



MINUTES

Attendees: W. Parkhouse (Chair), E. Elle (Vice-Chair), K. Nordgren (Secretary), L. Campbell, M. Crouch, D. Hik, P. Kingsbury, G. Liosis, M. MacDonald, K. Masri, N. Modi, E. Park, P. Pasquier, M. Pinter-Collett, N. van Houten, K. Verkerk, K. Whittle

In attendance: R. Khan Hemani, Vice-Provost and Associate Vice-President, Students & International
S. Birnie, Associate Registrar, Information, Records & Registration Services
J. Chou, Student Representative

The Chair welcomed everyone to a new year.

The agenda was approved as presented.

The minutes were approved as presented.

1. Department of Physics

It was moved by D. Hik and seconded by K. Masri

“that SCUS approve under delegated authority and send to Senate for information the Q designation for PHYS 313-3, Special Relativity effective Spring 2021.”

CARRIED

1. Department of Geography (SCUP)

It was moved by P. Kingsbury and seconded by D. Hik

“that SCUS approve and recommend to SCUP the Notice of Intent for the Climate Change and Society.”

CARRIED

P. Kingsbury provided an overview of the Notice of Intent.

A suggestion was made to include Indigenous topics courses in the minor. P. Kingsbury agreed and will forward on to the department for consideration.

A question was raised regarding flexibility of enrollment, whether a non-geography major student enroll in these courses. P. Kingsbury responded that while courses should be accessible to a wide range of students, he will refer the issue to the department.

The Chair began by expressing appreciation to G. Liosis for bringing this issue forward. He explained that SCAR had referred the document to SCUS to review before Senate on Monday, January 11th.

The Chair asked SCUS to look at the entirety of the document and to consider all possible options, in addition to the actions already taken, in order to find common ground and a path forward that addresses the concerns raised by students. The Chair asked the committee if they are supportive of allowing open discussion including all participants. All agreed.

G. Liosis thanked the Chair for the opportunity to speak to the motions regarding the Pass/Fail grade, and acknowledged J. Chou as a major contributor in developing the motions. He noted that the main issue of concern was the increased mental health strain experienced by students due to factors such as increased work load, social isolation, and navigating courses that have not adapted well to the online format. He stated that students are upset that the Pass/Fail grading option did not continue after the spring 2020 term, and there were no further discussions on alternative solutions. He noted that a petition calling for Pass/Fail grading received almost 7,500 signatures, and the motions before Senate on Jan.11 are co-sponsored by 13 student senators and endorsed by the SFSS Board of Directors.

Committee members provided feedback, expressed concerns, and made suggestions regarding the Pass/Fail grading system as it related to each of their faculties. Discussion ensued.

P. Pasquier thanked G. Liosis for bringing this topic forward for discussion and added that he would support the Pass/Fail grade if students demonstrated that it was needed; however, he noted the Pass/Fail grade served its purpose for Spring 2020, and since then SFU has adapted. He noted that average enrollments and grades are up

within FCAT, faculty have been more compassionate in their courses and grading, and expressed concerns for potential unfairness for students who made the decision to drop courses in the fall term, for potential problems with pre-requisites, and the possibility of jeopardizing the quality of an SFU degree.

N. van Houten expressed her appreciation for bringing this forward to the committee noting the importance to discuss the perspectives from both the faculty and of the students. She continued that she has heard from students that having flexibility in course grading would be a tremendously valuable choice, considering the pressures of online learning for both faculty and students. She noted that the issue raises questions regarding the use competency-based grading that could be discussed in future.

K. Masri informed SCUS that SFU Beedie instructors and administrators have been flexible and supportive, including providing accommodations for students impacted by COVID-19. He has spoken with students who are concerned that Pass/Fail grading disadvantages some students over others, for those in co-op terms and applying for scholarships. He noted other concerns such as retroactively changing 'P' grades back due to current circumstances/needs, instructors concerned with modifying curriculum to adapt to competency-based grading, students who may not receive adequate feedback and support needed to advance, internal transfer students who may not be as prepared.

M. MacDonald raised a concern regarding converting from a practice of standard grading to a competency-based/mastery grading model. She noted that the Faculty of Education has many competency-based courses which allows students to work towards mastery, which require completely different assessment practices and is not as simple as converting the grade. She was not in support of the motion based on the issue of evaluation practices.

L. Campbell expressed her appreciation for the conversation. She had spoken with as many faculty members and staff as she could and noted that even when individuals or departments supported the pass/fail grading system, they raised some concerns mainly around academic implications, such as: prerequisites that ladder into upper division courses, where a 'P' grade would not properly prepare students; potential for students in difficulty to miss out on mandated academic supports; increased workload for advisors; students' academic records will be a little different within each program. She noted that these concerns will require investment in additional advisors, who will need help to support students' decisions. Within FASS, instructors initially adapted by implementing smaller assignments; however, instructors realized that many small assignments may also be overwhelming for students.

E. Park thanked everyone for their comments and stated that he has spoken to each school in Applied Sciences. He noted that average grades in FAS are up across the board; however, there were concerns raised that Pass/Fail grading may harm students in the long term

