

SENATE MEETING, APRIL 25, 2020

QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

AGENDA ITEM 7: GSA REPORT

- *Question on the Graduate Students' Association Report to Senate - what is meant by "implantation of a universal plan for all graduate students" end of para 3 on page 19 of the package.*

*Answer provided by Mery Mendoza, GSA president: The GSA sent two letters to the University senior administration, to consider the implementation of a universal plan which is found here: <https://gsa.usask.ca/documents/statements/2020covid19.pdf>. The GSA leaders have received a written response to our letter and we look forward to continuing our conversations on those topics that are still not addressed such as tuition adjustment and others. A follow-up letter is also found here: https://gsa.usask.ca/documents/statements/2020covid19_2.pdf

GENERAL QUESTION RE: COURSE DELIVERY CHANGES

- *First, have there been any changes to course or program delivery since March that the University may be interested in keeping for future years? In particular, are there any changes to the delivery of law classes and exams that might be retained for future years? Or is it too early to tell?*

It's important to highlight that USask has been in the business of remote learning for decades and we have much in-house expertise both amongst faculty and amongst support staff to in the activities of development and delivery. When the university switched to remote delivery in mid-March there was a flurry of activity to put supports in place to scale up immediately. Interested senators may want to have a look at the websites that were developed to support students in remote learning and to support faculty in remote teaching.

<https://students.usask.ca/study/remote-learning.php#Accessingcoursework>

<https://teaching.usask.ca/remote-teaching/>

I think we believe that faculty colleagues, in general, did some impressive work during this period, well supported by the Gwenna Moss Centre for Teaching and Learning, the Distance Education Unit, and Information and Communication Technology. The teamwork and collaboration were remarkable.

As we plan for the Fall of 2020, knowing that remote delivery will feature prominently, we have more lead time to get ready and as such we can develop and deliver high quality learning experiences that our students expect. We are moving to a new learning management system, which we anticipate will be easier to use and brings with it more features to enable remote delivery.

Although too early to tell, it's possible that the quick shift in March and the continued need to make fuller use of the learning management system for the fall will result in shifts in the way faculty colleagues view the role of technology as an enabler of teaching and learning.

From the College of Law specifically: The College of Law introduced changes to grading mode that applied strictly to courses completed in the Winter 2020. The College of Law will begin the process of planning for September now that finals are complete and are considering how to deliver classes in a remote context. We will plan cautiously (while considering new and innovative methods) and are mindful that, however we deliver our programming, we must remain in compliance with the terms of the National Requirement established by the Federation of Law Societies of Canada. The Council of Canadian Law Dean's is currently in discussions with the Federation on this matter.

GENERAL QUESTION RE: CASPer

The questions relating to CASPer have all been answered by the Academic Program Committee of University Council, unless otherwise noted.

- *Several of the confirmation items submitted by the University included Admission Qualification Changes that propose moving to adopt CASPer as part of their admission process. The various explanations of the system in the meeting package helped to clearly explain the intent and value of pursuing this direction. However, there doesn't appear to be much research yet to confirm if CASPer is generating the type of outcomes expected for student admissions and eventually successful graduates and professionals. This information may take years of research to generate. Has the Council – or perhaps the individual Colleges – given consideration to developing key performance indicators to assess the short, medium and long-term benefits and outcomes the CASPer program is generating? There is a lot of reliance being put on this system to help select the best candidates and it may be useful to know early in the transition if this is being achieved.*

Some individual colleges (for example dentistry and Medicine) have included in their proposal for the addition of the CASPer plans for assessing if the tool is providing the data required to make important admissions decisions. So short answer – yes, colleges are considering how they will assess the new tool.

- *Is CASPer already used in admissions to other programs at USask? If yes, which ones?*

Yes. Pharmacy and Nutrition uses the CASPer as part of its admissions process.

- *Is it intended that this become a standard tool in admissions more widely at USask?*

The CASPer is becoming more widely used as a mechanism to assess required core competencies (such as empathy, communication, and interpersonal skills) and may become a standard admission tool for those disciplines, which already consider these “non-academic” competencies as part of their admissions process.

