

Minutes of the University Council on Teaching
Wednesday, March 13, 2019
12:30-1:45, CTE

Attendees: Kathleen Bailey, Shaylonda Barton, Jeff Cohen, Stacy Grooters, Billy Soo

The agenda of the March 13 meeting was the Inclusive Excellence Projects, the Course Evaluation project, Academic Integrity, and the Student Mental health project.

Inclusive Excellence Project

Stacey Grooters provided a brief report on the Inclusive Excellence Projects. The remaining funds from the TAM grants is being used to support projects and programs that are trying to further inclusive teaching at Boston College. Ten individuals/groups are receiving funds to support project that center around diversity and inclusion. Stacey described a few of the projects, and provided printed material for all of them.

The encouraging interest and demand that the CTE received when they put out the announcement raises the question of whether this is something the UCT should pursue on a more permanent basis. Discussion centered around the question of whether the TAM grant description should be revised or perhaps create a new grant that is separate from the TAM grants that focuses on inclusive excellence in teaching, which is broader than TAM.

Course Evaluation Project

Billy Soo gave a report on the Course Evaluation project. A committee was formed to investigate the current course evaluation instrument; it has already has met three times. Members are: Kathy Bailey (MCAS), Shaan Bijwadia (MCAS '19), Jessica Black (SSW), Julie Devi (Student Services), Alex Eishingdrelo (UGBC, MCAS '20), Stacy Grooters and Keisha Valdez (CTE), Angela Kim Harkins (STM), Larry Ludlow (LSEHD), Daniel Lyons (Law School), Madeleine McCullough (UGBC, MCAS '20), Colleen Simonelli (CSON), Danielle Taghian (MCAS), and Tom Wesner (CSOM).

The committee met with IDEA, a vendor that provides online course evaluations or Student Rating of Instruction (SRI). IDEA has a great number of resources, including diagnostic reports based on SRI scores. IDEA offers four questionnaires (40, 18, 12 and 7 questions) which can be selected based on need. For example, the shortest questionnaire can be used for mid-term evaluation, the longest for deep diagnostic information, and the others for specific learning objectives and teaching methods. The four versions can be alternated over the years and selected by individual faculty and/or departments. Diagnostic reports offer strategies to improve teaching. IDEA controls for class size, discipline, core and elective courses.

Boston College's current vendor, Blue by Xplorance, presented additional features that BC is

not currently using, primarily due to privacy concerns. Blue is available to discuss the addition of features such as graphs which depict changes in teaching over time. Blue does not offer diagnostic features.

The committee will next turn its attention to researching SRI questions and platforms at peer institutions to consider whether BC's questions need to be updated and revised. Are they asked in the proper sequence? Can they be clarified? Are they biased? Is there a way to include learning outcomes? How many questions should be included (too many questions might produce inadequate responses)?

Another component that course evaluations might provide is information for students who are selecting courses. Although open ended responses cannot be viewed by students, course evaluations can provide valuable summative information when students register for courses, e.g., description of the style of the class, size of the class, the difficulty of the course, required field trips, and so on.

The committee raised the possibility of an IRB study on what impact teaching in an introductory course has on student performance in upper-level courses within an academic department/major. The committee might also recommend an IRB study on race and gender bias in student evaluations.

Academic Integrity

The UCT decided to take up the issue of academic integrity for consideration. The goal is to formulate a list of recommendations, which will be discussed at our next meeting. One idea is to set up resources for faculty, such as a Google Drive form, to capture suggestions from all instructors about what they have done to reduce academic integrity problems. This platform can then be shared with all faculty so they will become more aware of the issue. The CTE also has a resource site, which would also be a good place to store the suggestions.

Student Mental Health Project

The committee discussed Carol Dweck's book, *Mindset*, which focuses on resilience, and considered making recommendations based on the problems that the book brings to light, such as helping students deal with the anxiety that arises from the pressure to be the best at everything. Committee members agreed that this was tied into academic integrity issues in a causal way.

Instructors might be able to reduce some of the anxiety students are experiencing by choosing to drop one grade over the course of the semester or being more flexible with assignments if they are more aware of the campus culture of perfectionism and pressure.

Committee members suggested a series of lunch discussions organized by the CTE in which participants can discuss these issues and come up with best practices.

It was pointed out that the CTE organizes reading groups around specific topics.