

December 21, 2015

Dear Colleagues,

I am writing to update you on the activities of the Educational Policy and Planning Committee (EPPC) of Arts and Sciences in the fall semester, and the plans for the spring semester. The purpose of the EPPC is to coordinate educational policy across the schools that make up Arts and Sciences. I am grateful for the support so many faculty members and administrators have provided in carrying out the work of the EPPC, and in offering their valuable time in service of our educational programs.

Most of the work of the EPPC is carried out in subcommittees that report back to the full EPPC for discussion of their findings, progress and recommendations. We regularly provide updates on the activities of the EPPC for wider discussion in faculty meetings, in meetings with department chairs, institute and center directors, and in meetings of the directors of undergraduate and graduate studies of each department. The updates of the current subcommittees are provided below.

**The Task Force on Global Education in Arts and Sciences** (chaired by Rosalind Morris) continued its work this fall. Over the summer and during the semester, the Task Force distributed four surveys to (1) departments, institutes and centers, (2) instructors who have taught abroad during the last three years, (3) PhD students, and, (4) students in stand-alone MA programs. In addition to these surveys, subcommittee members had extended discussions with the EVP of Arts and Sciences, the Deans of the College and General Studies, the Dean and Associate Dean of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, the divisional Deans, the leadership of the School of Professional Studies, and the Office of Global Programs (OGP). Throughout the fall, the Task Force continued to have conversations with faculty members and departmental representatives. The fruits of this intensive process are slowly beginning to emerge and the members feel confident that they are obtaining a detailed and textured picture of global pedagogical activities and student experiences.

The Task Force had originally intended to complete its work by the end of this semester, but the complexity of the data gathering necessitated an extension of the period of review. Rosalind Morris updated the faculty on the deliberations of the Task Force at an Arts & Sciences faculty meeting on Wednesday, December 9, 2015. The update was focused on formal teaching abroad, as reported in departmental surveys and face-to-face consultations with faculty. The Task Force is considering the impact of teaching abroad on the Morningside campus, considering rates of growth and distribution of both the burden and benefits of such activities across the Arts and Sciences faculty. Next spring, the Task Force will follow up with a broader discussion of these issues with special reference to pedagogy and the student experience, the institutional structures that support them and the data issues that have arisen in the context of this study. The discussions are organized through reference to three broad sets of issues, namely (1) information, communication and data, (2) logistics and organizational priorities, including possible contradictions between individual faculty interests, student desires, and institutional needs—particularly under circumstances of continued growth in teaching abroad, and (3) policy issues, including the need for more coherent and integrated planning and faculty oversight. Further updates on the activities of the Task Force will be provided in the spring.

**The Subcommittee on Innovative Practices in Teaching and Learning** (chaired by David Helfand) takes as its remit the critical examination of research in teaching and learning, a survey of current practices in light of the best research, and the formulation of recommendations and preparation of resources for Arts and Sciences faculty who wish to take advantage of them. The Committee is considering a number of critical issues, including grading policy and its effect on student learning, criteria for the appointment of instructors, and novel pedagogical approaches such as blended learning and student-centered, project-based methods that have been shown to stimulate deep and long-lasting learning. The subcommittee is examining evidence on teaching methods and will recommend a set of materials and practices for interested Columbia faculty within the Arts and Sciences; it will also consider how Arts and Sciences faculty and students can benefit from the new Center for Teaching and Learning. The subcommittee discussed its original name and

recognized well-justified objections to that name, in that "Best Practices" could be read to imply there is one set of practices that are best for everyone to use in their classrooms, a notion to which the members do not subscribe. The name has been changed to the *Subcommittee on Innovative Practices in Teaching and Learning*.

The subcommittee is reaching out across the Arts and Sciences (and beyond) to see what instructors are doing; if you are aware of any innovative practices in teaching, please send an email to [David Helfand](#) or [Brent Stockwell](#). The subcommittee noted several themes in the teaching practices collected to date, namely (1) most people do not know what their colleagues are doing, (2) the primary obstacles instructors face are space and time constraints, (3) the training of graduate students is a challenge in many departments, (4) some faculty members are unaware that there is an extensive research literature in pedagogy underpinning much of the current interest in rethinking the way instructors teach, and (5) a significant number of faculty members are interested in adapting their teaching approaches, but need support. These findings suggest a productive role for this subcommittee, in (a) playing a part in spreading the word about successful practices, (b) addressing the space problem and disseminating time-saving support materials, (c) working with the [Center for Teaching and Learning](#) to train graduate students in teaching, and (d) disseminating information on pedagogy research.

