

Discussion of Educational Policy Items Related to COVID-19 Situation
Senate Council
March 13, 2020

The Senate Council met in a specially called session at 11:00 am on Friday, March 13, 2020 in 009F Main Building, although there were some participants who participated via video conference. Below is a record of what transpired. All votes were taken via a show of hands unless indicated otherwise.

Senate Council Chair Jennifer Bird-Pollan called the Senate Council (SC) meeting to order at 10:58 am. The Chair welcomed those present.

The Chair welcomed Provost David Blackwell and he expressed his gratitude to SC for meeting to address academic policies and helping the University to continue its mission to operate as close to normal as possible. He explained that the situation is very fluid, and the administration is working on communications to address next steps.

The Provost reported that, in response to the survey sent to students, many students indicated that they would be traveling over spring break. The University is working hard to plan for the health and safety of everyone on campus and the greater community, and this influenced the decision to move classes online for the two weeks following spring break. Classes going online will be a challenge for both students and faculty and the University wants to be sure that everyone has the best chance for success.

Provost Blackwell expressed his great respect for shared governance and confirmed that the Senate ultimately determines academic standards. He will continue to consult with the Chair as issues arise. He asked that all concerns and ideas be communicated with the Chair for her to funnel to the appropriate workstream.

The floor was opened for questions that included:

- If classes are all online, are students allowed to come into the classroom while the professor records the lecture if the student chooses to?
No, there could be the perception that the students on campus have an advantage and it could cause confusion as to whether they are really supposed to come in or not.
- Will we be asking the students who come back to campus to stay inside/isolate?
The students are currently being surveyed to see how many plan to come back to campus after spring break. Once the response is in, it will influence the policy.
- Where is the line between administrative action and academic policy?
There are a range of decisions that relate to both. Administration may not be able to consult Senate Council for some decisions due to expediency, but at the very least the SC Chair will be consulted.

The Chair thanked Provost Blackwell for coming.

The Chair outlined what is most urgent for SC to consider during their meeting. She noted that the overarching goal for the day was to be focused on student success and academic freedom. She asked SC to provide as much guidance as possible on big issues brought up in the meeting so that she can make informed decisions on their behalf if necessary. She plans to send a campus wide email out in the coming days to inform faculty and students of decisions made.

The Chair asked that they first go around the table and say one thing that they are most concerned about addressing in the coming weeks. Comments included:

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- Students receiving all curricular components for graduation
- Syllabus modification
- Health and safety of faculty and staff
- Students graduating on time
- Students' choice of pass/fail grading
- Continuity of instruction for experiential courses
- Technical requirements for students and faculty
- Hands on activities that cannot be recreated online
- Withdrawal window
- Long term delivery of courses
- Long term accommodation of students
- Empowering faculty to modify syllabi as soon as possible and in writing
- Alternate delivery to students can include more than online teaching and should be used as appropriate.
- Possible student perceptions that courses offered via alternative delivery methods during this crisis are the same as distance learning classes
- Maintaining standards while supporting changes
- SACSCOC standards and maintaining the academic integrity of the degree
- Who will be making decisions about graduate students and if research will continue?

The Chair then asked everyone to go around the table and share solutions. Comments included:

- Conduct summative exams online
- Instructional designers are available for faculty who need help thinking about best modalities
- Spend the time between now and the end of the planned "alternative delivery" period planning for what may happen beyond then
- Give faculty blanket authority to change syllabi as needed and provide guidance on what can be changed.
- Clear communication from faculty to students to alleviate stress
- Faculty should not make decisions in isolation, but rather come to a departmental consensus, to help with accountability.
- Extending withdrawal window for students

1. Statement Regarding Temporary Changes to Courses, Degree Programs, and Certificate Programs.

The Chair asked SC to email her with thoughts about the draft email message going out from SC to faculty. The email was meant to convey the message that UK is not becoming an online university and that the spring 2020 semester is not precedent setting. Grossman suggested adding a statement about the importance of keeping everyone healthy and asking faculty to be as flexible as possible with students.

