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SPECIAL SENATE MEETING MINUTES June 3, 2020

The 613th Special meeting of the Senate of Saint Mary's University was held on Wednesday, June 3, 2020, at 3:00 PM, via Zoom. Dr Takseva, Chairperson presided.

PRESENT: Dr Summerby-Murray, Dr Butler, Dr Bhabra, Dr Francis, Dr MacDonald, Dr Sarty, Dr Bannerjee, Dr Brosseau, Dr Collins, Dr De Fuentes, Dr Doucet, Dr Grandy, Dr Grek-Martin, Dr Hanley, Dr Khokhar, Dr McKee, Dr Panasian, Dr Power, Dr Stinson, Dr Takseva, Dr Twohig, Mr Brophy, Ms Killam, Ms van den Hoogen, Mr de Chastelain, Ms Abigail Winters, Mr Tumussime, Mr Zokan, Dr Smith, Ms Milton, Ms Sargeant-Greewood, and Ms Bell, Secretary to the Office of Senate.

REGRETS Ms Nankani

Meeting commenced at 3:04 P.M with the territorial acknowledgement.

20110 **REPORT OF AGENDA COMMITTEE**
The Senate Agenda was approved.

20111 **NEW BUSINESS FROM**

1. Floor (not involving notice of motion)
Discussion - plans and the mode of instruction for the fall term (202110).
Key Discussion Points:
 - Chair reiterated the need for Senate to be closely involved in constructive and meaningful dialogue in all decisions that have impact on the academic programing and delivery of courses.
 - Dr Butler shared a presentation.
 - The Deans and Associate Deans had a meeting to discuss this issue.
 - Consultations were done with:
 - Programs and Departments
 - Other institutions,
 - SMUSA,
 - SMUFU and others.
 - July 1 was discussed as a decision date for the fall term delivery, but the community has made it clear that, as soon as possible, a decision is wanted and warranted.
 - This proposal is in the best interests of the long-term future of the university.

- Communications from other universities in this regard have been noted. These communications have been vague because of the uncertainty of the current situation. They were not received well by the intended audience.
- When the campus is allowed to open, population density will be regulated by the provincial public health authorities. There will certainly be physical distancing required.
- Saint Mary's University will have to meet and cautiously exceed the direction of the provincial public health and safety directives.
- We need clarity and certainly in the short term. Students, parents and faculty need to know how courses will be delivered in the fall.
- We also need academic continuity for the fall term. Whatever our decision is for the fall term, we must provide continuity and not change direction or our decisions in this regard.
- There is concern related to the potential impact of a second wave of Covid 19.
- We have already approved the return to research protocols and we expect to learn during those efforts.
- Of significant consideration is the operation of residences for students and residents who require accommodations. Dal and MSVU are already receiving requests from students to come onto campus.
- Access to services are a concern and consideration. We also need to consider how to address Co-Curricular activities.
- International travel restrictions will still be in place.
- Domestic restrictions will likely still be in place.
- There will be a gathering size limit of 50 or less with distancing restrictions applied to part or all of the fall term.
- Policing all of the restrictions in terms of presence and activities on campus will create anxiety. For example, many students are commuter students. If those students have a long gap between classes, we may have to ask them to leave campus during that gap time.
- Saint Mary's University is committed to equity and inclusion for all students, faculty and staff. Providing a “hybrid” approach to course delivery will create unintentional inequities.
- Online course delivery allows for the creation of enriched critical student engagement in academic courses and opportunities for enriched in-personal student engagement in Co-Curricular learning.
- Availability and deployment of resources is a challenge:
 - In-person and hybrid delivery requires expensive physical modifications and protocols; associated costs and staff resources are prohibitive. Not all required modifications are in fact possible, for example, hallway and stair widths, and the size of elevators and bathrooms.
- No matter what we do, there will be a loss of international enrolments. Students starting courses online in the fall will have that time counted as time studying in country. To start online in fall 2020, students will need a valid study permit, but sufficient resources are not in place to handle the processing of applications for these permits to allow students to attend in the fall.
- Competition for domestic enrolment is going to increase in this climate.
- There are also going to be revenue losses resulting from the fact that there are no conferences occurring on campus. There are many places around campus where revenue losses have already been noted.

