March 1, 2021

To: Shane White, Chair
Academic Senate

From: Jessica Collett, Chair
Committee on Teaching

Re: Valuing Faculty Service to Academic Senate Committees Proposal 2021

Dear Professor White and Members of the Executive Board,

On February 16, 2021, the current Committee on Teaching met alongside two former chairs of the committee to discuss the “proposal” of sunsetting the Committee on Teaching (COT). The “Valuing Faculty Service to Academic Senate Committees” proposal was shared with all attendees ahead of time.

The attendees were Jessica Collett (chair), Beth Lazazzera, David MacFayden, Anastatios Papathanasopoulos, Angelina Quint, Casey Reas, Roger Savage, Stephanie White, as well as James Bisley, Daniel Kamei, and the COT’s analyst, Renee Rouzan-Kay. This document was circulated to all committee members—including those absent from the meeting—to approve before forwarding them on.

The current committee chair, Prof. Jessica Collett, began the meeting by briefly sharing information from the meeting she had with Shane White and April de Stefano in early February. Highlights include that UCLA has more committees than any other UC senate and that the workload of these committees may be too much to sustain given the decrease in administrative staff (the senate is currently down four analysts, with no plans to hire), increasing difficulties getting additional faculty to fill positions across the span of committees (thus recycling members and placing the service burden on the same people), and the disproportionate demands on members of under-represented groups to serve. Believing that teaching excellence could be sustained by a sub-committee of the Undergraduate and Graduate Councils and that an ad-hoc committee populated by Senate administrators could be delegated for teaching awards, the proposal is to eliminate the COT.

The current and former committee members understand and appreciate the challenges above, particularly the ballooning workload of analysts and the disproportionate demands on underrepresented groups and faculty who already take on a lot of service. However, there were concerns about procedure and strategy, including the decision not to hire more analysts and others in critical positions, resulting in a robust discussion.

Here is a summary of the points brought up in the meeting that we are forwarding to Chair Shane White and the Executive Board:

In addition to the specific concerns articulated below, it is important to note that the sudden springing of what appears much more as an unavoidable plan rather than a proposal on “sunsetting”
committees appears inconsistent with the UC’s commitment to shared faculty governance. There was no discussion of potential responses to this proposal in the document itself.

CONCERN #1: The lack of transparency in the “Valuing Faculty Service” proposal. The proposal says nothing about decreased funding and staff vacancies as a potential driver of this initiative. Furthermore, it overstates any potential decrease in workload for both staff and faculty.
  a. The management of additional sub-committees and creation of ad-hoc award committees will still take up analysts’ time, suggesting this is a shift in workload rather than a reduction in it. Thus, the current under-staffing will continue to be a problem and analysts will still be overworked if there is no additional hiring done on the administrative side.
  b. Similarly, the sunsetting of this committee and others will result in additional service demands for the already busy council members who are tapped to serve on sub-committees like the proposed one focused on teaching excellence.
  c. Ad-hoc award committees will potentially take up more faculty and analysts’ time with the on boarding of ad-hoc reviewers who do not serve on the award committees for a number of years before cycling off.

CONCERN #2: It is ironic that a proposal entitled “Valuing Faculty Service” belittled the COT’s importance and work of the committee members. COT has made huge and true contributions to teaching at UCLA beyond selecting teaching award recipients.
  a. Teaching is a major part of the university’s mission. What does it say when it is delegated to a subcommittee?
  b. The COT’s focus on teaching is distinct from the UgC and GCs’ current focus on curriculum. The proposed standing subcommittee must have teaching experts.
  c. Reviewing the nomination packets for teaching awards is an enormous amount of service over three straight months.
  d. The COT has also been asked to weigh in on many important teaching issues. In addition, the COT is a non-political committee that may have differed from the Undergraduate and Graduate Councils on perspectives and recommendations in the past.
    i. The diversity and apolitical nature of the committee comes from a shared commitment to teaching and the ability of the committee to attract members from across campus who may not be those who would be interested in serving on more diffuse councils like UgC and GC.
    ii. Making a subcommittee from within UgC and GC for teaching-related issues will decrease the participation and inclusion of faculty who would have important opinions on teaching but would not commit to the service load of UgC and GC.
    iii. The COT is also an Academic Senate committee that is relatively easy to staff.

CONCERN #3: It is unclear how the replacement committees will be selected and staffed.
  a. Award Committee:
    1. The continuity of the current system, with a mixture of people with both committee and institutional knowledge and newcomers, is an important and valuable component of the current system and must be retained in some way. The work for COT is a huge learning curve and niche work.
    2. Members of the COT are selected to serve because they are passionate about teaching and committed to excellence. This must continue to be the case.
3. With service on a committee that considers teaching excellence throughout the year, COT members are also informed about the pedagogical practices that are more important on campus and well suited to evaluate nomination packets.

b. UGC & GC Subcommittee

1. This committee should have at least two designated members from outside of the councils who is committed to teaching to ensure that the sub-committee’s members are well informed on pedagogy and best practices as well as a realist point of view. The current COT suggests two DTA winners for two-year commitments on off years.

2. The current committee is very diverse—bringing different talents, expertise, and experience to the committee—and this should not be lost.

3. The COT should have input on this sub-committee’s bylaws, which should be extended to include the COT’s current charge as related to teaching excellence.

4. With the movement of workload from eliminated committees, there should be a consideration of increasing the size of both the UgC and GC.

I look forward to discussing this further at our meeting on March 3 and I am happy to answer any questions about this response or moving forward. Thank you for your consideration.

Best,

Jessica L. Collett, Chair
Committee on Teaching

Cc: Shane White, Chair, Academic Senate
Jody Kreiman, Vice Chair/Chair-Elect, Academic Senate
Michael Meranze, Immediate Past Chair, Academic Senate
April de Stefano, Executive Director, Academic Senate
Renee Rouzan-Kay, Senior Policy Analyst, Committee on Teaching
Members of the Committee on Teaching