



Northeastern

TO: Senate Agenda Committee
FROM: Faculty Development Committee
DATE: March 13, 2023
SUBJECT: Final report for 2022–23

The Faculty Development Committee (FDC) had 8 meetings during the academic year. The Committee carried out the specific charges assigned by SAC. The charges were addressed as follows with recommendations:

Charge 1: To support the increasing number of students with combined majors and aid the University in achieving the outcomes of the new academic plan, this committee will:

- Survey faculty on any training they believe is necessary to support students with combined majors from a programmatic perspective
- Identify faculty development opportunities and/or training based on survey responses

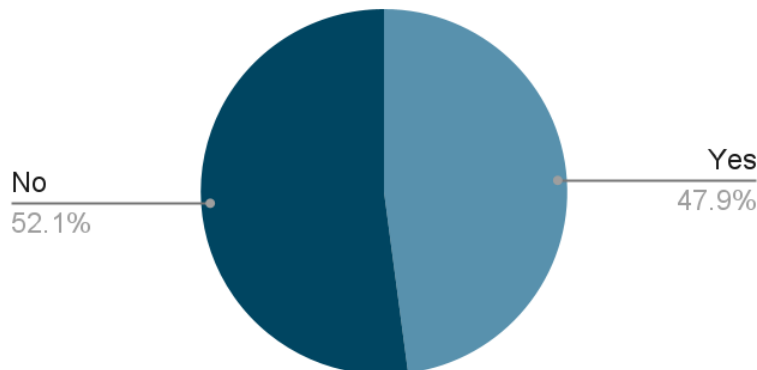
Process: To address **Charge 1**, the FDC prepared 6 questions that were included in the Fall 2022 faculty survey, 3 quantitative and 3 qualitative. Our analyses of the quantitative questions follow, with recommendations.

Question #1: Are you aware of how to learn if students in combined majors are enrolled in your courses?

This question received 359 responses with the following results:

- Yes: 47.9%
- No: 52.09%

Response



Analysis: The results are almost even. This is not optimal. Faculty should have an easier time finding out whether there are combined majors enrolled in their courses. This information appears in Banner under the “Summary Class List” link, and is also available on Canvas under the “FACT Reporting and Photo Roster” link. Faculty may benefit from additional messaging at the beginning of each semester reminding them of this functionality in Banner and Canvas.

Recommendation: Remind faculty how to access this information more regularly.

Question #2: What resources have you used to support your students and/or develop your own pedagogy in the last five years?

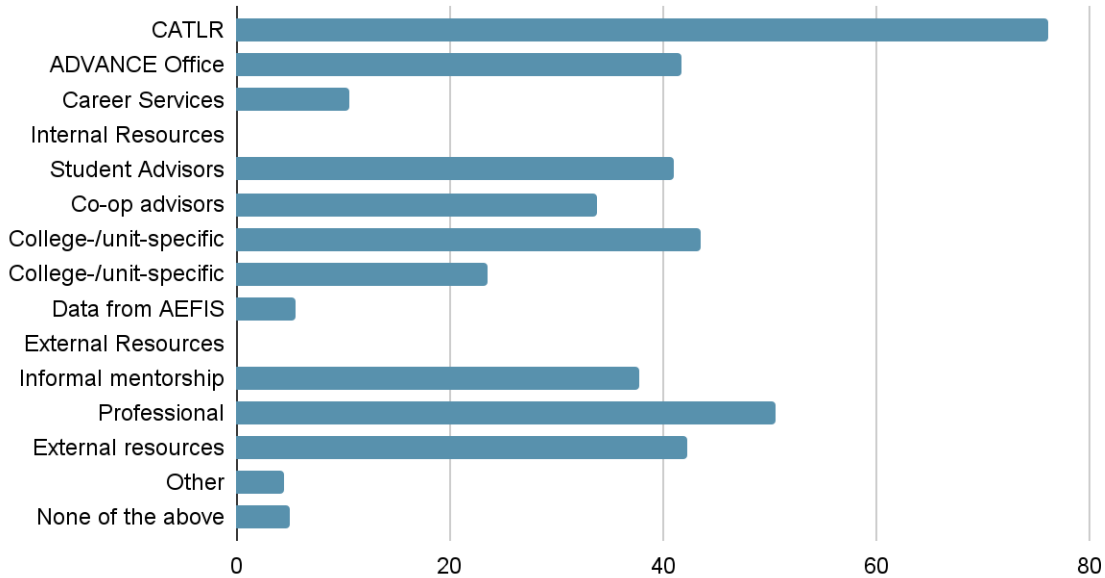
Faculty were asked to identify the resources they most frequently access when seeking to support students and grow their pedagogy; faculty could select multiple resources. This question received 360 responses. An overwhelming amount, 76.11%, noted CATLR as their primary support. Additionally, the ADVANCE office was a popular choice for student support and pedagogical resources with 41.67% of faculty reporting interaction with ADVANCE. Faculty reported seeking out student advisor support 41.11% for student and pedagogical issues.

