

Vancouver Senate

THE FIRST SPECIAL MEETING OF THE VANCOUVER
SENATE
FOR THE 2019/2020 ACADEMIC YEAR

WEDNESDAY, 8 APRIL 2020

5:00 P.M. to 7:00 P.M.

1. **Call to Order and Territorial Acknowledgements – Dr Santa J Ono** (information)
2. **Report from the Provost – Dr Andrew Szeri**

Academic Operations in Light of COVID-19 (information)

- a) General Overview, Enrolment and Faculty Matters – Dr Andrew Szeri
- b) Teaching & Learning Initiatives – Dr Simon Bates
- c) Student Financial & Registration Support – Dr Kathleen Ross
- d) Graduate Student and Postdoctoral Fellow Support – Dr Susan Porter
- e) Library Resources – Dr Susan Parker
- f) Information Technology – Ms Jennifer Burns
- g) International Learning Programs and Global Engagement – Dr Murali Chandrashekar
- h) Research Operations – Dr Gail Murphy

3. **Correspondence – Dr Santa J. Ono**

- a) Letter from Past and Current Student Members of Senate Regarding COVID-19 (information) (docket pages 2-7)
- b) Letter from Arts Faculty Members to Arts Senators Regarding Student Evaluations of Teaching (information) (docket pages 8-9)
- c) Open Letter from Professor Charles Menzies Regarding Student Evaluations of Teaching (information) (docket pages 10)

4. **Other Business**

Under the *Rules and Procedures of Senate*, a consideration of business other than that in the call for the special meeting is not permitted.

March 26th, 2020

Dear President Ono and Provost Szeri,

On behalf of student senators from across all UBC faculties, we applaud the University's response to COVID-19, especially the recent faculty-specific responses. We also extend great thanks to health workers and administrators who continue their work on campus despite the risks. We are writing to urge you to continue the empathic actions towards academic accommodations in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. We seek to ensure that all provisions are made across *all* faculties in order to best support students. This letter seeks to highlight the necessity of continued empathic action and outlines our recommendations to the Senate and the Deans.

The Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) has been present in Vancouver since late January and has grown exponentially, resulting in our current status as a global pandemic¹. Just as our faculty and staff, students are facing difficult decisions between dedicating themselves to their academics or responding to pandemic-related breaking-news regarding their personal safety and that of their families and communities. These uncharted waters have exposed vulnerable populations on campus to the most uncertainty and threat. As students prepare for exams, this crisis continues to weigh heavily on the minds of all, preventing many from performing to their normal academic standards. Many students can no longer dedicate the same time or mental capacity to studies due to situations beyond their control, including border closures, financial insecurity and threats to the health of their communities.

In these times of uncertainty, it is important for us to care for each other as a community. We call upon UBC to implement options that will assist students in completing their semester on a path of least resistance. It is important that the University does not institute any universal accommodations, such as the University of Alberta's faculty-wide pass/fail, as this removes agency from students and does not account for each individual's circumstances and preferences. **We applaud the quick responses of many faculties and the University, but we wish to remind faculties and the University that the speed of responses should not come at the cost of student consultation.** We recognize that this will not be easy, but it is necessary to support our students in these exceptional circumstances.

The University has an academic responsibility to ensure that all students can be set-up for the greatest opportunities possible and not hindered by issues beyond their control. Given the importance of assessments and examinations on students' bearings, we kindly ask you to thoroughly read through this letter which will lay out the broader responses that individual faculties and the University can support. Please note that these are not an exhaustive set of possibilities; departmental and individual choices to adjust the syllabi have had and will continue to have a great impact on students.

