Minutes of the Fifth Meeting of Senate
Held Friday, January 4, 2008
ITEC Lecture Theatre, Robertson Library, 3:00 pm


Regrets: D. Buck, R. MacDonald, P. McKenna, W. Rankaduwa, D. Ryan, S. Thomas,

Absent: N. Etkin, G. Evans, S. Gillis, K. Landry, S. MacDonald, J. Nimmo

1. Approval of Agenda

The Chair called the meeting to order. The agenda was approved (Moved by M. Hughes) as circulated.

2. Approval of the Minutes (December 7, 2007, enclosed)

Moved (J. Pitre/J. Moran): that Senate approved the Minutes as amended. Amendments: change November 9th to December 9th on first page. Use a consistent approach to naming for Senators: first initial and last name.

3. Business Arising

No Business Arising.

4. Report of the President

• A number of UPEI’s new offerings continue to receive press and promotion including new executive education programs in the School of Business in partnership with York University’s Schulich Executive Education Centre.
• C. Gillan received the ASG Staff Achievement award which was presented at the University’s Christmas Social.
• W. Whelan will be recognized on January 28th for his CRC in biomedical optics.
• There will be a call for Professor Emeritus nomination shortly to allow time for review and recommendations to Senate for Convocation.
• Two of the 4 honorary degree recipients have been contacted and both are very honoured to accept; the others will be contacted shortly.
• The International Development Day luncheon and celebration of international students will be held February 8th.
• The National Survey of Student Engagement will be conducted again this year, beginning in February. NSSE is carried out every 2 years with UPEI 1st and 4th year students being encouraged to participate. There will also be a Library survey (LibQUAL) taking place in January and February which is open to students and faculty.
• The Atlantic Undergraduate University History and Classics Conference will take place on campus February 7-10.
• The Decanal search committees in Education and AVC are proceeding with the selection process and there will be public presentations and interviews held in the near future.
• D. Kessler will give an illustrated talk about her trip to Tasmania as writer-in-residence. It is called “Deirdre’s Devilish Time in Tasmania” on Thursday, January 10, 2008, at 7:30 p.m. Main.
5. **Report of Senate Standing Committees**

(a) **Nominating Committee**

There was no report from the Nominating Committee for this meeting. The Chair indicated that a DVM student representative for the Dean of Veterinary Medicine Committee has still to be identified. This will be reported to the Senate at the next meeting.

(b) **Annual Report - Academic Appeals Committee**

J. Velaidum reported that there are a number of issues, primarily technical issues, that the Committee is working on, especially to make sure that the students and Registrar’s Office have a clear and functional process. The Chair asked for comments on the revised arrangements regarding notifying students with academic difficulties in the fall semester. J. Velaidum and V. Timmons responded that the Registrar’s Office indicated that the letter that goes out in December seems to be working. The letters were also changed to be more supportive and provided clarification of the options available to students.

6. **Report on Student Success & Retention**

V. Timmons provided an overview of the document “Retention Statistics for Senate, January 2008”.

Enrollment numbers are down by 52 full time students and 178 part time students compared with this time last year. The overall numbers for part time students for the last decade are stable but are down significantly from historic levels. We are picking up additional international students although a number have not yet completed the process.

Retention rates for Arts, Business and Science, 1st and 2nd year are down to historically low levels. The decline in retention does not seem to be related to academic factors, gender or other factors analyzed. International students overall tend to have better retention (85%). Student athletes also have an overall higher retention rate (84.5%). This suggests that some aspect of the sports program could help improve retention for other students. Academic suspension numbers are down significantly from 04/05, another sign that academic performance is not the major factor in retention. One factor that does stand out in this comparison is the number of full time faculty teaching 1st-year courses, it was almost twice as high in 03/04.

The Chair initiated a discussion of the retention issue by highlighting the change in retention from 78% in 03/04 to as low as 70% most recently. F. Gray asked if we have surveyed students who leave to find out why they have not returned. V. Timmons indicated that responses to the survey were low and did not highlight obvious factors. NSSE has highlighted that we fare poorly in 1st year experience. J. Sentence suggested that people leaving the University are probably going to another institution or leaving for work elsewhere, such as Alberta. He suggested we might want to look at similar numbers from elsewhere to see if we are experiencing the same pattern as other institutions due to similar economic and related issues. V. Timmons responded that NSSE does still tell us something about the 1st year experience of UPEI students that we should be looking to respond to.

B. Davetian suggested 3 factors that could provide some opportunity to improve retention: students need to feel associated with “a core” and to more obvious groups (e.g. fraternities) that they can belong to; allow 1st year students to take other than the traditional introductory survey courses; have students declare a major sooner (with the option to change it later) so that they are part of a community sooner. B. Davetian also commented that fewer full time faculty are teaching introductory course. M. Hughes highlighted the need to compare our numbers to
other institutions and also we need to remember that students also need to have some responsibility for their own engagement. V. Timmons indicated that comparing retention stats from other institutions can be problematic because not all calculate them in the same way. W. Gauthier suggested that engagement and outreach are critical as students feel overwhelmed by the transition to University. Student Union did a survey before the holidays and had over 1,000 responses - the response regarding school spirit was neutral. C. MacQuarrie suggested that the mean might be a poor representation and a quartile approach to high school grades might provide a better picture. She also suggested that the full time faculty statistics might be confounded by class size. M. Murray highlighted the fact that the sessional number stands out and while one response might be to hire more full time faculty, it does bear more investigation before conclusions are made. He also suggested that seeing data for additional years and comparing the use of sessionals between Faculties at UPEI as well as with other institutions would be useful.

