

**University Council on Teaching
Meeting of Tuesday, April 6th, 2021
12:30pm-2:00pm, Zoom Meeting**

Meeting Minutes

Attendees: Billy Soo, Jeff Cohen, Kathleen Bailey, Patricia Tabloski, Sara Castricum, Shaylonda Barton, Stacy Grooters, Kim Humphrey, Jessica Black, Sylvia Sellers-Garcia, Peter Pinto

The meeting began with a discussion of the upcoming Excellence in Teaching Day. The planned date for the event is Friday May 21st, a date after final grades for all classes are due but before the scheduled graduation. The administration currently plans to have a BC faculty member deliver the key note address. One professor from MCAS has expressed significant interest and has been deemed by the administration to be fully competent and very effective as the speaker. In addition to the key note address, the event will have two faculty panels and one student panel (the administration is still in the process of recruiting four undergraduates across different schools and programs). After these panels, there will be a virtual reception. Although a virtual format is not ideal, a reception will still be useful as the administration hopes to create a sense of informal connections between attendees.

A committee member then questioned whether Zoom break out rooms would be utilized during the ETD programming?

According to the member in charge of ETD planning, the keynote session will have all attendees on a large zoom while the three panels will be separated into separate zoom links and rooms. They have found that breakout rooms are not able to accommodate captioning needs for the event. Thus, the attendees must use separate zoom links so that captioning can be ensured. The reception, however, will have self-selecting breakout rooms in order to foster natural conversations and interactions. The administration has been made aware of technology that allows groups to have their own virtual “tables” where an attendee is assigned to a specific table but then can freely move to others. They are currently looking into possibly using this technology for the reception. It was successfully used for the student activities fair and career fair and was first introduced by the academic advising center. Lastly, the administration is currently reaching out to faculty members to see who would be available and interested in being members of the two faculty panels. Currently, the list of possible speakers has grown relatively fast and the administration plans to finalize their choices soon.

The committee then moved to discussed TAM and Wellness Grants. This year’s TAM grants have been collected and are ready to be reviewed. However, due to a minor issue, the deadline had to be extended. Regarding Wellness grants, there is \$8,000 that is left over due to Covid halting many of the grant plans last year. This money has either been given back to the committee after not being used. The committee has reached out to people who applied for the grant last year before the campus was closed due to the pandemic. Currently, four projects from last year have been identified as being able to be adapted to the grants for this year. The unused money will be put toward this year’s TAM grants, meaning more money will be available for next year’s TAM grants as well.

The committee then transitioned to the topic of Mid-Semester Feedback. According to the committee member in charge of this topic, the rates of completion of the Mid-Semester Feedback forms decreased this semester as compared to last semester. Regarding the percentage of professors who opted to use it, the usage rate decreased from 30% to 23%. This lower participation rate carried over to student participation, as their total reply rate decreased as well. The committee believes that this dip in participation (albeit relatively minor) is due to many professors believing that they will not be teaching through their virtual method every again. Thus, the Mid-Semester Feedback would not be useful or very representative. In addition, the committee speculated that some professors may predict negative results due to the difficulty of teaching virtually and they do not want negative feedback to reflect the review of their performance (especially since they do not plan to teach like this ever again). Despite the dip in participation, the committee agreed that the Mid-Semester Feedback is very useful and should be continued to be offered.

The committee then moved to discussed Course Evaluation questions regarding online course formats. The new questions were recently presented to CSON and the Woods College successfully. However, an attendee questioned whether there would be a new course evaluation instrument. This was an instrument that had planned to be used for course evaluations but was halted due to the pandemic. In the fall, assuming normality, the committee plans to roll out the new course evaluation instrument throughout all schools.

A committee member then asked if professors will be able to alter the questions to better fit their particular circumstance or questions.

A committee member responded that professors will be able to supplement questions with ones more focused on aspects of a particular school, program, major or class. In addition, the committee expressed the need for a question focused on whether the students considered their work “meaningful” or just busy work. This is especially true for online synchronous classes, in which many students may think their assignments are only busy work due to the separation between professor and student when in reality the work is vital to the class. The committee wishes to ensure that students genuinely feel that their work is meaningful, especially after the professor has taken time to explain its necessity.

A committee member then raised a question regarding whether professors could change the instrument for the evaluations to account for fully remote questions. More specifically, are their specific questions the committee could add that would assist professors who are teaching fully remote in order to get the most information about their teaching experience. In addition, the member asked whether it would be logistically possible to have a separate instrument for online and in-person courses.

The committee member in charge of this issues answered that they are unsure whether two instruments could be used in order to better accommodate specific types of learning.

The last topic of the meeting was the ongoing discussion over Covid Impact Statements.

Currently, the school of Social Work is already requiring Covid Impact Statements from all of their faculty. It has been relatively successful so far.

The Deans have discussed this topic at length and although they recognize its usefulness, they are worried about how true the statements will be. The concern is not that faculty members will lie about the negativity of their circumstances in order to make up for poor performance, but rather, that faculty will refuse to highlight their circumstances due to pride, even if they were seriously detrimental. If the entire statement is self-reported and unverified, the deans worry that the usefulness will be limited by the potential for faculty refusing to explain their individual circumstances.

A committee member then commented that since the majority of statements would be factually focused (i.e. specific conditions under which professors were required to work), we can assume most statements to be truthful. This would be especially true if the prompt or questions were framed in a particular way in order to illicit concrete answers. For example, questions could focus on how many hours a professor spent on child care each work due to virtual school for their children. The committee as a whole expressed agreement with this comment.

A committee member who had completed the School of Social Work Covid Impact Statement commented that the questions she answered did not focus on outside factors or ask for quantitative answers. However, the prompt was very clear and the member expressed approval of it.

The committee then debated whether the impact statements should have professors qualify or quantify their experiences?

A committee member within the MCAS school suggested that most MCAS professors do not meet regularly with MCAS deans. Thus, many significant factors or stories of professors facing difficult conditions fail to be relayed to the Dean. Thus, providing an opportunity for professors to tell these stories (in more than a quantitative way) would be ideal. Either way, however, a faculty's number of publications or other achievements are going to come out at the end of this year. Therefore, providing background, no matter how trivial, will provide reasoning as to why such achievements were lower or higher than previously expected.

A member then asked whether the Provost wishes the committee to make a formal recommendation to them on this subject.

The lead member responded that a recommendation for the UCT would be appreciated. Thus, a google doc will be created immediately after this meeting and all committee members will be added. All members are encouraged to help in the crafting of this recommendation. The deadline for the recommendation to be completed is May 13th, since that is the next meeting date for the deans. Therefore, the deans would be able to discuss the recommendation at that meeting.

Respectfully Submitted,
Peter Pinto