



Minutes

January 20, 2023

3:00 PM EST

Zoom

Present: Courtney Cameron (Chair), Jessica Li, Christina Tassopoulos, Calvin Lei, Robert Dziarmaga, Rose Wong, Hillary Song, Julie Choi, Zamir Fakirani, Melissa Paglialunga, Shahbaz Khan, and Annie Hu

Regrets: Damiana Pavone, Jaylene Olson, Ayesha Khann, Quinn Stevenson, and Danielle Landry

Call to Order (3:03pm)

Courtney: Thanks to everyone for making time to meet at 3pm on Friday. I have put the statement we are discussing in the chat for those who haven't seen it (<https://www.instagram.com/p/Cnmn7P4ugJg/>).

Courtney: The reason for calling this emergency meeting is we want to chat about the statement put out yesterday by Osgoode LCP. I know that members of L&L have all had a chance to at least skim it. I invited our friends from Caucus here as well (it was Jess' idea). Our friends from Caucus are student leaders but are also removed enough to share their perspective. Right now, we have Calvin and Robert.

Courtney: I want to start by going through the statement. It opens up by discussing iTrek, which is the organization that the students running the Israel trip have paired with. They have pointed out many an issue with the organization. I touched base with Osgoode – their official response is that they have no association or opinion to make about iTrek. I wanted to get their opinion. Yes, the Facebook page is run by us, but it is also nearing this territory where this has outrun our council. Osgoode doesn't have an opinion on it.

Courtney: Next, the statement digs deeper into regional tensions and talk about apartheid. The big thing for us is the statement's section on L&L complicity. The view is that we allowed this trip to be shared and we allowed iTrek to be promoted without paying proper attention to the organization's harmful past, the conflict in region, and the situation that created for Palestinian students at Osgoode. It gets a bit more detailed in that they say, "We have concluded that L&L's actions display a pointed censoring of Palestinian students and their allies at Osgoode, all of whom deserve to have their voices and views heard". I am going to assume that they are talking about the comments/posts deleted from the Facebook pages (nobody from Osgoode LCP has contacted L&L so that's why say assuming). They call on L&L to apologize for our role in censoring.

Courtney: This is a very bird's eye view of the statement. I am assuming everyone has read it. It is very well thought out and well cited. It's clear that they have taken a lot of time to put it together. They are also calling on all students to refuse to take part in the trip. As I said, I think that this has grown a bit bigger than our council. I don't think anyone on our council is fully equipped to handle this situation; it is larger than our capabilities.

Courtney: This debate happens every year in our Facebook groups. This year was more heightened, which led to us deleting posts/comments, and it's grown from there. I have already emailed the York Centre for Human Rights, Equity and Inclusion, and I'm hoping that they can just advise us going forward. Essentially, I want to lay out situation for them, tell them exactly what L&L deleted (we have screenshots), and get some support on what they think the best steps forward are going to be.

Courtney: I now want to chat with you all about what you thought about the statement, what you have thought about the situation so far, and your stance on potential L&L statement. They are calling for a statement and I want us all to be on the same page. What do you think that response would say? Any steps besides consulting with the office that you would recommend?

Hillary: I had a meeting with the JLSA; the Osgoode Legal Centre for Palestine hasn't reach out. I am not sure if they want to because one of the people involved has been one of the main people at the centre of the Facebook situation.

Hillary: The JLSA has sent me their updated comments in response to the statement along with a personal statement from a Jewish student. They have some comments that I want to share. The most pressing comment was how and why L&L removed the posts. I have screenshots of the posts and I can link them to the Student Code of Conduct. I could make a Google Doc saying why comments were removed. I am willing to do that if it is helps.

Hillary: JLSA has a different opinion about who we should apologize to. The JLSA states that L&L should remind students that it is a highly complicated issue and that everyone has a right to their own opinions in a respectful environment. The JLSA believes that we shouldn't apologize for deleting comments because it would show that we are willing to look over the Code violations that were made. That is their perspective on that. They lastly want to say that there can be different forums for dispute resolution; the Facebook group is not appropriate. Because I am in the Mediation Clinic, I know they have done that in the past. I can reach out to Karen Drake (the Mediation Clinic Director) to see if we are able to provide this alternative mechanism to students. I think these are constructive comments. It is up to use to decide what we want to do.

Hillary: I also wanted to share this personal letter from a Jewish student at Osgoode. The student is disappointed at the fact that we had to let this happen. It is really unfortunate, and the student said it provided a space for students to voice antisemitism and ignore how pervasive t is on campus. The letter adds that there were only Jewish students responding to antisemitic comments, showing that there are no allies on campus. That is maybe not the fairest thing to say. They also agree that we shouldn't do a formal apology because they think it was specifically targeting Jewish students. All in all, I think it is an educational opportunity. That's basically what I wanted to say. Just regarding increasing transparency through a shared document, ADR avenues – these are action items we can work on. In terms of an apology, that is up to all of us.

