Minutes of the University Council on Teaching
Wednesday, September 27, 2017
1:15-2:30, CTE

Attendees: Kathleen Bailey, Shaylonda Barton, Jeff Cohen, Billy Soo, John Rakestraw Kathleen McInnis-Dittrich, Stacy Grooters, Robert M. Bloom

The agenda of the September 27 meeting was the Course Development Retreat

Several questions about the retreat were discussed:

1. What should the title of the retreat be? Will “Course Development” limit the application pool, since it sounds like the retreat is only on course development, strictly understood. Can an applicant apply for the retreat if they are just modifying a course? Will the title discourage people from applying?

Perhaps the retreat is something broader, about teaching in general, philosophy of teaching, and teaching techniques.

2. What should the teaching retreat include?

It should include reflection on teaching as well as course design and implementation.

There should be space for curriculum development, which requires conversations among faculty. So there could be a range of different things that appeal more broadly such that there would be some reflection on teaching, curriculum development, and professional education.

3. How much of this belongs in the actual description for the retreat?

The conversations among faculty would be an important part of the retreat. We can’t let a one-week retreat turn into a six-week retreat with all the things that they are discussing which are relevant. What holds the week together -- keeping in mind that the retreat is only a week?

4. What do we expect/what will they expect?

It is important to keep in mind expectation management. It is important that we are clear what we expect to come out of the retreat. Perhaps it is easier to communicate what would be expected from a writing retreat. Course design isn’t simply about deciding what you’ll teach, but how, what the assignments will be, activities, and so on. All of this could fall under course development. But the focus still has to be on one course, even if that includes thinking about
a lot of these other topics, rather than all your courses, or general reflection on teaching.

Curriculum development really sounds like a whole other retreat, which would require more than one faculty member from a single department.

So we could include some proposals that we would be open to in order to make sure that faculty are not turned away. So the course can be the organizing principle, but this does not preclude, say, three English professors at the retreat talking about large curriculum issues, techniques, etc. The course design is the organizing principle, but the plenary sessions can discuss broader topics. This would have to be explained in the description.

Giving examples in the description would be important.

There might be difficulties with all this. How does a Physics teacher interested in course development really help a Professor from the Law School? Shouldn’t the retreat focus on discussions of technology that can be used in the classroom, such as PowerPoint, big class versus small class issues, foreign-language problems in the classroom, diversity issues, or one-on-one advising. These things would be helpful for all professors across departments and schools.

These ideas are actually understood to be part of “Course Development.” There is a problem in the discussion simply because of terminology issues.

The retreat can also be a way to re-inspire teachers who aren’t excited anymore. “Remembering Your Why.” Again, this angle can be talked about from the viewpoint of a single course. We can include these less formal aspects, too.

All of these things are fine, but there has to be something deliverable; there has to be a syllabus, or a new course, something, in the end.

Another possible example to provide would be some sort of joint application. It would be great to get multiple faculty members together from the same department to allow for discussions about curriculum development, etc. Each professor though would have a particular course he or she is focused on. The application can have something that links to others.

We should consider sending targeting emails to department heads or individual professors.

The first year is crucial because we don’t want to turn people away, but it is also crucial because it will set the tone for what the retreat is, because it will be harder to change once a sort of culture sets in regarding what the retreat is. So in terms of planning we have to balance these things.
So there has to be, on the one hand, a concern with your own course, your own syllabus, but, on the other hand, reflection on larger questions of teaching.

So themes that are important for the retreat are: a chance for faculty to get re-energized; a chance for faculty to reflect; but it should also be something where the faculty produce. At the end of the retreat, significant progress has to have been made that matters to the particular faculty. Re-energize, reflect, produce.

It is also important to build a community among the faculty. Not simply networking, but a community in terms of expectations. The writing retreat provides an entire infrastructure outside the retreat that provides support, and we don’t have that around teaching. To the extent that departments have this support varies across departments. We want to build a more rigorous community that engages in reflecting on teaching is a crucial part of this, which is also true of the CTE in general.

5. Mechanics: Announcement, Application Deadline, Notification of Acceptance

When do we want the application to go out? What about the announcement? Waiting until spring will probably be too late. On the one hand, we want to do it sooner, so that everybody sees it sooner rather than later, and to ensure they have time to write a good application. So what would be the deadline? When do we need to inform the recipients?

We should probably notify people by February, which means that the applications would need to be submitted by early January. Having the deadline in December would be too problematic because of end of semester and grades, etc. January 8th would be a good date for the deadline. But we can open up the application process by December 1st. That gives the committee a week before the semester starts to look at the applications. Another CTE meeting can be held late January to make decisions. Notifications can be sent out by February 15. That will gives us November to put out the publicity announcements.

For the first time, we could also contact the department chairs to recommend a couple of faculty members that would be really interested in going to the retreat. So there should be a combination of an open application process, open to any faculty who wants to apply. But we should also do some sort of invitation aspect, or encouragement with respect to faculty we think would be a good fit for the retreat. It should be a little bit of both. This will also help to get a broad range of faculty across the college and schools.

There should be a university-wide announcement from the Provost’s Office.

The biggest challenge will be to find the right language to use in the
application description.

The CTE can include a quick announcement in the next newsletter.

6. Application Evaluation:

How will the applications be evaluated? Perhaps a two-step process, depending on how many applications are submitted. Faculty members from a particular department/school should probably be looking at applications from the relevant department/school. Diversity with respect to experienced faculty will be a value.

Who are the applications open to? Full-time faculty, tenure-track and non-tenure track, including professors of the practice. But we could also be open to long serving part-time faculty. The visiting professors probably should not be considered because they are likely to teach the course they are working on at another college or university.

But part-time professors might be a problem, too. Some schools or departments have several dozen part-time faculty, though many of them are unlikely to apply. In Social Work, for example, part-time faculty are not encouraged to develop their own courses.

So for the first year of the retreat, the application process will be limited to full-time professors only; in the following years we can consider part-time professors.

We’ll begin to circulate a draft of the application soon.

Again, there should be some sort of emphasis on the importance of reflecting on larger themes about teaching, rather than just on the importance of developing a new course. This is a way of developing a larger community around teaching.

The participants have to produce a syllabus, etc., but also write something along the lines of: this is the pedagogical problem that I am trying to solve, this is what I am doing in order to solve the problem, and this is what I would accept as proof that I succeeded. So there has to be some background reflection. Challenge. Strategy. Outcome. This is one possibility.

Participants will have to submit something at least by the end of the summer, but perhaps even on the last day of the retreat. There has to be a real deliverable. We should be able to provide the Provost with these deliverables, whatever they are. Details of the deliverable doesn’t need to be in the application, but it has to be clear that in exchange for the retreat we expect something concrete from the participant.
Action items:

1. Title of the retreat
2. An announcement about the retreat to be sent out to all faculty from the provost’s office
3. Application

Next meeting OCTOBER 25 @ 1:15 in the CTE