report that followed the Investigation on the past decanal search be implemented in full before a new hiring committee is populated to hire a new Dean in the Faculty of Arts.

CARRIED.

It was noted that this Motion should be sent as an advisory motion to the Board of Governors.

A letter of support signed by 34 members of the Faculty of Arts was sent to the President, expressing clear support for Dr. Robson. What did the President take away from that letter of support from the vast majority of the members of Arts? Dr. Docherty replied with an acknowledgment that the Faculty of Arts members are passionate and demonstrate that passion, but these things cannot supersede policy and procedure.

When pressed that Faculty questions are not being answered in a satisfactory manner and often clouded in confidentiality, Dr. Docherty acknowledged the many complexities and dynamics involved on all sides, and that his answers may not please everyone.

The Arts BUFA representative let members know that they will take concerns forward to the BUFA Executive to ensure there is transparency in the policies. Further discussion ensued.

Dr. Docherty also ensured that the discussion will continue at JAC or with the faculty association, regarding policy changes to hiring etc., and that all changes will need to go through appropriate processes and brought to the board. Moving forward, a discussion at a very general level at Senate might be good. Senate wish to give advice on how committees should look. Dr. Kofi Campbell will lead the new search and how things will unfold, and of course we will looking for someone to serve in an acting capacity.

4.0 Partial Fall Re-Opening/Return to Campus

Dr. David Docherty wished to address AFC first by stating that BU is in the planning phase on what re-opening will look like in the fall by working closely with public health. The Province believes that we will be more “open” than BU is planning for re-opening. If the variants are immune to the vaccine, then we need to plan for that also. It is very likely that the re-opening plans will be implemented as the majority of vaccine second doses should be completed by fall. BU is required to follow public health rules as a public organization, and that is what we are doing by planning to be in-person on campus for classes of 25 or less students. The decision is being made now, so as to give us time to put it in place. BU is optimistic it will proceed as planned.

Mr. Mike McCormick, Director of Physical Plant, continued by confirming that Physical Plant is working with senior administration to plan physical spaces around campus. Mr. McCormick showed a power point presentation that explained room capacities, cleaning, ventilation, and the investments BU has made to make the campus safer. (The slides from this presentation were shared with members after the meeting.)

A question was asked regarding whether masks will still be mandatory in classroom setting. Furthermore, what does it mean by stay home when sick? Or what happens when students do not follow the rules and the protocols? Dr. Docherty advises that the best prevention is getting the second dose. He furthers that if you are sick, you can't teach the class. BU expects that masks will be worn, but perhaps if 88% of the province is vaccinated, then we will have achieved “herd immunity” and masks may not be mandatory. Of course, we have to take into account health issues also as some students can't wear masks, and we cannot enforce vaccinations for students due to privacy laws. He hopes that peer pressure will help keep protocols in place. He clarified that if you have the second dose and come into contact with someone who is Covid positive, you only need to self-monitor, not self-isolate. We will also keep an eye on what the variants do. Demographic data will be consulted closer to fall to help ensure safety on campus.

A question was brought forward that what if a faculty member does not get the second vaccination? Dr. Docherty replied that if you choose not to get a second dose, you will still be expected to be teaching. Due to privacy, no one has to share if they are vaccinated or not and no one can tell the difference therefore both vaccinated and unvaccinated faculty will be expected to teach.

A question was asked when faculty will know the real capacity limits of classrooms and be able to see for themselves how the rooms will be configured. Mr. McCormick replied that Physical Plant and the Acting Dean of Arts are meeting tomorrow to go through classrooms to determine capacities and what is needed to prepare the classroom. Dr. Kramer added that he went into classroom 206 and was able to configure the classroom according to Physical Plant capacity suggestions. A question was asked whether BU is using 2 metres or 6 feet measurements. In answer, Mr. McCormick reported that BU chose to use 6 feet. A concern was raised that by using feet instead of metres, we are overstating capacities by 10%, which is inappropriate for safety measures. A suggestion was made that BU should be conservative to ensure safety of faculty and students who have to go into those situations.

A member asked that if family members are immunocompromised, what kind of evidence would be needed to discuss a medical accommodation and whether there is a policy around the accommodation? Dr. Docherty cannot comment on this particular (personal) situation but there is a duty from BU to accommodate.

