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MEMORANDUM

To: Executive Committee of Faculty Council (October 4, 2024)
Faculty Council (October 24, 2024)

From: Professor David Steinman
Chair, Teaching Methods & Resources Committee (TMRC)

Date: September 25, 2024

Re: **Teaching Methods & Resources Committee 2023-2024 Activity Report and 2024-2025 Goals**

REPORT CLASSIFICATION

This is a routine or minor policy matter that will be considered by the Executive Committee for approving and forwarding to Faculty Council to receive for information.

BACKGROUND

In accordance with Procedures of Committees for Council of the Faculty of Applied Science and Engineering, this report is a brief summary of the activities undertaken by the Teaching Methods & Resources Committee (TMRC) during the 2023-24 academic year. The report also references goals for 2024-25, based on the outcomes of these activities.

ACTIVITIES

From July 2023 to May 2024, TMRC has met as a full committee 10 times, for a total of approximately 14 hours of meeting time, along with multiple working group meetings that involved 10+ hours of work per group. For each academic semester, TMRC held standing meetings to discuss and advance the efforts of the working groups, and also held an extended adjudication meeting for Teaching Awards in the Winter term. A more detailed account of key TMRC activities in 2023-24 is described in the sections below

RECOMMENDATION FOR COUNCIL

For information.

Working Group 1: Documenting Teaching Effectiveness in Annual Activity Reports (AAR)

In addition to the Committee's core responsibility to administer and adjudicate the Faculty's Teaching Award, in recent years, TMRC has been asked by the Faculty to develop and publish robust guidelines and/or best practices for the evaluation of teaching effectiveness in tenure, promotion and PTR, namely:

- **[FASE Guidelines for the Assessment of Effectiveness of Teaching in Tenure, Continuing Status and Promotion Decisions](2022)** (2022)
- **[FASE Best Practices for Assessing Teaching Effectiveness in PTR Decisions](2023)** (2023)

Therefore, in 2023-24, it was felt that a natural next step would be to offer some approaches for how to better describe and elaborate on teaching activities via the free-form AAR teaching section. In working towards this objective, a number of text and video resources were developed, alongside a report that focused on (i) reviewing the literature to summarize best practices for the development and evaluation of teaching effectiveness, and (ii) summarizing existing PTR documents and data sources available at FASE U of T. Based on recent discussions with the Dean, and ideally following a presentation to Chairs & Directors, TMRC will aim to provide these as constructive resources for faculty members to help them describe their activities and how they align with faculty guidelines and best practices for assessing teaching effectiveness.

Working Group 2: Streamlining Teaching Awards and their Adjudication

Over the years, it has been noted that the FASE Teaching Awards—Early Career Teaching Award (ECTA), Faculty Teaching Award (FTA), Sustained Excellence in Teaching Award (SETA), Teaching Assistant Award (TAA) – are onerous for both the candidates to put together and also for the Committee to review. It was also noted that the process for adjudicating the awards varied from year to year, given changes in committee composition and insufficient documentation. Therefore, in 2023-24, the Committee focused on (i) revisiting the criteria for the teaching awards to ensure that there was alignment across the various awards, and (ii) leveraging updates to criteria to develop and trial a more structured adjudication process.

Regarding criteria, the primary changes were: (i) that the eligibility periods for the awards be such that a candidate can only be eligible for one award at any given time; (ii) that the criteria for excellence should align with and/or reflect TMRC's published guidelines for teaching effectiveness; (iii) refining details pertaining to the primary and supplemental documents required for the nomination package; and (iv) to try to return to the initial intent of the SETA ("*sustained* excellence in teaching award") and potentially separate out applications that might focus on the administrative educational (transformational at a faculty-wide administrative level, such as the establishment of a new program), and instead encourage applicants to focus on instructional leadership (showcasing lasting impact via curriculum development, mentorship, pedagogical expertise, assessment of student learning) – recognizing that exceptional SETA candidates may not have had the opportunity, desire or goal of pursuing high level administrative changes.

These changes will be reflected in updated Award guideline documentation that will be circulated in the 2025 Call for Nominations. (Following a recent consultation with the Dean, it is not clear how or whether such "transformational leadership" should be separately recognized, so for now TMRC will flag, if necessary, this year, any scenario where our adjudication of submitted awards indicates any tension between "sustained excellence" and "transformational leadership").

Regarding the adjudication process, we developed and implemented a rubric and pre-meeting review process via MS Forms that all Committee members were asked to complete for each application. The results of the Form were then anonymized, summarized, and shared to begin the discussion for each Award. The intention of this approach was to promote more objectivity and transparency about scoring and comments, mitigate bias, and better focus discussions. Overall, the Committee found this process helpful, and a goal for 2024-25 will be (i) to capture these decisions in the Committee Manual, and (ii) iterate and improve on some aspects of the adjudication process (taking into consideration constructive suggestions that had been made during the debrief of this process). Example of areas we will be working to clarify include revised approaches to quantitative scoring, factors to take into consideration for identifying cases where it may be appropriate to select no recipients or two recipients for a given award, and how to improve communications around award guidelines to better support applicants.

Working Group 3: Student Evaluation of Teaching

This working group arose out of TMRC's longstanding concern about the (over-)reliance on and (over-)interpretation of raw numbers in assessing teaching effectiveness. The intention was to develop recommendations related to the use of course evaluations data in a way that is specific to FASE, since much of the published "evidence" is not discipline-specific. Some topics that this Working Group considered included (i) response rates and survey fatigue; (ii) how bias can show up in student evaluations; and (iii) quantification and communication about the precision of course evaluation scores. For the latter, specific questions included how course evaluations might differ in comparing first year and upper year courses, and the significance of 0.1 decimal points in distinguishing comparable candidates. The goals were to support Working Group 2 in providing guidance for structuring adjudication discussions when candidates are otherwise quite close, as well as to provide recommendations for Working Group 1, in terms of how guidelines for interpretating course evaluation data might be helpful when assessing teaching effectiveness.

To achieve these goals, in 2023-24, a preliminary analysis of publicly available course evaluation data on Quercus was performed. Ultimately, this exercise was not fully concluded due to (i) internal disagreement within the Committee regarding some details of the statistical analysis; and (ii) concerns about this exercise being beyond the scope of TMRC's terms of reference. To gain clarity on any potential next steps, in 2024-25, the Chair and Vice-Chair met with the Vice-Dean, Undergraduate to help clarify questions and concerns around scope, and to ensure that these preliminary deliberations are provided as suggestions only. Any future work in this realm will be coordinated through the Vice-Dean, Undergraduate office, with support from CTSI for any further analyses.

Additional areas of discussion

- After being approached about naming a teaching award after an individual, TMRC members voted against setting a precedent of naming any of the FASE teaching awards. A report outlining the rationale for this was submitted by the Chair to the Dean's Office.
- There was some discussion about revisiting the name of TMRC to something that perhaps better reflects the work of the Committee over the last decade (resources to support and evaluate teaching *and* learning at FASE). However, this discussion did not lead to formal action. Should the topic be revisited, the Committee would need to undertake wider consultations with the FASE community to gain insight on the role and scope of the Committee, and what gaps, if any, might exist.
- The TMRC remains committed to mitigating bias and promoting EDI as it relates to the assessment of teaching excellence. This is an ongoing discussion within the Committee. It would be beneficial to receive input from the Faculty regarding TMRC's role in researching and/or promoting EDI best practices for use internally (e.g. as it applies to adjudicating teaching awards), given that TMRC is one of several Faculty Standing Committees for which there may be some level of consistency required in terms of process and practice.