Beyond the scope of Northeastern University, 50.56% of faculty opt to seek outside support from professional networks, as well as 42.22% from external (unnamed) resources.

The percentages shown below were calculated with respect to the number of respondents to this particular question. Respondents could choose multiple options.

- University-wide resources
 - CATLR: 76.11%
 - ADVANCE Office: 41.67%
 - Career Services Office: 10.56%
- College-level resources
 - Student advisors: 41.11%
 - Co-op advisors: 33.89%
 - College-/unit-specific workshops: 43.61%
 - College-/unit-specific funds to support professional development: 23.61%
 - Data from AEFIS: 5.56%
- External resources
 - Informal mentorship networks: 37.78%
 - Professional networks: 50.56%
 - External resources: 42.22%
 - Other: 4.44%
- None of the above: 5.00%

Frequency of Response



Analysis: CATLR is the most popular resource/source of support for faculty, and professional networks come in as the second most popular resource/source of support. When considering where faculty seek out assistance, the answers can be categorized by University centers/resources, Internal College Resources and External Resources. CATLR is clearly the most used resource. The ADVANCE Office might also be well suited to assist faculty in this area. One untapped internal resource for mentoring may be the M2AP Grants (Mutual Mentoring Advancement Program Grants). This is a resource available to all full-time faculty and can be useful in building relationships between faculty, peers, and senior colleagues at Northeastern and beyond and was not specifically asked about in the survey.

Recommendation: As the go-to internal resource for pedagogical training and development, CATLR should offer workshops on supporting combined major students. The workshops may be conducted either as live synchronous events or as self-paced modules, depending on what CATLR deems more appropriate. Remind faculty about the resources available through the ADVANCE Office, including the M2AP Grants program.

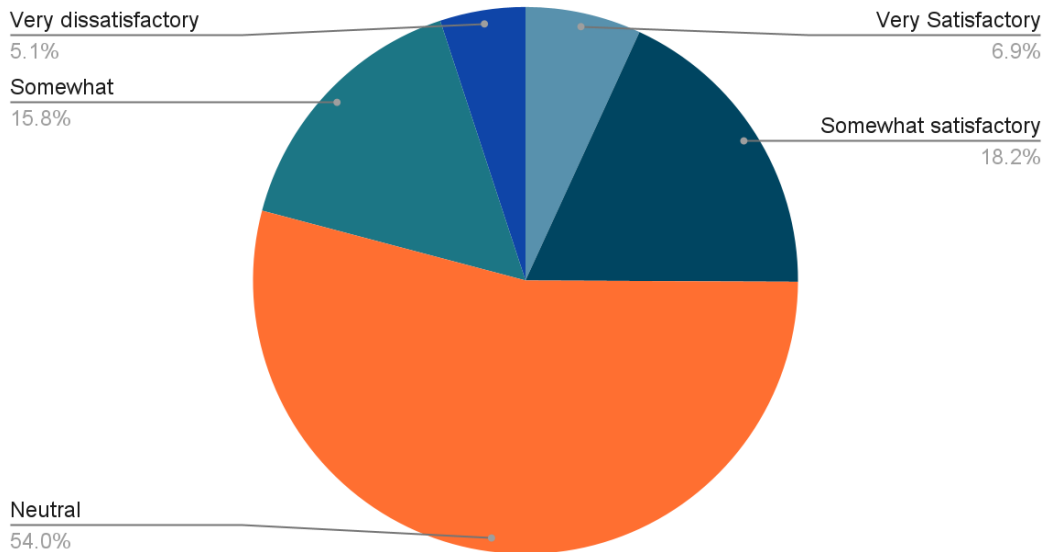
Question #3: How would you describe the level of support available for faculty to support students with combined majors?

