

Summary of discussion about the Learning Charter at the December 17, 2009 meeting of University Council

10.1 Request for input: University of Saskatchewan learning charter

Professor Long began his comments by explaining that at the suggestion of his committee, his presentation will be videotaped for podcasting. The presentation is available on the committee's web page at

www.usask.ca/university_secretary/council/committees/teaching_learning/Learning_Charter.php

Several members of Council congratulated the committee on the document and for the changes that have been made in response to earlier suggestions. Comments on the presentation of the document included a critique of the graphic accompanying the charter and an endorsement of the title "learning charter." Several further suggestions to the charter's contents were made:

- that the language of the various obligations under the charter (pertaining to student, instructor, and institution) be standardized and harmonized. Currently, for example, students are called upon to "act ethically" and instructors to "act professionally." Why the difference?
- that the committee consider what values might be implicit in some of the statements (e.g., what do we mean by success? Or by 'a dignified manner') and what limits there might be to some of the obligations expressed in the charter (e.g. 'offer high quality programs.').
- that the section on acting ethically be broadened to include not just academic integrity but other kinds of ethical behaviour we expect of our students
- that the instructor commitments include an obligation to build an effective learning environment, and acknowledge that instructors share with the institution an obligation to cultivate the support their students need.
- that the section on promoting research enhanced learning recognizes that students may be engaged directly in research activities themselves and are creators and disseminators of new knowledge.
- that the committee give some thought to the fact that "students" and "instructors" are different kinds of categories than "the university," since the university could not exist without both students and instructors.
- that the document goes too quickly from the introduction into 12 specific learning goals, without first giving a glimpse of the whole. Perhaps there could be a paragraph under "Core Learning Goals" that is more integrative, more humanistic, and holds out some goals for education, including welcoming all ways of learning and knowing including aboriginal.
- articulating assumptions or principles would be helpful, e.g. that education is a process of personal development for individuals that often happens in a community and typically involves learners engaging with mentors, or as learning as a partnership.
- there may need to be more acknowledgement that just as there are different styles of learning, there are different styles of delivery and teaching.

- the charter seems to be very classroom-based; there should be more acknowledgement of learning (such as on-line and experiential learning) that takes place outside the classroom.
- the university's commitment to fostering learning partnerships should ensure that community-based learning is offered in a safe environment and not subjecting the students to undue risks.
- Under university commitment #2, the commitment to ensure qualified and effective instructors contains two separate ideas: one connected with the selection and review process and one with ongoing professional development. The idea that teaching performance should be an important factor in the search and review process should be decoupled from the notion that the university is also responsible for providing opportunities for instructors to develop and enhance their teaching skills.