¹ [World Health Organization, March 11th 2020](#)

We call upon the Senate, the Faculties and the University Administration to enact the following measures:

1. Extension of Credit/D/Fail option and urge individual faculties to broaden the scope of courses permissible under Credit/D/Fail
2. Extension of the Withdrawal deadline, allowing students to take a W standing on their transcripts
3. Offer Transcript Notation indicating the grades that were obtained during the COVID-19 period
4. Honour the continuation of all students' UBC Awards, should any academic accommodation received at this time render them ineligible per eligibility criteria
5. Promote the existence of all emergency and technology funds available to students
6. Promote the current Academic Concession Policy, emphasizing the sections on 'conflicting responsibilities' and 'compassionate grounds' in the context of COVID-19

Signed,

Julia Burnham, co-author, Student Senator at-large

Charlotte Gilby, co-author, Arts Student Senator

Max Holmes, Student Senator at-large

Dante Agosti-Moro, Commerce and Business Administration Student Senator

Chris Hakim, Student Senator at-large

Natasha Rygnestad-Stahl, Allard School of Law Student Senator

Alex Gonzalez, Applied Sciences Student Senator

Nick Pang, Student Senator at-large

Julia Chai, Student Senator at-large

Vivian Tsang, Medicine Student Senator

Alexa Tanner, Graduate Student Senator

Temitope Onifade, Graduate Student Senator

Riley Ty, Science Student Senator

Lillian Milroy, Land and Food Systems Student Senator

Christian Surniawan, Forestry Student Senator

Carly Koenig, Education Student Senator

Enav Zusman, Pharmacy Student Senator

Rojin Djavanmardi, Dentistry Student Senator

Appendix:

1. Extension of Credit/D/Fail to Faculties currently without that provision
 - a. Undergraduates
 - b. Post-graduate
2. Extension of the W deadline to Faculties currently without that provision
3. Offer Transcript Notation
4. Honour the continuation of all students' UBC Awards, should any academic accommodation received at this time render them ineligible per eligibility criteria
5. Promote the existence of all emergency and technology funds provided to students
6. Academic Concessions
 - a. Academic Concessions
 - b. Aegrotat Standing (AEG)
 - c. Increase Cr/D/F credit limit

Extension of Credit/D/Fail

Undergraduate Students

We applaud and support the decisions that many faculties have already made to extend the Cr/D/F deadline until May 6th to allow students maximum agency and support. We highly recommend faculties that have the ability to match these measures, to do so. This provides the students' agency to choose what is best for their overall wellbeing. We believe many students will choose this option as it will alleviate much of the academic stresses that would otherwise compound their already heightened stress and anxiety.

Graduate and Professional Programs

Graduate and Professional Programs face more challenges to changing examination practices. However, it would be unfair given the pandemic circumstances to expect graduate and professional students to perform to their normal academic standards, but also hugely inconvenient to delay their education.

Given these circumstances, we strongly recommend, where appropriate, that faculties extend the Credit/D/Fail or Pass/Fail deadline to May 6th. This will allow students to make choices that will benefit their overall wellbeing and careers. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that some programs only assess students through final examinations, given the current circumstances, for these programs we urge the adoption of a Credit/D/Fail or Pass/Fail extension to May 6th.

We applaud the graduate and professional programs as creating a timely response. We recommend that provisions like Credit/D/Fail are formally passed by senate so these academic tools may be utilized, when needed by programs in the future.

Extension of the Withdrawal deadline

We strongly recommend an extension of the Withdrawal (W) deadline until May 6th. This recognizes that some students have been highly impacted by these exceptional circumstances and that the fair option is to allow them to withdraw. It frees students to address the imminent health and safety priorities in their lives, without consequence of an inevitable poor-performance in their course. It is important that students receive the choice to withdraw from their courses, and be provided with the agency to make a decision that best fits their circumstances.

Transcript Notation

A transcript notation would be offered to all students at UBC for all courses completed in Term 2 2019/20 including non-graduating students; in the case that COVID-19 affects future terms, this notation would also be applied. The transcript notation would be provided on all transcripts for no extra cost to the student. The notation should indicate that the institution supported students through online education as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Transcription notations will be used to signal to program admission teams, future employers and university admissions teams that the student completed those courses under the volatile period

spanning the COVID-19 pandemic. This is vital as it demonstrates the institution's hardships given the unforeseen circumstances. Furthermore, when students are vying for competitive admission, the institutional assurance that the grades may not be a true reflection of the student's abilities. This assurance can be enough for admissions teams or employers to understand the varying grades and be more likely to admit them.