Courtney: Something you said I agree with is that we had a transparency issue here. For sure, we need to think of a way to retroactively be transparent. I am worried that saying this is the comment and why we deleted could be harmful.

Hillary: I completely agree. For those students who were triggered to see those comments, seeing them again could be very negative.

Courtney: We thought this was harmful to take down but now we are going to put it back up. That doesn't seem like the best option. We could say that if you want to discuss a comment that was deleted, we can go though it. But isn't that creating another lack of transparency?

Julie: For Crim in 1L, there was a document circulating of all trigger warnings for classes. By default, it was all blacked out, and if you wanted to see it, you had to unblack it. We could do this, and we don't have to black out our justification of it. I think booking an appointment would make the transparency issue worse. We could black out the picture and name as well so that stays anonymous.

Courtney: Does anyone have concerns if we do this (by blacking out the comments)? There is a caveat here: we should take it back to the York Centre for Human Rights, Equity and Inclusion before doing anything.

Shahbaz: I think the reposting might easy the hurt a lot of people felt. They felt like they might be silenced. When it comes to an apology, I am not firm yes or no but maybe a statement addressing transparency with lot of sensitivity.

Courtney: I completely agree with you. If this happened in a regular school time, there would be more discussions about it.

Annie : What about a link instead? So, people would have to click into the link to read the comments, because visibility also differs depending on what device you're reading it on.

Courtney: Annie said in the chat there would be a link so people can link to the comment; they have to take extra step so not triggered and it takes away visibility issues.

Calvin : I personally don't think reposting rule breaking posts even if censored is appropriate. If it is accessible, it still breaks the rule when viewing. I think just understanding why the posts were removed is sufficient.

Courtney: My personal stance is to come out and apologize for a lack of transparency. But I think specifically what is being called for L&L. I want to find exact quote. Again, I want to talk about this. I am deeply upset to hear that this is how it landed for students. My concern with coming out and saying what they're asking us to say is that it is the equivalent of saying that Hillary and I removed comments with a view of censoring Palestinian voices. I am not debating the fact that it landed that way and that's how we've made students feel, but I worry that wording in such a way that L&L was intentionally silencing Palestinian voices will send that message. I think it is important that we make it clear that we say removed for breaking rules. I want to hear everyone else's views.

Christina: I honestly think that we have to do exactly what you said – acknowledge that this is how people were impacted but that it was not our intention. Also, people to understand that there are two sides. If we apologize for silencing one side, then the other side is going to say, “well you were just helping us”. My personal opinion is that that is the way to go.

Courtney: I also think too that there were comments deleted on both sides of the debate. It is tricky because that is not how it is being presented.

Shahbaz: So far, what I am noting is that we start by saying we did not mean for that and though it has landed like that, it is unfortunate. Comments were deleted on both sides. People are going to be upset that there was an open forum, and now that has been closed.

Jess: I agree with everything everyone said so far. I just wanted to bring up the fact that this is an on-going issue and part of what I want our team to do is to come up with a solution – what we are going to do in response to iTrek and the posts they are going to want to make in future years. For everyone here who was also on L&L last year, it's like a déjà vu situation. It has been exacerbated more this year, and I don't want this to go on every year. It has done a lot of damage to students but also to L&L's reputation. I think that's something we have to fix. Why I want to bring in the Centre for Human Rights is not just to respond, but what we can do moving forward. I feel like there's no need to rush to make a statement. I don't think we should make a statement until we are sure what the action is going to be. That's just my personal view.

Melissa: I think we are ill-equipped to handle this situation. Speaking for myself, I do not feel comfortable or able to properly comment because I lack the appropriate expertise. I agree that we must bring in qualified parties to consult such as the York Centre for Human Rights. In addition, I think even if we are not ready to give a statement that we provide the student body with some sort of update. I think it is important for students to know that we are listening and taking action accordingly. For instance, someone left a comment in the L&L comment box asking for the meeting minutes from January 4th to be posted. This is a completely fair request, but I am unable to post them until they are approved by consent at the next meeting 2 weeks later. This type of delay can give the wrong impression.

Courtney: I am also concerned about the time but more considered about putting out a statement that's not what it should be.

Hillary: I completely agree with what Melissa said. Even the conflict management piece, I am not qualified to do it. Even in removing comments, I am doing it, but I feel uncomfortable doing it. In addition, I know it is going to be putting a target on me. Having some external oversight might be helpful. I am not sure what form that would take. I have an idea to have a member from each equity seeking group to be part of the online committee. But that also requires the coordination. I can look into more about what we can do. In relation to some of the repercussions that fell on me and other students, one of those was cyberbullying, and that's not something being addressed in the statement. The actions have caused hurt; the fact that they are not even mentioning the cyberbullying is upsetting. That doesn't mean we can just ignore the cyberbullying. I understand how timing is important but if it takes time, that's okay.

