Minutes of the University Council on Teaching  
Wednesday, October 25, 2017  
1:15-2:30, CTE Innovation Lab  

Attendees: Kathleen Bailey, Jeff Cohen, Billy Soo, John Rakestraw, Robert Bloom, Danielle Taghian, Kristen Heyer.  

The agenda of the October 25 meeting was the Course Development/Teaching Retreat.  

The meeting began with a discussion of the timeline regarding the proposal applications. It would be good if an announcement is sent out by the end of November; the deadline for the applications would be January 8th; and the notice for acceptance would be sent out in early February. This will be a quick turn around. A teaser for the retreat has already been sent out last week in the CTE Newsletter.  

John has been in contact with Burt Howell, who directs the Villa Writing Retreat, and our timeline fits pretty well with his schedule. He sends out the initial invitation in mid-January, and he begins notifying people of their acceptance in mid-February. So we should be able to tell him before he sends out his invitations who has applied to the teaching retreat, and before he sends out his acceptance notifications, who has accepted ours. He is open to the possibility that someone can do both of the retreats. This warrants further discussion.  

After our discussion today, the CTE will meet again and come back with a more formal proposal to share with the UCT.  

The goals of the retreat: to support instructors as they develop a new course or revise an existing course; to demonstrate BC values teaching; to provide resources that cultivate teaching; to build a community of teaching at BC.  

It seems there are two components to this retreat. The first is the community of conversations among those at the retreat. The second is to give faculty support for developing their projects. In terms of evaluating the applications, it will be hard to judge the first of those other than to pay attention to demographics and to aim for diversity. Therefore, the focus of the application needs to be on the project.  

However, to help judge that first component we could ask department chairs to nominate or suggest particular faculty members.  

In fact, we can have targeted invitations in a couple of ways:  
1. at the Council of Deans meeting, John can ask the deans to encourage department chairs to urge faculty to participate;
2. Departments looking to revise introductory or core courses can be targeted; this might require sending up to three faculty members who teach that introductory course.

**Title of the retreat.** Suggested: “Teaching Retreat: Reflecting on Teaching and Designing for Learning.” The term, “retreat,” is a good idea. It should be made clear that it is a retreat to help distinguish it from other events. The sub-title works well since it highlights the two goals of reflection and course design. Is it too long a title, not catchy enough? It would be helpful if the title suggests that we are interested in the focus shifting from what we are teaching to what students are learning.

The application will have several components:

1. Demographic data, such as name, department, course title, how many students impacted by course proposal? Large lecture, small seminar? Broader curriculum development project, if relevant.
2. Student learning challenges: examples on the handout are not exhaustive, more can be developed. It’s important to have examples that speak to everyone in the university, so for example, if there is one that doesn’t speak to the law school, there are others that cover relevant issues.
3. How do you propose to meet these learning challenges?
4. How to judge the effectiveness of your revision; what will be the measure of success?
5. What resources would you like to have from the CTE?
6. What are your goals for the week? What do you hope to accomplish?

Is it reasonable to expect applicants to know when they are applying how they propose to meet their learning challenge? Are we open to a project that is really just an identification of a problem and the applicant wants to spend some time thinking about it? Or are we expecting people to have a solution in mind already? It is probably acceptable that the applicant does not yet have the solution in mind, and the retreat will be where they will think about the solution.

The retreat should be an opportunity for faculty members to talk about how to approach a particular subject or topic. While a writing retreat is a very individual enterprise, the teaching retreat should bring faculty together and get them to talk about how they go about teaching a particular course, changing the curriculum, re-thinking a disciplinary intro sequence, etc. This is where the involvement of department chairs in identifying instructors becomes important. The teaching retreat will feature time to think about one’s own teaching, but is also a collaborative endeavor.

It should not be a requirement to propose a whole new course. There is a range of possibilities from a course that has been taught for a long time, but needs to be revised, to an altogether new course, or a course that has been taught as a seminar
and now has to be taught as a lecture. It could be that no new material is added to a course, but the teaching approach is adjusted.

The description of the retreat should make it clear that there will be required structured periods, mixed with collaborative work with colleagues (if relevant), and individual work periods.

As to the question of what resources the applicant would like to have from the CTE, we could also ask that in the application itself. The CTE will design part of the program based on the particular applications and the nature of the projects. This might include the use of on-line discussions, the use of technology in the classroom, diversity-related matters, or how to deal with sensitive subjects, and so on.

The call for proposals must make clear that faculty can apply as an individual or as a team. The application will have a space to designate a joint or individual application. Should teams be limited to three instructors? UCT consensus favors three. We will be looking for a well-defined project.

Since faculty might be unaware of what resources the CTE offers, if they are not familiar with the CTE, the application should list some topics (and also have a space for other ideas) and give a link to the CTE website.

UCT members pointed out that point #6, “What are your goals for the week?” is the gist of the proposal, and so perhaps it should be the second question on the application. John responded that ‘Student learning Challenges” was put higher on the list in order to highlight student learning. If we start with the instructor’s goals, many faculty will move naturally to my goals for my teaching, rather than student learning. Furthermore, if the project is to revise a course, the application won’t get the course revision done that week. This focuses on what the applicant hopes to get done this week, which sets the stage for the first of the deliverables.

Someone might not know what they want to do for the course, etc., and that is what they want to figure out at the retreat, which is fair. That would be a reason to go on the retreat.

The order of questions on the application should be as follows:
1. Demographics data,
2. Student Learning Challenge, (eliminate How do you propose to meet this challenge?),
3. What are your goals for the week?
4. How would you judge the effectiveness of your revision/evidence of success?
5. What resources do you need from the CTE to accomplish these goals?

It seems worth specifying that a week at the retreat would allow the applicant to begin within this wider trajectory, so the applicant can signal at least some specific goals, even if they are small.
There is some concern over the word “revisions.” A teaching retreat is something more than just presenting a new or revised course. We need to work on terminology.

How do we deal with an applicant who wants to boost their ratings? Is that a person who would be welcome? They have to say more than that, but if the goal is to improve your ratings, then the goal is to improve your teaching.

How are we going to distinguish between people who need or should go on this retreat and those who should just attend CTE meetings or events? When we send out the refusals, we can say that this is an interesting project, if you would like to pursue other possibilities, please let us know, and we offer these relevant programs.

**Deliverables:**

1. At the end of the week, attendees should give a description of what they have done over the course of the week, how far they advanced their project and/or met the goals they had set, together with next steps. This will make closure for the retreat and set the stage for what will come next on the project.

2. In the beginning of the semester, a syllabus should be submitted, along with an overview of the changes introduced as a result of the project.

3. After the course is taught, a reflection on the success of the project, including the usefulness of the retreat, comparing what one hoped for to what one experienced.

There will be about 22 or 23 spots for faculty. We have 25 rooms. Some will be for CTE staff.

More examples of projects should be added, so that potential applicants can see relevance for their discipline. This can be a link to additional examples, perhaps even illustrations of completed projects.

Questions for further consideration:
Length of responses to questions?
Recommendation from chair or dean, or both? Is there a departmental need for this project, for example, intro/core courses?