

## COMMITTEE ON TEACHING Annual Report, 2005-06

To the Academic Senate, Santa Cruz Division:

The Committee on Teaching (COT) met regularly every other week throughout the academic year to deal with an extensive agenda related to its charge to foster and promote good teaching, to recommend and evaluate methods for assessing teaching performance, and to oversee instructional support services on campus. The work and accomplishments of the Committee during the 2005-06 year are summarized below.

### Instructional Improvement Program Grants

The Instructional Improvement Program (IIP) provides seed money in the form of grants to encourage experimentation with new ideas in teaching and learning at the undergraduate level. One of the regular charges of COT is to adjudicate applications for Instructional Improvement Program (IIP) Grants. Adjudication of IIP grant proposals is a responsibility that COT takes very seriously and on which it spends a great deal of its time throughout the year.

COT awarded a total of \$107,236 out of requests totaling \$275,624. Twenty-four grants were funded out of 45 proposals. The total number of proposals submitted for funding was the same as last year. Awarded funding was approximately 39 percent of the total requested. IIP grants fell into the following categories:

- **Mini-grants** are available throughout the year when COT is in session. They support small-scale projects designed to improve undergraduate instruction. Mini-grants have a maximum budget of \$2000. In the year-long competition for Mini-grants, there were 20 submissions requesting \$34,459. Of these, 12 were funded for a total of \$17,850.
- **Course Development Fellowships** provide \$6463-\$8100 (depending on division) to cover one course release for the fellowship recipient. Course Development Fellows use the course release to develop a new undergraduate course or program in their departments or to make significant revisions in an older course. Fourteen faculty submitted applications for Course Development Fellowships, with a cumulative budget of \$88,963. Six were funded for a total of \$41,611.
- **Major Grants** are for major projects aimed at improving undergraduate education. These involve incorporating instructional technology, creating new course materials, or designing interactive or collaborative learning activities. Of the 13 proposals received for a total of \$152,202 requested, COT funded 6 for a total of \$47,775.

**Increased demand for IIP funds:** Total funds requested this year reached a 4-year high. Unfortunately, further cuts to the IIP fund meant that total monies awarded are at the lowest point since 1994-95 (when the maximum allowable grant amount was \$3,500). Only one Major Grant was awarded this year near the upper limit of \$15,000; other Major Grants awarded had their amounts cut from what was requested, receiving between \$5,000 and \$7,500 each.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Teaching and Learning Symposium**

This year's symposium was titled "Setting the Stage for Learning: Building Student Confidence, Control, and Competence." As a mini-conference, it included short concurrent presentations by UCSC faculty, an exhibit area, and a keynote address entitled "Psychological Factors in Student Success" by UCSC Professor of Psychology, Martin Chemers. The event was held at University Center on February 16, 2006, from 1-5 p.m. and was attended by 83 members of the UCSC community.

Feedback from attendees was highly positive, particularly praising the practical nature of the presentations and the opportunity for informal exchange of ideas about teaching strategies.

### **Excellence in Teaching Awards**

In selecting recipients for this award, COT considered nomination letters from students, endorsement letters from department chairs, and statements on teaching from the nominees themselves. Nominees who had already received an Excellence in Teaching Award within the last five years were excluded from consideration. Only nominees who were up to date in submitting narrative performance evaluations, as reported by the Registrar, were considered for an award.

From a pool of 17 eligible nominees, COT selected six faculty to receive the 2005-06 Excellence in Teaching Award. Chancellor Denton and COT Chair Charlie McDowell presented the awards at a reception held at University Center on May 24, 2006. The recipients were: Martin Berger, Associate Professor of History of Art and Visual Culture, Ruth Hoffman, Lecturer in College Nine, John Isbister, Professor of Economics, Dean Mathiowetz, Assistant Professor of Politics, Ken Pedrotti, Associate Professor of Electrical Engineering, and Ana Maria Seara, Lecturer in Portuguese.

In addition, this year, for the second time, the COT was asked to also make the selection for the Ron Ruby Award for Teaching Excellence in the Division of Physical and Biological Sciences. The award was established as a memorial to physics Professor Ronald Ruby who died in November 2003. This year's recipient was Earth Sciences Lecturer Hilde Schwartz.

### **U.S. Professor of the Year Nomination**

COT nominated two faculty for the U.S. Professor of the Year program. They were Professor Manuel Ares of Molecular, Cell & Developmental Biology, and Associate Professor Paul Ortiz from Community Studies.