- The losses in international enrolment will be long term. This is related to the continuation of those students in later terms. There is no movement in terms of government support for universities.
- Enrolment data as of May 31 (for fall 2020) was shown:
- The decrease in international registrations is problematic for the fall.
- The approved budget will be impacted significantly by this. There will be a deficit of \$900,000 for the year.
- No matter what the numbers say, we will not know what will happen in terms of enrolments until September. In our current situation, there is no precedent to follow, no past experience to go by. Survey results suggest that more than 50% of international students will defer their studies or choose a school closer to home. This also extends to out-of-province domestic students. Students worry that campuses will be dangerous places. In addition, students are also susceptible to misinformation about the pandemic.
- We need a decision and we need to act now. Clear direction and timely communication will allow the university to better prepare for the conditions facing us in the fall term.
- Since Senate oversees the academic policy, it has a key role in ensuring support for students. In this regard, it is proposed that:
 - That fall 2020 undergraduate and graduate courses will be delivered online.
 - Everyone at SMU will work diligently to enable opportunities wherever possible for in-person student engagement with research, with focused Co-Curricular learning opportunities, with student life programming and with each other in a safe and controlled environment, as public health directives allow.
- Over the summer months, Senate was encouraged to think through the implications of moving to full online delivery of classes in relation to the academic regulations and potential modifications.
- Questions: Are there any issues or concerns that have been missed? Are there any opportunities here for application in the future?
- Question: Is this proposed statement for discussion or ratification by Senate? What are the key developments that will allow a decision for a return to normal or semi-normal operations? Answer: Any decision for a return to normal operations will depend on public health directives and that situation remains uncertain. This proposal is being provided as a consultation with Senate only. Because this situation deals directly with health and safety issues, it is a Board decision. However, the academic components must be Senate's decision. An expression of support from Senate would be welcome at this time. This is an area of overlapping governance responsibilities between Senate and the Board of Governors. All matters relating to education policy and academic programming are under the purview of Senate, although on paper the Board has final responsibility for matters relating to budget, operations and risk management. Faculty Senators reiterated the need for collegial governance that would not minimize the role that Senate plays in this process.
- By moving forward with a decision, this would allow the university to work with programs to address ways to manage their programs plans.
- Concern was expressed regarding the use of the term 'Co-Curricular'. There are curricular aspects of course delivery that can significantly

enhance student experience, and the academic integrity of courses in accreditation programs. We must address fall on a case-by-case basis. The use of the term 'Co-Curricular' will signal to students that those activities may not refer to on-campus course-related activities in this situation. Response: The concern is that in this environment we do not want to damage the student's ability to engage. If for reasons of health concerns, or physical proximity, the student is unable to or does not engage with something happening on-campus, we do not want that to disadvantage students. Those activities would have to be extra and not critical course components.

