Minutes of the University Council on Teaching  
Wednesday, December 6, 2017  
1:15-2:30, CTE Innovation Lab

Attendees: Kathleen Bailey, Stacy Grooters, Shaylonda Barton, Billy Soo, John Rakestraw, Kristin Heyer, Jeff Cohen, Jackie Lerner, Katie McInnis-Dittrich

The agenda of the December meeting was the Course Development Retreat, TAME Grants, and Course Evaluations.

The TAME Grants

The TAME grants were discussed first. Jackie Lerner, Julia Whitcavitch Devoy, Jeff Cohen, and Kathleen Bailey comprised the subcommittee. There were 23 applications requesting $38,750, with $21,000 to dispense. Sixteen applications were approved, and seven were not funded. Of the sixteen approved projects, nine were fully funded, while seven were partially funded.

The increased number of applications for TAMEs can be explained by the fact that there is now only one round per year, as opposed to two in the past, and the grant competition is better publicized.

The committee discussed putting up the names of recipients and titles of grants on the web site. If there is interest in a particular grant, the recipient can be reached to provide more in-depth information. The committee hopes that providing this information on successful projects will be helpful to prospective grantees.

Shaylonda Barton will send out the award notifications as well as the rejection notifications on Monday (12/11). The funding will move to the department lines on Monday (12/18) and award recipients can start spending funds at that time.

All grant recipients must provide an expense report with itemized receipts. If there is money left over from a TAME grant, recipients may use it on an expense related to the project. Shaylonda would at that point reach out to the committee seeking approval.

The Teaching Retreat

On Monday (12/4), a draft of the web announcement for the teaching retreat was circulated to the UCT by John Rakestraw. The announcement and application center around three key questions: identifying a learning challenge, project goals, and what kind of support would be helpful.

John clarified the “learning challenge” section as: what do you want the students to learn and what are you going to do to help them learn it? The target for each faculty member should be a particular learning challenge. If the target is too narrow, such as solely the content of the course, participants won’t have anything to talk about with others. The retreat should be an interdisciplinary exercise. For example, if one’s learning challenge is to incorporate simulations
or case studies, then that is a conversation that can involve other disciplines. The focus should be what is the learning challenge and how is it that students learn rather than the particular content a participant will be teaching.

What is the compelling reason for developing a new course? Is it because there is nothing in the curriculum, or because there is a need to incorporate technology? And what makes it different? Is the applicant focusing on interdisciplinary approaches? Developing a new course is a learning challenge. So if an applicant is developing a new course, they can offer some form of justification, how does it fit into the larger department, etc.

The CTE will amend the announcement following the comments of the UCT, and the Office of the Provost will aim to send the announcement out shortly; the application will become available by December 15, with a deadline of January 22, 2018. It is uncertain how many applications will be received. Applicants will be notified sometime in February. The application will be hosted on the CTE web site under “programs.”

The question arose whether applications should be ranked by the Dean of each school. The consensus was that there wouldn’t be enough time, although the UCT would reconsider this option next year. However, the committee felt that department chairs should weigh on the applications, although this does not have to be a formal letter of recommendation, especially if it is a curriculum change, or a group project. Department chairs should be aware and supportive of proposed projects.

Since this is the start-up year for the teaching retreat, UCT members agreed help to spread the word within their departments and schools.

**Teaching Evaluations**

The provost’s office has had student and faculty inquiries concerning course evaluations. The student site, PEPS, has become somewhat defunct. Few students use it because comments are the extremes, and not very helpful in choosing courses. But our official online system is not very good either, and has not been updated in 25 years.

Coincidentally, CSOM’s teaching committee is looking at course evaluations. Their objective is: how can we help instructors improve based on the results of course evaluations? Preliminary work by CSOM, including comparisons with peer universities, has shown the wording of the questions currently in use is outdated.

The CTE has also been doing research on better ways to evaluate instructors and courses. Stacy mentioned the IDEA Center, a national center that facilitates various course forms. They have produced several white papers on faculty evaluation, which are available on their web site.

One issue that has come out with the evaluations is that they are provided before the course is actually completed. So perhaps it could be pushed back until after classes ended, or even after the exam is given so that the student has the opportunity to experience the entire course.
Billy Soo followed up with the information that course evaluations open in the final week of classes and close after final exams (about 16 days total). Students cannot see their final exam grade until after all they have completed all their course evaluations. If course evaluations are delayed, this will cut the time for students to complete them to 11 days, during which time they are also taking final exams. This might cut the completion rate, which is now almost 90%.

Another issue is that students who withdraw from a course are still able to fill out the evaluations. This can skew an instructor’s rating in a negative direction, which may be unwarranted. Since teaching evaluations are used in tenure and promotion decisions, we should make them useful tools, and not something to be glossed over or taken with a grain of salt.

Therefore, it was decided that revisiting faculty/course evaluations would be the next major project for the UCT. To this end, the UCT will invite several students to its next meeting for their input on course evaluations. Also invited will be Tom Wesner and Judy Gordon, CSOM, and Keisha Valdez, CTE.

Kathy Bailey will send an email about scheduling meetings for next semester after January 1.