

Submission to the Task Force on GFC and its Standing Committees

From: Anne Stalker, President, TUCFA

The University of Calgary Faculty Association Board of Directors has met and discussed the issues to be dealt with by the Task Force on GFC and its Standing Committees. They raised a number of issues and also thought about potential solutions. This is a submission based on three separate discussions by the Board of Directors, plus additional discussions at the TUCFA Executive Committee.

Concerns

A. Composition and Voting/Quorum Rules of GFC

- The composition of GFC is laid out by the *Post-Secondary Learning Act [PSLA]*, ss. 23, 24 & 25 [see Appendix].
- We need to think about how the GFC membership is handled in order to ensure that it achieves a proper balance among the various constituents. Currently, there are several problems, which I have set out below.
- Clearly, the intent of the *PSLA* with regard to GFC is that there is a balance between administration (*ex officio* members) and academic staff (elected members), with elected members being double the number of *ex officio* members. However, this is undermined in a number of ways.
- *Ex officio* members of GFC can send delegates if they are unable to attend whereas elected members cannot. This gives proportionately greater weight to the role of *ex officio* members and has the effect of changing the balance in GFC away from the balance set out in the *PSLA*. This is inappropriate.
- Block voting by *ex officio* members has been an issue. We know that Deans have been told by Central Administration in the past that they have to attend and vote a certain way on certain issues. Again, this changes the balance which GFC is supposed to represent. Given their functions [see Appendix, *PSLA*, s. 21(2)], Deans are there as much to represent their Faculty as to be part of the Senior Administration. Moreover, this decreases the trust that the academic staff have in the decisions of GFC, which in turn reduces engagement with the process.
- Because of the pressures on faculty and because the academic importance of GFC is not always recognized, Faculty Councils often elect members of faculty who are already playing administrative roles (Dept. Heads, Associate Deans) to be GFC members. This may be a good thing in that they may be more familiar with what is going on and can bring that understanding to the discussion. However, once again, it may throw off the balance at GFC between academics and administrators.
- For the same reasons as set out in the previous bullet, Faculty Councils may elect junior academic staff who do not have the experience to understand fully the issues at GFC. This serves to undermine the role of the elected members of GFC. This is exacerbated when there is little or no encouragement for them to discuss issues with their colleagues. Overall,

we believe that the goal should be to have faculty representatives who are reflective of the academic staff in the Faculty.

- GFC also has the right to appoint a certain number of members, and has exercised that to the fullest extent consistent with the *PSLA*. The impact of these appointees on the balance of GFC is not, however, reviewed on a regular basis. This should be part of the role of the GFC Steering Committee.
- The quorum rules are not always followed, which is a problem when they are designed to ensure that the balance at GFC is maintained for specific votes.
- It would be better if the President were not the Chair of GFC. As Chief Executive Officer of the University, the President has certain role duties which may conflict with his/her role as neutral Chair. Having the President as Chair is set out in the *PSLA* but the President could delegate it to an independent person, selected by GFC, who would be responsible for ensuring that GFC operates effectively to achieve its mandate.

B. Functions of GFC

- The functions of GFC are set out in *PSLA*, s. 26, with some additional functions mentioned in ss. 19 and 22 [see Appendix]. The primary one is in the introduction to s. 26(1): “Subject to the authority of the board, a general faculties council is responsible for the academic affairs of the university...”
- It is unclear that GFC understands or is actually performing all of its stated functions. For instance, the School of Public Policy was established without GFC involvement, despite s. 26(1)(l). Ultimately, in order to understand GFC’s functions, they need to be set out in a more user-friendly way than through the list from s. 26(1) of the *PSLA*. Somebody needs to sit down with that list, and with what we now do, and develop a new list of functions in clear language.
- The current discussion about policies demonstrates another problem. It is clear from past documents that policy-setting in academic areas has always been seen as a GFC function, essentially as the way it handles its responsibility for academic matters. It is the implementation of the policies that is an administrative matter. Of course, the fact that GFC powers are “Subject to the authority of the Board” means that when valid Board powers are affected, there may need to be a good working relationship to come up with a balanced policy. However, GFC must ensure that it has a good process in place for policy development [see below under **C. Processes**, #3. Policy Development.]
- Furthermore, how GFC performs all of its functions is not well understood. Some have been delegated to committees, and some are still within GFC itself, but with the background work being done by committees. The method of performing the functions needs to be set out clearly as well.
- Related to the previous two bullets, there is the question of the relationship between the Standing Committees and GFC. Currently, with the way that authority is being distributed, the Standing Committees appear to be doing work that is not under GFC authority but is rather “owned” and approved by the Senior Administration. For example, RDPC is involved in creating

some policies that are apparently neither “owned” nor approved by GFC but by the VP(R). This confusion must be sorted out to ensure that the GFC Standing Committees are responsible to GFC and not to the Senior Administration.

