

**University Council on Teaching
Meeting of Tuesday, March 9, 2021
12:30-2:00, Zoom Meeting**

Meeting Minutes

University Council on Teaching Meeting of Tuesday, February 9, 2021 12:30-2:00, Zoom Meeting

Attendees: Kathleen Bailey, Billy Soo, Jeff Cohen, Patricia Tabloski, Anna Karpovsky, Daniel Daly, Julia Devoy, Jacqueline Lerner, Kristin Heyer, Sarah Castricum, Shaylonda Barton, Stacy Grooters, Sylvia Sellers-Garcia, Peter Pinto

The meeting began with a discussion centered on the upcoming excellence in teaching day (ETD). The ETD will be kept a little more modest this year in order to reflect how exhausted faculty and administrators are and to avoid making them feel pressured. The administrators recognize that the ETD comes at an important moment within the pandemic. We are finally getting to the point in which we may be transitioning into the ending phase of the pandemic. This provides an opportunity for faculty and administration to reflect on the lessons of teaching during the pandemic.

A committee member then asked the committee for input on some elements of the ETD planning and to assess a proposed ETD reflection passage that will be distributed to faculty. The committee agreed that the passage was very thoughtful and more than sufficient. The committee member then explained that the administration is still trying to identify a faculty member on campus who could provide a thoughtful speaking address (virtually) about the insight gained from teaching during the pandemic. Questions regarding whether this faculty member should be junior or senior or if their school or department should be taken into consideration were then discussed.

A committee member suggested that the administration should look into the creation of a student panel in addition to the already established programming of ETD. We could ask the students about their experiences and insights from pandemic learning. Another member proposed inviting students from different modalities of learning in order to share their experiences. The committee agreed a student panel would be a useful tool for ETD and one that should be pursued. However, the methodology of deciding which students to invite is still undetermined.

On the question of who could provide a virtual speaking address, a few committee members suggested that a newer faculty member would be optimal. Junior colleagues have a better comfort level regarding technology and its use in teaching and thus their insights may be more useful/impressive than senior faculty members.

A committee member then remarked that the CTE are putting a list together of possible speakers and there will either be newsletter or announcement to the faculty for a broad call. She added that faculty should have a chance to weigh in on who should be invited rather than the CTE simply appointing someone. She then implored the members of the UTC to send names of any individuals they would suggest.

Soon after that request, multiple committee members suggested Professor Barbara Quinn. Members agreed that she is skilled, charismatic and thoughtful and worth reaching out to.

A committee member then remarked that Georgetown University has put out a covid impact survey that provided useful insight into the student body and faculty. The same member then questioned whether the UTC could have access to the results of the Georgetown survey and use incorporate the insights into current and future teaching. The committee agreed to the usefulness of this survey and that this is an idea the UTC should pursue.

The meeting then transitioned to the second topic of the meeting: course evaluations.

As of right now, BC plans to return to campus for in person instruction (assuming the current situation of the pandemic does not significantly deteriorate). Harvard has announced that they will be returning to campus for in person instructions, although larger classes are going to be hybrid. BC expects that all students who return to campus will be fully vaccinated by the first day of classes. Administrators are unaware right now if they will require all students to still wear masks while on campus.

A committee member noted that there are many professors who have been fully vaccinated and would like to return to in person classes (despite their original class plan being virtual). On the other hand, other faculty members have expressed concerns that in person teaching may still be unsafe.

The committee then discussed whether the two questions related to student views on modality of class that were added to the course evaluations be cut or if they should be kept. Since modalities may no longer be a topic of discussion after this semester, the questions would not be useful for upcoming semesters. Thus, the committee decided it is best to remove these questions from course evaluations after this semester. Next fall's teaching evaluations will be the normal questions without the two covid related questions (assuming most if not all instruction is back to in-person)

A committee member then noted that the Connell School of Nursing (unlike the other schools) has not been presented with this change in course evaluations and that this must be rectified as soon as possible. It was decided that the UTC should (if possible) virtually present to the STM and nursing school in April.

The committee then looked at a document showing comparisons of original and proposed questions for the course evaluations. The questions are mostly similar, with a few notable exceptions.

In order to receive input and feedback from faculty, the committee agreed to do a rollout to all the faculty and explain the UTC's thinking behind the course evaluation changes. This will be done after meeting with all schools (i.e. STM and Nursing). This presentation had already been planned; however, pandemic complications caused scheduling conflicts that pushed the presentation off indefinitely. This presentation would provide faculty additional time to voice their opinions and concerns rather than springing the changes upon them.

