

Committee on Teaching Annual Report 2017-18

To: Academic Senate, Santa Cruz Division

The Committee on Teaching (COT) met every other week throughout the academic year to conduct business regarding their charge to foster and promote good teaching, to recommend and evaluate methods of assessing teaching performance, and to oversee instructional support services on campus.

It was a highly productive year for the committee.

COT's work over the year encompassed several main themes. A main focus was completing our work on a full proposal for revising student evaluations of teaching (SETs) at UCSC. This continued the work of the prior year, in the context of COT's new purview over SETs. Members discussed and finalized proposals for specific change in three areas: 1) SET structure and the content of revised SET questions, 2) methods to increase SET feedback quality and return rates, and 3) deployment times. COT's full proposal for SET reform is appended to this report. As part of this effort, COT also deployed a survey to the entire faculty, consulted regularly with chairs of CAP, CAAD, and CITL director Jody Greene, as well as soliciting feedback from both the full senate and Senate Executive Committee (SEC). A second main area was continuing the development of a framework for collaboration between COT and the new CITL, which was entering its second operating year. Early in the year COT and CITL worked to develop several areas for collaboration which overlapped with main priorities of both bodies, and together with CAAD produced a jointly authored "best practices" document on interpretation and presentation of SETs, with a particular focus dealing with bias. Third, toward the year's end, COT engaged deeply with testing/piloting the campus's new online course evaluation (OCE) system, and produced early drafts of rollout communications for the new SET pilot year (2018-2019). This involved working with ITS and FITC on system and data report configurations, as well as working drafts of communication plans and outreach points, and ultimately conducting an internal pilot of the new customizable SET in spring quarter. In addition to these areas of new work, COT also conducted its traditional business, adjudicating the selection for the annual Excellence in Teaching Awards in spring quarter, and working on a wide variety of ad-hoc issues brought before the committee. Finally, COT's work continued over the summer with two subcommittees: the *OCE Pilot Evaluation* subcommittee worked on assessing the results of the spring pilot, and data presentation, while the *Rollout Communications* subcommittee continued forward momentum needed to formalize a communications plan and specific content in time for the planned fall quarter campus-wide new SET pilot program.

An overview of the committee's notable work in 2017-18 is provided below. Also appended to this report are 1) the final draft of *COT's recommendations for reforming SETs at UCSC* and 2) *Executive summary of the Faculty Survey on SETs*.

I. A Proposal for New Course Evaluations at UCSC

Background: In 2015-16 COT was delegated purview over campus student evaluations of teaching (SETs). This new responsibility originated as a request by VPAA Lee in the context of planned replacement of UCSC's online course evaluation (OCE) system, and was part of an effort to standardize campus practice and strengthen SET usefulness for improving faculty teaching and student learning. This gave the Academic Senate a central role in developing policy and practice for SET implementation, and opened a major opportunity for taking a fresh look at established online evaluations and practices.

For two academic years (2016-2018), COT therefore conducted a wide-ranging reassessment about how teaching is evaluated at UCSC, and developed a set of recommendations for major changes to campus teaching evaluation, as well as revised practices for SET deployment. An additional motivation was serious research-based evidence showing that standard course evaluations are significantly impacted by gender and other forms of bias. In addition, both faculty and department chair surveys revealed widespread concern about current SETs as mainly focused on "rating" professors, and not assisting enough to improve teaching or student learning, nor constructed to encourage thoughtful student reflection.

A New Framework for Evaluation of Teaching at UCSC emerged from this process. Together with the VPAA and the Center for Teaching and Learning (CITL), a joint goal emerged to fundamentally rework SETs with an ultimate goal of a broad cultural change on campus in how SETs are used and understood. The central change is a fundamental shift away from SETs as often a de-facto main personnel/teaching assessment tool, toward primarily a "formative" function; that is, a mainly instructor-customized instrument with a primary goal of assisting instructors in improving their own pedagogy and student classroom experience, and assessing their students learning in the context of their own course goals.

Outreach and consultation with key stakeholders and committees was a major focus throughout this process. In 2017-2018 the chair and committee consulted regularly with the VPAA and Director Greene of the CITL, as well as key Senate committees including Academic Personnel (CAP), Affirmative Action and Diversity (CAAD), Educational Policy, Graduate Council and the Senate Executive Committee (SEC). Chair McCarthy, Director Greene, and Chairs of CAP and CAAD maintained the informal consultation group first formed in 2016 to discuss ongoing specifics and issues with the revised SET process. Chair McCarthy also gave two formal presentations to the Senate Executive Committee, and a presentation to the entire Senate (May 16 meeting) summarizing key elements of COTs new proposals, and soliciting direct feedback.