Honour the continuation of all students' UBC Awards

Scholarship maintenance is a critical factor in many students' decision-making processes surrounding academic accommodations. For many students who receive UBC Awards, taking a W or Credit/D/Fail may render them just-shy of meeting the criteria set out by their award. With the evolving financial uncertainty and precarious employment situations for many students, it is important that financial security of their UBC Awards is guaranteed in these exceptional circumstances. We call upon the Senate Awards committee to pass a resolution that will forgive any student's ineligibility to continue receiving their UBC Award due to academic accommodations made under the threat of pandemic.

Promote the existence of all emergency and technology funds provided to students

We applaud the University's quick work to create emergency funding options available for students, however, we underscore the importance of making these funds publicly known. Many students will not reach out to faculty for direction or guidance on financial or technology needs, and will not receive the critical referral to Enrolment Services for relief. In times of crisis, the University must be prepared to make all relief options public and accessible to all students, not just the ones who have the time or courage to reach out.

Academic concessions

We strongly recommend at this time that all faculty and staff are fully aware of the new [2019 Academic Concessions Policy](#). As stated in the academic calendar, "this policy articulates the University's commitment to support students in their academic pursuits through the application of academic concessions in the event that students experience unanticipated events or circumstances that interfere with their ability to accomplish academic work". We suggest that all impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on students are sufficient to make them eligible for academic concessions.

We urge all faculty and staff to remind their students of this policy at this time. The Academic Concession gives students a greater ability to explain their circumstances thus get concessions that are more appropriate and equitable to their unique circumstances. Furthermore, faculty and staff responding to academic concessions benefit from greater control over what concessions are permitted. It is worth noting, the handling of individual academic concessions is a higher workload, however, it gives faculty, staff and students greater flexibility in decision making ultimately resulting in greater equity.

Aegrotat (AEG) Standing

As stated in the academic calendar, [AEG](#) “allows a student credit for a course even though the course requirements have not been completed due to medical, emotional, or other difficulties. This standing is awarded only if the course instructor and the dean agree that the student has demonstrated the capacity to deal with the course material satisfactorily. When AEG standing is awarded, a letter grade is assigned. This will be converted to the minimum percentage for that category for the calculation of averages”.

We strongly recommend that AEG standing is given to all graduating students who are unable to complete course requirements under the provision of “other difficulties” due to UBCs closure or other COVID-19 related circumstances. This would include, but not be limited to laboratory components, Capstone projects, practical medical examinations (where appropriate) and all programme requirements. Students who have shown understanding and aptitude throughout the required course should be allowed to pass the overall course they need to graduate. To otherwise block students from graduating on account of unfulfilled course requirements would deeply inconvenience many students careers, financial situations and wellbeing.

To achieve AEG, students would need to apply via forms that should be easily accessible i.e. on Faculty websites and submit the forms before the end of the faculty’s examination period. Accessibility of this is vital for students who must graduate May 2020 but would otherwise not be able to.

Increase the Credit/D/Fail course limit

We recommend the University increases the current limit of Cr/D/F courses to minimum five courses. In the rare case that a student has taken the maximum number of Cr/D/F courses, we would recommend that those students are made eligible to Cr/D/F at least one more course of 3-credits. This ensures student agency and ability to act based on their personal circumstances and wellbeing.

Letter to Faculty of Arts Senators

Dear Arts Senators:

We are Faculty of Arts teaching staff who are concerned about the UBCV Provost's decision to continuing holding student evaluations of teaching (SEoTs) "as usual" this term. There is nothing usual about the conditions for teaching this term and we do not believe that this decision is in the best interest of the teaching staff at UBCV. The ability of individuals to undertake the burdens of the switch to online teaching differs according to individual circumstances and these burdens have been placed particularly heavily upon the most vulnerable members of our teaching complement, who have both a larger number of courses to teach and a smaller pool of financial resources to absorb additional burdens like the cost of high-speed internet or other equipment they need for their courses.

