



# **General Faculties Council**

## **Handbook**

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## Contents

*Note: This is not an officially approved GFC document. It is a compilation document, referencing GFC decisions and generally reflecting practices, and is intended to serve as a resource for GFC and its Standing Committees members.*

The Role of General Faculties Council.....	3
The Responsibilities of General Faculties Council .....	3
How General Faculties Council Works.....	4
The Connection between General Faculties Council and the Board of Governors .....	5
General Faculties Council Membership.....	6
The Staff of General Faculties Council.....	7
Quorum .....	7
Replacement and Voting at Meetings.....	7
Motions/Resolutions .....	8
A Typical General Faculties Council Agenda .....	9
Committee of the Whole.....	9
Faculty Councils .....	10
The Committee System of General Faculties Council.....	10
Election or Appointment by General Faculties Council.....	10
Guidelines for Issues Brought to GFC for Action.....	11
The General Faculties Council Website .....	12
General Faculties Council Contact Directory.....	12

## **The Role of General Faculties Council**

The *Post-secondary Learning Act* (PSLA), proclaimed on March 17, 2004, stipulates that General Faculties Council (GFC) is responsible for the academic affairs of Athabasca University, subject to the authority of the Board of Governors (Board).

GFC should be an effective voice of the academic community, approving academic policy and priorities, and offering its advice to other decision-makers on issues touching upon the academic work of the University. GFC:

- provides a forum of collegial governance which gives effective voice to the various interests and constituencies within the University, and which provides for the effective dissemination of information concerning institutional objectives and priorities;
- provides a clear and vigorous articulation of institutional goals and priorities, thereby creating a policy framework within which departmental and faculty planning can occur;
- responds in a facilitative manner to proposals originating elsewhere within the University;
- ensures that decisions respecting proposals originating from departments, faculties and GFC committees are taken within the context of institutional priorities and with clear understanding of the potentially adverse impact on, and tradeoffs for, other units.

GFC and its standing committees should be guided by the following governance principles:

- be accountable and take responsibility for their roles within the governance system;
- provide a participatory, inclusive and collaborative environment;
- all actions undertaken with transparency;
- consultations occur before approval or endorsement is sought;
- members be accountable to the ideal that the University community participate in academic decision-making.

GFC must ensure that it maintains a broad perspective on issues within the framework of the University's mandate and established priorities. It is expected to provide vision and leadership to the academic community.

## **The Responsibilities of General Faculties Council**

GFC, as specified in section 26(1) of the PSLA, subject to the authority of the board, is responsible for the academic affairs of the university and, without restricting the generality of the foregoing, has the authority to:

- (a) exercise any power of a faculty council that GFC considers desirable to exercise;
- (b) consider and make decisions on the reports of the faculty councils as to the programs of study in the faculties;
- (c) determine all programs of study to which clause (b) does not apply that are to be offered by the university for credit toward the requirements for any degree or diploma;
- (d) determine the timetables for examinations and for lectures and other instruction in each faculty;
- (e) consider and make decisions on the reports of faculty councils as to the appointment of examiners and the conduct and results of examinations in the faculties;
- (f) provide for the granting and conferring of degrees other than honorary degrees;
- (g) provide for the preparation and publication of the university calendar;
- (h) hear and determine appeals from the decisions of faculty councils on applications, requests or petitions by students and others;
- (i) consider all matters reported to it by any faculty council and communicate its opinion or action on those matters to the faculty council concerned;
- (j) determine the date for the beginning and end of lectures in the university and also the beginning and end of each university term;
- (k) make rules and regulations for the management and operation of libraries;
- (l) recommend to the board the establishment of faculties, schools, departments, chairs and programs of study in the university in any subject that GFC thinks fit;
- (m) make rules and regulations respecting academic awards;
- (n) determine standards and policies respecting the admission of persons to the university as students;
- (o) make recommendations to the board with respect to affiliation with other institutions, academic planning, campus planning, a building program, the budget, the regulation of residences and dining halls, procedures in respect of appointments, promotions, salaries, tenure and dismissals, and any other matters considered by GFC to be of interest to the university;
- (p) authorize lecturing and teaching on the university premises by persons other than members of the staff of the university;
- (q) authorize a school to have a school council of the same nature and with the same powers, duties and functions as a faculty council and, in its discretion, revoke any authority so given.