- Finally, these functions and the processes need to be reviewed by GFC each year (probably through the Steering Committee with a report to GFC) in order to determine what the priorities are for the year and how they can be achieved. This process can also be used to review the functions generally to keep them up to date, to see how they are being done, and to ensure that they are being done in the most effective way.

C. Processes

1. Representation and Consultation

- The *PSLA* does not set out how GFC is to perform its functions. The current processes are set out in the GFC Handbook, but are not very specific. However, on p. 3, under *How General Faculties Council Works*, under the discussion of communication about the nature of GFC decision-making, there is the following statement: “Elected members are expected to report back to their Faculty Councils on the work of GFC, and appointed members and observers are expected to report back to their constituents.”
- It is clear that the intent is that GFC members are to represent their faculty colleagues without getting feedback on specific issues. This may be part of the problem of engagement. Faculty members are independent, highly intelligent staff members with a high degree of involvement in creating the teaching and scholarship environment of the University. They will only feel properly represented and engaged in the work of GFC if they have the opportunity to have a say in the issues that matter to them. This should be made a clear part of the functioning of GFC on important issues.
- This would require changes to the statement about how GFC works, plus a clearer statement about the function of the GFC members (a “job description”). For instance, it should be stated that GFC members are required to get feedback from their colleagues on important issues, even though, at the end of the day, they may vote their own conscience. This would mean that GFC members should be given the opportunity to meet with or communicate with their colleagues on GFC matters through the faculty’s communication and meeting system.
- Moreover, given the fact that they are to vote their own conscience at the end of the day, it is important that GFC members have the necessary experience to represent their colleagues; this should not be viewed as a job to be given to the newest member of the faculty because no one else wants to do it.
- There are other issues that make it difficult to perform GFC functions in a more consultative manner as well. For instance, currently, the materials do not come far enough in advance to give GFC members the opportunity to get feedback from colleagues on issues. If they are to get feedback on significant issues, that needs to be figured into the timelines.

- Furthermore, it would be useful if the GFC agenda were made available on the UToday site so that anyone could see what was coming up at GFC.

2. Agenda-Setting and Planning

- Currently, GFC and the GFC Steering Committee are not actively involved in agenda setting. They are normally reactive rather than proactive. For instance, they normally receive an agenda already set, with no idea where the items came from, rather than being asked to think through what should be on the agenda (for the year and for each meeting.)
- Furthermore, the Standing Committees are not asked for input into the agenda-setting or for help in planning. This should be part of their role.
- As noted above under **B. Functions of GFC**, it would be helpful if there were a set of functions that could be reviewed seriously each year, with input from the Standing Committees and some careful discussion of which of these are an issue for GFC that year and how it is to perform them. This could also determine which issues need to be discussed more broadly and timelines set out for that.

3. Policy Development

- The way that policy issues are brought forward at the moment is problematic. They are brought forward with the fully-developed policy already prepared, so GFC's role is only to be responsive to what is set out. It would be better if GFC (on the advice of its committees) set out the policy issues that needed to be addressed during the year, then provided the opportunity for GFC to brainstorm on the basic issues. With that input, the relevant committee (or the administration, if there is no committee) could take the information gathered from the brainstorming and develop it into one or more options (adding their own points, but indicating that those are their own points.) Then those options would be brought back for discussion and ultimately approval. It would also be possible, where appropriate, to engage the academic community as whole in this discussion.
- In some cases, the Standing Committees are advisory to GFC, and thus play a supportive role in this process, with the final say left to GFC. However, there are also issues which GFC delegates to the Standing Committee. In these circumstances, the Standing Committee should operate in the same way as described for GFC above, but using sub-committees or administration for developing the options.
- The important feature here is that, in agenda-setting and policy-development, the Administration is not an independent decision-making entity, but part of the committee (GFC, or the Standing Committee) and should operate as part of the committee. It is only in implementation that it has independence, and then only to achieve the goals set by the Committee.

4. Standing Committees

- The last two items (#3 & 4) also reflect the need to define the proper relationship between the Standing Committees and GFC. GFC should think about what it wants the Standing Committees to do each year, with input from the Standing Committees of course. The Standing Committees should also come to GFC with specific questions about the policies they are talking about in order to get GFC's input. In other words, there needs to be a more fluid relationship between the Standing Committees and GFC, where GFC asks the Standing Committees to help it perform its specific tasks, and the Standing Committees ask GFC for broader input. It also should be clearer who has the ultimate authority to make decisions and what the consultation process should be. Finally, the relationship among the Standing Committees should also be clarified. For instance, UPC should know what RDPC thinks before it makes any decisions about research. Finally, the relationship between the Standing Committees and the Senior Administration needs to be sorted out with regards to the ownership and final approval of policies, as discussed under **1B Functions** above.