- *If so, what advantages does CASPer have over competitors, and as an admissions tool more generally? Does its use in admissions have any impact on academic outcomes in programs that are using it? Professional outcomes? If there is a divergence, what does this say about the utility of academic programs in professional development?*

The CASPer tests for similar core competencies as the Multiple Mini Interview, which is used by most health science disciplines at USask as part of admissions processes. The MMI is a fairly involved, labour-intensive, and expensive process to run, but are used because they provide valuable information on students' “non-academic” skills. Competency in the skills that the MMI and the CASPer test for are showed to have positive impacts on student success in health science programs.

- *Why is the DDM program recommending a CASPer pilot while other programs appear to be willing to use it without such a pilot?*

*Answer provided by the Doug Brothwell, Dean of Dentistry: Dentistry is a very cautious College, and often finds that tools that work well for other programs do not necessarily work well for us. The abilities of dental professionals are quite unique in healthcare, as are our educational programs. I estimate that at least 50% of what we need to teach is in the psychomotor domain, and need to be careful that our selection tools do not hinder finding the correct candidates. By doing the pilot test, we can retain our usual means of selection while we investigate the right performance cut-points that will allow us to balance selections in the 3 important areas, the cognitive, psychomotor, and affective domains.

- *Why is the College of Medicine using CASPer as a screening tool, unlike other programs that appear to employ this tool in developing overall admissions scores?*

*Answer provided by Trustin Domes, admissions, College of Medicine. The College of Medicine decided to use CASPer as a screening tool in our admissions processes so that we would have another variable apart from academics to narrow down the applicant pool prior to the multiple mini interview (MMI). We will continue to use the MMI as the main method to score and rank applicants on personal factors, as we are able to control the contexts of the assessment and assess contexts that our College deems most important (which may differ from CASPer). Additionally, our MMI directly compares our applicants on the same questions/scenarios, compared to CASPer, where applicants may have been assessed on multiple different types of questions/scenarios. We believe that CASPer does a good job of appropriately ruling out applicants with professionalism issues on the lower end of the scale amongst a broad range of applicants to medical school across the entire country, making it a more appropriate screening tool than a selection tool. This has been demonstrated through a study at our institution at the postgraduate level. The majority of medical schools in Canada utilize CASPer in this way, especially since this is not the only personal factor assessment variable that we will have on our applicants. Additionally, since CASPer is a fairly new tool and we have not had a chance to internally validate the results on our applicant pool and correlate them to our other personal factor assessment variables, we don't feel comfortable using the score in the direct ranking of applicants at this time.

- *Does this uneven approach to the employment of CASPer cause any concern? Has any thought been given to a more coordinated approach?*

Admissions requirements for USask programs are determined through consultation with faculty in those colleges and assessment of the admissions landscape at peer institutions. Changes are recommended through college faculty councils, then through the academic governance process at the university-level. As with all academic changes, change to admissions requirements are a "bottom-up" process.

- *Procedural: does Senate's authority over admissions standards (in so far as the 12-month delay is concerned) go as detailed as how this new proposed CASPer test is used, rather than simply the fact that it is used as part of the admissions process? For example, the context and background state that initially this test will be used "conservatively" to rule out candidates based on the z-score. If we approve this, and then this usage is altered, does this then require it to come back to University Council and Senate for approval?*

*Answer provided by the Office of the University Secretary: Senate's purview extends to the qualifications required to be considered for admission into a program. Selection criteria (so the weighting of the different required qualifications) is the purview of Faculty Councils within Colleges and

Schools. If Faculty Councils determined to put more weight on the CASper, it would be within their jurisdiction to do so.

AGENDA ITEM 9.2 ADMISSIONS QUALIFICATIONS CHANGE: COMMERCE

- Background to question: Academic programs are often so structured that attempting to complete a program out-of-sequence can be very disruptive to the student's course schedule, leading to gaps while pre-requisites are obtained and potentially adding a term or two to the overall length of the students degree. Question: *Can you please elaborate on how a student without Math 102.3 can obtain the credit while in the program, what the impact to the student will be, and which supports are required and/or offered by the School, if any.*

*Answer provided by Noreen Mahoney, Association Dean, Students & Degree Program:

The Math deficiency is supposed to be cleared in year 1. Students would need to take MATH 102 prior to taking MATH 121. While MATH 121 is a required first year course, students could take MATH 121 in term 2 of their first year, Spring following their first year, or term 1 of year 2 and still take the second year required courses for which MATH 121 is a prerequisite without falling behind. We have a dedicated team of academic advisors and a robust early warning system, so we will be able to identify if these students are struggling and provide them academic advice as necessary. If a student does "fall behind," we have several courses offered in the spring and summer should they wish to stay on track to finish in four years. That being said, several of our students choose to take more than four years to finish their programming.