Moreover, the Provost's reasoning in which he claims that "we [sic] believe it will be useful to gather student feedback on their experience of the transition to online" is concerning. This is not a goal for SEoTs contemplated in the Senate policy for SEoTs, the SEoT questionnaire was not developed with this goal in view and will not yield reliable or valid data on that topic, and there are many aspects to the student "experience of the transition to online" that go beyond their experience in (and thus their evaluation of) individual courses and their instructors. If gathering student feedback on the transition to online teaching is the University's goal, it must develop a dedicated instrument for this purpose.

The Senate meets in special session on 8 April to discuss covid-19-related matters. We urge that you place a discussion of this decision onto the agenda for that meeting.

Sincerely,

Alan Richardson (Philosophy)
Laura Baumvol (Vantage/ASRW)
Jennifer Berdahl (Sociology)
Sarika Bose (English)
Millie Creighton (Anthropology)
Rose-Marie Déchaine (Linguistics)
Laila Ferreira (ASRW)
Kyle Frackman (CENES)
Suzanne Glessner (Anthropology/Linguistics)
Charmaine Gorrie (CNERS)
Gunnar Ólafur Hansson (Linguistics)
Liz Hodgson (English)
Kasim Husain (CAP/English)
Gareth James (AHVAT)
Suzanne James (English)
Carla L. Hudson Kam (Linguistics)
Thomas Kemple (Sociology)
Uma Kumar (CENES)
Jason Lieblang (CENES)

Moberley Luger (English/CAP)
Ervin Malakaj (CENES)
Lisa Matthewson (Linguistics)
Evan Mauro (CAP)
Siobhán McElduff (CNERS)
Charles Menzies (Anthropology)
Shaylih Muehlmann (Anthropology)
Juliet O'Brien (FSIH)
Sara Pashan (CENES)
Jaclyn Rea (ASRW)
Marina Roy (AHVAT)
Hotze Rullmann (Linguistics)
Judy Segal (English)
Catherine Soussloff (AHVAT)
Ania Switzer (CENES)
Anne-Michelle Tessier (Linguistics)
Katja Thieme (ASRW/English/Vantage)

Dear Andrew,

I note your memo on SEoT for UBC-V instructors that was relayed via my department. In that memo is the suggestion that there is valuable data to be collected on the transition to online delivery – emergency remote teaching. There may indeed be data waiting to be harvested, yet this instrument was not designed to do that task.

The individual option for instructors that you have provided is problematic. One of my colleagues recently shared their thoughts via a department list serve raising concerns about the implications for a faculty member to not use this term's records – wondering out loud how that would be interpreted and understood in reviews if others did include them.

The data you are looking for on the transition could have been rolled out in a way that left evaluation of teaching off the table. The technical modification of those forms is not that complicated (or at least that is what I have been told by the technicians previously).

At this juncture, where so much is in turmoil, so many of us with family, friends, associates affected adversely by the pandemic and it's spill over effects, it seems that running yet one more evaluation during this time takes on the appearances of an act of unkindness. As instructors we have been asked, and many of us have taken a lead on encouraging others, to act with compassion. We have made modifications, accommodations, and allowances. We have worked to pay attention to our students' needs.

For example, in one of my courses where we are reading an ethnography and viewing a film of working in a food processing plant one student explained that they couldn't get past the first page of the book. They were surprised at their response – I excused all of the subsequent assignments. Another wrote apologies for missing a virtual class from their phone as their parent was being admitted to an emergency room. Another had given up their rental accommodation because economic uncertainty due to the pandemic and our virtual class fell on their moving day. And on these stories go. In the best times I work out alternative projects or other accommodations, but in this case asking these students to continue to do make-up work strikes me as an act devoid of compassion. The harm caused by continuing the SEoT, however valuable the data may be for you, outweighs any perceived benefit.

I am compelled to urge my own students not to complete these evaluations as I can find no importance in doing them at this time. Furthermore I encourage my colleagues not to facilitate or support the implementation of SEoT either.

With warm regards,

Charles