

Establishment of an Ad-Hoc Committee for a *Policy on Academic Units*

Recommendation to Senate from the Vice President, Academic and Research

April 11, 2025

Action

To have Senate establish an Ad-Hoc Committee to make recommendations for a Policy on Academic Units (proposed terms of reference attached).

Background

Academic units (Departments, Schools and Faculties) are the foundations of the University. Academic programs are offered therein to collectively deliver on the University's mandate of teaching, research and community engagement. It is, therefore, crucial that the University community has a shared and common understanding of their nature, scope, authority and roles, and that decisions concerning academic units are made based on clear and transparent criteria.

A clearly articulated policy ensures that the academic structure of the University aligns with its mission, strategic plan, and academic priorities. Such a policy leads to non-arbitrary, effective and collegial decision-making that enhances trust and fosters a sense of fairness.

A policy also provides clarity about the roles of academic units, their responsibilities, governance mechanisms, and interactions with Senate, and helps academic leaders understand their mandates more clearly. This is particularly important as accrediting and review bodies are placing more emphasis on the need for robust collegial models of governance within academic units, and within the University as a whole.

The University has been asked to consider proposals for the creation of new departments, as well as merging existing departments. However, without a policy, there isn't a defined process or criteria upon which such decisions can be made.

Rationale

The main goal of developing a policy on academic units is to bring consistency and clarity to how academic units are established, merged, or disestablished. Currently, there is a lack of transparency and uniformity in how these decisions are made, which can create confusion, duplication of effort, and governance challenges.

A robust policy will ensure fair, transparent and collegial decision-making. The policy would define criteria and factors to be considered when establishing a new academic unit, including by re-designation or amalgamation, or merging or closing an academic unit.

A policy will also provide guidance on the roles, functions, authorities, structure, and governance of collegial decision-making processes within the unit, which is particularly relevant in newly established Faculties. The policy should also make space for and encourage creative thinking about interdisciplinary programs and innovative governance models that ensure that all voices are heard and respected.

Note: The decision to establish, merge, amend or disestablish an academic unit rests with the Board of Governors, which acts on the advice of Senate. This is achieved by a first consideration at Senate, with a recommendation proceeding to the Board. Senate cannot regulate the Board's decisions, but it can regulate how it formulates its recommendation to the Board. An effective policy will strengthen Senate's processes and empower Senate and the academic units to bring forward recommendations based on clear and transparent criteria.

SENATE AD-HOC COMMITTEE FOR A POLICY ON ACADEMIC UNITS TERMS OF REFERENCE

MANDATE

In establishing the Ad-Hoc Committee, Senate directs that it make recommendations on a *Policy on Academic Units*, including:

1. The role, function, authority and structure of academic units (Departments, Schools or Faculties);
2. Relevant elements of an academic plan and structure to be developed when proposing the creation of a new academic unit;
3. Assessment criteria and factors to be considered when establishing a new academic unit, merging existing academic units, or closing an academic unit; and
4. A process for Senate to make recommendations to the Board of Governors for the establishment of a new academic unit, merger of existing units, or closing of an existing unit.

COMPOSITION

- Six (6) Faculty Members, no more than one from any Faculty, elected by Senate, but not necessarily Senators;
- Two Deans – one from a departmentalized Faculty and one from a non-departmentalized Faculty (appointed by the Vice-President, Academic and Research);
- One Department Chair, elected by Senate, but not necessarily a Senator;
- Student appointed by the Student Union;
- Registrar or their designate;
- University Secretary (non-voting ex-officio); and
- Vice-President, Academic and Research, who will chair the committee.

Note: Senate will consider the principles of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in balancing the composition of the committee.