2. Will SC and Senate meet digitally, in person, or a combination of both?

The Chair consulted with General Counsel William Thro about conducting online meetings for Senate and SC. Thro informed her that the state law was updated in June of 2018 to allow for online meeting, but it must immediately cease if any Senate member loses connection and it may not continue until the connection is restored. The Chair commented that for the smaller SC group this is a good option, but for a full Senate meeting, there may be too much potential for technical problems. She noted that SC does have the authority to make decisions on behalf of Senate.

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There was discussion about posting the Senate agenda online and asking Senators to send their comments to SC so they can make voting decisions that are informed by input from senators, even if the senators will not be voting on the items. By using Zoom, online meetings will be transparent and anyone could attend. It was suggested to postpone items that can be postponed until the full Senate is able to meet.

3. Things to think about

Possible Senate Rule waivers and guidance for such waivers was discussed. For example, there may be instances when students need a study abroad course to complete program requirements, but the trip has been cancelled.

Assistant Provost for Strategic Planning and Institutional Effectiveness Annie Davis Weber explained that she received an email from SACSCOC that clarified the number of credit hours required for a student to graduate cannot be changed by institutions. She did note that if comparable courses are available, they can still meet program requirements with course substitutions, or if learning is demonstrated in other ways.

There was discussion about Directors of Graduate/Undergraduate Studies having the authority to accept alternative courses if they are found to be equivalent to the course the student is unable to take.

The Chair then asked SC members to think about the possibility of changing program requirements rather than total credit hours. SC members discussed the matter and determined that directors of undergraduate studies (DUSs) and directors of graduate studies (DGSs) already had the authority to approve a wide range of course substitutions. In response to questions, Registrar Kim Taylor cautioned SC members that if course substitutions were being made, a degree audit should be run to be sure the outcome will be what was sought. There were questions about tracking course exceptions and Taylor said that there would be a way to track exceptions.

There were a few comments about substitutions for college-level requirements and the Chair suggested that the college's associate dean would be the best resource for those issues.

Calendar- Withdrawal

The Chair reminded SC members that the last day to withdraw from a course during the spring 2020 semester will be coming up on April 3. SC members were generally supportive of the idea to delay the deadline to withdraw from a course until much later in the semester. There was discussion about the deadline extension and how it would affect students. It was noted that these policies will depend on the length of time that courses are being taught via alternate delivery methods. Registrar Taylor informed SC of the current deadlines for grading windows and the potential for faculty to have a shorter grading window to turn grades in if withdrawal deadlines are extended. In response to other comments, Taylor stated that the deadline to withdraw needed to occur before the grading window opens at the end of the semester. Brion spoke in favor of extending the withdrawal deadline and having a shortened grading window.

SC members discussed the specific date to identify as the last day to withdraw, as well as whether or not it should be contingent upon the possibility of a return to regular delivery of classes. There was also discussion of the potential impact retroactive withdrawal appeals (RWAs) if the withdrawal window is

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not extended sufficiently. Because the Senate's Retroactive Withdrawal Appeals Committees (SRWAC) prefers to grant withdrawals for an entire semester (but not for a single course), students who do not withdraw but then receive a poor grade may not have recourse in the future to use the retroactive withdrawal appeals process to withdraw from one course retroactively.

Gail Brion (EN) made a **motion** to extend the last day for students to withdraw from classes for the spring 2020 semester to May 12, 2020 11:59 pm (EST), the day after grades are submitted. Michael Hamilton (SGA) **seconded**. The Chair asked if there was any debate. Taylor commented that having the withdrawal date so late would impact the colleges' progression audits, which will be impacted if a student withdraws from a course on May 12. The date could be managed, but it would mean delaying all degree conferrals, along with a host of other issues.

Robert Grossman (AS) made a **substitute motion** to change the last day for students to withdraw from classes for the spring 2020 semester from May 12, 2020 to May 1, 2020 11:59 pm (EST). Leslie Vincent (BE) **seconded**. The Chair asked for debate on the substitute motion. There was discussion about the potential for more students filing for retroactive withdrawals and a suggestion that grades be turned in earlier. Ombud Kaveh Tagavi stated that having the withdrawal date fall immediately before final exams would be feasible from his perspective. He said that at that point, it would be difficult for any student to make an RWA based on course modality or other problems related to the COVID-19 situation. The Chair noted that the SC could create expedited or alternate proposals for COVID-19-related RWAs if it was needed in the future. SC members agreed that the proposed change to the withdrawal date was a one-time change, for spring 2020 only.

