Minutes of a Special Meeting of the Senate Executive Committee held on the above date at 1:30 p.m., remotely via BlueJeans

Those present:
- Dr. D. Barnard, Chair
- Prof. J. Anderson
- Prof. R. Biscontri
- Prof. P. Blunden
- Prof. T. Chen
- Prof. M. Gabbert
- Dean E. Jurkowski
- Prof. C. Miller
- Ms. T. Nagra
- Prof. D. Oliver
- Dr. J. Ristock
- Prof. A. Schultz
- Dean J. Taylor
- Ms. L. Zapshala-Kelln
- Mr. J. Leclerc, University Secretary
- Dr. S. Coyston, Associate University Secretary

Assessors present:
- Ms. S. Bonner-Proulx
- Ms. N. Lam
- Dr. T. Mondor
- Prof. M. Shaw
- Prof. D. Watt

Regrets:
- none

Absent:
- Ms. J. Minarik

Also present:
- Ms. M. Watson, Executive Assistant to the University Secretary

I CONSIDERATION OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF APRIL 1, 2020

Ms. Nagra MOVED, seconded by Professor Oliver, THAT the minutes of the meeting of the Special Meeting of Senate Executive Committee held on April 1, 2020, be approved as circulated.

CARRIED

II BUSINESS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES - none

III RECOMMENDATION FROM THE ACADEMIC ADVISORY SUB-COMMITTEE OF THE PANDEMIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

1. Proposal for Further Extension to the Voluntary Withdrawal Date

President Barnard reminded the committee that, on March 16, 2020, Senate had delegated its approval authority to the Senate Executive Committee for academic matters arising during the emergency period. The Pandemic Planning Committee had established an Academic Advisory Sub-committee chaired by Dr. Mondor, Deputy Provost (Academic Programs and Planning).
Dr. Mondor said the Sub-committee was proposing to extend the Voluntary Withdrawal deadline for courses taught in the 2020 Winter Term to May 10, 2020, which would align with the deadline previously established (Senate Executive, April 1, 2020) for students to declare to the Registrar’s Office where they would choose to exercise an approved alternative grading option. The extension to the deadline was intended to recognize both the stresses on students in the emergency situation and the complexity of the different grading options they now had to consider, including the implications of their decisions. It would also be clearer for students to have one deadline by which to make their decisions, including whether to voluntarily withdraw or choose an alternative grading option.

Dr. Mondor said the Academic Advisory Sub-committee had consulted with several Deans and with the Provost on the proposal.

Professor Miller MOVED, seconded by Professor Oliver, THAT the Senate Executive Committee approve, on behalf of Senate, a further extension to the Voluntary Withdrawal deadline to May 10, 2020, for courses taught in the 2020 Winter Term (not including spanned courses scheduled over the 2019 Fall – 2020 Winter Terms).

In response to a question, Dr. Mondor said the current proposal had no effect on the deadline for Voluntary Withdrawal for spanned courses, which had been January 20, 2020.

Professor Chen observed that some students who were registered in spanned courses had raised a concern that it was not equitable not to also extend the Voluntary Withdrawal deadline for these courses, as they could not have anticipated the current situation when the Voluntary Withdrawal occurred in January. She suggested that, if one purpose for giving students the option to voluntarily withdraw from courses following the final exam period was so they could elect to remove failing grades from their transcript, the same allowance should be given to students registered in spanned courses.

Dr. Mondor said we would agree to a friendly amendment and the was revised as follows:

Professor Chen MOVED, seconded by Professor Miller, THAT the Senate Executive Committee approve, on behalf of Senate, a further extension to the Voluntary Withdrawal deadline to May 10, 2020, for courses taught in the 2020 Winter Term, including spanned courses scheduled over the 2019 Fall – 2020 Winter Terms.

Ms. Bonner-Proulx expressed support for Professor Chen’s comments and the amendment to the motion.

Responding to a question, Dr. Mondor confirmed that, given the current proposal to extend the Voluntary Withdrawal deadline, students who had withdrawn from courses, given recent changes to course delivery modes and grading options, could ask to be readmitted to those courses. Students would need to contact the relevant Faculty/College/School.
Dr. Mondor responded to several questions from Dean Taylor, which had been raised by Academic Advisors in the Faculty of Arts. He informed the committee that:

- deadlines for submitting lists of graduands and names of award recipients to the Registrar's and Financial Aid and Awards Offices, respectively, had been changed to May 21st;
- Faculties and Schools would have 5.5 days to complete end-of-term processes before the lists of graduands were approved on May 27th;
- the Registrar's Office would provide Faculties and Schools with prerequisite reports by May 13th, which would follow the start of distance education courses on May 4th but would be in advance of the May 15th revision deadline for 2020 Summer Term courses;
- students who completed deferred examinations would have ten days following the receipt of their course grade to decide to either retain the grade, choose an alternate grading option, or voluntarily withdraw from the course;
- Mr. Fuchs, Immigration Consultant, Human Resources, had confirmed there would be no negative ramifications for international students that would arise as a result of the various grading options recently approved by Senate Executive.

