



**SENATE ACADEMIC POLICY COMMITTEE MEETING
MINUTES**

Monday 31 January 2022 3:32-5:13 pm via Zoom

Attendees

Senators

E. Bhangu
J. Burnham
J. Gilbert
S. Gopalakrishnan
P. Harrison
C. Krebs
K. Lo (Chair)
C.W. Marshall
A. Pratap-Singh
J. Schumacher

K. Smith
R. Spencer (Vice-Chair)
H. Zerriffi

Ex Officio

J. Fox
M. Quayle
K. Ross

Regrets

M. Aronson

S. Matsui

Guests

S. Bates
C. Hendricks

Senate Staff

C. Eaton
J. Iverson

**Call to Order and
Territorial
Acknowledgement**

The meeting of the Senate Academic Policy Committee (the “Committee”) was called to order at 3:32 pm on 31 January 2022 by K. Lo, Chair.

K. Smith offered a territorial acknowledgement.

Agenda

THAT THE Senate Academic Policy Committee adopt the 31 January 2022 agenda as presented.

Moved: K. Lo
Seconded: E. Bhangu
Carried.

Meeting Minutes

THAT THE Senate Academic Policy Committee approve the 13 December 2022 meeting minutes as presented.

Moved: P. Harrison
Seconded: S. Gopalakrishnan
Carried.

**Digital Assessment
Tools**

S. Bates explained in 2018 the Senate Teaching and Learning Committee (STLC) discussed principles around the cost of digital assessment tools, which are digital licenses, typically for online homework systems, that instructors may use in courses. The topic was presented to the Senate in 2019 as one of broad academic interest and principles were endorsed, including: limiting the cost and extent of the tools; providing students with the full cost of the tools prior to

registration; that tools should be available unbundled from textbooks. He noted UBCO recently passed a version of this policy (see: [Policy O-131: Digital Assessment Tools](#)).

S. Bates said the motivation for developing the principles was that assessment should form part of tuition, and by requiring students to purchase additional tools to complete assessment tasks, another fee is imposed. Commentary at the Centre for Teaching, Learning and Technology (CTLT), from both faculty members and students, suggested that these tools were not necessarily bad, but rather, the issues were there were no limits on costs and the extent of assessment for which the tools could be applied. He said, in essence, students either bought access to the tool or faced losing marks.

S. Bates noted in Ontario, the Ministry of Colleges and Universities requires institutions to have a policy on the cost of instructional materials, over and above tuition. While that Ministry does not set precise details in terms of cost and limitations, there is a high degree of consistency among Ontario institutions, which provided the basis for the draft policy before the Committee.

C. Hendricks provided relevant datapoints. She noted the 2021 Academic Experience Survey conducted by the AMS indicated over 70% of respondents have gone without a textbook or other course resource due to cost. Moreover, estimated data from the UBC Bookstore and Learning Technology Hub, indicated: from 2019 to 2021 the number of students assessed by digital tools doubled; many students paid more than the \$65 cap set forth in the aforementioned principles (average was \$105); in 2021, students were charged approximately \$3.6M for these tools. It is thus assumed digital assessment tools are used for course marks. C. Hendricks also noted enrolment in courses that require digital tools has been rising; use in Winter Term 2 tends to be lower; the biggest users are the Faculties of Science, Arts, and Commerce and Business Administration.

E. Bhangu said a formal policy is proposed not only because principles tend not to have the same enforceability but also because cost and usage of these tools have increased since the Senate endorsed the principles, which suggests the principles are not working. In terms of affordability, the Student Affordability Task Force (SATF) recommended a policy is developed that aids in affordability. E. Bhangu noted the Senate has influence in this realm, and a policy at UBCV would align with UBCO. As it stands, there are no rules in place that could prevent an instructor from outsourcing all of their assessment.

E. Bhangu said she developed the draft policy in consultation with C. Hendricks, S. Bates, and the CTLT. The group took guidance from UBCO. Exceptions to the policy would be allowable for pedagogical reasons. Notably, a policy would limit the extent to which a student is impacted if unable to afford the tool.

Key points of the ensuing discussion were as follows:

