

Committee on Teaching (COT)
MINUTESⁱ
May 1, 2012, 10:00 – 11:30 a.m., Kerr Hall 129

Present: Daniel Selden (Chair), Pascal Garaud, Graeme Smith, Peter Rovegno (GSA), Michael Tassio (ASO staff)

Guests: Jessica Fiske Bailey, Jim Phillips

Absent: Dee Hibbert-Jones (with notice), Maria Schonbek, Mary Flannery (NSTF)

The meeting minutes of April 17, 2012, were approved.

Chair Updates

There were no updates from the Chair.

COT Charge

Members discussed the charge of COT and reviewed charges from Senate committees at other UCs. Members were generally supportive of the COT charge as it stands. One member remarked on how broad and comprehensive it is. Others acknowledged that COT has not used the power afforded to them via their charge in the most beneficial ways. Another member noted that absent the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) there is not a direct line of communication between COT and the administration.

Jessica Fiske Bailey asked whether or not members of COT were interested in writing a letter of support for raising funds that could be used for a CTL. Chair Selden agreed that this is something that committee should do. Excited at the thought of restoring the CTL, members discussed ideas for improving pedagogical competence including the following:

- Offering a series of workshops hosted by faculty who have received awards for excellence in teaching who could share their best teaching practices.
- Offering workshops on teaching designed for new teachers, graduate students and post-docs.
- Working with the Institute for Scientist and Engineer Educators (ISEE) on projects of mutual interests.
- Working with administration on ways to make the improvement of teaching a requirement for all faculty by, for instance, requiring faculty to attend a workshop on teaching every five years.
- Working with the administration to restore funding for Instructional Improvement Grants (IIG). IIGs could be funded at a lower amount and still have a notable impact on improving teaching.
- Hosting reading groups for faculty to read books on teaching pedagogy.

If any of these ideas are adopted, for them to be successful, it would be helpful if the importance of having excellence in teaching was re-emphasized.

UCSC Climate Study Faculty Survey

The Advisory Council on Campus Climate, Culture and Inclusion (ACCCCI), chaired by the Chancellor, is preparing to conduct a survey of UCSC faculty as part of its campus-wide climate study and has asked Senate committees to comment on the survey. Members reviewed the survey and made four general points:

First, members felt that the survey, in its present form, is much too long. The cover letter suggests that the questionnaire would take only “about 25 minutes” to complete. COT, however, predicts that the time actually required to read through the document, think carefully about the questions, and formulate a considered responses to the various questions would more realistically occupy at least an hour, or probably more of faculty time. This seems to be a sure prognosticator for a low faculty response rate.

Secondly, COT felt that in addition to or in lieu of some of the questions that currently bear on teaching, the survey might fruitfully pole the faculty as to (a) how they feel about the quality of instruction offered at UCSC in general, not just about their own teaching responsibilities; and (b) how seriously teaching is actually weighed in their department along with research and service for purposes of the personnel process and for general departmental standing. CAP has specified that a routine, one-step promotion must show evidence of excellence in two out of three of these areas; but is it actually the case in all departments that excellence in service and in teaching, with little to show in the way of research for the review period, would actually eventuate in a promotion? COT feels strongly that teaching ought to be recognized equally with research and service for faculty across the board, just as is reflected in this survey.

Thirdly, COT noted that questions concerning Instructional Technology Services (ITS) and faculty satisfaction with current levels of instructional technology support are not reflected in the questionnaire. Since there have been recent and radical changes to these services over the past several years, this seems an opportune moment to gather information regarding faculty satisfaction here. With the virtual elimination of the Center for Teaching and Learning, such information would be crucial in helping the campus rebuild in this area for the future.

Finally, COT found the category of “race” as applied in this questionnaire to be problematic. On the one hand, the survey reifies race as a category in a way that is no longer supported by most biological research. Even as cultural or ideologically driven categories, however, the choice, for example, between “White of European descent / White of Middle Eastern descent / Other White” is less immediately legible than it is perplexing. Overall, this portion of the survey appears to have been constructed without reference to or benefit from recent work in Critical Race Studies, much of which has originated on the UCSC campus. Similar problems, moreover, attend such categories sex/gender, sexual preference, and social class.

In sum, members felt that the survey is of critical importance, but would benefit both from shortening and some fine tuning of the questions and, in particular, such categories as race, gender, or sexual preference, which seem to come out of popular, “common-sense” modes of

thought, rather than the scholarly, critical rethinking of these “identities” that have accumulated with increasing rigor over the past twenty-five years.

Online Instructor Evaluations

Member Pascale Garaud is attempting to evaluate the transition to online evaluations by studying whether or not there are differences in the types of responses between paper and online evaluations. She has been in contact with Department Managers in the School of Engineering to get paper evaluations from the past four years. SOE has recently declined her request citing current workload constraints.

Members discussed the process of cataloging instructor evaluations and noted that from a logistical point of view, it might be burdensome for departmental staff to collect evaluations from the past four years.

Chair Selden raised questions about who the office of record for evaluations is. Is it departmental or a central office? Further, are evaluations public records and should they be available for anyone to view? These questions are of greater importance going forward given the transition to online evaluations, and the creation of new storage archives for them. Jessica Fiske Bailey agreed to follow up on these questions.

Pascale is also working with colleagues on methods to increase student response rates of instructor evaluations. One seemingly simple suggestion is for faculty to have access to data on response rates during the end of the quarter. As such, if the response rates were low, faculty could be more rigorous in their efforts to encourage students to complete evaluations.

The meeting adjourned at 11:40 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Daniel Selden, Chair
Committee on Teaching

ⁱ The meeting minutes of May 1, 2012, were approved by COT via email.