Mr. Leclerc said a Special Meeting of Senate Executive would be scheduled for May 27th so the committee could approve, on behalf of Senate, the list of graduands, including any students recommended for degrees notwithstanding a deficiency, and the report on medals and prizes. Degrees and diplomas would be issued effective June 4, 2020.

Professor Blunden raised a concern that the proposal would set a precedent for an option that would violate a fundamental principle that students should not be able to choose whether or not to accept a grade after the final grade had been determined. He recognized, nonetheless, that the proposal was being made in the interest of fairness to all students. Professor Blunden raised the possibilities of, first, automatically converting failing grades to Voluntary Withdrawals and, second, establishing a particular deadline or timeframe within which students who had voluntarily withdrawn from a course(s) could be considered for readmission to the course(s). Students who had withdrawn from a course in late March, for example, might be prepared to complete the course, including the final examination, but those who had withdrawn from a course earlier in the term would have missed significant lecture and course content.

Dr. Mondor suggested that any decisions that might be required regarding appropriate deadlines for students to request readmission to courses from which they had voluntarily withdrawn should be made by Faculties and Schools on the basis of the types of courses they offered. Professor Miller agreed, given the variety of alternate delivery modes that instructors were using and that instructors in some Faculties made greater use of streamed lectures, while others used prerecorded lectures that students could access outside of a scheduled lecture session.
Dr. Mondor said he would not object to an amendment to the motion, to automatically convert failing grades to Voluntarily Withdrawals, if there was support for this idea.

Several committee members raised concerns that automatically converting failing grades to Voluntary Withdrawals might have implications for students’ records of course loads completed, which could jeopardize their eligibility for student awards, loans, and grants, including federal and band funding for Indigenous students, and could also have implications for international students.

Professor Blunden asked if students could automatically be given an Authorized Withdrawal, rather than a Voluntary Withdrawal, which should not negatively impact any award or financial aid funding they might have held.

Dr. Mondor said Authorized Withdrawals, which were given for compassionate reasons, would continue to be available to students in the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic, and Faculties and Schools could consider those on a case-by-case basis. He noted that, with the various decisions approved by Senate Executive in recent weeks, students would have other options open to them. Also, instructors had made significant efforts to deliver their courses using alternate delivery modes, while preserving the content and quality of the courses. For this reason, and given that the University would want to preserve the academic integrity of its system, Dr. Mondor was hesitant to consider the possibility of automatically giving students Authorized Withdrawals for failed courses.

Mr. Leclerc noted that under the *Authorized Withdrawal* policy, Authorized Withdrawals were considered for all courses in a given term and not individual courses, except in extraordinary circumstances.

Professor Anderson identified as an issue, from the standpoint of instructors, the assumption that a final grade would be submitted by the standard date despite extensions given to students for various things, including to make decisions about Voluntary Withdrawals. He asked if it was appropriate to continue to expect instructors to complete their grading by the original deadlines, particularly if examinations for their courses were scheduled late in the final examination period.

Dr. Mondor explained that the grade submission deadline was determined by the requirements of the Admissions and Registrar’s Offices to process final grades within a timeframe that would allow for the assessment of applications for competitive entry programs, for admission for the 2020 Fall Term, and to confirm the lists of graduands for this Spring. He noted that there was limited flexibility to adjust either the final examination schedule or the deadline to submit final grades, which was April 30th, without delaying other activities. Mr. Adams, Executive Director, Enrolment Services, had indicated that the current proposal to extend the Voluntary Withdrawal deadline to May 10th was the latest that this deadline could be moved. As it was, the proposed deadline would reduce the number of days available to review applications for competitive entry programs. Dr. Mondor acknowledged the additional pressures that faculty members were experiencing at the end of this term and the stress associated with that. He
offered to consult with the Registrar’s Office if faculty were aware of particular courses for which the grading deadline would be particularly challenging.

The motion was CARRIED, as amended.

President Barnard thanked Dr. Mondor and others involved in reviewing questions that had arisen in the context of the pandemic, and developing proposals to respond to these.

IV    ADDITIONAL BUSINESS  - none

V    ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 2:15 p.m.

These minutes, page 1 to 5, together with the agenda, pages 1 to 3, comprise the minutes of a Special Meeting of Senate Executive Committee meeting held on April 8, 2020.