R. Kurial indicated that the issue of retention is being discussed at Chairs meetings and at departmental meetings. B. Davetian raised the issue of sessional vs full time faculty and the need to look at whether or not we could have full time faculty teaching 1st year courses with the coming “3 and 2” requirements. The question of Island students and differences in retention was responded to with the indication that retention for Island students was also higher in 03/04. The Chair indicated that we are also getting a better picture of the issue as the data are generated and analyzed. He highlighted that inflation of our offerings in upper years is having an impact on the attention paid to 1st year courses. The questions around the 1st year experience and whether we have our best teachers in 1st year courses are critical. One thing we can all do that will make a difference is to pay a little more attention to each other and take the time to interact with students in as many contexts as possible.

M. Hughes asked if it is feasible to survey students over 2 years instead of just 1 in order to provide additional information on their experience. V. Timmons responded that the letter sent in the Winter of 2007 from the President to students that had previously discontinued registered a big impact and resulted in 63 students returning, including many commenting on the impact of the letter. She also highlighted the example of Nursing and the fact that they have a cohort of 60 and still have high retention: a sense of a cohort (not necessarily a small one) can go a long way to helping with the student experience. B. Davetian suggested that his department can develop a program to bring in more students but the question that is raised is “What will happen if they did”? Would they get more faculty or resources? J. Velaidum asked for an update on the Director of Student Engagement as that position is so important to this issue. V. Timmons responded that the Committee for that position decided to wait for 1 year before proceeding for a number of reasons. She also asked Senators to let her know if they have other ideas for data to collect or ways to respond to the retention issue. The Chair ended the discussion by asking Senators to take the discussion to a broader context with their colleagues outside Senate.

7. **Budget Preview Report**

G. Bradshaw led the discussion of the current budget process. The picture on the revenue side is one of significant uncertainty, so the current process makes a number of assumptions. We are attempting to build a main campus budget with a tuition increase of 2%, but this will depend on government funding. We are still budgeting for an intake of 800, which is not certain given the challenges in enrollment. Major cost drivers are salaries and benefits at 70+% of the total budget, the upcoming “3 and 2”, increases in benefits costs, outstanding contract negotiations and energy costs. Some efforts, such as the energy efficiency activities undertaken to date may help reduce the impact of the energy factor.

P. Hooper provided additional detail. The base operating grant is $25.5 million with an assumed $1.4 million increase and $2.1 million tuition replacement for 2007-08. Enrolments for 2007-08 are estimated to be 2,808-2,862 depending on retention. Detail on retention rates and changes were presented, highlighting the likelihood that retention rates will continue to slide. An additional budget challenge is the increased costs for the University’s pension contributions. The total estimated increase in costs is $3,072,100 (including current budget proposals from all units) while the increase in revenue is projected to be $2,420,000, a difference $652,100. The increase in graduate and international student enrolments has increased significantly, which will help balance the changes in undergraduate and part time enrolment. Revenue from all sources was $105 million in 2006-2007. There are still
uncertainties in the provincial commitments re AVC, so those numbers are not included here.

B. Davetian asked for clarification of the difference in the Costs/Revenue projection and the $652,100 “shortfall” and P. Hooper indicated that this amount includes the proposed budget increases, which are still under discussion at the budget table. The Chair highlighted that making more efficient use of our resources is the best way to have an impact on the budget. Energy savings that we have achieved over the last few years are a good example of that. We are also looking at initiatives to achieve savings in the use of paper. A critical area is in instructional resources, in particular where those resources are allocated (e.g. 3rd and 4th year) and in the “3 and 2” transition. The Chair also highlighted that the University has a very strong record of budget and resource planning.

D. Dahn suggested that the research revenue may be an indication that faculty are spending more time on research and that, in the same way as more efforts spent on 3rd and 4th year students, this factor may be having an impact on the retention issue. G. Bradshaw also indicated that the institution does shoulder an additional financial burden for supporting the increase in research activity. J. Velaidum asked where the grant-per-student ranks with other institutions. The Chair indicated that traditionally PEI would rank lower in this area although the most recent grant increase in combination with expected enrolment decreases has moved us up higher on a grant-per-student basis.

The Chair ended with a suggestion that the budget process will proceed with a continuation of the dialog and carrying the discussion to our colleagues in order to ensure the best result. He also highlighted that we are not poor in comparison to some of our regional colleagues and the even greater challenges that some institutions are facing.

8. Other Business

None.

9. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 4:50 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted

Mark Leggott
Acting Secretary