Annual Report: Academic Year 2008-2009
Davis Division: Academic Senate

Committee on Information Technology

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Total Meetings:</th>
<th>Meeting frequency:</th>
<th>Average hours of committee work each week:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Six</td>
<td>As needed</td>
<td>fluctuating</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Total proposals Reviewed:</th>
<th>Total of reviewed proposals deferred from the previous year</th>
<th>Total proposals deferred to the coming academic year –</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Three (courses, proposals, cases, etc.)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
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Listing of bylaw changes proposed:
None

Listing of committee policies established or revised:
None

Issues considered by the committee
(1) The committee provided to the Chair of the Academic Senate an evaluation of the Integrated Curriculum Proposal after a presentation to CIT by Registrar Frank Wada. The committee was in overall agreement with the project objectives, and provided some additional suggestions in the process – as listed in the attached short report of Jan. 1, 2009.

(2) The Committee reviewed the PPM 200-45 as presented by Assistant Vice Provost Shelby. The committee had not comments to add.

(3) The Committee conducted a preliminary review of the implications of a possible campus wide change in teaching evaluations to an electronic format. This has been the major component of the committee’s efforts for this year. The issue has originated in CCFIT as an administrative IT implementation that is supposed to enhance administrative efficiency and serve student desires for public disclosure. CIT’s review, concluded on Jan. 15, 2009 and attached below, has raised a web of concerns and opportunities that has identified this seemingly simple IT project as having very broad implications for both faculty and academic standards; as well as administrative efficiency. These implications can be both overall positive and negative, and it is of the essence to properly investigate and understand the outcomes such that the project can be optimally implemented with the least possible unintended negative consequences. CIT’s report has led to the Senate forming a new special committee (Executive Council action of May 13, 2009) with broad representation that will provide a thorough review of the issue during the 2009/2010 academic year.
Committee’s narrative:
The Committee on Information Technology (CIT), in its third year of existence, has spent considerable time identifying itself as the Academic Senate’s resource for providing recommendations and insight to IT issues. In particular, the committee has strengthened its interactions with CCFIT as the natural means of communication between the administration and the Senate on IT, and it has helped to reinforce the Senate leadership in academic oversight. CIT has been actively participating in the activities of CFIT during the year. The committee has also, during this academic year, worked toward a smooth mechanism for providing Senate representation to CCFIT subcommittees. These representatives are now identified for the coming academic year, pending approval from COC. Thus, we believe that the relatively new Committee on Information Technology is reaching a point of establishment and definition. This year’s work has been greatly contributed by by former CIT chair, Professor Michael Hogarth, Vice Provost-IET Peter Siegel, and Assistant Vice Provost-IET Dave Shelby.

Respectfully submitted,

Niels Grønbech Jensen, Chair
Sally Denardo
Giulia Galli
Douglas Kahn
Felix Wu
Wrye Sententia O’Toole
Peter Siegel (Ex-Officio)
Nancy Kilpatrick, Analyst, Academic Senate Office
To: Robert Powell, Chair  
Davis Division of the Academic Senate

From: Niels Grønbech-Jensen, Chair  
Committee on Information Technology

Re: Integrated Curriculum Proposal

University Registrar Frank Wada presented the Integrated Curriculum Proposal to the Committee on Information Technology on December 9. Although framed as a solution for improving primarily the course approval process, it became clear that the greatest value of the proposal is the integration of all the systems and the resulting improvement for the University. A central database will increase the effectiveness of student advising and course management. The Committee is in agreement with the overall direction of the project and recommends an endorsement of the proposal with the following comments:

- A timeline of key milestones should be developed with specific functions/features to be met at each milestone. Specific features should be identified as available at the end of the implementation period.
- Funds must be guaranteed for this project, including a longer term financial commitment. If the project is delayed for any reason, or resources are not available as originally planned, the investment will be less useful. Future funds will be required to sustain the project and should be guaranteed, as well.
- A reduced implementation period of 24 months rather than 36 months should be considered. According to the Registrar, the system is likely to be changed again in 5-6 years.
- Audiences that will use the proposed system must be identified (e.g., Advisors, MSO’s and Department Chairs). The system should be vetted by a substantial representation of these audiences. This will reduce resistance to change that is inevitable with the introduction of any new system.

Under the conditions above, the Committee recommends to proceed with caution, but without delay once implementation begins.
January 15, 2009

To:    Robert Powell, Chair
       Davis Division of the Academic Senate

From: Niels Grønbech-Jensen, Chair
       Committee on Information Technology (CIT)

Re:    CIT Consideration of Possible Online Teaching Evaluations

Following your request for input to the discussion on possible on-line teaching evaluations the Committee on Information Technology met on January 13. The committee was joined by Assistant Vice Provost for IET Dave Shelby, former CIT Chair Prof. Mike Hogarth, and yourself for the first part of the meeting. Assistant Vice Provost Shelby gave a short update on the IET on-line teaching evaluation project, which was described as being in a very early stage of development. Thus, there were few details on implementation, except that it is envisioned by IET that the tool will start as being voluntary. Even so, there seemed to be considerable desire on part of the smartsite developers and others to advance the project at relatively high priority with the driving motivations including anticipated cost savings regarding staff workload and a student desire to develop easily accessible compilations of teaching evaluations for broad dissemination.