## **How General Faculties Council Works**

GFC has firmly committed itself to collegial governance.

GFC attempts to expedite its work as much as possible, and the University Secretary takes a leading role in planning, routing, and scheduling, to ensure that proposals move through the process as quickly as thoughtful decision-making permits. A transcendent principle in the work of GFC has been the determination to provide fair consideration of

an issue through thoughtful and timely debate, ensuring that opposing views and minority interests are considered.

GFC has delegated some of its decision-making authority to other bodies. For example, the Student Academic Appeals Committee's decision regarding a student appeal is final; the Student Awards Committee approves the criteria and description for new undergraduate and graduate student awards; and the Academic Planning, Policy, and Standards Committee approves proposals for minor changes to existing undergraduate and graduate programs.

GFC receives reports and information items from its committees and from other areas of the university that touch on the work of the academic community. This provides the members of GFC the opportunity to convey their views to the decision-makers, if desired.

GFC has a responsibility to ensure that others understand the nature of its decision-making. These are some of the means by which GFC attempts to communicate with a wider audience:

- Elected members are expected to report back to their faculty councils on the work of GFC, and appointed members are expected to report back to their constituents;
- GFC agendas and approved minutes are public documents and are available on the University Secretariat's website. Agendas are distributed at least one week prior to each meeting, and minutes are posted after their approval at the next meeting.

## **The Connection between General Faculties Council and the Board of Governors**

The PSLA establishes the roles of GFC and the Board, but there are overlapping jurisdictions. For example, a new program proposal has its academic elements reviewed by GFC, who makes recommendation for approval to the Board, and its financial components and its relationship to institutional priorities examined and approved by the Board.

The President is both the Chair of GFC and a voting member of the Board. The PSLA requires any recommendations from GFC to the Board be transmitted to the Board through the President. As such, the President is the conduit between GFC to the Board and presents proposals from GFC to the Board.

One representative of GFC sits as a voting member of the Board. That representative is elected by the members of GFC for a three-year term, affirmed by the Minister, and can be reappointed (s.4(1) AU Regulation).

The Administration serves as the operational link between the two governing bodies. The University Secretary ensures that items flow from one committee system and governance body to the next, designing a schedule and routing for expeditious travel. The Vice-Presidents and other officers ensure that the policies approved by GFC and/or the Board are implemented and that the University's business and academic programs operate within the policy framework approved by the governing bodies.

## **General Faculties Council Membership**

The membership composition for GFC is set out under section 10 of the Athabasca University Regulation. Section 10 states:

*10(1) The general faculties council consists of the following members:*

- (a) the president of Athabasca University, who is the chair;*
- (b) the vice-presidents of Athabasca University;*
- (c) the dean of each faculty;*
- (d) the director of each school;*
- (e) the chief librarian;*
- (f) the director of extension or, if there is none, the officer performing comparable functions;*
- (g) the registrar;*
- (h) the members elected in accordance with section 24 of the Act;*
- (i) 2 students nominated by the council of the students association;*
- (j) one graduate student nominated by the council of the graduate students association;*
- (k) one tutor nominated by the organization representing tutors;*
- (l) 2 members, each nominated by the non-academic staff;*
- (m) the members appointed in accordance with section 25 of the Act.*

The number of full-time academic faculty members to be elected by faculties is set out in section 24 of the PSLA. Section 24(2)(a) requires the total number of elected members be twice the number of persons who are members by virtue of their offices. The number of members that may be elected by each faculty/centre is relative to the number of full time academic in a faculty/centre compared to the number of full time academic faculty in the university as a total (s.24(2)(b) PSLA).

An elected member normally holds office for a term of 3 years. A faculty council/centre may elect members to hold office for one or two year terms so as to provide overlapping terms of office for the representatives of the faculty or centre, or

to elect a new member to hold office for the remainder of an unexpired term. An elected member ceases to hold office if the member ceases to be a full time member of the academic staff of the faculty of centre (s. 24(3), 24(4) and 24(5) PSLA).

Section 25 of the PSLA permits the members of GFC to appoint members. On June 13, 2012, GFC approved appointing 1 term academic staff and 4 tutors (1 appointed by each of the following faculties: Faculty of Business, Faculty of Health Disciplines, Faculty of Science and Technology and Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences) as members of GFC. On December 16, 2015, GFC approved appointing the Associate Vice President Research a member of GFC.

