

SENATE

TO: Senate

FROM: Alison Watt, Secretary, Senate Nominating Committee

DATE: January 17, 2008

SUBJECT: Elections at Senate Meeting – Monday, February 4, 2008

The following Senate committee currently has vacancies. Elections, if required, will be conducted by ballot at the Senate meeting of February 4, 2008. Under Senate regulations, any Senator who wishes to submit nominations may do so by notifying the Secretary of Senate in writing (email watt@sfu.ca) of such nominations. Nominations must be received by the Secretary no later than Friday, February 1, 2008. Nominations received after that time will not be accepted. Senators making nominations must ensure in advance that the nominee is willing to stand for election.

International Student Exchange Committee (ISEC)

One Faculty Member from the Faculty of Applied Sciences for term of office to May 31, 2008; **one Faculty Member from the Faculty of Health Sciences** for term of office to May 31, 2009, and **one Faculty Member from the Faculty of Business Administration** to replace Michael Favere-Marchesi for term of office to May 31, 2009.

Faculty of Applied Sciences:
Faculty of Health Sciences: Steve Corber
Faculty of Business Administration:

Senate Committee on Agenda and Rules (SCAR)

One Faculty Senator to replace Michael Hayes for term of office to May 31, 2008.



Question from Senator Letourneau

29 January 2008

PREAMBLE

On November 19 of last year, the Senate Committee on Graduate Studies (SCGS) voted to recommend to Senate several changes to the graduate studies section of the calendar, under a provision that they would be made effective in September of this year. One of these changes applied to the refund policy concerning courses dropped after classes had started – it would affect graduate students who paid their fees per credit-hour (as opposed to per semester).

The previous policy gave a full refund in the first month of the semester, and no refund thereafter. The new policy gives a 75% refund in the first month, 50% in the second month, and no refund thereafter.

As I understand it, shortly after this decision was made, the Dean of Graduate Studies' office was informed that the proposed change to the fee policy did not require any further authorization. A decision was made to immediately implement the new policy effective at the start of this month.

An email indicating this was sent to the various departments with affected students; however no change to the calendar was published online and therefore affected students were neither informed nor aware.

It is important to note that the registration period for graduate students started before November 19, the date when the decision was made into changing the refund policy.

Graduate students in the Faculty of Health Sciences, who pay fees on a per credit-hour basis, brought it to my attention that they never received the notice of these changes, and that many of them (at least 40), registered for courses under the impression that they would be fully refunded if the courses were dropped early into the semester. Some of these students then dropped their courses this month, and it was not until they discovered that their tuition as billed was higher than expected that they began to question and know something was wrong.

QUESTION TO THE DEAN OF GRADUATE STUDIES

Can the Dean of Graduate Studies please provide further detail on what happened, and indicate what steps are being taken, and will be taken, to fix the situation and refund students according to the published policy?

QUESTIONS TO THE DIRECTOR, UNIVERSITY SECRETARIAT

Following-up on the concerns of the Health Science grad students, I asked the Director of the University Secretariat as to why the changes did not need to go to Senate, and was informed that the authority to make those changes was delegated to the Graduate Studies Committee last year.

According to the change, the Committee now:

"consider[s] and decide[s] on policy recommendations concerning graduate course registration, course and program withdrawal procedures, and on the administration of graduate records."

Similar language exists in the terms of reference for the Committee on Undergraduate Studies.

I also note that, in terms for the Graduate Studies Committee, another section says that the committee must "*make recommendations to Senate*" regarding the Graduate General Regulations. Likewise, the Committee on Undergraduate Studies has several other sections which say "*recommend to Senate*".

I now find myself confused on several points regarding how the process is supposed to work:

- Does a "policy recommendation", as stated in the Committees' terms of reference, mean that a decision of the Committee on such a matter requires no further approval by any body?
- If the final word on such matters does rests with the Committees, can such regulations be changed without updating any version of the calendar? If so, how would students be notified of such changes?
- How does the implementation of changes relate to the timing of registration periods and calendar updates?
- Do these delegations, in any case, apply to matters related to the assessment and refund of fees, as responsibility for fees lies with the Board of Governors and so could not be delegated to committees of Senate?

Can the Director of the University Secretariat provide some clarification on those points? Can the Director also clarify how the decision making process, from the Committee(s), to Senate, to the Board, to notification to students and/or publication in the Calendar works, especially as it relates to matters of timing?

To: SFU Senators
From: Jon Driver, Dean of Graduate Studies
Subject: response to submitted questions from senator Letourneau
Date: 31st January 2008

Senator Letourneau has asked a number of valid questions about a change to the assessment of tuition fee refunds for graduate students who drop classes after the semester has started. Here I explain why the changes were made, how a problem arose, what we will do to fix it, and why it was felt that Graduate Studies had the authority to implement these changes.