Above all, the committee notes that any activity pertaining to instruction, curriculum, pedagogy, faculty tenure and promotion is the exclusive domain of the academic senate. The current campus activity on developing a new teaching evaluation tool and the plans for implementation must therefore stop immediately, since this work is conducted without the explicit endorsement or leadership of the academic senate. The efforts and plans can be restarted only at the pleasure of the academic senate. We recommend that the senate works expeditiously to provide a mechanism for restarting the project in an efficient format that benefits the senate and the campus, and CIT is eager to become a constructive contributor to the development of an academically enhancing revision to our teaching evaluation process.

While the committee sees opportunity to better the teaching evaluation process through revisions that may be possible by an electronic format, it also has many concerns and observations regarding this project and its objectives. Switching course evaluations from paper to an electronic format is not merely a matter of technology; it is very likely to alter the nature of evaluations and have consequences for how this information is used. For example, a “web-enabling” of course evaluations without controls that mirror today’s distribution constraints will fundamentally change the intent (and use) of the course evaluation. As stated above, we believe that technology has potential for improving the effectiveness of the evaluations. However, the currently planned deployment alters the evaluation mechanism while not leveraging technology to optimize course evaluations in support of curricular or pedagogic improvements – the fundamental reason for having a course evaluation process in the first place. As such, we expect that also other academic senate committees and entities get involved in the discussion.

Following are some highlights of the committee discussion.
The committee does not agree that providing even a voluntary on-line teaching evaluation tool is appropriate without the direction of the academic senate. An online tool, available through UC Davis smartsite, is a de facto introduction of the direction of the project. This can greatly complicate future redirection based on academic senate concerns and desires. Thus, the committee expects that no university-wide online teaching evaluation tool be developed or made available before the academic senate has been properly inserted in the leadership of the project.

While the committee is sympathetic to, and generally supportive of, using technological advances for enhancing efficiency, staff workload is not a main concern when it comes to the process used for evaluating the teaching performance for faculty in merit and promotion packages.

The committee finds the prospect of creating an electronic record of teaching evaluations, which can (and perhaps will) be made public, unacceptable. The purpose of teaching evaluations is two-fold; primarily to provide constructive student feedback to the instructor; and secondarily to help evaluating the overall teaching record of faculty for merit and promotion, the latter conducted by senate review of a confidential package. We find it troubling if UC Davis becomes a facilitator, and thereby implicit endorser, of uncontrolled anonymous public statements about its faculty. This not only raises both legal and ethical questions about protecting the reputation and well being (professional and personal) of the faculty as well as their work environment; it also may involve very complicated new procedures to ensure that no inappropriate language or untrue statements be publicized through UC Davis channels. This can easily become a costly and time consuming project complicated further by new policies on acceptable language and censorship. We therefore submit that teaching evaluations, electronic or not, are maintained as protected and confidential information to be used for the originally intended purposes only.

There are aspects of the existing teaching evaluation format that the committee finds important to consider maintaining. They include 1) that the students who participate in the evaluations are indeed participating in the classroom; 2) that the evaluations are completed as part of the classroom experience (as opposed to some other place and time); 3) that the evaluations are entirely voluntary on part of the students. Additionally, we note that the perception of anonymity – except for the remote possibility of comparing evaluations to detailed writing samples – is ensured by the current process.

There are aspects of the existing teaching evaluations that the committee finds unproductive in contributing to the purpose of evaluations. For example, evaluations being used as an expression of popularity instead of quality of instruction. This creates an unfortunate faculty conflict between academic rigor and student comfort. It should not be dismissed that, while some students provide thoughtful comments and evaluations, others provide comments and rankings based on how easy a course is made by an instructor and on perceived grading philosophy. This is an area that could potentially be improved by an electronic evaluation process. The committee here eyes a unique opportunity for correlating numerical rankings of course and instructor with awarded numerical grades of students; all while maintaining the anonymity of the individual student. This will help to better interpret course evaluations in general and thereby to make better use of the student feed back to the faculty. However, we also note that the abovementioned conflict can possibly result in diminishing academic rigor if anonymous UC Davis teaching evaluations are made available beyond their proper use.
The committee further notes that appropriately implemented on-line teaching evaluations may open for other new opportunities, such as more timely feedback to the instructor, opportunities for quick evaluations of individual lectures throughout a quarter, if so desired by an instructor, and a more campus-wide streamlining of evaluation standards for the benefit of faculty merit and promotion actions considered by CAP.

In short, the committee has many concerns regarding a switch to electronic course and teaching evaluations. We do, however, see opportunities for using the electronic format as a vehicle for providing constructive enhancements to the traditional paper evaluations – provided that this is done with the mindset that evaluations are maintained for faculty use only and not for other dissemination. In this regard, the committee has, subsequent to the meeting on January 13, discussed if administrative oversight of course evaluations would have been more logically governed by the MyInfoVault oversight committee, since this entity is concerned with protecting personnel information, which is where course evaluation data belongs.

One avenue for advancing an acceptable and desirable electronic course evaluation format is to form a (one) dedicated committee that consists of representatives from appropriate academic senate committees together with appropriate representatives from IET, including legal advice on privacy issues to ensure that any new evaluation format protects the gathered information. This can enable a constructive mix of academic senate leadership in project design and objectives with the technical competency and insight of IET; thereby efficiently move the endeavor ahead with beneficial goals.

c: Vice Provost–IET Siegel
    Asst Vice Provost–IET Shelby
    Prof. Hogarth
    CCFIT Chair Gygi
    CIT