

Committee on Teaching (COT)

MINUTES

Meeting of October 22, 2014

Present: Judith Scott (chair), Viqui González-Pagani, Phil Hammack, Matthew McCarthy, Marc Matera, Jim Phillips (Director of Learning Technologies), Christopher Kan (GSA Representative), Nadia Mufti (CUIP Intern), Barak Krakauer (committee analyst).

Absent: Kevin Bell (NSTF).

Consent Agenda

The minutes of the October 8, 2014 meeting were approved with amendments.

Announcements

Director Phillips requested a discussion of last year's eCommons survey. The committee decided to take this issue up at a later meeting.

Online Course Evaluation "Best Practices" Report

The committee discussed a draft version of a set of recommendations to increase the response rate to online course evaluations. These recommendations were collected by the 2013-2014 Committee on Teaching, based on discussion held by that year's committee and correspondence with departments that had higher response rates.

The committee had a few reservations about the list in its current form. For example, one major recommendation is that class time be set aside to fill out evaluations on students' laptops, but this is problematic not only due to the fact that many classrooms still do not have WiFi, but also because many students may not have laptops or other devices to bring into classrooms, and making this approach mandatory may exacerbate issues of inequality.

More generally, the committee was of the opinion that this list of "best practices" should reflect more serious, careful and conscientious consideration of what's being done around campus. Addressing this issue appropriately would involve the collection of more recent data about response rates, as well as collaboration with other people on campus working on this issue, such as a committee formed by the Vice Provost of Academic Affairs (VPAA). The Committee on Teaching looks forward to collecting more data on this issue as well as representation on the VPAA committee on response rates.

State of Instructional Support at UCSC

COT continued its discussion from the previous meeting about its report to the Senate on the lack of support for teaching on campus. The committee was disturbed that the \$2,000 from the Excellence in Teaching Awards would only be one-time funds, and wanted to ensure that the report to the Senate reflected this fact.

One major topic of discussion content of the report was the issue of support for Graduate Student Instructors and TA's. The Center for Teaching used to provide services to train TA's, but there is no longer any such campus-wide pedagogical training. The Graduate Division offers a TA

orientation covers issues such as Title IX training, disability services, union rules, and other such legal issues, but offers no training on teaching. While some departments offer TA training classes, many do not; the classes that do exist have wildly different methodologies and effectiveness. The committee agreed that support for TA training on campus is decentralized and, in many cases, non-existent. This fact is especially striking given the campus-wide focus on graduate growth: while COT believes that graduate students can be effective teachers with the proper training and support, it would be irresponsible to increase the population of TA's and GSI's without providing comprehensive and centralized pedagogical support.

The committee also noted various other campus-wide issues that could be addressed with increased support for teaching. For example, many centers for teaching provide classroom observations and recommendations for instructors; such assessment of teaching could be beneficial in assessments of teaching for hiring or promotion, especially given the present reliance on the noisy data of student evaluations. Furthermore, this kind of teaching assessment may be a welcome resource for faculty members who would view it as a safer and more neutral alternative to asking a colleague for help. Any kind of teaching support would be welcome if it could partially ameliorate issues caused by steadily increasing class sizes.

Ultimately, the committee decided to appeal both to the faculty as well as administration to receive support for reinvesting in teaching at UCSC. From the faculty, the committee would solicit recommendations about steps that it could take to improve teaching; from the administration, the committee would attempt to make the cumulative effects of these cuts to teaching clear, and to focus their efforts on restoring funding and working with development to seek any other means of support possible for providing pedagogical support on campus.

The committee agreed to continue working on a written report to the Senate over the next few days, and to determine the form and content of the oral report at the next meeting.

Principles for Graduate Growth

The Senate Executive Committee has produced a document that outlines the principles for graduate growth at UCSC over the next few years. A large increase in the graduate population of UCSC will have obvious impact on the research mission of the university, but COT was interested in the impact of graduate growth on teaching.

Whether or not the campus targets for graduate population are realistic, the committee wanted to ensure that the administration values the contact that graduate students have with undergraduates. If the planned graduate growth will increase the number of TA's, then the committee is hopeful that undergraduate education would benefit from smaller section sizes and more contact with graduate students. As long as the university's commitment to graduate growth includes more TA's and pedagogical support for TA's and GSI's, then the quality of instruction at UCSC could improve. However, failure to increase TA numbers and pedagogical support could exacerbate existing problems related to undergraduate instruction.

Discussion of COT Intern and Pedagogy Project

The committee discussed the website being created by Nadia Mufti, the CUIP Intern. Members agreed that the website could be used to link to resources for teaching that exist in campus as well as host video interviews with faculty members. These interviews could be about one minute

long on the page, along with links to longer versions of these interviews. In addition to the interviews, these videos could also include other media such as lectures or other teaching materials.