Chair’s Opening Remarks to University Council – March 19, 2020

We acknowledge that Council meets on Treaty 6 Territory and the Homeland of the Métis. We pay our respect to the First Nations and Métis ancestors of our gathering place and reaffirm our relationship with one another.

I will begin by thanking members of Council and the entire campus community for their efforts during this uncertain time. I particularly wish to acknowledge the support of the Council chairs, the Secretary’s office, and University Secretary and Chief Governance Officer, Chelsea Willness for the work they have done behind the scenes in our timely response to many complex issues. We are fortunate to have governance systems in place that allow us to quickly and efficiently address matters such as the ones we are facing.

Today’s meeting is unusual but it is important that the work of the University, including governance and the academic mission, continues with a minimum of interruption. I appreciate the flexibility and dedication of this body to ensure we continue with our planned and necessary processes.

Coordinating committee members worked quickly to pass a motion on behalf of Council to ensure changes to syllabi were permissible. This decision on behalf of Council was made following processes in place to deal with exceptional circumstances such as the one we are currently experiencing. See the attached ‘Briefing Note – COVID-19 and Declaration Regarding Syllabi Changes’ for the details.

Our recent PEC breakfast addressed a number of pressing issues. We were updated on revisions to tuition plans by the Provost, we examined the issue of university autonomy, and also received an overview of the budget from VP Finance, Greg Fowler. A series of thoughtful discussions followed each topic and we continue to focus on these and other matters collectively with PEC.

As we move forward with a high degree of uncertainty, I encourage Council members to continue to look out for one another and provide leadership and support to the University as you have always endeavored to do.

Regards,
Jay Wilson, Council Chair
Briefing Note – COVID-19 and Declaration Regarding Syllabi Changes
Prepared by: Office of the University Secretary & Chief Governance Officer
March 13, 2020

Purpose
• With the ongoing risk of COVID-19, the University of Saskatchewan is taking steps to ensure the health and safety of our students, faculty, and staff, while continuing to support its core academic mission and governance functions.
• Under these circumstances, it will be necessary for courses to move to an alternate delivery mode (such as online) at short notice and examinations may need to be delivered in an alternate timeline or format.

Academic Courses and Examinations Policy
• The Academic Courses Policy governs the delivery of academic courses and examinations at USask. Importantly, this policy outlines the requirements for the content of course syllabi, which outlines the mode of course delivery as well as the format and weighting of final examinations.
• University Council: “prescribes methods and rules for evaluating student performance, including prescribing examination timetables and the conduct of examinations” (delegated through the academic courses policy); and “prescribes dates for beginning and ending lectures” c.U-6.1 61(1)(g);(k).

Action(s)
University Council, as approved by the Coordinating Committee: “Grants authority to instructors to alter syllabi for their classes for the duration (timeframe as determined by the President) of the COVID-19 pandemic to allow for alternate modes of course delivery and examinations.”

Approval

Approved on March 13, 2020, by:
Governance Committee of Council
Coordinating Committee of Council (chairs of all Council committees)
President’s Executive Committee

Authority
• Under the authority of the Board of Governors, USask’s Emergency Measures Policy designates the president the responsibility to provide an effective response.
• As per the University of Saskatchewan Act, 1995, University Council has the authority to “do any other thing that the council considers necessary, incidental or conducive to exercising its powers, to promoting the best interests of the university or to meeting the purposes of this Act.”
• The Governance Committee has assigned responsibility to the Coordinating Committee of Council to “take necessary measures in light of COVID-19 in the best interest of the university to deliver on the core academic mission while also ensuring the health and safety of the campus community.”