The subcommittee arrived at a useful classification of the types of pedagogical changes being considered; these involve (i) in-classroom innovation, which includes everything from entirely flipped classrooms to think-pair-share strategies, exit tickets, and mixed lecture/group-work approaches, all of which will look different in small, medium, and large classes, and may well look different in different departments and divisions, (ii) changing class composition, which involves experiments such as mixing computer science and history majors to use big data to examine historical issues or pairing classes from different fields, and (iii) getting out of the classroom, which connects students directly with the physical and social environments.

**The Subcommittee on Class Size and Education** (chaired by Greg Wawro) plans to consider the impact of class size on students' educational experiences, access to classes undergraduates need to complete their programs, assignments of teaching assistants and the impact on time to degree for graduate students, possible lower limits on class sizes, as well as best practices for size of language classes. The mission of the subcommittee is to examine evidence and practices regarding class size and recommend a set of guidelines for Columbia faculty within the Arts and Sciences.

The subcommittee has recruited its members and had its first meeting where members discussed plans for studying changes in enrollments. The committee represents a broad cross-section of Arts and Sciences with representatives from each division and from GSAS. The subcommittee discussed different experiences of committee members and their respective divisions to determine whether the questions and ideas for finding answers made sense. While causes and consequences of increasing enrollments are a primary focus, members of the subcommittee also emphasized the importance of studying decreasing enrollments for certain types of classes. For example, language departments have recently seen a decline in enrollments, possibly due to conflicts in times between language and other courses.

After the subcommittee on class size settled on a set of questions and a strategy for answering them, the chair explored data availability. The chair met with representatives of the EVP's office to discuss the data the subcommittee sought for its analysis. We learned that the infrastructure required to collect most of the data that the committee was interested in was already in place due to previous research conducted by the EVP's office. But given the massive amount of data in question, it was understood that it would take some time to create and process the data for use in this specific analysis. That process has essentially been completed. The one issue that remains to be resolved before we can delve fully into the data is establishing (1) guidelines for ensuring secure maintenance and analysis of the data with safeguards for confidentiality and (2) scope parameters that take into consideration the sensitive nature of the data. The subcommittee is working to resolve this issue so that analysis may begin in earnest shortly.

**The Working Group on the HHMI Initiative to Improve Science Education for Undergraduate Students** (co-chaired by Stuart Firestein and Kathy Takayama) submitted a pre-application to the Howard Hughes Medical Institute in response to their [request for applications](#) to increase inclusive teaching in the sciences. The application explored the General Studies (GS) cohorts as one of the core elements of engaging nontraditional students in STEM, collaborating with the administration of GS. The group also focused on the difficulty some students experience in introductory level science courses, particularly in biology and chemistry. The proposal therefore concentrated on potential solutions to this problem, such as special sections for non-traditional students, preparatory coursework and changes to curricula and syllabi. GS students share courses with other Columbia undergraduates, but the percentage that graduate as science majors is half that of traditional students. The proposal aims to provide all GS students with the skills and confidence required to complete training in the sciences. Approaches to be used include intelligent-tutor and blended-learning strategies in preparatory courses, the first year Frontiers of Science course and introductory major courses that develop fundamental mathematical and scientific reasoning skills. Recent findings on affirmation interventions will be used to increase confidence in student success. The proposal also notes that there will be greater use of the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL). The Working Group expects to hear whether Columbia will be invited to submit a full proposal by March; if invited to submit a full proposal, it will be due in July.

**The Working Group on Implementation of the Course Evaluation Guidelines** (chaired by Dan Rabinowitz) is charged with implementing the EPPC Course Evaluation Guidelines, which were accepted in a straw vote by an overwhelming majority of faculty at the May 2015 faculty meeting. The guidelines include a revised set of evaluation questions and also identify the questions for which students will be able to view responses. As the work progresses, there needs to be consideration of how to best examine bias, as well as to explore various strategies to increase response rates. The original proposal can be found [here](#).