- Question: This is a transitory situation. Can we address this in a positive tone? Answer: Messaging around this situation tries to frame things in a more hopeful way. Senate has had a significant interest in accessibility. Having online support complementing the classroom activities will help with this and will contribute to the university being a more accessible environment.
- Question: Can we consider more sections with smaller numbers? Answer: There are ways to do this without extra sessions. For example, the TAs could manage smaller discussion groups within larger courses.
- Question: Quality of education would be a concern in the fall. What kind of approach will be taken in terms of communicating this decision to students? How will we communicate that there may be a potential for on-campus activities in the fall but that would not be required in terms of course grade outcomes? Answer: There is no announcement that will be sent to all students concerning the potential for on-campus activities. Our goal is to be emphatically clear about the fact that delivery of courses will be online in the fall term. We want to be clear about the work that is being done by various units to support this approach. We do not want to appear to be committing to a path that is subject to change. We want to be clear that we will be continuing to make our best efforts to maintain the Saint Mary's experience for students.
- All graduate and undergraduate courses will be delivered online. We will be clear about the supports that will be available online to students and faculty in this regard.
- It is projected that the second wave of COVID 19 may be experienced in September or October. We need to recognize that our priority is to protect our community through all of this. We will communicate that our focus is mainly on the health and safety of our community.
- We want to be clear that there may be opportunities for on-campus activities while complying with public health directives.
- A key concern is how to ensure the continuity of the Santamarian experience, which relies very closely on the relationship between faculty and students.
- A reiterated concern was raised that this decision may have long-term impacts on the university. Delivery of programs and quality of education is of concern. Faculty Senators expressed concern that no major decisions regarding programming should be made in a situation of crisis, and the long-term goals and values of the institution should be understood to be of paramount importance.
- Question: What is happening with part-time faculty and the hires that have been placed on hold? This will affect the quality of programs. Many of the part-time faculty contribute an extremely important role in terms of the quality of education and experience. Answer: Once this

decision is made, we can move forward with decisions related to part-time instructors. The hires that are on hold are part of a discussion between the university and SMUFU.

- Questions: Are we sticking with the schedule as published in Banner? Will courses be offered synchronously or asynchronously? Answer: As the decision is made, this will be a question referred to the programs. We will have to look at what this means in terms of student choice and registrations.
- Question: Are we looking at reducing tuition? Answer: The costs for these developments have been high. We are not considering reducing fees.
- **Suggestion:** When the message goes out, we need to focus beyond the delivery mechanism. We need to identify the thoughtfulness with which we have considered Saint Mary's University's approach to this situation. We need to focus on our concern with the quality of our delivery and the student experience in this situation.
- Concern was expressed about the online delivery having a negative impact on enrolments. Question: What is the financial impact of going online? Answer: Somethings get absorbed into the vacancy allowance within the budget. There are other things that will offset some expenses. Without doubt, the financial impact will be significant.
- It was suggested that we would need to be careful with our tone. The message going out needs to be vastly more expansive than the proposal that has been presented. Answer: The proposal contains the core principles. Our goal is to say that we are going to do this in a way that is meaningful for the student. The issue is what detail we are able to provide now.
- It was noted that the economy would reopen this Friday. Question: What does this mean in terms of a return to campus? Answer: The universities have not been given the green light to reopen at this time. We have been asked to address the public health concerns before the authorities will consider allowing a return to campus.
- A protocol is being developed (with technical and developmental support) for faculty to come into campus to make recorded lectures.
- Concern was expressed regarding access to faculty offices. If faculty are to move all their classes to online delivery in the fall, they will need access to their offices and the records kept there. Response: This is currently under consideration. At this time, no university has been allowing faculty back on campus in a normal way. Strong encouragement was provided to the EMG and the Board of Governors to develop a flexible solution to faculty access to their offices that will be implemented at the earliest possible time, and following an announcement to the University community that we will be moving to online delivery of courses in the fall. Faculty need to be able to access their office space and everything in that space to prepare adequately for fall classes in this model.
- Question: What is happening concerning the evergreen process? What types of hardware and upgrades will be available to faculty to facilitate moving to online course delivery? Answer: This is being addressed now. We will have many computer labs with equipment that will not be used in the fall and those resources may be re-deployed. That is one approach under consideration. We are looking at equipment purchases and acquisitions. There are on-going discussions in this regard.

