Motion on Formation of an Internal Governance Committee on Online Teaching and Assessment
Referred by Faculty Issues Committee

Motion: The Faculty Senate recommends the formation of an Internal Governance Committee to address the multiple and complex issues emerging from the increasing number of online course offerings and degree programs. Membership should consist of representatives from A/P and T&R faculty, some of whom are teaching online, the DRO, assessment, a representative of the Center for Instructional Technology and Learning (CITL), and at least one academic chair. This committee should report to the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs.

Function: The function of this committee would be to monitor and guide the policies and practices associated with specifically online courses, or hybrid courses including online components. The issues considered might include but are not limited to online teaching effectiveness on student learning and retention, on tenure prospects for new faculty, issues of academic freedom in an online situation, accessibility for all faculty and students for online teaching, and the fundamental question of assessment of these online courses. The committee would also consider how to keep standards equivalent with face-to-face courses and degree programs, while recognizing the different methods, spaces, and issues which might arise. In order to realize the above functions, this committee should take the lead in the development and dissemination of a university-wide policy that can be used to guide further development in the area of online teaching and assessment. Consistent with the procedures for the approval of new policies, the Faculty Senate would approve any policies developed by the new IG.

Rationale: Because of the increased range and number of programs and courses that are delivered in online formats, and because the online assessment of teaching across the curriculum is under consideration, an internal governance committee is necessary to monitor and propose policy in this area. This committee will investigate issues related to the delivery of online classes as well as their assessment. Although an attempt has been made to create parallel forms of assessment for both online and classroom teaching, the differences between online space and real space necessitate different approaches to teaching. In turn, these necessitate questioning whether assessments can indeed be parallel and whether they can be interpreted and compared as parallel systems. The move toward expanding the number of online courses should be guided by the development and approval of a plan for examining the impact of online teaching not only on students but on departments where online, classroom, and hybrid forms of teaching may co-exist. Department chairs have not been given any guidance regarding the interpretation of evaluations of online classes or the means for assessing the adequacy and quality of online classes. In this sphere alone, numerous questions arise. For example: Do issues of academic freedom play out in the same way when the space of a classroom is entirely located in an online space? How should access to online classes be determined? When a department offers some online and some offline sections of the same class, how should they be compared? How will online teaching affect the evaluation of tenure track faculty? Although the questions regarding the use of online evaluations in classes that are not online are different from these questions, objections have previously been raised to moving in this direction, despite the belief that online evaluations might have the potential to increase the number of completed evaluations. Because online classes must be assessed by online evaluations, a committee should be addressing issues related to online assessment and previous reasons for not moving in this direction.
The issues are complex and varied, and their resolution requires input from people in assessment, people who are involved in online teaching, people who will be processing those evaluations, and people who will be planning additional online courses. As a result, there is no single proposal that can be made at this time that goes beyond recognizing the need to address these issues and to develop a policy that can be responded to and used to guide further development in the area of online teaching and assessment. The need for this policy is evident in the report of the Online Task Force which was formed and met during AY2012/13. Their inability to arrive at more than a delineation of the problems and considerations of the factors that would impact a policy attests to the need for a committee that is dedicated to addressing the myriad issues of online teaching and assessment across the university. The formation of this IG committee will be a step in the beginning of this process.