Julie: Is the problem that students can't access why their information can be deleted? They have access to the code of conduct but didn't have access to which section it applied to. Is that's what's missing?

Hillary: I think it's required for us to know the content.

Courtney: People don't know why exactly what parts of the Code they violated for their post/comment to be deleted.

Annie: I was under the impression that students should be aware of the Code of Conduct. In terms of timing, I think it would be helpful for L&L to say we read the statement, we are acknowledging it, and say we are working on providing a response.

Courtney: I think that's a great idea. In that acknowledgement, we can let them know who we are contacting and why it's going to take longer than just our council talking. Does anyone have a problem with that suggestion – I would be happy to put something out today.... But I also don't want to put that out if anyone sees a problem with that. Does anyone think that it will land empty

Shahbaz: I think it's going to incite more comments but if we are going to put something out, it is going to incite more comments from both sides. People are going to get heated, and they are in the mood to get heated.

Courtney: We're going to get spicy comments anyway. You're right – that's something to consider. We are going to acknowledge that it's going to reignite the debate. Does anyone else have reservations about putting something out today?

Christina: I think we should say something. I do hear the other side; I do see it. I feel like ignoring is not the best way.

Jess: I think we could say something about transparency because we can. It's the point about apologies that I'm hesitant to commit to until we consult with some external groups.

Christina: I agree. Within that statement, we don't want to put out a half-ass statement without it meaning something.

Jess: Would it be a really bad idea to set up anonymous feedback form?

Christina: I also just think that within our communications, we need to emphasize we are human beings too. Why is that L&L can just be attacked? Why has Hillary been cyberbullied? People should 100% share their opinions but they need to be respectful.

Melissa: I have started including a L&L Comment Box in the weekly newsletter. It is at the bottom of the newsletter so I can move it up this week. But so far, we haven't gotten any submissions related to the statement.

Courtney: Let's move it up in the newsletter this week, and when we put up this update, we can include the link. Zamir shared in the chat some good language we can include. I have no problem agreeing with apologizing for the lack of transparency. We can let people know that we are in the process of connecting with the York Centre and in the meantime, we want their comments. Once we've had that meeting is when we can put out a more fulsome statement with a solution, so this doesn't happen again.

Julie : And we could also include what the issues students can expect for us to respond to in the next statement and who we will consult with to reach this conclusion?

Courtney: I think it's in out of our wheelhouse and we're not an overly diverse council, we do have a lot of consulting to do. I don't know if we know what issues there are to solve.

Julie: You addressed the potential issues in what Zamir coined. How we are going to execute online guidelines and extend it to who is allowed to post in terms of future iTrek posts. Like what if a 1L posted that same thing?

Courtney: It's so tricky because the rules as they stand currently say that if you're an Osgoode student, you can post. It is also tricky because Osgoode doesn't have a stance. I don't want to mention iTrek in a post until we have had the proper consultations.

Jess: In relation to what Christina said about speaking to L&L, I wonder if part of that is whenever we have signed off, we do so as the L&L society – would it make a difference to include our names?

Courtney: I think it would humanize us, but people might not be comfortable with that.

Hillary: I am okay with it, but I don't know if we are opening the group for dissatisfied people to come harass them. To be clear about iTrek, the person who posted is a current Osgoode student. Technically, he has the right to post whatever he wants. Maybe that has positive implications. Our names are already on the website.

Courtney: Let's give everyone the chance to think about putting your name on something. Next steps – I am going to get to writing this blurb that hopefully we can put out today and that we apologize for lack of transparency. I am going to send that statement to all of you in the Slack and we can make changes and hopefully get that out tonight or early tomorrow. I don't want

to put it out before a motion. We have so much on our plates, and people think all we have is L&L on our plates. People just expect you to be on Facebook 24/7. Humanizing us is definitely a good thing. We can build that together and hopefully the office can meet with us next week. Nobody is required to be at the meeting. I think we have a decent plan going forward. It's difficult for us to respond to something we don't know everything about. I like to be aware of the world, but I am in no means qualified to engage in a decision about that. Is there anything else that anyone wants to say? If anyone has any concerns, I am around this weekend, so I am happy to hop on a phone call. Keep an eye on your emails re: meeting with York Centre for Human Rights next week and the update we want to put out.

Adjournment (4:05pm)

Motion: *THAT* we adjourn.

(Cameron / Tassopoulos) CARRIED

Consent Agenda

The item on the Consent Agenda, the Minutes of the meeting of 4 January, 2023 was deemed approved.