5. GFC Manual

- At the moment, there is really no process for tracking GFC decisions. If you want to find out what GFC decided on a particular matter (e.g. the USRIs), you need to go back over all GFC meetings, delve into the individual documents (which are not normally attached to the Minutes, and therefore have to be found independently) and determine what has changed in those documents over time. Instead, there should be a manual of GFC policies that is kept up to date and that tracks changes. This should apply both to procedural decisions on the functions of GFC and its committees, and to substantive policy matters.

Recommendations

A. Composition and Voting/Quorum Rules of GFC

- i. Review the rules relating to GFC membership, quorum, and delegation to ensure that the proper balance on GFC is maintained, given the issues raised above. Some possibilities would be to allow alternatives to be sent when elected members are unable to attend, allowing for alternative voting mechanisms, and reviewing the nature of appointed members (e.g. should they all be voting?)

B. Functions of GFC

- ii. Review the functions of GFC with a view to developing a list of possible functions to be reviewed each year. Merely printing out the list from the *PSLA*, s. 26(1) is not enough to set out clearly

what the functions of GFC are. This list, for instance, should recognize the policy-setting role of GFC as a way of achieving its goals.

C. Processes

1. Representation and Consultation

- iii. Review the functions of the GFC members, particularly the elected and appointed members, with a view to developing a “job description” that includes getting feedback from colleagues when important issues are being debated.
- iv. Develop a set of guidelines for faculties in electing and providing support for their GFC members (e.g. the qualities a GFC representative should have, the internal processes through which they can get feedback from their colleagues).
- v. Put the agendas of GFC on UToday

C. Processes

2. Agenda-Setting and Planning

- vi. Create an agenda-setting function within the GFC Steering Committee. Once a year, it should review GFC’s functions and the reports of the Standing Committees and determine what the goals are for the coming year and the process for achieving them.

C. Processes

3. Policy Development

- vii. Develop proper processes within GFC and its committees for consultation on and discussion of major issues, in order to get the feedback that is needed for strong and well-understood policies. This must include a first discussion to identify issues and priorities, plus possible solutions, a good process for policy development involving committees and administration, and a final process that ensures that the feedback of all is considered.

C. Processes

4. Standing Committees

- viii. Review the Terms of Reference of the Standing Committees in light of the functions of GFC, to ensure that they have a clear purpose which helps GFC to perform its functions, and with the specific duties set out as a method of achieving that purpose.

C. Processes

5. Policy manual

- ix. Create a coherent Policy Manual covering the decisions of GFC (both procedural and substantive), including the content of those decisions, and the changes to them over time, with an equivalent manual for each of the Standing Committees. This should be online for ease of access. When changes are made, the old document should not be removed but should be retained for reference purposes.

Appendix

Post-Secondary Learning Act

Sections Relating to the Composition of GFC

Composition of general faculties council

23 Each university must have a general faculties council consisting of

- (a) the following persons who are members by virtue of their offices:
 - (i) the president, who is the chair;
 - (ii) the vice-presidents;
 - (iii) the dean of each faculty;
 - (iv) the director of each school;
 - (v) the chief librarian;
 - (vi) the director of extension, or if none, the officer performing comparable functions;
 - (vii) the registrar;
- (b) the members elected under section 24 to represent the faculties and the schools that have school councils;
- (c) the following student members:
 - (i) 2 students nominated by the council of the students association;
 - (ii) if there is a graduate students association, one student nominated by the council of the association;
- (d) the members appointed from the staff and students of the university under section 25.

Elected members

24(1) The faculty council of each faculty and the school council of each school that has a school council may elect from the full-time members of the academic staff of the faculty or school the number of members to the general faculties council that may be assigned to it pursuant to subsection (2).

(2) On the direction of the general faculties council from time to time the registrar

- (a) shall establish the total number of elected members to be on the general faculties council, which shall be twice the number of persons who are members of the general faculties council by virtue of their offices, and
- (b) shall determine and assign to each faculty and school the number of members that may be elected by that faculty or school, which so far as is reasonably possible shall be in the same proportion to the total number of elected members as the number of full-time members of the academic staff of the faculty or school is to the total number of full-time members of the academic staff of all the faculties and schools.

(3) A member elected under subsection (1) holds office for a term of 3 years or until the member's successor is elected.