II. Faculty Survey Regarding SET Changes

COT conducted a survey of UCSC faculty in November -December of 2017 as a follow-up to the 2016 survey of Department Chairs and Managers. The new survey collected feedback on both faculty's use and assessment of current standardized SETs. In particular, the survey asked about merit for personnel reviews, effectiveness for improving faculty teaching and student learning, and relative value of current questions.

Faculty in all departments and programs were invited to participate, and 33% of all faculty responded. The presentation of full findings is summarized in the survey executive summary

report, where main findings are presented under two themes. There was overall strong support for fundamentally changing current SETs, and significant concerns about the existing instrument. Campus-wide only 25% of respondents felt current SETs provide adequate information to improve teaching, and another 25% felt current SETs have no value at all. Over 90% of faculty either definitely or conditionally supported the idea of “formative” shift for SETs described above. The *perception of bias in SETs* was extremely widespread; however >90% of respondents were unaware of any specific resources or tools to deal with it. Finally, the survey demonstrated widespread interest in having alternate approaches (beyond SETs) to both assess and improve teaching and student learning.

III. Completed Comprehensive Proposal

The Rollout of New SETs is envisioned as a two-year process. 2018-2019 will be a pilot year, used to test and refine the new instrument. The traditional (current) SETs will continue to be the default option during this year, and new SETs will be deployed on an “opt-in” basis to classes of interested faculty. At the beginning of each quarter faculty will have the option to “opt in” to test the new SET approach for specific courses. Based on feedback from faculty and other key stakeholders gathered in 2018-19, COT envisions that a revised version will replace current standardized SETs in the 2019-2020 academic year.

The full COT proposal for SET revision will be appended to this annual report, and will also be found posted to the COT website.¹ An overview of main elements of the three proposal sections are outlined below:

A. *New SET instrument: Revised format and questions*

COT’s proposal centers around a new instructor-driven, course-specific approach. The new survey is divided into two sections. Both reflect key goals of greatly reducing standardized quantitative (“bubble-in”) instructor evaluation, and instead emphasizing descriptive, open student responses.

- 1. *Campus-wide, “common” questions.*** The majority of common questions target student motivation and self-reflection on class effort. Some questions asking students to qualitatively assess teaching also remain; however, these have been drastically reduced to 3 (from 25 in the current campus SET). Two questions survey students’ opinions of 1) overall teaching effectiveness and 2) students’ perceived overall course learning. However, both are now directly paired with open (qualitative/descriptive) responses, requiring students to contextualize and explain their responses. The last common question is completely open (descriptive), asking for feedback about the most effective course elements. The common questions, as with current UCSC SETs, will be forwarded to both departments and CAP, and become part of an instructors file.
- 2. *Instructor created custom questions.*** The second section represents the heart of the new SETs, and is fully instructor driven and customizable. Responses will be returned *only* to instructors, reflecting COT’s goal of a campus shift away from SETs as tools for personnel actions, and toward a model where SETs are instructor-centered tools for

¹ <https://senate.ucsc.edu/committees/cot-committee-on-teaching/index.html>

improving teaching and learning. While instructors may choose to include these data in their personnel files, private responses will allow instructors to take risks in assessing any course aspect, but especially teaching innovation. In the pilot year, instructors can choose to enter up to 5 customized questions in the system. While instructors have complete latitude to generate any questions they desire, the COT companion website will provide templates with a bank of example questions from different disciplines within a number of specific categories.

B. Improving Response Quality and Response Rate

A persistent concern since the adoption of online evaluations is substantially lower response rates in relation to the prior in-class paper system. The impact of low response rates on SET outcomes is not straightforward, as research has shown potential response rate impact scales strongly to class size. However, the larger issue is likely *quality* of evaluations. Many online systems attempt to increase return rate by saturating students with electronic reminders, or “punitive” measures such as withholding grades. Such measures can have the unintended consequence of degrading response quality, creating incentives for cursory “compliance” responses.

The central goal of COT’s proposal for return rate is therefore providing students incentive and in-class time to provide for the most thoughtful feedback possible, aligned with our core goal of increasing student engagement and accountability. Key elements include:

- ***Provide Class Time for Evaluations whenever possible.*** The removal of course time to complete evaluations is likely the single factor most responsible for response rate decline, and arguably changes in representative content. While in-class time may not be possible for every course, providing class time directly links SET completion to instructor introduction and context. As important, time within the formal class structure underscores that SETs are not simply a “tacked on” requirement, but rather an integral part of the course structure and the learning process.
- ***Provide Strong Instructor Context.*** Research has shown that strong instructor-provided context for importance and purpose of evaluations can be enormously effective in increasing both student motivation and quality.
- ***Provide quarterly communication summarizing recommended practices.*** A quarterly communication from COT will be sent to all instructors, analogous to prior guidelines disseminated with each quarter’s paper evaluations. It should include talking points for importance and purpose of SETs.
- ***Incentive approaches may also be effective.*** Incentive approaches, typically variations on extra credit or participation credit, have been tested by faculty and are even recommended by some departments. These have been reported to be successful; however, they can also be controversial. In particular, the underlying student motivation may not fully align with COT’s focus on maximizing thoughtfulness in evaluations. COT’s full report describes these as options for consideration, as well as pros and cons typically raised.