AGENDA ITEM 9.3 ADMISSIONS QUALIFICATION CHANGE: NURSING

- *Cost implications for students: [This is a repeat of the question sent to the MD program but modified for Nursing]: The proposed admissions test costs \$52 for each student to apply only to the U of S. Over 600 students apply each year. If subsequent years have this number of applicants, students would collectively pay each year over \$31,000 to a private corporation for this test. How will this impact the pool of applicants available to this program based on their ability to pay this fee?*

*Answer provided by Hope Bilinski, Association Dean, College of Nursing: Thank you for your question. The cost implications for students applying to the College of Nursing is important. In addition to the test itself, CASPer provides students with other resources relating to preparations for the test, a sample test, and accommodations if required. While \$40.00 (CAD) adds to the cost of application, this cost was compared somewhat to the cost of a student entering a college and failing because of factors not relating to academics. Of importance, and a cost implication for the student, the College, and subsequently the health care system, is the ability for a student to progress in a program, complete the program successfully, and all in a timely manner. Over the years, the College of Nursing has experienced what many other programs in nursing have experienced, which are students who are unsuitable for the profession but strong academically, entering their program of study only to struggle personally and professionally, take time off from the program, or leave completely before completion. Overall, our intention was to choose a tool in which the cost was not prohibitive and would ultimately have a positive impact on the student experience and student success.

- *Background to question: Using personality tests for screening purposes is somewhat controversial. The College is proposing to test students prior to entry to the program, and students often experience tremendous personal growth and change throughout their first degree. Question: The move to CASPer is new and novel for the College and the proposal is putting a significant weight on the CASPer results (40%), representing a major change in the admissions process. Would the College*

consider a 'breaking-in' period where the change could be implemented in stages and allow the College to gradually increase the weight of the CASPer results after feedback on each intake is received from instructors and other stakeholders?

*Answer provided by Hope Bilinski, Associate Dean, College of Nursing: The decision to use the 40% weighting was made based on consultations with other schools of nursing across the country. The consensus was that the non-academic competencies such as communication, empathy, resilience, ethics etc. are critical to the development of nursing students and to the profession of nursing. As such, the weighting must be significant enough to make a difference in the type of student that is entering the program. The common weighting was 40%. Some of our BSN advisory committee members felt the weighting should be 50%. Schools who began with a lower percentage (e.g. 20%) have not seen the difference in their student body, thus essentially wasting the student and College resources in integrating the test. The implementation will include monitoring the student experience, the proportion of students who struggle with progression, and the issues that are identified in students who fail or leave the program.

AGENDA ITEM 9.5: ADMISSIONS QUALIFICATIONS CHANGE: MASTER OF WATER SECURITY

- *I am curious as to who the planned prospective students are for this program? Are they Canadian students who would study in China to complete the program or Chinese students who would receive a USask degree? Is the plan that all components of the MWS be completed in China?*

*Answer provided by Trever Crowe, Dean, CGPS: The MWS program will continue to be offered at USask with the target students being both domestic and international students and will also now be offered through Beijing Normal University, and the prospective students for the program offered at BNU will be mainly Chinese students. The offering through Beijing Normal University will be completed entirely in China, but is still a USask program.

- *The submission indicates that the addition of mathematics and statistics requirements will ensure students of all backgrounds are successful in the program. How will these additional requirements ensure this success? I am also wondering about the partnership with the Beijing Normal University in China. Can more be shared about this? How do these new requirements open the opportunity to offer the program there? The specific academic requirements for this program isn't included in the package. I'm wondering if these details can be submitted similar to the other admission qualification change packages.*

*Answer provided by Trever Crowe, Dean, CGPS: Programming within SENS has various audiences and students with different backgrounds are welcome to apply for admission. The MWS includes course work that requires a basic understanding of mathematics and statistics as pre-requisite background. The point is well taken that simply having the appropriate background does not ensure success in the program. Rather, the language should have indicated that previous completion of courses in undergraduate mathematics and statistics will provide the background to help students be successful in the program.

