

ACADEMIC SENATE CURRICULUM & INSTRUCTION COMMITTEE

Final Report on the Committee's Activities for 2019-20

Members: Brad Roth, Chair, Political Science and Law; Juliann Binienda, Clinical, Family Medicine and Public Health Sciences; Kelly Dormer, Student Disability Services; Tom Fischer, Psychology; Robert Harr, Physics and Astronomy; Peter Henning, Law; Manoj Kulchania, Finance; Sandra Oliver-McNeil, Nursing; Richard Pineau, Mathematics; Stella Resko, Social Work; Ali Salamey, Honors College; Yang Zhao, Electrical and Computer Engineering

Liaisons: Basel Berry (Student Senate); Paul Beavers (Policy Committee); Darin Ellis (Provost's Office); Pramod Khosla (AAUP-AFT).

The Curriculum & Instruction Committee (CIC) met seven times in AY 2019-20 – four times in the Fall Semester and three times in the Winter. The Committee also responded via Listserv to numerous arising issues. CIC engaged in the following activities:

- (1) Recommending an end to the Wayne State (Barnes & Noble) Bookstore's promotion to students of the "Bartleby Learn" commercial on-line resource package;
- (2) Addressing the need for appropriate faculty participation in processes where grades are challenged, in both (a) the ordinary grade appeals process and (b) the process for appeal of grade penalties in academic misconduct cases;
- (3) Learning about the process of adjusting course websites to meet standards of accessibility;
- (4) Examining the Provost's interdisciplinary hiring initiatives;
- (5) Monitoring developments in University processes relating to curriculum and instruction (e.g., on-line Student Evaluation of Teaching, electronic course wait-lists).
- (6) Monitoring the work of bodies in which Committee members have a role (e.g., the 3N Committee on Online Teaching; the General Education Oversight Committee; the Undergraduate Research Subcommittee).
- (7) Supporting initiatives of other University bodies (e.g., Student Senate).
- (8) Providing advice to the Provost's Office on responses to the COVID-19 crisis.

1. **"Bartleby Learn."** The Committee examined Bartleby.com, the Barnes & Noble on-line resource, which was being marketed not only within the University Bookstore (with stickers affixed to textbooks), but also through the student email listserv. The resources provided by bartleby.com include access to step-by-step solutions to textbook homework problems.

Committee members determined that this ease of access invites students to look up answers without attempting to solve problems on their own. As part of their monthly subscription, students are able to ask 30 questions to “experts.” Such “answers on demand” services do not foster critical and independent thinking skills on the part of our students. Instead, they create a crutch for students and foster the potential for academic dishonesty. Beyond concerns about bartleby.com’s facilitation of unedifying short-cuts and academic dishonesty, CIC members’ testing of the on-line program raised doubts about the quality of the assistance rendered.

The Committee recommended that Wayne State University terminate its participation in promoting, and should keep its name from being associated with, bartleby.com as a resource for students. The Committee sought to bar bartleby.com advertisement on the WSU Bookstore site, the placement of bartleby.com stickers on assigned textbooks, and the display of bartleby.com paraphernalia in the WSU Bookstore. The Policy Committee adopted CIC’s position, and the Associate Vice President for Student Auxiliary Services agreed to end Wayne State’s relationship with bartleby.com.

2. Grade Appeal and Academic Misconduct Appeal Processes. CIC joined with the Faculty Affairs Committee in examining the processes by which grades are appealed, especially in cases of downgrading for academic misconduct, in an effort to determine whether reforms are needed to assure that faculty judgments are accorded due respect. This inquiry followed complaints from particular faculty members that their judgments had been summarily overruled in academic dishonesty cases. As the Student Code of Conduct is due to be updated, CIC members scrutinized the Code’s omissions of opportunities for faculty to be heard at pivotal moments in the process. Dean of Students David Strauss promised that when it is time for amendments to the Code to be proposed, the Academic Senate will be consulted, with final drafting to be performed by the Office of the General Counsel.

3. Course Website Accessibility. The Committee heard from University staff responsible for making Wayne State’s web resources compliant with standards for accessibility to the disabled, including: Dr. Sara E. Kacin, Director, Office for Teaching & Learning; Nick DeNardis, Director of Digital Communications & Interim Web Accessibility Coordinator; Nathan Chavez Associate Director, Academic Applications, C&IT; and Krystal Tosch, Web Accessibility Coordinator. Although our Learning Management System (i.e., Canvas) sites are not yet subject to federal regulation, that day is coming, and instructors need to understand how to adjust their on-line materials to meet these demands. The staff members discussed various tools available to ease this task, and emphasized the need to be proactive in asking for help in seeing to it that all students are able to access course materials effectively.

4. Provost’s Interdisciplinary Hiring Initiatives. CIC joined with the Faculty Affairs Committee in making a preliminary inquiry into the operation of the Provost’s annual thematic initiatives to make joint appointments across colleges of faculty whose research agendas are thought to establish or build on distinctive strengths of the University. Concerns have been expressed about the opportunity cost of these initiatives, given the extent to which, through much of the University, retiring and departing faculty have not been replaced. Concerns have also been raised about an adequate range of participation in the decision-making processes, both for establishing the subject areas and for making the hires. Although the two Committees received a

presentation from the Provost and engaged in a follow-up discussion with the Associate Provost for Faculty Affairs, the advent of the COVID-19 crisis led to the postponement of follow-up efforts to the coming Academic Year.

5. Monitoring Developments in University Processes. The Committee heard a presentation from Laura Woodward, Director of Testing and Assessment, about the roll-out of on-line Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET), and expressed various concerns and suggestions. The Committee heard a presentation from Kurt Kruschinska, University Registrar, about the electronic wait-list being introduced to course registration.

6. Monitoring the Work of Related Bodies. Pramod Khosla reported to CIC on the Report issued by the 3N Committee on Online Teaching. Tom Fischer, the Senate’s representative on the General Education Oversight Committee (GEOC), kept CIC periodically informed about GEOC matters. Brad Roth, chair of the Academic Senate Subcommittee on Undergraduate Research, kept CIC apprised of progress in the effort to reform the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program (UROP).

7. Supporting Initiatives of Other University Bodies. CIC was frequently in dialogue with the Student Senate on issues of concern to the latter. CIC endorsed in full the Student Senate Resolution on LGBTQ+ Issues, with special attention to the paragraph relating to curriculum, which proposed “the hiring of at least one full-time faculty member dedicated to the field of Queer Studies to join the Gender, Sexuality, and Women’s Studies Program in order to develop and teach courses dedicated to the field of Queer Studies.” CIC issued a Letter of Commendation for the outstanding work of the Office for Teaching and Learning in helping faculty cope with the effects of the COVID-19 crisis.

8. Advising the Provost’s Office on COVID-19 Crisis Responses. As the University sought to adjust to the COVID-19 crisis, the Provost’s Office put a number of questions to CIC. These matters – including the formula for a Pass/No Pass option for undergraduates, proposed revisions to University Policy 14-1 specifying Course Instructional Methods, and ideas for the outsourcing of proctoring for remote exams – were discussed on the listserv, with feedback being reported back to the Provost and the Associate Provost for Academic Programs. The Committee also held a lengthy discussion with Associate Provost Ellis about the University’s “restart” plans for the Fall, and will make itself available for consultation over the summer as matters arise.

Respectfully submitted,

Brad R. Roth, Chair