### **The Staff of General Faculties Council**

The President is the Chair of GFC, and presides over the meetings of the group. The Chair is responsible for keeping the meeting moving in an orderly fashion, ruling on questions, etc.

The Provost and Vice-President, Academic is the Vice-Chair of GFC, and steps in for the Chair when needed.

The University Secretary is responsible for assisting the Chair as needed, especially for ensuring that rules, policies and procedures are properly followed, producing minutes of the meetings, conducting research for historical GFC documents, past items to serve as examples for current proposals, and other archived GFC materials, as required.

### **Quorum**

A majority of the members (50% + 1), excluding vacant positions, shall constitute a quorum at any meeting, unless otherwise expressed in the GFC Rules. For example, amendments to any rule of GFC must be approved by a majority of two thirds of the members of GFC whether present or not.

It is the duty of the Chair, with the University Secretary, to determine if quorum is present before calling the meeting to order.

### **Replacement and Voting at Meetings**

Members may not send alternates to meetings of GFC or its standing committees (GFC Rules PART II, A. Membership, provision 9 and PART V Committees, provision 11.8).

Each member present, including the chair and ex officio members, is entitled to one vote and only the members present may vote on any question (GFC Rules PART II, F. Rules of Order, provision 7.1). This applies for GFC and its standing committees.

When a question is put to vote by the Chair, members will indicate their vote in such manner as the Chair may direct. The Chair will declare the result of the vote and such declaration will be conclusive. If, prior to the time when the Chair has undertaken to determine the vote, any three members request that a count of the votes be recorded, then the number of votes for and against the question will be counted and this count recorded in the minutes of the meeting. If any member wishes to record his or her abstention from voting on any question, the member must do so immediately following the declaration by the Chair. Abstentions will not be counted (GFC Rules PART II, F. Rules of Order, provision 7.2). This applies for GFC and its standing committees.

Voting by proxy is not permitted (GFC Rules PART II, F. Rules of Order, provision 7.4). This applies for GFC and its standing committees.

### **Motions/Resolutions**

Proceedings of GFC are governed in accordance with Roberts's Rules of Order (GFC Rules PART II, F. Rules of Order, provision 1). This includes making of motions/resolutions.

A motion/resolution brings business before GFC or a standing committee for decision. A motion/resolution is debatable, amendable and takes a majority vote to adopt.

The components of a minuted motion/resolution are:

- the mover/seconded (if required);
- the proposed action; and
- the outcome of the decision.

Motions/resolutions use affirmative language whenever possible (e.g., to approve, endorse). A motion/resolution should be as detailed as possible. It is important for a motion to be worded precisely as members vote on the exact language, not on a vague idea.

A motion made at GFC must be moved and seconded before the subject matter of the motion is open for debate (discussion). Motions made at GFC standing committee meetings do not require a seconder.

Once the debate is concluded, the Chair asks the question (those in favor, those opposed) and declares the results (carried, not carried).

A commonly misused term is to "table" a motion/resolution. To table a motion is to set a motion/resolution aside temporarily in order to take up something of immediate urgency. The intent is not to: i) activate a motion/resolution; or ii) kill a motion/resolution or to put it off to the next, or a future, meeting. If a member wishes to make a motion/resolution, he/she should "move" it. If a member wishes to propose that decision on an already moved motion/resolution be deferred to a later date, he/she should move to "defer or postpone" the action.

Types of motions and rules relating to motions are outlined in Robert's Rules of Order.

## **A Typical General Faculties Council Agenda**

A typical GFC agenda is broken up into the following sections:

- Approval of the agenda, including the consent agenda

Consent agendas are used to expedite business at a meeting. The purpose of the consent agenda is generally to eliminate the need to deal separately with many routine items not requiring explanation or discussion. If a member wishes to discuss any item contained on a consent agenda, he/she may request that the item be removed from the consent agenda and placed on the regular agenda for consideration or discussion.

- Declaring conflicts

Subject to the Conflict of Interest provision of the GFC Rules, members will be asked by the Chair to declare any conflict they may have with respect to the meeting agenda.

- Business arising from the consent agenda
- Approval of the minutes from the last GFC meeting
- Business arising from the minutes
- Reports from Executive Officers
- Reports from GFC Standing Committees

Note: Action items being forwarded to GFC by a GFC standing committee are listed under that standing committee.