Another question was asked if we are back to in-person classes, with fixed seating, how will it work with a seminar classroom experience? It was further suggested that those classes may do better online. The questioning went further to ask if there has been any thought to giving instructors control over whether their classes are online or in-person, regardless of safety but more for academic purposes. Dr. Docherty suggested that doing something on-line for a week in an in-person classes, as a hybrid classroom experience, might work in certain circumstances. Faculty are welcome to incorporate zoom etc., into their in-person pedagogy.

A question was asked whether there has been any thought to using HEPA filters in the classroom? Mr. McCormick replied that HEPA filters have been considered but have not been chosen. We considered what our systems can operate on, the noise produced with certain systems, etc.

Questions continued in response to presentation today, as well as questions sent prior to today's meeting. Question was raised regarding what accommodation plans are being made for students who need medical accommodation? Dr. Docherty replied that they need to go to student services and make some decisions based on each individual case. Again, BU has a duty to accommodate. Several other concerns were discussed regarding access and accommodation.

A concern about herd immunity was brought forward and a question asked: Is BU working with herd immunity information provided by province or will we use our own unique community? If students come from areas with few vaccinated people, are we taking a nuanced approach? Dr. Docherty responded: we don't know if students have been vaccinated or not but have demographics (although maybe doesn't include international students) to have an idea of who is on campus. The approach to everyone's safety is vaccination.

A point was made regarding truth and reconciliation. Dr. Docherty requested an email to address this issue personally.

Another question was raised on what authority does a faculty member have if someone does not adhere to rules in the classroom? Dr. Docherty hopes that peer pressure will win out but if faculty feel the class is unsafe, you may end class early. There will be more planning and discussion on discipline with Registrar's Office.

Another question raised by faculty on whether faculty need to allow students into their office if student is unvaccinated and whether faculty are allowed to ask if student is vaccinated? Dr. Docherty responded that you cannot ask. He suggests office hours be on zoom. Also classes may be broken into both in-person and zoom to accommodate group learning.

A question surfaced about the stairwells in Clark Hall and how will people be moving in the building? A question was raised as to whether Clark Hall can have one stairwell for up and one for down. Mr. McCormick responded that access is restricted right now but we will be opening up access to others soon. Restricting one stairwell to upward traffic and a different one for downward traffic is not feasible however as all stairs don't go to all floors.

Another question was asked: how will bathroom usage work? Mr. McCormick replied that Physical Plant has not looked at public spaces yet. Campus has been closed we haven't closed/restricted anything else because there are not many people around. Physical Plant is just focusing on classrooms right now and will determine public spaces in late July. Dr. Docherty replied that restrictions may change by September but we will hold true to grey level, which is more conservative than provincial guidelines.

Mr. McCormick needs to bow out to another meeting. Dr. Kramer thanked Mr. McCormick for his time and slideshow. Mr. McCormick invited further questions through email.

A question was brought forward as to whether students should be required to sit in the same spot all term to ensure contact tracing accuracy. Dr. Docherty does not think this is necessary as Prairie Mountain Health does contact tracing.

A question was raised about cleaning between classes and time it will take: will that take extra teaching time away? Inquirer will email Mr. McCormick for further clarification.

A question was asked about accessibility and equity around elevator posters. How will we deal with students (who get sick) on campus regarding stigma and inequities? Dr. Docherty responded that BU will work with all students to ensure access, similar to what BU did when it first shut down last March (supplying laptops, making study spaces available, ensuring access to internet etc). The same lens must take place on who is vaccinated and who is not.

A question was asked regarding if the presumption is we are going to open, regardless of faculty risk or personal safety? Concern was raised that there is no way knowing who is vaccinated or who is following the rules. Suggestion was made that faculty members could be given the choice to teach in-person and assume personal risk? Furthermore, question continued as asking what does BU intend to do when there is an outbreak? Dr. Docherty replied that an outbreak could be as little as 2 people, but it is anticipated that there will be fewer positive cases when more people are vaccinated. There are accommodations and processes in place for individuals who are not able to teach in person, for whatever reason. Discussion ensued regarding legalities and concerns.

4.0 New Business

5.0 Dr. Wilder Robles congratulated Dr. Patti Harms on her recent book award, mentioned at last AFC meeting.

5.0 Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 5:18pm.