

2019-2020 Year-End Committee Report

Committee:	Educational Affairs
Charge:	
Chair:	Claudia Swan
# of Meetings:	4

Completed Business and/or Accomplishments

In 2019-2020 the committee devoted substantial time and effort to discussing and researching opportunities and obstacles to co-teaching at Northwestern. In 2018-2019, the committee had discussed ways in which we could address, if not mitigate student stress. One particular framework we discussed was reformulating “AND is in our DNA” so that, rather than implying a genetic predisposition to being able to do anything (and everything) it could capture and inspire interdisciplinarity among instructors, researchers, and students alike. We settled on the matter of opportunities for and obstacles to co- and team-teaching: pathways to interdisciplinarity. In November, in a Summit Meeting, Morty mentioned potential donor interest, so we set to researching the matter in order to compose a report. We were, however, thrown off track in the winter due to COVID-19.

Unfinished/Continuing Business

The research we agreed to conduct on co- and team-teaching (through interviews and surveys we distributed and collected) is 75% complete. I have a list of further faculty members it was recommended I speak with, and still need to write up some of the interviews I conducted.

This was a peculiar year for the committee as regards our other ongoing concern, over the past several years: CTECs. In 2019, the Provost’s Office established a Committee to Reimagine CTECs (CRC) on which I and Candy Lee, member of the Educational Affairs committee, serve. This winter, in light of the American Sociological Association’s statement, co-signed by many other institutions of higher learning, to recommend that SETs not be used in high-stakes personnel decisions, the committee discussed bringing a resolution before the Senate urging Northwestern to adopt the same practice. That resolution was intended to give some backbone to the efforts of the CRC. However, we were ultimately discouraged from formulating a resolution as the matter of how CTECs would or would not

be used down the line was under discussion in the Provost's Office (This is my understanding.). In addition, the Educational Affairs Committee tried in the spring to get ahead of the matter of assessment of remote instruction by encouraging faculty to add questions—but were informed that the Provost's Office had instituted a university-wide policy of adding a question, so we let it go. I must say I am concerned about who is driving the CTEC-train, insofar as they continue to be used in high-stakes personnel decisions, but have gone unchanged now over the longish period during which the CRC has been active. Now the matter of how representative they are is compounded by how they do or don't capture the better and worse features of remote instruction.

New Business for Next Year

In my view, co- and team- teaching and remote instruction could be a combined concern. I have wondered whether the university couldn't provide more of the team-taught courses so popular among students (and that many faculty are interested in teaching) virtually. Could this be an opportunity in the form of a crisis?

I hope in the fall to be able to address through this committee various concerns about teaching remotely. In the spring, I had enlightening experiences working with experts on campus to use and introduce students to digital resources; this summer, my experience with the training provided--the Practicum on Online Teaching—has been disappointing. Not because the experts who are leading it are not inspiring; they are. But because it's a one-size fits all practicum that leaves so much up to instructors navigating this new landscape, and I believe Northwestern could do more, more effectively, to ensure that we are providing excellent remote instruction.