## **Committee of the Whole**

A large assembly like GFC may occasionally need to form a Committee of the Whole. The purpose of a Committee of the Whole is to suspend a formal meeting in order to address a matter that can better be dealt with informally. Any votes taken during a Committee of the Whole session are not considered decisions of GFC, but recommendations to GFC (Roberts Rules of Order). The rules are as follows:

- The members of GFC vote to go into Committee of the Whole.
- Committee of the Whole functions as a real committee; when it convenes, GFC ceases to be in session.

- Committee of the Whole can be chaired by a new Chair. The Chair of Committee of the Whole is appointed by the Chair of GFC.
- Committee of the Whole votes to rise at the conclusion of its session.
- Rising implies that Committee of the Whole ceases to exist and GFC is back in session.

Proceedings of Committee of the Whole are not entered into the formal minutes of the assembly. The University Secretary prepares a brief synopsis of the Committee of the Whole proceedings and enters them as an appendix to the minutes.

## **Faculty Councils**

The PSLA sets out the required membership of faculty councils in section 28 and the powers of faculty councils in section 29. GFC approves terms of reference for each faculty council.

## **The Committee System of General Faculties Council**

PART V of the GFC Rules sets out the 'rules' governing standing and ad hoc committees (e.g., a task force, a working group, or an advisory group), and defines the standing committees, including the membership composition for each standing committee. Unless, otherwise specified, standing and ad hoc committees are subject to the same procedural rules as GFC.

GFC has seven standing committees:

- Executive
- Academic Planning, Policy, and Standards
- Academic Learning Environment
- Student Academic Appeals
- Student Awards
- Academic Excellence Awards
- Academic Research

The terms of reference for each standing committee set out the powers and duties for that standing committee.

## **Election or Appointment by General Faculties Council**

The GFC Executive Committee has responsibility to encourage nominations for vacancies on GFC, its standing committees, and other bodies requiring representation from GFC or the academic community.

Every Spring, a list of nominations being sought for various elections to be held at GFC and appointments to be made is prepared by the University Secretariat. Occasionally

throughout the year, a list of nominations being sought if vacancies have been identified is prepared.

Call for nominations are made and notices are given as required. For example:

- for full-time academic faculty members to serve on GFC, notices are given to Deans
- for full-time academic faculty members to serve on GFC standing committees, notices are given to the full-time academic faculty members of that faculty
- for student representatives, notice is given to the students associations
- for the tutor representative, notice is given to the organization representing tutors
- for non-academic staff members, notice is given to the professional and excluded professional staff

Generally, nominations are open for three weeks. Once nominations close, a list of nominations will be presented to the GFC Executive Committee.

If elections are required, electronic voting will be facilitated. If elections are not required, persons nominated will be elected by acclamation.

### **Guidelines for Issues Brought to GFC for Action**

Section 26 of the PSLA establishes that GFC is responsible for the academic affairs of the University, subject to the authority of the Board which has final responsibility for overseeing the business of the University. GFC provides institutional leadership in supporting the mandate of the University.

Because the University is a diverse community and GFC is sometimes tasked with speaking to issues, there may, from time to time, be extenuating circumstances under which an issue may come before GFC with request for action.

#### **Criteria**

Issues brought to GFC for consideration shall meet the following criteria in order to be considered appropriate GFC business:

- direct linkage to the mandate of the University
- contains a core academic component

Those bringing forward an issue should communicate a request in writing to the University Secretary that the issue be considered for placement on a GFC agenda, and include the following:

- in depth, non-biased background information on the issue to assist the members of the GFC Executive Committee and GFC in taking informed action;

- commentary on the importance and impacts of the issue, and identification of possible conflicts;
- clear indication of what the champions wish GFC to do, preferably including draft wording of any motions to be considered.

The University Secretary, through the Chair will bring the request to the GFC Executive Committee for consideration and possible recommendation to GFC or its standing committees.

### **The General Faculties Council Website**

The GFC website, <http://ous.athabascau.ca/general/index.php>, contains the GFC Rules, current membership lists, the meeting schedule, agendas and minutes, terms of reference guides, template forms, and links to governing documents and legislation.

### **General Faculties Council Contact Directory**

The University Secretariat provides support for all areas of General Faculties Council. If you have any questions or require further information, please contact

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