- ***Recommendations, not policy.*** The great diversity of UCSC course formats means one practice for increasing SET quality and return rate cannot be mandated. COT therefore provides a set of core recommendations, along with information about additional options.

C. *Deployment times*

SET deployment times have the potential to impact both return rates and quality of feedback. Deployment times for current SETs were arguably relatively unimportant, given the standardized nature of most questions. COT's goal for return times is flexibility/customization to align with the new individualized framework. Given the new emphasis on instructor-generated questions and overall course learning and impact, evaluations for many courses might not be as effective until the entire course is completed. Recommendations for course return times include:

- ***In class structure sets timing for most evaluations.*** As noted above the main COT recommendation for improving quality of feedback is move back to in-class evaluations during week 10, whenever possible.
- ***Extended window if in-class evaluations are not possible, at least through inter-term breaks.*** COT recommends extending the window for evaluation at least through inter-term breaks, and ideally for 3 weeks after course end-date. This will give additional options for those instructors who believe the best feedback can be obtained after entire course/exam completion, and may also increase overall return rates.
- ***Explore instructor-driven ability for longer term back-looking evaluations.*** Many instructors feel that a course's ultimate impact can be gauged only in context of significant time (e.g., several quarters or even a year). COT therefore recommends exploring the creation of a new ad-hoc mechanism for instructors who wish to collect long-term feedback. This may be particularly valuable for foundational major classes or chain-classes.

IV. Implementation and Piloting

Implementation within new OCE System. College Net was chosen to be the vendor to implement the "What Do You Think" (WDYT) platform. In the winter and spring quarters, the committee worked with the Faculty Instructional Technology Center (FITC) to begin planning for how COT's new custom SETs would be implemented. This turned out to pose significant unanticipated challenges due to limitations discovered for desired customization within the campus' newly contracted College Net OCE system. The COT chair, representatives of FITC and Institutional Research met regularly through winter and spring quarters, including phone meetings with College Net representatives, and consultations with Stanford ITS staff and professors with experience implementing the same vendor's system. Ultimately, the committee was able to devise solutions that met our goals for customization, based on linkage to information on COT's website, for our pilot deployment.

Custom SET first internal pilot. In spring 2018, all members of COT piloted the new SETs for their courses, within a wider first campus pilot of the new WDYT system. Committee members worked with FITC staff to code the new SET common and custom questions and deployed these to their courses. This initial ‘beta’ pilot provided invaluable experience with the new system, including how new SETs would look and work for instructors, be experienced by students, and how actual reporting options and distribution to different levels within the University would function. The overall outcome was extremely positive, showing a full new SET pilot to the campus was clearly feasible for 2018-2019 year. However, we also identified numerous aspects for revision and improvement. At the end of the academic year, COT formed a subcommittee to continue meeting through the summer to address issues from this pilot, in preparation for the pilot year rollout.

Rollout and Communications Planning. Working with FITC, COT began planning for the communications associated with the pilot year. The committee anticipated a first campus-wide deployment in fall 2018, however on a participant-limited “opt in” basis to allow both faculty and department staff a manageable experience with the new SETs. COT anticipated expanding the pilot rollout throughout 2018-2019, making adjustments based on faculty, staff, and administration feedback. Beginning in Spring 2018 and continuing with a second subcommittee over the summer, COT began drafting rollout communications, to include 1) messages to department staff, 2) messaging and drafts of instructions for all faculty, and 3) plans for linking required instructions and information that could not be included directly within the OCE system direction to COTs website. The new customizable SET pilot is now slated to begin testing in Winter Quarter of 2019.