Despite some initial challenges, CUIT made progress in improving the student interface to the revised evaluation questions. It seems likely that with continued interactions with CUIT, and continued support from Arts and Sciences, that the remaining tasks for optimizing the student interface will be completed by the next evaluation cycle. The task is made difficult by the limited resources available to the CUIT team, and the lack of flexibility in the current Courseworks tool, which are issues to be addressed in the future. Nonetheless, everything is on track to have evaluations completed by students this semester reported at the beginning of next semester. Implementation is somewhat constrained by limited resources. For example, there is not currently a mechanism for monitoring comments, beyond the option that faculty members review comments in their courses and report to Arts and Sciences if there is anything they view as unacceptable.

To deal with potentially objectionable or biased student evaluations, EPPC has established *The Subcommittee on Course Evaluation Standards*, which will provide oversight of course evaluations as the Working Group winds down its implementation activities. The new subcommittee is charged with the following mission:

*The Subcommittee on Course Evaluation Standards will propose policies regarding evaluation redactions that will be discussed and approved by EPPC for final discussion and approval by the Executive Committee (EC) and the Faculty of Arts and Sciences. The subcommittee will have authority to decide about specific redactions without bringing them to EPPC, assuming these are consistent with a policy that had already been established and approved by EPPC, the EC and the faculty of Arts and Sciences. This subcommittee will be governed by these guidelines:*

1. Decisions on requests to block the posting of results will be made by this subcommittee of EPPC, with at least three faculty members, with at least one member from each of the three divisions. The subcommittee will establish a standardized protocol for responding to such requests.
2. Subcommittee membership is for no more than three years, with staggered replacements.
3. All requests for review should be made through this subcommittee.
4. When a faculty member or instructor asks for a student comment to be reviewed, all of the student's responses for that course are blocked from viewing until a final decision is made.

5. The subcommittee is empowered to request information from the faculty member and department concerned.
6. A majority of the faculty members on the subcommittee constitutes a quorum.
7. All decisions are by majority vote, if consensus cannot be achieved (although consensus should be the goal).
8. The subcommittee will maintain records of all requests, whether or not any post was blocked, the language that was blocked, and the rationale for the decision. These records will be maintained over time by EPPC.
9. The subcommittee will report each semester to the EPPC on the rationales for the decisions, and the EPPC will ratify, or not, the policies for future decisions.
10. The subcommittee will be charged with determining what the policy is on redactions, in terms of removing an entire response, or only parts of responses, and how to address the issue of bias in evaluations. This policy will be reported to the EPPC and to the faculty of Arts and Sciences for discussion and approval.

**The Working Group on Implementation of the Course Number Guidelines** (co-chaired by Rose Razaghian and Barry Kane). Work on this initiative is moving forward with the projected implementation date and cut-over this summer still being a realistic target. As is the case with most initiatives that involve both functional and technical coordination and integration of multiple systems involving many offices and departments, there are unanticipated issues along the way that require resolution. The good news is that the working group has received excellent cooperation from the various academic departments, and there has also been very positive collaboration among all relevant teams, including CUIT, CCIT, the Registrar's Office, and those responsible for the flow of course data from SIS to the online Bulletin. Currently, work has focused more on the renumbering of courses and some of the unexpected problems arising out of the complete resequencing of numbers that at least some departments have completed. The subcommittee is strategizing how best to accommodate the new numbers that the departments feel will make the most sense internally while still conforming to the overall renumbering protocol.

An information and training session was recently conducted with all Directors of Academic Administration and Finance (DAAF) within the various Arts and Sciences departments covering not only a thorough update of the new course prefix/renumbering initiative, but also instruction regarding how the new course designations will be integrated into the upcoming Curricular Planning Statement (CPS) process for the 2016-2017 academic year. Specific attention was drawn to critical dates and deadlines and how the DAAFs can best coordinate and collaborate with the Registrar's Office to ensure a successful course planning experience and the deployment of an accurate and on-time Directory of Classes. Emphasis was also given to the advent of Vergil and how this state-of-the-art course planning tool facilitates the earlier release of course data to advisers and students to ensure better advising and more informed course selection.

Overall, the renumbering project is moving forward as planned, and the working group expects a successful deployment this summer.

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