The Beijing Normal University is a valued partner, and these newly proposed admission requirements do not substantively change the relationship between USask and BNU. The delivery of this program is not contingent upon approval of these proposed revised admission criteria. Rather, these proposed admission requirements will help to ensure that students who are admitted to the program will have the necessary background and will have a good chance of being successful in the program.

AGENDA ITEM 9.9 ADMISSIONS QUALIFICATIONS CHANGE: DOCTOR OF MEDICINE

- *The proposed admissions test costs \$52 for each student to apply only to the U of S. For last year, 564 students applied. If subsequent years have this number of applicants, students would collectively pay each year over \$29,000 to a private corporation for this test. Assuming the z-score is used as indicated, on average this test alone would help the college rule out 14 students from admissions, regardless of whether the other criteria would have ruled them out anyway (like the MMI). Is it really worth having students pay \$29,000 to rule out a mere 14 applicants? The document also refers to monitoring the impact of the cost and assessing it as a barrier to admissions. How exactly will the college be monitoring this cost impact? And where will the new, additional funding come from to support students who would otherwise not apply due to these rising costs of admissions?*

**Answer provided by Trustin Domes, Director of Admissions, College of Medicine: The College of Medicine did consider the added cost of taking CASPer to the applicants and we had to weigh this cost against the benefit that it would add to our current selection process. In our current processes, we invite individuals to our MMI based solely on academic performance and we do not have another variable to assess applicants before that. By having CASPer, we can rule out applicants with significantly low CASPer scores prior to the interview stage (who likely would not have done well on the MMI either, but at this point we need to evaluate if this is indeed the case) and open up an interview spots to applicants who otherwise would not have received one. We have set the cut score of CASPer conservatively at this point so we are able to internally validate the results for our applicant pool and to correlate the results with other personal factor assessment metrics. Although using it this way may only prevent 14 students from making it to the next stage of application, having even one of those students make it into the College with significant professionalism and/or interpersonal issues will cost the College and society significantly. Although our other metrics are designed to prevent applicants with issues of unprofessional behaviour or undesirable personal traits for the study and future practice of medicine from moving forward, having an earlier check point for this prevents us from having to go through the laborious effort to rule these individuals out and also gives other well-suited individuals an opportunity to interview and potentially get accepted to the College.*

We will be monitoring the financial impact and potential barrier this may have on our applicants through surveys of our applicant pool, discussions with pre-medicine societies and clubs on the U of S campus and at the University of Regina and also through open dialogue and discussion with our applicants, career advisors and Indigenous coordinators. Given the relatively low cost of CASPer, our College does have the funds and ability to offer financial assistance to individuals with significant financial need who may have also received financial need through the AAMCs MCAT Support Program. Depending on the impact and number of individuals involved, we will also discuss this situation with Altus to see if they can develop a program similar to the AAMCs for the MCAT for applicants with significant financial need and barriers to apply to medicine.

AGENDA ITEM 10.1.3 CONFLICT OF INTEREST POLICIES REVIEW

**Answers provided by Marcel de la Gorgendiere, chair of the Conflict of Interest Policies Review Committee:*

- *In general I support the Committee's work but I have a couple of questions and comments: I agree that the Conflict of Interest Policy ("Policy") could do with a set of principles in the preamble, akin to Dalhousie's policy and the Responsible Conduct of Research Policy. Are the examples Dalhousie*

provides more illustrative?

Yes. Examples include: “Conducts a review, assessment or evaluation of a project or colleague, the outcome of which may affect the university member’s personal interests; conducts or participates in a research project which may affect his or her financial interests or those of a related business...”

- *When discussing the difference between Dalhousie’s policy and USask’s, the Committee indicates that one significant difference is that USask’s “focuses on individuals and their ability to do their job” – could you please expand on what is meant by this phrase?*

Personal conflict of interest refers to someone trying to gain individual benefit from a situation rather than looking out for the best interest of the university. Institutional conflict of interest refers to a corporate relationship where the best interest of the university and its stakeholders must be of primary consideration over and above any corporate interests of the partner institution.

- *The Conflict of Interest Committee’s recommendations indicate that the Board of Governors could initiate the development of procedures or “a procedural flowchart to accompany the policy” – could you please explain the differentiation being made here?*

The development of procedures would be a written account of how the policy would be implemented. A procedural flowchart would be a visual depiction of the implementation process.