- A. Pratap-Singh said he was surprised to learn students are asked to pay for assessment and thinks student costs should not exceed tuition fees.
 - S. Bates noted the Senate discussion in 2019 indicated some of these tools are really good and provide targeted feedback; some students appreciated the educational opportunities and practice. A policy that sets a price cap could be a push for publishers to adjust their pricing models, especially for large courses. E. Bhangu added if there is a price cap, the University has the Open Educational Resources (OER) Fund for instructors to create their own resources, which also aligns with the SATF.
- C. Krebs supported a cap, but said \$65 is too high. Assessment is a fundamental part of teaching, and it is being outsourced because of understaffing. She said there needs to be a structural change in the academy so there are no 400+ student classes. Imagine how many TAs could be hired with the same amount of money that is spent on these tools. The document highlights a larger problem: student affordability crisis. The policy is a band-aid; it does not address the core problem.
 - P. Harrison said he agreed with C. Krebs' underlying philosophy, adding he was concerned the policy would be ignored, much like the principles. He said a different model is needed to address the issue. He suggested the Board might look at another way of allocating funds (to the CTLT and other similar resources, for example).
 - C. Eaton said P. Harrison raised an interesting point regarding the Board; the Board is not collecting the costs of the tools, publishers are.
- H. Zerriffi echoed earlier comments and asked if there are alternate mechanisms so that students do not incur additional costs. He raised two points: 1. Presumably, a large number of assessment tools come from a small number of publishers and thus supported centralization; 2. Using assessment tools for practice becomes an affordability/equity issue.
- J. Schumacher said he was in favour of a policy and asked what prevents the Committee from considering a policy like UBCO's, which stipulates all student assessment is included in the cost of tuition?
 - E. Bhangu explained that policy started with a dollar cap, then moved to no fee. C. Eaton added the Okanagan debate fixated on the appropriate percentage of a final grade that can be assessed by digital tools.
- WRT OERs, K. Smith said many instructors do not have the resources to convert, and the OER Fund is not sufficient. She supported the policy overall, but cautioned the Committee that charging nothing for digital tools would shift the burden to instructors.
 - S. Bates underscored this is a process. It took him five years to make his course zero-cost (beyond tuition). The OER Fund at UBCV has save students \$10M over the years. He said multiyear processes have to start somewhere.

- J. Burnham was experiencing audio issues and offered her comments in the chat: “I’m very much in agreement with many of the arguments brought up about going further (i.e. lowering cap, lab fees etc.), though I would hope that we could still approve this intermediary measure today (particularly as we sort through the intricacies of [K. Smith]’s points around contract labour and the implications of a totally-free approach in our current conditions). It can be tricky to get bogged down by solving issues perfectly the first time, but even with the \$65 cap, we will be positively impacting students in the meantime while we can work on the larger, systems-level pieces that require coordination of resourcing and decisions made outside of our scope as [Academic Policy]. I think the attitudes of this committee speaks highly to our ability to be diligent about this and try to continue moving beyond this first step!”
- S. Gopalakrishnan suggested, instead of an absolute amount, setting the cap as a percentage that students pay per-credit (25% of domestic costs, for example), with departments paying the balance from tuition revenue. He said this would make units think more systematically.
- R. Spencer said he was uncomfortable with the draft policy because the University has framed the problem incorrectly. UBC does not think in an appropriate way about using technology to improve teaching and he asked why it is not more focused on information technology. Education is still seen as handmade, efficiencies are not sought. The policy is an opportunity to spread the costs of technologies. He suggested building these technologies into the cost of instruction because they are a valuable part of the learning process.
- K. Ross said the draft policy is an early step in the right direction. The University does not yet have a good sense of the impacts of the UBCO policy. She supported a requirement to report to the Committee as a way of tracking and assessing change.
- H. Zerriffi said he would like to see burden shifted to the unit, if not the institution as a whole. He suggested the policy include commitments to action. For example, the cap could be \$65 now, and in five years tools must be zero-cost. This engenders an accountability mechanism for central administration.
 - C. Krebs supported the idea of accountability. She added universities are dependent on publishers for content; UBC should leverage the collective need for collective negotiation, noting the EU successfully negotiated with Elsevier. She also supported a reporting requirement and suggested that responsibility rest with deans.
- A. Pratap-Singh supported a zero-cost approach. He said setting a cap might inspire instructors to begin using assessment tools that incur costs.
- C. Eaton noted the UBCO policy includes a reporting framework. WRT to H. Zerriffi’s point about commitments to action, he said that could be included in the policy, but cautioned future senators may not agree.

- S. Gopalakrishnan suggested department heads approve exemptions to the policy, not deans.
- K. Lo suggested dividing the policy into two parts: 1. Limiting the percentage of a final grade that can be assessed by digital tools; and 2. Limiting costs of the tools. He noted both quality of assessment and timeliness are important considerations and cautioned against a policy that is too heavy-handed (zero-dollar), but said he appreciated the equity concerns.

E. Bhangu asked if the Committee was ready to vote on the policy. K. Lo noted it was on the agenda for discussion, and that consultation, specifically with students, is needed after the document has been refined.

- C. Eaton suggested a motion to support in principle, recognizing there are areas for improvement.
- A. Pratap-Singh suggested ADAs also be consulted.

THAT THE Senate Academic Policy Committee endorse in principle the draft policy on Usage of Digital Materials for Assessment.

Moved: E. Bhangu
Seconded: P. Harrison

C. Krebs suggested ADAs could seek feedback from heads and directors, and that the Committee consult following its usual process. P. Harrison said the longer-term implications are important, and those are absent in the draft policy. The larger issues need to be considered when the document is circulated for broad consultations and then forwarded to the Senate.

With that, the Committee voted on the motion on the floor.

Carried.

Policy V-1 The Committee did not have time to discuss this item.

Next Meeting The next meeting of the Committee will be held on 28 February 2022 3:30-5 pm.

Adjournment The meeting was adjourned at 5:13 pm.