



June 30th, 2015

To: Council

Re: VPA Report

Dear Council,

It feels great to be back in Edmonton, and the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (STLHE) conference in Vancouver was very insightful around teaching and learning, scholarship of higher education, learning outcomes and open educational resources. I'll draft up a report around the conference activities to the Executive over the coming weeks.

I'll be a bit tardy to this meeting as I'll be chairing the Senior Board meeting of COFA, but if you have any questions don't hesitate to reach out before or after our Council meeting.

Here is a report on my duties to date:

1. Teaching Quality

Quality teaching is something that I really want to address this year, and there's two ways I think it can be improved on campus. In the short term, we should be looking at revamping programs that foster a culture of excellence in instruction on campus, such as the Festival of Teaching. In the long term, I feel that a teaching tenure stream can go a long way towards promoting the importance of teaching and learning on campus, as well as dedicate staff towards constantly improving current practices on campus. It'll go a long ways in ensuring we have a high standard of instruction within our classrooms.

On the short term front, I've gotten a positive response from some members on the Festival of Teaching Steering Committee to expand the festival to reach out to Departments on campus. The thinking is that there are some innovative instructors on campus that have great practices for all of campus, but some practices that are only applicable to a certain discipline. The latter is covered by the festival, but not the former. My next steps are to see how many Departments are interested in participating in a newer version of the festival.

Thinking more broadly, I've only done preliminary consultation around a teaching tenure, but the stakeholder groups will be undergraduates, graduate students, academic staff and central administration in implementing a teaching stream. I hope that a formal committee is put together to propose recommendations around a teaching stream to the Provost's office, and right now I'm trying to understand the position of each of those groups. Most recently I've met with a member of AASUA's Teaching and Learning Committee.

2. Be Booksmart

The letter to instructors has gone out early this week, encouraging them to consider strategies for lowering the financial burden academic materials can place on students. I'll let you know how the letter is received next week based on feedback from instructors.



2. University Standing Committees

No University standing committees met over the past ~~two~~ four weeks.

3. General Faculties Council

There was a meeting of the Academic Standards Committee while I was in Vancouver for STLHE, so President Khinda attended as the Students' Union representative. She also attended a meeting of the Academic Planning Committee, which I believe will be one of the last meetings of GFC and its committees for the summer. Meetings and reports will resume in September, barring any emergencies.

4. COFA

I'll have an update on the activity of COFA Senior Board next Council meeting, but we'll be discussing leadership on campus, FA goals, student group administration and the governance review task force.

The Arts Faculty Students' Association restructure has been going rather well so far. There are three subcommittees dealing with the new Arts FA's executive structure and bylaws, the programming until there is a new executive and finally the group's finances. The restructure committee has begun to draft a document around the organization's mandate, mission and values. They've identified the need for student consultation during key steps of this part, and are going to go through the vision and Bylaws next.

5. Council

Looking forward to discussing our experiential learning policy's first principles today. I'll also be looking at our policy around quality instruction next this summer, and our policy on students in governance during the school year. I suspect the governance review task force will inform some of the principles for the latter policy. Let me know if you're interested in helping draft principles around quality instruction!

Nominating committee has also reviewed applications for the governance review task force.

6. International Students

One item that has come up over the previous years is academic integrity, particularly how it relates to international students. Our Executive noticed that the U of A had the lowest standards for admitting international students out of most U15 universities, and that there may not be enough in terms of services or programming to help international students prepare for post-secondary once they arrive.

I'm currently reviewing our policy around internationalization, in case it isn't capturing ways to prevent international students from being a place where they aren't likely to succeed. I'll also look to the Faculties of ALES, Arts and Extension, who expressed interest in developing proactive strategies on this as well.

Thanks so much for your time, and looking forward to the next report.

All the best,
Fahim Rahman