### **Course/Instructor Evaluations**

One of the major goals COT gave itself this year was to make some progress towards an online system for collecting, storing, and analyzing course/instructor evaluations. The result of that effort was a report recommending the campus phase out the Scantron system, replacing it with an online collection system. The report was sent to Senate Chair Faye Crosby on May 19, 2006, and an oral report was given at the Senate meeting that day. The complete report is attached.

## **Best Practices Regarding Non-Senate Teaching Faculty**

COT felt it would be appropriate to ascertain to what extent departments have been able to implement the “best practices” recommendations from the “Report of the Special Committee on Non-Senate Teaching Faculty” (<http://senate.ucsc.edu/scol/nstfres.1425.pdf>). As you probably recall, a resolution endorsing that report and asking departments to “actively seek to implement the best practices outlined in the report” was passed at the May 2004 Senate Meeting.

The report is not long (less than three pages) and is an excellent reminder of some things we can do to improve the quality of teaching at UCSC and improve the quality of the professional life of our highly valued non-Senate teaching colleagues.

COT solicited responses from all academic departments and programs to a short series of questions related to the best practices recommendations. We received responses from 15 of 40 departments and programs as well as from 20 non-Senate teaching faculty (NSTF) via the NSTF Committee on Committees. It is difficult to summarize the responses, which varied considerably, however, the overall sense of the department responses was considerably more positive than the responses from the NSTF.

On a positive note, with one exception, all departments reported that Senate and NSTF mailboxes were intermingled. This was supported by the NSTF, but also dismissed as “window dressing for a caste system” by one faculty member. There were a wide variety of responses to most of the other questions, which asked about the extent of NSTF involvement in the review process for other teaching faculty, attendance at department meetings, support for professional development, equivalencies for non-course work, and percentage of full-time NSTF. Most of the responding departments had very few NSTF, the Writing Program being the notable exception. There were positive signs in that most departments reported at least sometimes being able to provide equivalencies for non-course work.

Seven of 18 NSTF responses indicated at least some participation in personnel reviews. Eleven have at least some participation in department meetings and eight indicated high or appropriate levels of involvement.

Half of the 16 NSTF responded to the “unnecessary distinctions” question in such a way as to indicate less than desirable levels of inclusion and acceptance as “faculty.” These negative responses ranged from “I do not feel integrated into the department, though I have not been aggressive in pursuing this” to “I still feel it is haves and the have-nots and it is not at all a good feeling,” “it just smacks of window dressing for a caste system,” and “there is a priest class/servant class feel to functions of the department”.

In conclusion, although some departments have made improvements in response to the best practices report, it is clear that more effort is needed to eliminate unnecessary distinctions between Senate and NSTF, and to more fully integrate NSTF into all teaching functions of departments.

## **Acknowledgements**

The Committee would like to thank Ruth Harris-Barnett, Director of the Center for Teaching Excellence, and Henry Burnett, Director of Media Services, for their invaluable contributions to

the Committee. The Committee on Teaching was expertly staffed by Roxanne Monnet from the Academic Senate Office.

Respectfully submitted,

COMMITTEE ON TEACHING

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August 31, 2006

May 19, 2006

Faye Crosby, Chair  
Academic Senate  
Santa Cruz Division

Dear Faye:

The COT would like your feedback and/or endorsement of the following report. If you support the report we request that you forward it to the administration for consideration. On May 15<sup>th</sup> COT met with the Chancellor and discussed the content of this report although she has not yet seen the actual text. At that time she indicated that she was favorably disposed towards supporting such a move.

COT recommends that ITS implement an online system for collecting instructor/course evaluations, with stewardship of the system residing with the VPDUE. As with the existing Scantron form, the use of this system would be at the discretion of the divisions and departments. In this report, we will provide some background on the current use of instructor/course evaluations on this campus, reasons for recommending going to an online system, and recommendations about some details with regard to the proposed system.

## ***Background***

Currently the CTE provides a standard Scantron form to departments that elect to use it. The direct cost of this service, currently approximately \$10,000 per year, is provided as part of CTE's budget. (This figure includes cost of paper forms, maintenance of equipment, and CTE staff time. It does not include staff time in departments to administer the program.) It is difficult to estimate the staff time related to tabulating non-Scantron forms or even transferring the electronic Scantron summary files into some other electronic form for review and analysis.

Over the past two years, COT, with the help of CTE Director Ruth Harris-Barnett, has reviewed a number of reports and existing systems on the use of online systems to collect student feedback on courses and instructors. In April of this year COT invited Dr. D. Gallow, Director of the Instructional Resources Center at UCI to visit UCSC and meet with interested individuals to discuss UCI's online system. Two formal meetings took place during her visit. One was a special meeting of COT with invited guests from CEP, CAP, Graduate Council, AHR, ITS, and the administration. A second meeting in the afternoon was open to all faculty (both senate and non-senate members).

