

ACADEMIC COUNCIL REPORT

SESSION:

Public
Non-Public

ACTION REQUESTED:

Decision
Discussion/Direction
Information

TO: Academic Council

DATE: June 27, 2023

FROM: Lauren Turner, University Secretary

SUBJECT: Meeting Formats

COMMITTEE MANDATE:

GNC is responsible for providing advice to Academic Council on its governance structure and processes, the nomination and election of new members, and Academic Council performance.

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT:

- At the April 18, 2023 meeting of GNC, the Committee requested that the University Secretary prepare a memorandum setting out options for meeting formats for Academic Council for the 2023/2024 academic year.
- The Secretary prepared the analysis below and presented it to GNC on June 20, 2023.

ANALYSIS:

There are three meeting formats that could be used by Academic Council in 2023/2024:

1. Continue to meet online;
2. Meet in person; or
3. Run hybrid meetings

The benefits and drawbacks of each type of meeting are set out below. The disparity between benefits and risks, as well as feedback from other governance professionals across Ontario, put hybrid meetings in a distinct second place between completely remote or completely in-person meetings.

Online

Benefits:

- Online meetings are familiar to members of Academic Council
- Online meetings do not require travel time
- There has been higher attendance at Academic Council during this period of online meetings
- Members who would otherwise not be able to attend (e.g. because they have COVID-19 symptoms) can attend online
- There is equality between the north and downtown campuses

Risks:

- It can be difficult to achieve the same levels of individual engagement in online meetings as at in person meetings
- Dependent on stability of meeting platform

In Person

Benefits:

- Many people find in-person interaction more meaningful and productive
- A break from screen time
- Not reliant on technology

Risks:

- Scheduling travel time can cut into productivity
- Lack of equality between campuses – easier for those who teach/work downtown vs those who teach/work at the north campus
- Harder for those who are unwell/have other duties (e.g. dependent care)
- Some members may not be comfortable meeting in a crowded boardroom

Hybrid

Benefits:

- Members who would otherwise not be able to attend (e.g. because they have COVID-19 symptoms) can attend online

Risks:

- Can create in group/out group dynamics between those who regularly attend meetings in person vs those who regularly attend remotely
- The above may become a dividing line between those who can easily attend in person (i.e. those who teach/work at the downtown campus) vs those who have further to travel
- Those who attend remotely generally report a diminished meeting experience (e.g. harder to see members' faces and facial expressions, potential for their questions/hands to be seen less or slower than those in the room)
- Those who attend in person may not be able to see the faces of those attending remotely due to screen size/location in the Boardroom

GNC June 20, 2023

- GNC discussed the meeting options, ultimately preferring a mix of in-person and online meetings, with consideration given to weather conditions in Ontario

- The Committee recommended that the first and last meetings of the year be in-person to allow for in-person orientation and a form of celebration to mark the end of the year
- The Committee further recommended that in-person meetings in particular be communicated early to members of Academic Council so that calendar time could be allocated appropriately
- The University Secretary was directed to mock up a potential schedule for 2023/2024. The following is therefore presented for Academic Council's consideration:
 - September 2023 – in-person meeting
 - October 2023 – online meeting
 - November 2023 – online meeting
 - January 2024 – online meeting
 - February 2024 – online meeting
 - March 2024 – online meeting
 - April 2024 – online meeting
 - May 2024 – online meeting
 - June 2024 – in-person meeting

NEXT STEPS:

Following discussion at Academic Council, the Secretariat will send out calendar invitations for the 2023/2024 academic year reflecting either in-person or online meetings for the dates directed by Academic Council.