- Question: With enrolments so precarious, when will the decision be made about the timing of course cancellation decisions for courses with low enrolment, given the amount of time required to prepare alternative courses for remote delivery? Answer: This decision resides with the Deans and Departments. The VPAR will work with the Deans on this.
- Members were asked to continue to raise issues through their Dean to ensure that all concerns are being addressed and nothing is missed.
- Question: What about accredited programs that require on-campus activities? Answer: Some of the accrediting bodies are showing flexibility on these components for the fall term only.
- As the sector has looked at the supports institutions have put in place for faculty and students because of this situation, it has been commented that the supports offered by the Studio at Saint Mary's University are noteworthy. However, human resource capacity was cited as a possible and likely challenge in the kinds of support the Studio is able to offer.
- Question: When will the communication be released? Answer: As soon as possible. Our goal is to release a communication tomorrow.
- As soon as this is released, a communication should immediately be sent to faculty identifying the support that will be provided. A Town Hall with Dr Butler will also be organized to address this issue. Faculty senators reiterated the need for specific types of support to be provided to faculty to ensure that they have the means and knowledge to prepare and deliver all courses online. This is imperative to safeguarding the academic integrity of courses.
- Question: Can we signal that if the situation changes, we will respond quickly to provide a larger opportunity for in-person participation? Answer: We have to be careful about equity of access for all students. We will look at this opportunity but approach it cautiously.
- Many concerns were raised around the capacity to deliver a fulsome Santamarian education and a positive experience for students with the proposed platform. Faculty Senators strongly encouraged the EMG to ensure that some flexibility is built into the proposal that would allow for access to campus for additional activities that would sustain and support student engagement and University campus experience that is not limited only to remote access.
- Question: Banner is used to register for courses. If we have asynchronous delivery, the restrictions may disappear and courses that students thought they could not take, they will be able to take. If the main content is offered asynchronously, the opportunities open up. Answer: Once we make this decision, faculty can then address this potential. Because of the nature of our student population, asynchronous offerings make the most sense given the complexities of time zones, etc. We do have a new code for this in Banner to identify courses that can be offered in this manner. Dave Peters' team is working on this. Dr Wendy Carroll has been doing a lot of work in this regard and there is a presentation that she developed on this. She has also offered to help faculty interested in pursuing this further. The VPAR emphasized that faculty members have the freedom to decide whether their courses will employ synchronous or asynchronous modes of delivery, either in full or in part in each of their courses.
- Conventional ads seeking PTOL instructors for in-person classes include the designated timeslot of the courses in question. Asynchronous courses would have no such designations but it may be premature of Chairs to advertise this delivery mode if it is ultimately the PT instructor's

decision. Question: If the decision ultimately lies with the instructor, perhaps advertisements for part-time instructors should not predetermine the mode of delivery? Answer: The VPAR indicated he would look into that question and report back to depts/programs via the Deans.

- Concern was expressed regarding the problem with asynchronous course offerings and the loss of group tutorials/seminar type interactions and learning.
- It is important that we have a shared understanding of what we mean by these terms, as we are experiencing a few issues already with spring courses because of different interpretations.
- A very strong concern was expressed that the local part-time pool is shrinking. Question: Can contracts be prepared now? Answer: Yes but be conscious whether there is a capacity for those instructors to deliver online before moving forward.
- The proposal was shown again with a request for feedback/suggestions:
 - 1) Use “additional enrichment activities” versus using the word ‘Co-Curricular’.
 - 2) Include a reference to/clarity on “on-campus course activities” in the second paragraph.
 - 3) Focus beyond the delivery mechanism in the communication. Identify the thoughtfulness with which SMU considered their approach and the concern with the quality of our delivery and the student experience.
 - 4) Clear articulation of the work that is being done by various units to support this approach.
- The Chair urged Senators to monitor issues that have impact on teaching, learning and academic programming arising from this proposal to bring forward to upcoming Senate meetings.

Moved by Stinson and seconded that, **“the Senate supports the decision that fall 2020 undergraduate and graduate courses be delivered online” Motion carried.**

20112

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 5:05 P.M.

Barb Bell,
Secretary of Senate