The discussions at those meetings were generally very supportive of moving forward with an online system. In addition, those discussions helped us clarify some of the features we would like to see in a system at UCSC.

## ***Why go online now?***

The current Scantron system generates at least 15,000 sheets of paper each quarter. This paper must be stored for many years. Often additional copies are made in order to provide individuals (e.g. the reviewed faculty member or personnel committees) access to the evaluations without risking loss of data.

The Scantron form has limited room for department specific questions. An online system could provide much greater flexibility for departments to ask the questions they are most interested in, while retaining some common questions across a broad segment of the campus.

COT (as well as CAP and CEP) would like to see more wide spread use of at least a small set of common questions (e.g. How would you rate the instructor's overall effectiveness as a teacher?). In addition, the current Scantron process does not facilitate any comparisons from one course to the next, be it for an instructor, for a course, for a department, for a division, or for any combinations (e.g. all 80s courses in the School of Engineering, or all introductory courses with enrollments over 100). COT believes that some such comparisons are valuable and could result in better teaching on this campus. Furthermore, we believe that an online system can be created that makes such comparisons relatively easy. We also recognize that not all possible comparisons are advisable and recommend below that care be taken to limit the types of comparisons that are made.

The use of online systems to collect student feedback on courses and instructors has been widely debated and is being adopted by more and more campuses. One of the major concerns raised has been the possible impact on response rate. Although there are no truly definitive conclusions, in most cases response rates have remained roughly the same, with some institutions reporting better response rates and others reporting somewhat worse response rates. We urge the implementers of the system at UCSC to make every effort to provide a system that will maximize the response rate. The system in use at UCI provides a mechanism for determining which students actually submitted a response in order to allow for small incentives if desired. As discussed below, the system includes protections for cases when the class or response size is very small.

Another concern has been the quality of the responses to open ended questions. From what we have been able to determine at least the length of the student responses is not diminished when going online. In fact, at UCI it appears that students actually write more. It is worth noting that an online system provides greater anonymity to students, especially in small classes where instructor recognition of student handwriting might easily occur in some cases.

## ***Proposed system***

The recommendations for the new system recognize the following uses for such a system:

- Current practice at UCSC is for instructor/course evaluations to play a major role in the personnel review process. Although COT would like to see a more comprehensive review process of teaching, we recognize that at least for the next few years, this practice will not change appreciably.

- The current forms are the primary source of formative feedback to instructors. We believe that the new system could, in some cases, enhance the quality and applicability of the formative feedback that the students provide instructors.
- The system will not only provide formative feedback to instructors, but it will also provide formative feedback to departments, the divisions, and CEP about specific courses.
- The system will allow for some calibration of student responses in various courses or collections of courses (e.g. 80s courses in a particular department or division).

In light of the above uses, we recommend that a system be established with the following goals/properties.

- The new system would eventually replace the CTE funded and operated Scantron system. Departments could of course continue to use the Scantron forms using departmental staff and funds.
- The new system would consist of 4 sections
  - free-form questions,
  - standard questions (2-4),
  - department selected questions, and
  - instructor selected question.
- Students should be given a window of time (for example 1 week) during which they can complete the online evaluation.
- Only students enrolled in the class will be able to submit the evaluation and they will only be able to submit it once. Access will be controlled using their ucsc login and password.
- Students will be notified via email when the window opens, and reminded periodically until they complete it or the window closes.
- When the evaluation period is closed, the instructor will be provided a list of the names of which students completed the evaluation. However, if fewer than 5 evaluations were submitted, no list will be provided.
- Instructors may offer students small incentives (e.g. homework bonus) for completing the evaluation.
- The same system used for end of quarter evaluations will be available for soliciting mid-quarter feedback. In this case, the results will go only to the instructor.
- The system must ensure that the privacy of individual faculty members is not compromised by any reporting of aggregated data. Guidelines will need to be established for what types of reporting can be done. Two extreme examples are:
  - public release of evaluations for a single course offering by a single instructor, even in summary form will not be permitted, and
  - public release of summaries for collections of all 80s courses offered by each division for a particular year will be permitted.

## ***Conclusion***

COT believes that the technology exists to economically move to electronic collection of student feedback. We believe it is time to phase out the antiquated Scantron system and the huge amount

of paper it generates. We also believe it is appropriate for UCSC to move towards limited use of student feedback for comparative purposes. An online system would greatly facilitate such comparisons.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Charlie McDowell". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letter of each word being capitalized and prominent.

Charlie McDowell, Chair  
Committee on Teaching