The Post-Pandemic Future of Higher Education at Wayne State University

The Policy Committee and the full Academic Senate have long been aware of the ongoing changes in higher education, including the following: demands (whether from administrators, students, politicians, or businesses) for a more laser-like focus on careers and skills rather than general arts and sciences education, often under the rubric of "competency-based education" or "career preparation"; the combination of cost-savings and convenience represented by online education, especially where courses can be "assigned" to less costly adjunct faculty or lecturers and duplicated year after year with minimal changes; a tendency to focus on STEM disciplines in terms of allocation of resources, design of buildings, hiring of faculty and recruitment of students, with the accompanying tendency to close programs in the creative and performing arts and humanities; the demographic pressure on revenues; the desire to recruit and educate undergraduates who may need substantial assistance to compensate for poor educational backgrounds; and the problem of balancing undergraduate and graduate student bodies, with their differing recruitment, costs, functions and career paths. All of these issues have been made more acute because of the pandemic and the rapid accommodation of non-traditional teaching methods and remote learning to protect public health of students and employees alike. This raises questions about what a 'return to normal' can and should mean—and what do we want it to mean.

The Policy Committee believes that it is necessary to take a "deep dive" into these issues and consider what options there are, in particular, for Wayne State University at this juncture. What changes should the university make? Are the changes due to the pandemic ones that should be treated as an opportunity or a problem? Are there changes that the pandemic has pushed us towards that are problematic and damaging to the goals of higher education? Are there changes that we have made temporarily that are worth developing more protective protocols for but ultimately incorporating as new directions?

Thus, we are asking each of the standing committees of the Academic Senate to begin an in-depth study of issues relative to the committees' areas of expertise. There will be some aspects of these issues that should be considered for the nearer term—i.e., with a view towards recommendations to Policy by the end of the Winter 2021 semester. Others will require more substantial review, in order to prepare a report to Policy with longer-term recommendations on educational policy by October 15, 2021. The Policy Committee will integrate the various reports and recommendations for plenary Senate review and forwarding, as determined appropriate, to the Provost, President and Board of Governors.

Each committee should consider what matters it should investigate deeply. It should research the subject, including investigating the issue through the educational literature, discussing with personnel at Wayne State and, to the extent possible, researching trends at other similar public universities. In preparing the committees' studies and recommendations, members should review recent publications from Inside Higher Education (the university has purchased the rights to distribute an article, *An Inside Higher Education Report: College Leadership in an Era of Unpredictability*, attached below) and The Chronicle of Higher Education (*The Post-Pandemic College*, available for purchase at this link) as well as other education articles in media over the last two years (e.g., Forbes, Ten Predictions for the Very Near Future of Higher Education (Nov. 27, 2019) (noting that "Instead of going to college to get a job, students will increasingly be going to a job to get a college degree"). It will be important to consider questions such as the following and others that particular committees may consider relevant to their subject matter.

1. Guiding Principles:
    a. Is this discussion grounded in rational arguments about the future rather than self-interest of particular units within the university?
    b. Are the suggested/recommended solutions flexible enough to handle the continuing uncertainty regarding the COVID-19 pandemic and the enhanced likelihood in a globalized environment of future similar pandemics or other emergencies?
    c. Do the discussions consider that Wayne State University cannot be everything to everybody so that we focus on areas in which we have strengths on which to build?
    d. Are we careful to balance our need to provide adequate support to admitted undergraduate students with our need to maintain and enhance graduate and professional programs to ensure our continued viability as an R1 research institution?
2. Students:
    a. Undergraduate students:
        i. Is our undergraduate body changing in ways that require us to change the services offered?

        ii. Are we preparing our undergraduate students appropriately for further education and/or careers? If not, what is missing?

        iii. What have we learned from pre-pandemic and pandemic classes regarding the impact of class size on student success? Is there data that can help us determine whether it is time to move towards smaller classes (i.e., of 30 or fewer) except in very rare circumstances where experience has shown that large-scale classes can be successful?

    b. Graduate students:

        i. Graduate students have historically been essential to our research and undergraduate instruction, in part with the idea that we are training teachers for future university positions. Is this a viable pathway for the future?

        ii. What did the substitutions made necessary by the pandemic tell us about what we are likely to be able to achieve with graduate education in the next decade?

    c. Non-matriculated students, pre-college students, and so-called 'adult learners'

        i. Are there ways that we should be developing the campus to be more accessible to younger students not yet ready to enter college?

        ii. Are there opportunities to offer programs directed towards non-matriculated students (see also item 2, below)?

        iii. In what way could the increase in online courses free the university faculty to create more programming for adult learners? More career-oriented training programs?