- *The Committee also indicates that the Board of Governors could “[c]onsider the possibility of institutional bias.” Could you please provide further explication of what is meant by this recommendation?*

The committee looked at two references to the issue (Williams, Bryn, and C. MacDonald; Nichols-Casebolt and Macrina): institutional bias and institutional conflict of interest. These should have been included in the terminology of what will be referred to the Board. Institutional bias for these purposes referred to some research potentially being advantaged on a systematic basis in the university, for instance public funding being preferred over private funding of research. The Williams paper says: “The existence (or appearance) of such conflicts can lead to actual bias, or suspicion about possible bias, in the review or conduct of research at the university (AAU, 2001, 10).” The Nichols paper says “Institutional Conflict of Interest has the potential to emerge when leaders or those in positions of authority have personal or financial interests that could result in bias or perceptions of bias in the discharge of their institutional duties and responsibilities.

AGENDA ITEM 11.1 STUDENT ENROLMENT

Thank you also for the brief update on student enrollment etc. It is quite informative, given the constraints. I do have a couple of questions:

- *While the increase in teaching activity is relatively small (0.5%) it is still larger than the increase in enrollment (0.2%). I imagine that this may be because planning for teaching activity may be easier to plan than enrollment, or that there are other factors in play. Is the idea that teaching activity increases will mirror enrollment rises, or are they separate issues?*

**Answers provided by Patti McDougall, vice-provost, teaching, learning and student experience: It is certainly the case that increases in enrolment typically bring increases in more teaching activity (measured as 3 credit unit course delivery - the count of number of students registered in a one-term*

class). It is also true that the increases tend to mirror each other but not always in the same way. Keep in mind that students take varying loads of courses such that many of our students (particularly in certain programs) take longer to complete degrees. For example, this year we saw teaching activity increase at a higher rate than enrolment. This would suggest that the students we had were taking more classes. Last year, the pattern reversed such that we had an overall enrolment increase of 3.3% with a corresponding increase of 2.6% in teaching activity. As was the case this year, these percentage increases are close but not identical. The big driver here is about what students choose as their course load – where 30 credit units (10 courses) counts as a full load. Although some of our programs require a full load, others lend themselves to greater variability, particularly Arts and Science where about half of our UG students are enrolled. There are factors that influence whether students take a full course load or a less than full course load such as (and most commonly) family responsibilities, learning disabilities, and employment.

- *Do you have any further insight into why the ESL student numbers are down? Is this due to Canada's dispute with China/Saudi Arabia, or is more nuanced?*

Just as a beginning note, we have not had large numbers of Saudi students enrolled in the University of Saskatchewan Language Centre (USLC) for quite some time and as such there was no impact on the USLC program during the difficult period referenced in this question. For interest sake, we had an extremely low number of Saudi students in any of our programs at that time so again, minimal impact of that particular national issue.

Chinese students still make up the majority of students in our ESL program, however, since we are aware of the shifting pattern of Chinese students seeking ESL, secondary and postsecondary studies abroad, we have been focusing on diversifying our international enrolment to mitigate enrolment risks. The overall number of participants in our ESL program has declined, like other programs, since peak enrolments in 2013-14. The English language market has undergone some major shifts with the majority of non-English speaking countries, including China now offering the lower level of English language training within the country. Competition has also grown with the number of private ESL schools and ESL school/transition programs expanding rapidly. USask continues to offer a strong ESL program, but instead of focusing on offering lower levels of study (which are no longer lucrative), our strategy is to recruit students who wish to continue on to university-level study (in particular UPREP and UBRIDGE programming).

Shifts in the number of Chinese students pursuing degree studies is also changing and has been for the last few years. Although there are more families in China that can now afford to send their child (or children) abroad, these students are going to a far broader number of destinations. The One Belt One Road initiative, with targeted scholarships, have encouraged many Chinese students to study in countries closer to home, and China's World Class 2.0 initiative has contributed to students wanting to stay in China to study at high ranked institutions within the country. That said, Canada continues to gain popularity and credibility as an international study destination, and China will remain an important market. Latin America including Mexico, Vietnam, Japan, Iran and international students within Canada are growing sources of students for our ESL program.