(4) Notwithstanding subsection (3), a member elected under subsection (1) ceases to hold office if the member ceases to be a full-time member of the academic staff of the faculty or school.

(5) Notwithstanding subsection (3), a faculty council or school council

- (a) shall, as circumstances require, elect members to hold office for one-year or 2-year terms so as to provide overlapping terms of office for the representatives of the faculty or school, and

- (c) may, when a member ceases to hold office before the expiry of that member's term of office, elect a new member to hold office for the remainder of the unexpired term.

Appointed members

25 The members of the general faculties council referred to in section 23(a), (b) and (c) shall appoint the appointed members of the general faculties council from the staff and students of the university, in the number and for the terms of office that the elected and student members and persons who are members by virtue of their offices determine.

Section Relating to the Functions of Deans

Deans

21(1) The board of a university shall appoint a dean for each faculty of the university.

(2) A dean of a faculty

- (a) repealed 2008 c25 s3,
- (b) has general supervision over and direction of the academic work and instructional staff of the faculty and of the officers and employees employed in connection with that work, and
- (c) has the other powers, duties and functions that are assigned to the dean by the president.

Sections Relating to the Functions of GFC

Powers of general faculties council

26(1) Subject to the authority of the board, a general faculties council is responsible for the academic affairs of the university and, without restricting the generality of the foregoing, has the authority to

- (a) exercise any power of a faculty council that the general faculties council considers desirable to exercise;
- (b) consider and make decisions on the reports of the faculty councils as to the programs of study in the faculties;
- (c) determine all programs of study to which clause (b) does not apply that are to be offered by the university for credit toward the requirements for any degree or diploma;
- (d) determine the timetables for examinations and for lectures and other instruction in each faculty;
- (e) consider and make decisions on the reports of faculty councils as to the appointment of examiners and the conduct and results of examinations in the faculties;
- (f) provide for the granting and conferring of degrees other than honorary degrees;
- (g) provide for the preparation and publication of the university calendar;
- (h) hear and determine appeals from the decisions of faculty councils on applications, requests or petitions by students and others;

- (i) consider all matters reported to it by any faculty council and communicate its opinion or action on those matters to the faculty council concerned;
- (j) determine the date for the beginning and end of lectures in the university and also the beginning and end of each university term;
- (k) make rules and regulations for the management and operation of libraries;
- (l) recommend to the board the establishment of faculties, schools, departments, chairs and programs of study in the university in any subject that the general faculties council thinks fit;
- (m) make rules and regulations respecting academic awards;
- (n) determine standards and policies respecting the admission of persons to the university as students;
- (o) make recommendations to the board with respect to affiliation with other institutions, academic planning, campus planning, a building program, the budget, the regulation of residences and dining halls, procedures in respect of appointments, promotions, salaries, tenure and dismissals, and any other matters considered by the general faculties council to be of interest to the university;
- (p) authorize lecturing and teaching on the university premises by persons other than members of the staff of the university;
- (q) authorize a school to have a school council of the same nature and with the same powers, duties and functions as a faculty council and, in its discretion, revoke any authority so given.

(2) Any recommendations from the general faculties council to the board must be transmitted to the board through the president.

(3) A general faculties council may delegate any of its powers, duties and functions under this Act, including the powers referred to in section 31, as it sees fit and may prescribe conditions governing the exercise or performance of any delegated power, duty or function, including the power of subdelegation.

Board to consider recommendations

19 A board must consider the recommendations of the general faculties council, if any, on matters of academic import prior to providing for

- (a) the support and maintenance of the university,
- (b) the betterment of existing buildings,
- (c) the construction of any new buildings the board considers necessary for the purposes of the university,
- (d) the furnishing and equipping of the existing and newly erected buildings, or
- (d) the establishment of faculties, schools, departments, chairs, programs of study and any other activities the board considers necessary or advantageous.

Appointment, suspension and dismissal of staff

22(1) Except as otherwise provided in subsection (3), the president of a university may, in the president's discretion, suspend from duty and privileges

- (a) any officer or employee of the board, or
- (b) any person who is paid from funds administered by the university,

for a period not exceeding 3 months, but any person suspended pursuant to this subsection is entitled to be paid his or her salary during the time the suspension is in effect.

(2) A person shall not be appointed to, promoted to or dismissed from any position on the academic staff at a university except on the recommendation of the president made in accordance with procedures approved by the general faculties council.

(3) Subject to any existing agreement, a president may, in the president's discretion, suspend from duty and privileges any member of the academic staff at the university and shall forthwith report the president's action and the reasons for it

(a) to the board, and

(b) to the executive committee of the general faculties council.