V. Collaboration with Center for Innovations in Teaching and Learning (CITL)

A continuing focus during the year was evolution of a framework for the most productive collaboration between COT and the new CITL (in 2018-19 entering its second year). COT wrote the proposal for the CITL’s establishment, and along with Senate leadership successfully advocated for its creation in 2016-17. However, many of the new CITL’s functions now overlap with elements of COT’s charge, likely requiring a reevaluation of the overall framework for teaching-related oversight and events on campus, as well as a new delineation of relative roles of the senate vs. administration and a potential oversight structure. In 2018-19, we continued these discussions via meetings including senate leadership, COT chair, VPAA Lee, and CITL Director Greene. These yielded an arrangement where Director Greene would remain a “sits with” member of COT, however due to time constraints would attend on an ad-hoc basis. COT and CITL would formally identify specific focus areas for collaboration at the start of each year. The COT chair and the CITL Director and Assistant Director also held monthly informal meetings throughout the year to keep abreast of issues and promote the most productive committee meeting time.

Best Practices White Papers. Based on this new structure, the main collaborative focus for 17-18 was to develop “best practices” documents that would focus on 1) identifying and dealing with bias in SETs, and 2) providing guides for faculty on how to use and interpret SET data, including interpretation of both qualitative and quantitative feedback. This project became an ongoing collaboration between COT, CITL, and the Committee on Affirmative Action and Diversity (CAAD). Both COT and CAAD members contributed specific text sections, and COT (in

combination with other stakeholders) worked to edit final documents. The final documents (*A Guide to Using SET Data and Preparing to Read Student Comments on SET Surveys*) are available on both CITL and COT websites.

VI. Excellence in Teaching Awards

COT is charged with the administrative oversight of the Excellence in Teaching Awards (ETA). In adjudicating these awards, we look for evidence that the nominee has thought deeply about teaching and learning and effectively applies that thinking in the classroom. ETA winners are based on student nominations, augmented by statements of teaching philosophy and letters of support from department chairs for a short list of finalists. In 2017-18, COT evaluated nominations by four hundred and fifty students, for over one hundred different instructors. We see this as evidence of the extraordinarily strong commitment by UCSC faculty and instructors to students and their learning.

Based on student nominations, teaching statements and chair letters were requested for a short list of fourteen instructors. After much deliberation, the Committee selected six to receive 2018 teaching awards, with an additional two chosen to receive letters of Honorable Mention. Chancellor Blumenthal presented the awards to the ETA recipients on June 12, 2018 at a luncheon hosted by the Chancellor's Office at the University Center.

2017-18 Excellence in Teaching Award Recipients:

1. David Harrison
2. Melissa Jurica
3. Albert Narath
4. Carine Rohmer
5. David Smith
6. Veronica Tonay

Honorable Mention

1. Steven Coulter
2. Robin Dunkin

VII. Upcoming Agenda for 2018-19

Implementation of the new SETs and Pilot Program was discussed as the central goal for a 2018-2019 proactive agenda, bringing to fruition the main focus for the prior two COTs. Specific action items discussed included:

- Implementation of pilot year limited rollout in fall quarter of 2018.
- Finalize communication and outreach plans for introducing new SETs to campus.
- Department outreach: Throughout pilot year, in collaboration with CITL, a COT representative would visit all departments or council of chairs meetings to answer questions and promote new SETs.
- Frosh orientation outreach program: To emphasize importance of student engagement.
- Instructions: For custom SETs and example questions to be finalized and posted to COT website, in collaboration with Instructional Research, Assessment, and Policy Studies (IRAPS; Anna Sher).

- CAP, CITL, and Administration working group: Establish a formal working group to discuss a framework for adopting new SETs formally in personnel actions, beginning in 2019-2020.
- Faculty Trainings: Interface with CITL and IR on possible faculty trainings for new customized questions.
- Begin graduate student SET revisions: New SETs are currently targeted only at faculty; expansion to GSRs and TAs was envisioned as a logical next step, once current new SETs are in place.
- Audience Response Systems: Student representatives brought to the committee's attention a desire to look at clickers and other audience response systems, potentially evaluating function and standardization to reduce student costs.

Additional topics discussed included:

- Updating COT's charge: In particular updating relative roles of COT and CITL in different areas related to campus teaching, as well as potentially including a more formal description of relationship between the two bodies.
- Library Role: COT discussed briefly the establishment of a formal COT role addressing how evolution of libraries may affect campus teaching and learning. In 2017-18 this was judged to be premature, but this could also be part of an updated charge.
- Formalized role in student success: In 2017-18 Vice Provost Padgett reached out to initiate discussions on COT as a main senate committee with a direct advisory role to Student Success.
- Engagement in Graduate Student Instructors (GSI) proposal: The campus proposed expanded role of GSIs in 2018. Because of the potential impacts on teaching practice and quality, the committee felt COT should have a central role in advising on this initiative.
- Fundraising; "A Night for Teaching" idea was discussed with university relations, representing fundraising and direct community outreach to the general public (as opposed to CITL's more academic themed events), with proceeds to help support COT events or augment the currently very limited budget for ETA awards.

Respectfully Submitted;
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