The meeting then moved to briefly discuss TAM grants. Five TAM grants have been received as of this meeting and will soon be reviewed. The grants will be reviewed over the course of the coming week in order to give sufficient amounts of time for the subcommittees to review them.

A committee member then requested three committee members to volunteer to review the received TAM grants. Those wishing to volunteer will privately reach out to the head committee member.

To provide a background on the different grants, a committee member explained that the Teaching Advising and Mentoring (TAM) grant is a cap of \$15,000 dollars, includes salary, and is meant for a larger project. In contrast, the TAME grant is for expenses like books or a conference, does not include salary, and the cap is \$2,000.

The committee then moved to discuss the previously proposed idea of a Covid Impact Statement.

Many schools have already or are considering creating a Covid Impact Statement and the UTC and BC administration must consider whether such a thing would be useful for us. A committee member noted that the deans talked about this topic at their last meeting and believe it would be worth considering. However, right now, the deans have not spent sufficient time weighing the benefits of creating such a statement. The deans proposed that the statement would be valuable for the annual review of individual faculty member. They want to know how adversely impacted the member was by covid this past year.

Such a statement is already mandatory in the school of Social Work. Multiple faculty members in that school who wrote one have expressed appreciation for the opportunity to officially explain the troubles/challenges they faced due to virtual teaching.

The current idea of the statement would be to provide a framework or prompt that would allow faculty to make a statement about how covid had an impact on their teaching. This would then go into their file and become an important part of their repertoire. The statement would come solely from the individual faculty and it would be their responsibility to write it.

A committee member noted that pursuing this idea should be done as quickly as possible while the pandemic is still fresh in our minds.

Some committee members objected that placing this Covid Impact Statement at the hands of faculty would only provide an additional burden to many of them. In addition, the coupling of the annual review with the statement could make many faculty feel pressured to change their statements.

A committee member then suggested that we should decouple the covid statement from the annual review. Some faculty would fear that the statement would besmirch or take away from their annual review.

An email and rudimentary survey regarding the effect of Covid on work ability was set out to a group of faculty. The deans wanted to get a sense of how badly impacted by Covid they were. Some faculty have said they've been extremely productive due to the extra time that the online environment granted them. Others who were struggling explained that they appreciated the frankness and outreach of the administration.

Committee members still felt uneasy about the possible negative ways in which the Covid Impact Statement could be used against faculty.

One member questioned whether it should be optional.

The committee agreed that at its best the statement would only increase sympathy and understanding. However, it's going to depend on a faculty's chair or dean and the last thing the administration wants is to make faculty feel pressured or nervous.

It is important to note that 6 women were late on annual reviews because they are homeschooling their children. Much of the burden of homeschooling due to the closing of schools has fallen disproportionately on women. The committee agreed with this premise and argued that such a burden should be reflected in annual reviews or possibly included in the Covid Impact Statement.

A committee member argued that there needs to be clear guidelines for how this will be used, who will see it, and for what it will not be used for. Currently, there is no clear metric for evaluating these statements and without such metric the statement could prove detrimental. In addition, this statement could affect adjunct faculty since their employment is based upon specific evaluations.

A member then suggested that perhaps a better alternative to the Covid Impact Statement would be to adjust its wording and purpose so that it only focuses on negative faculty experiences with Covid. Thus, the statement would not instruct faculty to describe their overall teaching experience but rather only the ways in which they have been negatively affected. This would allow the deans to see which faculty members are truly struggling and would not contrast their performance with those who felt positively affected by Covid.

Members then questioned: If you are not going up for tenure or a promotion, is there any reason you would write this at all if it was optional? Is it really only useful for that purpose?

A member answered that this could be used by administration when considering raises and salary in addition to possible promotion or tenure.

If it is decided to pursue this statement, we must have an announcement by the end of this semester so that faculty are aware that its coming.

Going over the main points of the statement debate again, the committee agreed that the statement must be optional for faculty. Otherwise, faculty may see the statement as an additional burden on them during an already burdensome year.

In addition, the administration should make sure that they are not intruding too much into the personal lives of the faculty. Making the statement optional would mitigate such a worry.

The meeting ended with a quick discussion related to student mental health and issues of academic integrity. A committee member explained that the student survey has shown significant mental health problems among students. Additionally, there have been a higher instance of anecdotal academic integrity issues. The committee agreed that the UTC should inquire into both issues.

Respectfully Submitted,

Peter Pinto