

UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON CURRICULUM (UCOC)

MINUTES

February 3, 2021

2:00-3:30 pm

****Zoom Meeting****

I. UCOC JANUARY 2021 MINUTES

- Attachment: *UCOC January 2021 Minutes*

DEFERRED to allow for closer review.

II. OLD BUSINESS

A. Anticipating and Addressing the Issue of Undergraduate Online Instruction (Continued from previous discussions regarding online curriculum)

DISCUSSED Chair Chi Mak asked the committee to consider what real opportunities there are for courses and programs that cannot be addressed on-campus in an effort to articulate the questions that need to be asked so a proposal can be properly evaluated. He suggested considering four primary themes, though there are likely more: quality, suitability, efficacy, and pedagogy. These could be used to develop metrics for evaluating online graduate courses, which could then be used as a template for developing metrics for evaluation of online undergraduate courses. The result could then be integrated into metrics for evaluation of online graduate programs, leaving online undergraduate programs to be explored further, noting the probable lack of expertise in online programs at USC currently.

When questioned about content, Mak suggested that content should continue to be evaluated as it is currently for all courses and programs. The additional assessment metrics mentioned are specifically related to the online aspect of courses and programs that are designed to be online. Members noted that content may take a significantly different shape depending on method of delivery and that the relevance and value of course outcomes need to be maintained.

Mak asked what members think should be the product of the present discussion. Should additional questions be asked within proposal forms? Should there be a separate approval process for online components? Should a dedicated committee review for online only or should each subcommittee assume the role of reviewing online curriculum within each subject area?

Brian Head, AHS co-chair, suggested that in his view online programs are not reviewed with as much details as perhaps they should, and that the present discussion presents an opportunity to adopt more thorough review of what demonstrates the true value of an online course or program, which is basically assumed for an on-campus version. He suggested departments should seize the opportunity to demonstrate how an online offering is not only as good as the on-campus version, but better than the on-campus version, and this principle should be considered from initial planning stages all the way to through to final approval. He wondered if online education has been a service geared primarily toward providing a greater level of access, but was in favor of moving in a direction that not only provides access but addresses pedagogy.

Danielle Mihram, USC Libraries and Dornsife Digital Humanities Liaison, agreed, adding that the sensory experience gained from an in-person experience is completely different from watching or reading about the similar experience online, so the question remains how the online version is made better. However, she also noted that research suggests the brains of young adults who are the age of incoming undergraduate students have been fundamentally changed as a result of being born into a completely digital age such that they may actually prefer to learn and interact within the spaces made possible by new immersive technologies, a concept which could be critical in the context of understanding what makes an online experience better than the on-campus one. She said the discussion becomes significantly broader when interfacing emerging technology with pedagogy—it's certainly not just a question of access.

Mak and Mihram agreed that there are definitely opportunities that were not available in the 20th century that educators should take advantage of and explore and develop innovation creatively so that the USC brand can lead instead of follow. Mak questioned if innovation is part of the program development process, how can UCOC be involved with and help inform program innovation given that UCOC reviews at the end of the process?

Judy Garner, HPS chair, reiterated that previous exercises in community outreach, wherein subcommittee faculty engaged with academic units earlier within the curriculum development process, were interesting experiences but did not deem to yield results. She said leveraging the expertise of groups such as CET and the Center for Scholarly Technology could be an exciting way to innovate and improve educational interactions between faculty and student.

Mihram suggested inviting folks from across campus who are doing creative work with new technologies to convene and add to the conversation of how to make online and hybrid education better. Garner responded that CET made similar efforts when the university suddenly shifted online (due to COVID-19) and that a year later perhaps what worked and what didn't work well could be looked at.

Mak and Garner agreed about gathering and sharing the expertise across the university—perhaps in the format similar to a mini TED Talk—and that CET should be a consistent voice in the discussion. Donna Garcia, Director of Academic Affairs and point of contact for Online Programs, suggested keeping Associate Vice Provost Mike Nichol and members of the OLC in the loop as other discussions and projects related to online education evolve around campus.

Geoff Shiflett, SES chair, said he was less enthusiastic about some aspects of the discussion, noting that in his experience the intrinsic value of an online version of an experience has never proven to exceed the value of the in-person experience. He suggested that simulations, virtual reality, live-streams, and various other interactive media may be very valuable experiences but he'd be surprised at the claim that they are better than the real thing. He reframed the question of online quality as: what has been taken away from the in-person experience to create the online experience, and what is the method for compensating for the difference? He said there are definitely excellent technologies being developed that would enhance the educational experience but it would take additional resources and levels of support from the university to explore them.

Mak said that the metrics being developed for evaluating online courses and programs are meant to assist in the review of the proposals and if the value of the online course or program is determined not to meet or exceed the value of an in-person program the subcommittee would be in a position to turn down the proposal based on the established criteria. He said it will be important to ensure it's clear to the subcommittee whether a course or program is online or in-person so it can be appropriately evaluated, though it's not exactly clear what needs to be added or updated in the review process.

Mak noted that the upcoming accreditation review might prevent a March meeting, but the work will resume in the next meeting.

B. UCOC's Role in Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility (Caroline Muglia, USC Libraries)

DISCUSSED Mak reflected on discussion from previous meetings and suggested that UCOC consider how to help address inclusion and diversity in terms of both students and opinions, noting that diversity of thought and opinion are critical even when discussing a narrow topic.

Associate Vice Provost Robin Romans noted the university leadership's shift from a position of non-racism to an explicit position of anti-racism, which may have significant effects on procedures like admissions but also on curriculum: the impact on pedagogy, how faculty teach and, ensuring students feel welcome and included. He suggested another aspect to consider is content, including the history and predilections of a field of study. Perhaps it's not as critical at the course level, but should be considered at the program and department level. Overall the goal is to foster discussion relating to these issues, not to close it off.

Members agreed that the discussions should center on pedagogy and content without dictating either.

Garcia mentioned related discussions on unifying and operationalizing the university's values and offered to invite relevant parties to UCOC's discussion of the review process. She added that CET hosts a 'diversity checklist' that might serve as a starting point. Head noted that reconciling these values is critical and that some values are department specific, suggesting that UCOC could still help articulate what the values might be and then consider them in the context of the a program's objectives when reviewing a course or degree program.

Other members underscored the importance of DEI in their areas, particularly in social sciences, humanities and off-campus programs. It was also mentioned how important it is to equip students to understand the relationship of DEI to their fields in their professional worlds.

Mak recommended collaborating with CET and other experts to help build a strong foundation for UCOC to adequately address some of these ideas and decide on next steps.

III. INFORMATION ITEMS

A. GE Memos

- *Attachments: UCOC GE Memo 1-27-21
UCOC GE Memo 1-29-21*

B. Scheduled Special Topics Report

- *Attachment: January 2021-February 2021 Special Topics*

Members Present

Diane Badame
Matt Bemis (Assoc. Registrar)
Steven Bucher
Megan Chan (Financial Aid)
John DeMartini (Support Staff)
Donna Garcia
Judy Garner
Lawrence Green
Brian Head
Chi Mak (Chair)
Danielle Mihram
Robin Romans
Geoffrey Shiflett

Members Absent

Guests