December 4, 2019

As we approach the end of the calendar year, General Faculties Council held the third of three very productive meetings for Fall 2019. I am most excited about finding membership clarity for September 1, 2020.

On the advice of its Executive Committee, and acting on a recommendation from Faculty members in the Library, GFC will, from the 2020-21 academic year, recognize a Library Council as a body equivalent to a Faculty/School Council at MacEwan. Now, of course, leadership in the Library will have to work with GFC on formal terms of reference, as curricular matters usually make up the main business of a Faculty/School Council, but the principle represented here is important: librarians will, through this approach, be eligible for GFC membership. With this decision made, GFC accepted a further recommendation to elect a member with a full-time faculty appointment outside the Faculties, Schools, and the Library. This will accommodate Counsellors, for one, but it also recognizes the fact that, in the past, Faculty members have been appointed in other units outside Student Affairs. This approach will ensure widest participation in academic governance at the highest institutional level. This is no small accomplishment.

To that end, GFC adopted a further principle that is most dear to me, personally: allowing everyone with a full-time faculty appointment the opportunity to run for General Faculties Council. The nature of a University allows, indeed sometimes requires, faculty members to undertake administrative work. While they are doing that work, they cannot be members of the bargaining unit. This means only that they are not in the Faculty Association, not that they have ceased to hold faculty appointments. I have a faculty appointment, as do the Deans. However, we also have seats on GFC because of the administrative positions we hold. Associate Deans are not ex-officio members of GFC, so I have always argued that they should be able to run for a seat and allow their colleagues to decide if they are best suited to represent their designated unit. Not only is this fair, it also removes a disincentive to engage in leadership. It means, for example, that the Director of the Office of Teaching and Learning Services could run for a GFC seat from her home Faculty should she wish to do so, and anyone with a faculty appointment could consider secondment into leadership without forsaking the opportunity to try to participate in the work of General Faculties Council. The greatest responsibility of bicameral governance is cooperation, with people sometimes playing different roles simultaneously. I applaud efforts that downplay sentiments of “us versus them.”

GFC also voted to include the Associate Vice-Presidents who are academic senior administrators. The AVP, Students and Teaching and the AVP, Research will join General Faculties Council next year, complementing the participation of the Registrar, who is an ex-officio member. We are adding two additional student members, bringing that number to four, and we will have a representative from our Alumni Association. Finally, we will add seven more faculty members, one from each Faculty and
School, as well as an additional seat for the Library. It is my hope that these decisions will provide the next President a robust group, while not making the mistake, against which we were cautioned in the Marshall Report, of building a GFC too large to be practical. We will now turn our attention to working with units across campus to enact a transparent election process to get the next GFC and its standing committees staffed in due course.

While we eagerly anticipate a more conventional GFC year in 2020-21, we should not lose track of the fact that the Council continues to do your work in this interim period. We completed policy approvals on Free Expression, Academic Integrity, and Non-Academic Misconduct, and these documents may be most interesting because they represent areas of shared governance with the Board. After passing through General Faculties Council, on the academic governance side, they move through standing committees of administrative governance, requiring coordination and cooperation across the bicameral model. In addition to the usual curricular changes one might expect to see, GFC dealt with programs approvals and terminations, as well as program review action plans. We approved November graduands ahead of Convocation, in anticipation of the opportunity, perhaps, to position this responsibility with Faculty/School Councils in the future. We also nominated Lucio Gelmini, Faculty of Arts and Science, for a seat on the Board of Governors, and we passed along to the Minister of Advanced Education that nomination.

Most importantly, perhaps, GFC remains the venue for discussions of matters of interest to the faculty. We received regular reports from the Acting President and myself, and in the midst of financial uncertainty Council provided an opportunity for frank and transparent discussions of future directions. It is quite likely that we will have to make changes to the ways in which we deliver programming, and while there are things that can simply be implemented, administratively, it remains a fact that only GFC can make more comprehensive changes to our programming. I expect that General Faculties Council will be key to how we respond to the refashioning of post-secondary education in this province over the next few years.

Sincerely,

Dr. Craig Monk
Provost and Vice-President Academic