Davy Jones asked about professional programs with special calendars. The Chair said that the change being discussed related to the Academic Calendar and professional programs with authority to create their own calendars will need to bring their requests for calendar changes to SC.

A **vote** was taken to substitute Grossman's motion for Brion's motion and it **passed** with seven in favor and four opposed. The Chair then asked SC members to discuss and debate Grossman's motion, to change the last day to withdraw to May 1. SC members acknowledged the concerns raised by all three student members about permitting to submit RWAs for single courses. The general consensus was that if the RWA process was not working smoothly for all students, a modified process could be developed by the SC.

A **vote** was taken for the motion to change the last day for students to withdraw from classes for the spring 2020 semester to May 1, 2020 11:59 pm (EST) and the motion **passed** with none opposed.

Pass/Fail

The Chair informed SC that the last day for students to change their grading option from a letter grade to pass/fail was February 5, 2020, but SC has the option to change this date to later in the semester. She asked SC what their thoughts were about this.

Allison Soult (AS) made a **motion** to make the last day for students to change their grading option from a letter grade to pass/fail for spring 2020 classes the last day of classes, currently May 1, 2020. DeShana Collett (HS) **seconded**. The Chair asked if there was any debate. There was discussion about the ramifications that students might face by changing from a letter grade to the pass/fail option but it was

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noted that ramifications could be addressed if the SC voted to change the date by which a student must switch from a letter grade to pass/fail grading. A **vote** was taken and the motion **passed** with all in favor.

The Chair then asked SC members to discuss implications for students who change their letter grade to pass/fail. Undergraduate students currently can take up to four elective courses as pass/fail and the Chair asked if that should be changed for the spring semester.

SC members discussed the issue and the comments included:

- Taking a course pass/fail for this one semester will follow the student around and will be difficult to track in the future.
- Students generally cannot use pass/fail grading for required courses.
- Freshman are not allowed to use the pass/fail option.
- Students on academic probation are not allowed to use pass/fail grading.
- Students are only allowed a limited number of courses to be pass/fail.

Grossman suggested the anticipated changes that would allow a student to take a program requirement should only be applicable to students graduating in May or August. There was little support for asking programs to submit a record of the exceptions being granted. After discussion, Brown commented that restricting the changes to only May and August graduates would only help some students. If a non-graduating student was currently in a program-required course this semester and the course would not be offered again prior to their graduation, the student essentially would not be able to take the course pass/fail. The Chair commented that DGSs and DUSs could still allow substitutions in the future for such students.

There was broad support for reminding DGSs and DUSs that they should be consulting with program faculty, especially the faculty of record. SC members were supportive of delegating to college-level faculty the responsibility for making decisions about pass/fail courses and college requirements. Discussion continued. In response to a question from the Chair, Taylor confirmed that a DUS currently already has the authority to allow a student to take a major requirement pass/fail, and that a college-level requirement for a letter grade could be waived by an associate dean. There were a few comments about allowing students to take UK Core courses with pass/fail grading but the Chair said she preferred to ask the Senate's UK Core Education Committee to provide a recommendation prior to any SC action.

SC members then focused on whether or not freshman would be allowed to take courses with pass/fail grading. Hamilton (SGA) made a **motion** to eliminate all class-specific language in the Senate Rules related to pass/fail policy for spring 2020 so that freshman may elect the pass/fail option. Connor Richardson (SGA) **seconded**. The Chair asked if there was any debate and reminded everyone that this motion is related only to undergraduates. A **vote** was taken and the motion **passed** with ten in favor and one abstaining.

The Chair asked SC what their thoughts were about allowing students on academic probation to use pass/fail grading for the spring 2020 semester.

Soult made a **motion** to allow students on academic probation to choose pass/fail grading for electives during the spring 2020 semester. Hamilton **seconded**. The Chair asked if there was any debate but there was little. A **vote** was taken and the motion passed with none opposed.

