

16 October 2012

TO: Murray Leaf, Speaker of the Faculty Senate
FROM: Theresa Towner, Chair, Committee on Effective Teaching
RE: CET Agenda 2012-13

The University's Committee on Effective Teaching met 15 October 2012. Pursuant to the Committee's charge, I report to you our agenda for the academic year:

1. Continue the 2011-12 CET investigation and evaluation of the roles played by School-level teaching effectiveness committees.
2. Investigate and define the degree and kind of CET's participation in the nomination and awarding of the Regents' Teaching Awards.
3. Investigate and evaluate the means by which Schools monitor the teaching effectiveness of part-time instructors, including graduate teaching assistants.
4. Investigate, with the help of the Provost's technical team, ongoing issues of access to teaching evaluations and their relationships to student grades, including but not limited to: the linking of student access to course grades and the submission of course evaluations; associate dean access to written comments on course evaluations for the purpose of evaluating part-time instructors; and numbers of and statistical trends in course evaluations over time.
5. Investigate the feasibility of establishing a video library or Wiki of resources for faculty addressing common questions and problems encountered in the classroom, including the challenges faced by teachers of online courses, with particular attention to the content rather than the technical aspects of such questions.
6. Investigate the feasibility and desirability of establishing a University-wide Center for Teaching and Learning, such as those presently in operation at Harvard, MIT, and UT-Austin, for example.

4 April 2013

TO: Murray Leaf, Speaker of the Faculty Senate
FROM: Theresa Towner, Chair, Committee on Effective Teaching
RE: Final Report

Pursuant to its charge, the Senate's Committee on Effective Teaching met four times during this academic year: 15 October and 28 November 2012 and 6 February and 6 March 2013. During these meetings we discussed the items on the agenda I submitted to you in a memo dated 16 October 2012. Below are those agenda items and the conclusions reached in our deliberations.

1. Continue the 2011-12 CET investigation and evaluation of the roles played by School-level teaching effectiveness committees.
We discovered large discrepancies between each School's officially designated procedures and the actual practices of evaluating teaching. We decided that rather than try to design one set of evaluation procedures for the University, we would be more effective to encourage each School to revisit those procedures, refine them as necessary to be both practical to implement and fair to individual instructors, and then follow their own guidelines.
2. Investigate and define the degree and kind of CET's participation in the nomination and awarding of the Regents' Teaching Awards.
We agreed that CET should vet the list of Regents' Award nominees in conjunction with the Office of Undergraduate Education. Dean Pineres subsequently forwarded the list of nominees to us, and several of us agreed to read and rank individual application files.
3. Investigate and evaluate the means by which Schools monitor the teaching effectiveness of part-time instructors, including graduate teaching assistants.
We discovered a wide range of practices, some of which were outlined in School bylaws and some of which were not. We agreed that the evaluation of part-time faculty is vitally important, especially in light of the University's increasing dependence on adjuncts. We recommend that the Senate encourage individual Schools to evaluate and keep records on the teaching of adjunct faculty.
4. Investigate, with the help of the Provost's technical team, ongoing issues of access to teaching evaluations and their relationships to student grades, including but not limited to: the linking of student access to course grades and the submission of course evaluations; associate dean access to written comments on course evaluations for the purpose of evaluating part-time instructors; and numbers of and statistical trends in course evaluations over time.
We discussed these issues at every meeting and, with the help of the Provost's technical team, finally concluded that the issue of the accuracy of student evaluations is a moving target. Much anecdotal evidence was offered by committee members and the general faculty, and many statistics were offered. We conclude that CET will always discuss these issues as technical elements of evaluations evolve and will never, in fact, conclude anything about them. I would like to acknowledge the expertise of Mr. Simon Kane and his help during our discussions.
5. Investigate the feasibility of establishing a video library or Wiki of resources for faculty addressing common questions and problems encountered in the classroom, including the challenges faced by teachers of online courses, with particular attention to the content rather than the technical aspects of such questions.

We concluded that this is one area in which the University would be the proper venue for such materials. See item 6 below.

6. Investigate the feasibility and desirability of establishing a University-wide Center for Teaching and Learning, such as those presently in operation at Harvard, MIT, and UT-Austin, for example.

We invited Professors Patricia Michaelson and Homer Montgomery to our meeting on 6 February to explain to us the role of such centers on other campuses and the more general benefits of having on campus specialists in the scholarship of teaching and learning. We saw these easily and agreed to address the Senate directly to explain them; Professors Michaelson, Montgomery, Karen Huxtable-Jester, and I attended the Senate meeting on 20 February and at the request of that body submitted a motion to create and staff a campus Teaching and Learning Center. The Senate unanimously approved that motion at its next meeting, and President Daniel advised creating a place marker for it in the pending budget.