A. Why changes were made

[Senators should note that graduate student tuition is assessed in two different ways. Some students are charged a flat rate per semester, regardless of the number of courses they take (“per semester” fees); some students are charged a fee based on the number of credits they take (“per credit” fees)]

Graduate Studies staff identified some problems concerning withdrawal from courses and programs and the associated fee refund rules. [Without going into a lot of detail, the two major problems were: (a) different treatment for “per credit” and “per semester” students; (b) a refund policy that didn’t take into account the reality of graduate student lives]. I therefore prepared a proposal to clarify the various policies and procedures concerning fees and fee refunds for graduate students who wish to do one of the following:

- (a) not register for a semester
- (b) not register for medical/parental reasons
- (c) withdraw from one or more courses once the semester has started
- (d) withdraw from all courses once the semester has started
- (e) withdraw permanently from the program once the semester has started

Senator Letourneau’s questions relate to items (c),(d) and (e) that concern refunds for students who withdraw after a semester has begun.

This document went to SGSC in September 2007 (as GS2007.30). Most of the document clarified our existing policies and procedures, but it also proposed some new procedures, notably:

1. “per semester” and “per credit” students who withdraw from a semester or permanently from the program would receive a 75% refund if withdrawing in the first month and 50% during the second month (previously the only refund had been 50% in the first month)
2. students who had to withdraw from all courses after the second month for extenuating reasons could supply documentation and apply to the dean of graduate studies for a refund (previously no

such provision existed, although in practice we were already trying to help students in such situations)

3. students in “per credit” programs could obtain a partial tuition refund if dropping a course in the second month of a semester (previously, no refund was allowed after the first month, but in practice we were already providing some refunds)

All of the above were already being done informally in Graduate Studies, because of issues of fairness, special circumstances, appeals etc. We therefore wanted to change the rules to reflect procedures that were already in place.

Although all of these changes provide students with a more generous refund and with opportunities to have special circumstances taken into consideration, there was one rule that we neglected to consider. The Calendar states that “per credit” students who drop a course in the first month are eligible for a 100% tuition refund. Under the ‘clarified’ practices that SGSC considered, this would be reduced to a 75% refund.

B. Why a problem arose

When some graduate students in Health Sciences dropped courses in spring 2008, they were offered a 75% refund. They challenged the refund, and correctly pointed out that this was at odds with the language in the Calendar, that offers “per credit” students a 100% refund if courses are dropped in the first month.

Although we had sent e-mails to graduate secretaries about the new rules and procedures, graduate students in health sciences did not receive a copy of the message. This may have been the result of a problem in Graduate Studies or Health Sciences.

C. What we will do to deal with the problem

1. We will ensure that for the rest of this academic year graduate student refunds are calculated using the rule that provides the most generous refund to the student. Health Sciences students (and any others affected) will receive a 100% refund if they drop a course during the first month.
2. We will submit the revised rules to the Board of Governors for approval, and ensure that the Calendar language is changed for the 2008/2009 academic year.
3. We also have to fix a problem in SIMS, so that “per credit” students who drop one course and register for a substitute are not charged anything for a net drop of zero courses.
4. We will advise Health Sciences that graduate students should be informed of refund policies, and that they should be encouraged to consult with advisors before making decisions about which courses to take.

D. Governance issues

I had told SGSC in September that the rule changes would need Board of Governors approval, but I made an error in my subsequent communications about this. I sent the SGSC-approved

document to the Vice-President, Academic, but in my covering memo I stated that all of the changes were consistent with our current procedures. Dr. Waterhouse responded that we could implement the new procedures, in the mistaken belief that we were simply clarifying existing practices. As noted above, I had forgotten that in standardizing our refunds (and making them more generous for most students) we had in fact changed the course drop refund policy for “per credit” students, to their disadvantage if they dropped a course in the first month.

Senator Letourneau has asked why SGSC has the authority to make changes to a policy concerning fees. SGSC does not have that authority, and that is why I forwarded the changes to the Vice-President Academic for transmission to the Board. As a result of my error Dr. Waterhouse ruled that the changes did not need Board approval, because I had informed him that all of the practices were consistent with current procedures.

With regard to Senator Letourneau’s other points about governance, we normally wait until the start of the fall semester to implement changes, so that this coincides with the publication of the same version of the paper and web-based Calendar. Exceptions to this practice are made from time to time when a change would clearly benefit students. Because we erroneously thought that the changes benefited all students, we implemented the rule in the spring. Had we realized that a sub-group would be disadvantaged, we would have waited until Fall 2008 before implementation.

As Senators will know, SGSC reports in detail on academic matters. The items under discussion did not concern academic issues. They were submitted for Board consideration, but a mistake in my covering memo misled the Vice-President Academic into thinking that we were only clarifying existing practices, and he could not have known that a rule change was incorporated in the document.