

Committee on Teaching (COT)
MINUTES
March 6, 2012, 10:00 – 11:30 a.m., Kerr Hall 129

Present: Daniel Selden (Chair), Dee Hibbert-Jones, Maria Schonbek, Graeme Smith, Mary Flannery (NSTF), Peter Rovegno (GSA), Michael Tassio (ASO staff)

Guests: Jim Phillips

Absent: Pascal Garaud, Nicol Gaffney (SUA)

The minutes of February 21 were approved with minor changes.

Chair's Announcements

Chair Selden announced that he has plans to meet with the Dean of Humanities regarding cross-divisional courses, and that he is hopeful there is still momentum to present to the Council of Deans.

Chair Selden sent a memo to Vice Provost and Dean of Undergraduate Education, Richard Hughey, asking that he write to Department Chairs encouraging them to provide COT Member, Pascale Garaud, with access to departmental teaching evaluations for her analysis of paper and online evaluations.

Grading Options at UCSC

COT members reviewed a chart detailing undergraduate grading options at UCs and discussed the rationale for adopting the "C-" grading option at UCSC. The "C-" grading option will provide faculty more freedom in accurately assigning grades and might be utilized as a way to give a student a passing grade, but not a grade sufficient for moving on to the next in a series of courses nor for satisfying a major requirement. All other UCs have the "C-" grading option.

Members also questioned whether or not it would be prudent to recommend that UCSC adopt "D+" and "D-" grading options. Doing so would align UCSC with the majority of other UC campuses (with the single exception of UCSD), and would provide greater detail in calculating a student's grade point average. Jim Philips noted that there is foreseeable benefit to aligning UCSC's grading options with other UCs, given the future of online courses that will attract students from multiple UC campuses. Chair Selden agreed to write to the Chair of the Committee on Education Policy (CEP) with COT's proposal.

COT Teaching Symposiums

COT has a long history of sponsoring campus events related to teaching, but has not done so since the Center for Teaching and Learning was defunded in the 2010-11 academic year.

Chair Selden began the discussion by sharing an email from regular COT guest, Jessica Fiske Bailey, who was unable to attend the meeting. Jessica raised several concerns and questions about COT's role in sponsoring teaching symposiums on campus. Because attendance has been

low at previous events, she questioned, what can COT now do to compel more faculty to attend? Further, what can COT do to gauge faculty interests in symposia topics, and who is the intended audience? Finally, who will do the work to arrange the symposia? There is a significant amount of event planning required to put on events and COT might consider hosting less staff-intensive events that achieve commendable goals.

Chair Selden and some COT members reasoned that attendance may have been low at teaching symposia due to little interest generated from the topics. Further, Chair Selden stated that teaching, at least in the Division of Humanities, is excellent and professors are not interested in focusing their efforts on improving it. Moreover, teaching evaluations, however useful, typically build faculty's confidence that their teaching is excellent.

Regarding symposia planning, Chair Selden recommended that COT form a sub-committee to decide on the topic and to handle logistics.

COT members discussed the types of events that they might host. One member related taking a useful course on time-management for new teachers focused on balancing research and teaching duties. Other members noted the importance of having events for new assistant professors geared towards balancing UC specific responsibilities.

Jim Philips mentioned that the Faculty Instructional Technology Center (FITC) is interested in co-sponsoring events with COT. One member raised the possibility of having an instructional day at FITC where faculty could get training specific to technology for their research and teaching efforts. Jim Philips gave the example of "Mobile App Learning Lounges" at UC Merced where students, faculty and staff are invited to explore possibilities of mobile technology and their potential benefits in the classroom. FITC is interested in hosting these sorts of events, and would appreciate COT's assistance in encouraging faculty to attend. While FITC is not staffed to be able to serve all faculty on a one-on-one basis, building a community around the act of teaching through events such as these might have lasting impacts for campus.

Jim Philips also mentioned a series of workshops at UC Davis designed to train faculty on best pedagogical practices for teaching online or hybrid courses. Faculty at UCD were encouraged to attend these workshops by being awarded a small stipend. Chair Selden weighed in, noting that workshops on online instruction, with an incentive, would garner an audience. The incentive might even be as modest as a certificate of completion.

COT members rallied behind the idea of proposing a series of workshops on hybrid and online instruction with focuses in text-, visual-, quantitative- and performance/practice-based courses. COT will develop a proposal and request funding for a pilot program.

COT's Role in Teaching Related Events at UCSC

Chair Selden reported that he has routinely, and increasingly, heard about teaching related events on campus that COT has had no role in developing. He voiced concern that COT's mission to foster and promote good teaching has become less relevant in light of its diminishing role in sponsoring teaching events.

Members discussed recent changes on campus that have had an effect on COT and, more generally, teaching excellence. Members expressed discontent over what they perceive as campus administration overstepping COT in transitioning to online instructor evaluations by framing the issue as a budgetary necessity. Moreover, members expressed frustration over campus administration's decision to defund Instructional Improvement Grants (IIGs) in recent years, and to suspend them in 2011-12. One member questioned how UCSC can maintain high standards of teaching excellence, while resources such as the IIGs have been defunded. COT, another member argued, is often bypassed on considerations that affect teaching excellence, and when they are consulted with, it is too late in the process for them to make meaningful contributions.

In concluding their discussion, members argued that decisions motivated by budgetary concerns are having a noticeable impact on the quality of teaching excellence at UCSC, and it is urgently necessary that COT play a greater role in consulting with Senate leadership and/or Senior Administration on issues that affect teaching.

Members agreed that COT ought to be consulted with when campus units are considering major changes to teaching technologies or events related to teaching. Further, COT members agreed that formal correspondence to Senate Chair Gillman was necessary to explain the problem and to request advice.

The meeting adjourned at 11:30 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Daniel Selden, Chair
Committee on Teaching