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The Chair then asked SC for their thoughts about the maximum of four pass/fail elective classes allowed for undergraduate students.

Grossman made a **motion** that all pass/fail courses taken during spring 2020 not count toward the four-course cap on pass/fail courses. Brion **seconded**. It was clarified that the change would apply even if a student was already enrolled to take a course as pass/fail. The Chair asked if there was any debate and there was. SC members also discussed how this change could affect repeat options and challenges this may cause for the Registrar's Office. A **vote** was taken and the motion **passed** with all in favor.

Grossman clarified that the change did not permanently remove the cap of four electives taken pass/fail, but rather that the pass/fail courses taken during spring 2020 would not count towards the four.

The Chair said that when she sent out the campuswide message, she would include a reminder about the individual authority people at the college level and the program level already had authority to make some decisions. SC members suggested sharing the information as widely as possible and offered a variety of suggestions, including a communication directly to students.

4. Specific Plans of Action for Changing Program Requirements

Syllabi

The Chair asked Roger Brown (AG) to describe his suggestions and he did so. He noted that many faculty are going to be concerned about the prospect of changing syllabi for their courses in the middle of the semester, even if it was warranted due to the pandemic. There was discussion about when faculty should provide students with updated syllabi. They also discussed the challenges of informing students and faculty of the recent changes to the Academic Calendar, pass/fail changes, and the process for faculty to change syllabi. The Chair commented that it sounded like there was a consensus among SC members that current policies permit instructors to adjust syllabi in response to extreme circumstances. There was also discussion about how changes will differ if classes go online for two weeks or for the remainder of the semester Discussion continued, at length.

Grossman made a **motion** that during the spring 2020 semester, faculty are authorized to change their syllabi due to extraordinary situation being faced and must communicate any changes to their students. Vincent **seconded**. The Chair asked if there was any debate. There was discussion about encouraging instructors to minimize their changes to syllabi. There was also discussion about setting dates for changes to be turned in and the time period open for changes. A **vote** was taken and the motion **passed** with all in favor.

Excused Absences

There was discussion about waiving *SR 5.2.4.2.1* ("Acceptable Excuses") for the spring 2020 semester. Waiving this *SR* would allow any absence declared by the student be considered an excused absence. There was concern about this proposed change being overly permissive and difficult for instructors, especially those with large classes, but it was noted that the duration of classes shifting to alternate delivery modes would play a part in deciding how to best deal with the issue. There was also discussion regarding specific challenges for students without access to reliable internet.

SC suggested that a message be sent to instructors encouraging them to be flexible with students during spring 2020 because of the extraordinary circumstances. SC strongly recommends that faculty not require a doctor's note if a student explained they were absent due to sickness. There is already federal guidance from the Centers on Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) regarding when and when not to

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seek medical care. In response to concerns that some faculty still would require a doctor's note to excuse an absence, the Chair noted that Ombud Tagavi had attended the meeting and will be able to remember SC's discussion if an issue arises.

The Chair will communicate this in her email to faculty and will consult with members of the Emergency Operations Committee before sending it out.

The Chair thanked everyone for a productive meeting. She noted that the focus of the meeting was on undergraduates, but she will use SC's guidance in discussions regarding professional and graduate programs. She will bring any larger questions to SC during their Zoom meetings. The Chair also mentioned that SC office staff will be working from home as much as possible. There were a few final comments from SC members. Hamilton thanked SC members for keeping the day's discussion focused on the student experience, sometimes when it made things harder for faculty. He noted that it was more work for faculty to take up student suggestions and he greatly appreciated all the SC was doing.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:40 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Jennifer Bird-Pollan,
Senate Council Chair

SC members present: Andrade, Bird-Pollan, Blonder, Brion, Cantrell, Collett, Cramer, Grossman, Hall, Hamilton, Richardson, Shaikh, Sault, and Vincent.

Invited guests present: David Blackwell, Anna Bosch, Sheila Brothers, Roger Brown, Davy Jones, Kathi Kern, Kaveh Tagavi, Kim Taylor, and Annie Davis Weber.

Prepared by Stephanie Woolery on April 2, 2020.