INTERNAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

November 17, 2020
2:30 to 3:30 p.m.

Zoom Meeting

Attendance: Chair: Adam Shaen, (Human Resources); Kathy Pozihun (VP Administration & Finance); David Barnett (Provost & VP Academic); Alexis Paulusma (COPE); Jason Freeburn (LUTA); Sukhraj Grewal (LUSU); Dave Andreason (OPSEU); Pat Larin (SchII); Md Nazrul Islam (GSA); Matthew Benoit (CUPE)

Regrets: Jack Drewes (IUOE); Heather Spivak (Unifor); Bernie Chasse (USW); Gautam Das (LUFA);

Recorder: Kylie Williams (Human Resources)

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1. Approval of the Agenda

Moved by Dave Andreason that the agenda be approved
Seconded by Jason Freeburn. All in favour. ***Carried***

2. Approval of the Minutes of the previous meeting of October 20, 2020

Moved by Jason Freeburn that the minutes be approved.
Seconded by Matthew Benoit. All in favour. ***Carried***

3. Business Arising from the Minutes

There was no business arising from the minutes

4. Lakehead COVID-19 Update – Kathy Pozihun & David Barnett

Kathy spoke about the second wave of COVID-19 being observed across the country, province and city. On November 16th there were 21 new cases announced in Thunder Bay. The COVID-19 Transition Committee and its working groups are all extremely busy working to keep the campuses as safe as possible. In response to the second wave, Kathy

reminded everyone to be vigilant and work remotely whenever possible, stressing that physical distancing measures, hygiene protocols and masking are more important than ever. These reminders will also be distributed to the broader University community.

An employee from NOSM was among the positive cases in Thunder Bay who, before testing positive for COVID-19, attended the Balmoral Street Centre on November 10th. As they did not come into contact with anyone in the building, public health has indicated there is no concern for broader transmission.

Due to the rising number of cases in the region, Kathy advised that the Thunder Bay District Health Unit may announce new travel advisories or restrictions.

5. Budget Development Update – Kathy Pozihun & David Barnett

David and Kathy presented on the 2021-2022 integrated budget planning process at Lakehead University. The current provincial landscape was discussed, with emphasis on the challenges posed by current tuition restraints, enrollment levels, Strategic Mandate Agreement (SMA 3), and the impact of COVID-19.

Kathy indicated that in response to the current financial challenges the University continues to exercise extreme budget caution. Some of the greatest impacts have been the result of a reduction in international enrollment due to limited international mobility and a decrease in year 1 domestic student enrollment. Initiatives underway to balance the budget include monitoring discretionary spending, considering salary freezes, looking at pension reform by undertaking voluntary pension evaluation, freezing and delaying hiring where possible, travel budget reductions and the recent closures of some parking lots for the winter months. Winter enrollment numbers, once known, will indicate if the University needs to pursue further initiatives to reduce costs. These strategies could include staff reductions, elimination of carry forward funds or closure of campus buildings.

The move to working and learning remotely has resulted in other necessary costs, including increased resources for virtual mental health, increased professional development expenses and the creation of virtual labs. While the revenue outlook is uncertain the University is focusing on strategies to retain students and expand and remain competitive in postsecondary markets.

It was asked what was meant by pension reform. Kathy explained the pension board has commissioned a report to understand the position of our current pension plan and evaluate what other pension options are available. Other options could include joining a JSPP (Jointly Sponsored Pension Plan) or increasing pension contributions to the current plan. With any pension reform there would be a great deal of due diligence and governance work that would need to occur.

Pat asked if there was a time frame for the salary caps imposed by Bill 124. Adam confirmed there is a floating three-year moderation period. Bill 124 was in place the summer of 2019 and any collective agreements expiring on or after the effective date are subject to the bill.

Alexis inquired about student feedback concerning online learning experiences. David indicated that students have been reaching out to provide feedback regarding their learning

experiences. They are encouraged to use the student evaluation tool is also a means to provide instructors with feedback to develop their online courses. David and Kathy are also working with LUSU on a few issues brought forward by students. Sukhraj added that there have been many reports of students not enjoying their online learning experience. They feel that they are not getting enough support, or the professors are being unreasonable.

Jason asked why the Board of Governors is expecting to be delivered a balanced budget during the pandemic where many are accepting deficits. While Kathy indicated she cannot speak on behalf of the Board, she stressed that Universities who have incurred a deficit have found it very difficult to recover. It is in the interest of the University to remain financially sustainable.

6. Questions for Senior Administration

Dave asked for clarification regarding building closures, specifically, should those be pursued as part of budget restraints what would that entail. Kathy rephrased that buildings would be secured and occupants located elsewhere as an effort to save on utilities and maintenance cost.

Given the recent announcement that some parking lots would be closed for the winter, it was asked if snow removal was provided by a contractor or done inhouse. Kathy confirmed that at both campuses snow removal is provided by contractors.

7. Roundtable

Jason Freeburn (LUTA) – Many technicians are at the point of fatigue. This term included the extra challenge of remote learning which demands more time and effort to offer the same level of experience. While there have been some problems there are also many success stories for realizing learning outcomes. Jason suggested a gathering around the holidays to hold workshops or seminars for educators to share their experiences which could be enlightening and offer ideas for improvement in the winter term. David mentioned that the Teaching Commons has a means for people to share their experience and noted it could be better promoted.

Nazrul Islam (GSA) – During this last month, to engage Grad Students, GSA has offered a grant writing workshop presented by Dr. Alla Reznik

Dave Andreason (OPSEU) – TSC remains busy working with users of the virtual lab and with employees and students working remotely.

Adam Shaen, (Human Resources) – Collective Bargaining with COPE will commence this month and negotiations with LUFA continue. There were multiple bids submitted from the RFP process for Lakehead's LTD plan. As part of the review process Adam will be reaching out to members of the Internal Relations Committee to participate in finalist interviews, should interviews be required. He also announced that the University has very recently approved the Wellness Strategy and will have a more detailed update soon.

Kathy Pozihun (VP Administration & Finance) – No update

David Barnett (Provost & VP Academic) – No update.

Alexis Paulusma (COPE) – No update.

Sukhraj Grewal (LUSU) – No update.

Matthew Benoit (CUPE) – No update.

Pat Larin (SchII) – No update.

8. Other Business

There was no other business to discuss

9. Adjournment

Meeting was adjourned at 3:26 p.m.