3. Credentials:

    a. Grades:

        i. Does the university's current grading system need to be updated to work well in a post-pandemic educational university? If so, why and how?

        ii. Should pass/no credit options be expanded along the lines of what was offered during the pandemic? Contracted?

        iii. Should there be an established policy for when the university may shift as a whole to a P/N system because of pandemics or similar emergencies? Should this apply solely for undergraduates or also for graduate students? Are there accreditation issues involved for professional students that require a different approach?

    b. Badges and Certificates

        i. Should there be a widespread move to breaking apart degree programs into smaller segments, represented by badges or certificates?

        ii. If so, what kinds of criteria should apply and how would the merit of such credentials be standardized university-wide?

    c. Degrees

        i. Does the current degree programming across the university need to be updated and if so, why and over what term?

        ii. Various educational institutions are giving academic credit for experiential work already completed (sometimes described as competency-based education). To what extent should a university such as Wayne State consider such ideas?

        iii. Various political figures suggest that a university such as Wayne State has a duty to provide career paths to its students. To what extent does career training and degree programming merge or clash?

    d. Careers

        i. What is the role of schools/colleges and departments to better prepare their students for careers?

        ii. What information about potential careers should be part of the marketing and part of the curricular and degree planning within schools/colleges and departments?

    e. Assessment

        i. To what extent has assessment data been useful in evaluating curriculum and other program offerings?

4. Online Education:

    a. To what extent should the university retain the distinctions developed to satisfy the needs of teaching during the pandemic—synchronous and asynchronous online courses, hybrid courses, etc. and are there other categories that should be developed?

    b. To the extent that there continue to be some courses taught online and others taught in person, how can departments and schools help students transition successfully between modes when courses are sequential and depend on mastery of a prior course?

c. Should the university encourage more faculty to teach remotely or encourage more faculty to return to the in-person classroom. What are the pros and cons of the two modes of instruction?

d. To the extent the university retains a higher number of online courses,

    i. What kind of university support (e.g., workload relief, summer support) will be available to faculty for development of new online courses?

    ii. What should be the rubrics for assessing the quality of the courses?

    iii. What kind of peer review and/or administrative review of online courses should be put in place to ensure that courses taught online satisfy some minimal standard of quality? What should that standard be?

    iv. Especially for asynchronous courses (or synchronous courses that include some asynchronous elements), how should the university standardize the requirements for such courses and what special quality measures should be put in place because of asynchronicity?

    v. Is there a way to substantiate teacher time for asynchronous elements of courses without adopting a "Big Brother" presence? If not, how does the university know that the courses are actually serving the students?

    vi. How should the university resolve the dilemma of online exams (privacy, confidentiality, assuring that the registered student is actually the examinee, etc.)? Once the pandemic ebbs, should there be a requirement that all exams other than ordinary "take-homes" will be proctored in a secure place with adequate student identification?

    vii. Should teaching online versus teaching in person be treated as different types and levels of workload for faculty? What is a fair way to handle those differences?

    viii. How can faculty ownership of materials developed for their particular courses be assured in an environment in which substantial faculty effort and time are required to create online materials, whether synchronous or asynchronous?

5. Study Abroad and international outreach

a. To what extent should the university expand its opportunities for students or faculty to travel abroad for study or participation in exchange programs in the future?

b. Is it important to have Summer? Semester? Full Academic Year? Study-Abroad programs?

c. To what extent should the university change its recruitment strategies for international students?

d. Should the university develop a "virtual campus" for international students? If so, what criteria should be used to evaluate the courses offered, the students admitted, the faculty teaching such a virtual campus? Should there be degree programs at such a virtual campus? If so, what changes need to be made to approval processes for such programs.

6. Faculty:

a. If the university offers more badges and certificates and fewer 'whole' degrees, how will faculty workloads be systematized?

b. Should school/college and department policies ensure that faculty have flexibility to determine the mode of instruction for the classes they teach? Would this flexibility only apply to pandemic-like conditions or should schools/colleges and departments be able to mandate certain modes of instruction for particular faculty or particular courses?

c. While workload is primarily a union issue under the collective bargaining agreement, to what extent can university policies build in flexibility to ensure that the differing demands of online versus in-person instruction are taken into account (e.g., online teaching soaks up faculty time because of random times of student contacts, especially for asynchronous classes but also for synchronous online, and hybrid classes add further time constraints on faculty)?

d. Is interdisciplinarity possible in an increasingly online environment?

7. Research:

a. How can the university maintain its R1 research status if it moves to more online courses and more badges, credentials, non-matriculation and other novel ideas?

b. What facilities are essential for STEM courses and laboratory instruction?

c. What kind of support should the university provide—in contrast to the external grant support from government and foundations that faculty already compete for—to ensure that faculty have sufficient time and freedom to consider new ideas that allow research to flourish, while also accomplishing their teaching and service roles?

8. Staff

a. Should academic staff, who pre-pandemic were required to be in the office during office hours, continue to work remotely, some or all of the time? Are there areas of interactions with students and/or

faculty for some academic staff that are better with in-person meetings and thus may require in-office work hours?

9. <u>Diversity and Accessibility</u>:
   a. How can schools/colleges and departments better take accessibility into account in designing curriculum, determining modes of instruction, and supporting students?
   b. Are there ways to enhance diversity within courses and majors, so that students are exposed to a broader range of perspectives?
   c. How can the university reduce the stress on faculty and staff of color who are called upon to serve to ensure diversity in ways that limit their time for research or service in other areas?

10. <u>Facility needs</u>
    a. Are there facility questions particularly relevant to the topic under consideration?

11. <u>Experiencing the University Context</u>
    a. To what extent should the university attempt to retain significant on-campus residential housing for undergraduate students? Are there ways to enhance that experience through residential communities?
    b. To what extent should the university address need for housing dedicated to graduate students and to graduate student families?
    c. To what extent are on-campus activities likely to be essential to the undergraduate experience in the post-pandemic university?