Faculty were asked to evaluate their perception of the level of support available to faculty teaching combined majors, using a Likert-type scale with five levels. This question received 335 responses. Results shown below calculated with respect to the number of respondents to this question.

- Very Satisfactory 6.87%

- Somewhat satisfactory 18.21%
- Neutral 54.03%
- Somewhat dissatisfactory 15.82%
- Very dissatisfactory 5.07%

Frequency of Response in Percent



Analysis: Most respondents chose “neutral”; there is not a general consensus that the University provides deficient support for faculty regarding combined majors. However, only a minority (about 25%) believes the faculty support is satisfactory at some level. This shows an unsatisfactory response from the University to the affected faculty.

Recommendation: Assign more resources at the University, College, and unit levels to support faculty involved with students with combined majors. This is in line with some of the conclusions to questions 4 and 6 below, where specific recommendations about faculty support are detailed.

Combined, the FDC’s 3 qualitative questions on the Fall 2022 faculty survey received responses from 93 total faculty.

- **Question #4:** What topics and/or training would help you better support combined majors in your courses?
- **Question #5:** Do you know of other institutions that provide strong support and/or training for faculty teaching combined majors? If so, please describe them here.
- **Question #6:** What is one barrier that could be eliminated to ensure the success of students with combined majors?

Significantly, Question #5 garnered no meaningful cases for other institutions that train faculty for combined majors. This lack of responses suggests that Northeastern is poised to act as a

leader in higher education for training and supporting faculty who teach, mentor, and otherwise work with students in combined major programs.

Common themes emerged among the responses to Questions #4 and #6. Instead of analyzing those questions individually, below we combine our analysis under 5 themes. Our combined recommendations follow the analyses.

Theme 1: Collaboration between academic units

Analysis: Participants expressed a need for increased collaboration across academic units, especially pertaining to the great variation in degree offerings between Colleges. Notes range from a need for basic logistical supports such as a “centralized list of combined majors” to potential for “co-teaching” across disciplines. Student success was described in the feedback about collaboration, as one stated, “I think often students with combined majors fall through the cracks because both departments assume the other department is offering support.” Faculty success was also present. One shared, “more information about what makes a combined major, how these students and their study programs are different from others, and what resources are available on campus.” Some comments about communication included “transparency & information sharing,” and a “lack of communication between the college academic advisors and faculty advisors” exists. As one participant summarized, “knowledge is power folks. I should have more information about who is in my classroom and why they are there. I should know their academic background so I know what to expect from them in terms of prior learning.”

Theme 2: Student support

Analysis: Participants were concerned that students were not provided with enough information about how combined majors work, “how these students and their study programs are different from others, and what resources are available on campus.” Other respondents mentioned that students should be able to easily access information about required courses within the combined major, the availability of electives, opportunities for co-ops, and how the completion of a combined major could lead to employment opportunities. One stated, “Students in combined majors often are not meeting the appropriate pre-req requirements in order to fulfill upper-level courses in a timely manner to graduate. Better care should be taken to ensure that they are planning appropriately for their degree path.” Further, it was suggested that instead of having students with combined majors rely on their home departments, the University could “create a cross university ‘home college’ and resource center, similar to the co-op support infrastructure, for combined students of all combination degrees.” This “new interdisciplinary college for all combined majors” could specialize in supporting this growing community of students as they navigate “combined or interdisciplinary thinking.”

Theme 3: Advising / co-op support

Analysis: Faculty responded with some suggestions in a number of areas. Information sharing and enhanced communication was core to many of the faculty comments. Understanding and having resources of the structure of combined majors for advisors and co-op advisors was recommended as well. Developing a best practices module/training was mentioned. Working to identify the advantages of a combined major in the workforce and establishing combined major

focused coops to enhance the purpose of the combined major. Advisors and co-op support that specifically understand the needs of combined majors.

Theme 4: Effectiveness and assessment of combined majors' value

Analysis: Many respondents questioned the overall value of combined majors to disciplinary and interdisciplinary learning objectives. Some suggest that students are poorly served by combined majors because they do not have the opportunity to develop deep skills and experiences within a single program, as in a traditional major: designing a combined major curriculum “involves a deletion of some of the most important upper-level courses in each major” or a “dilution of two fields to the point [that] neither becomes useful,” putting students at a disadvantage because of how learning is scaffolded: “Students can’t simply start at the most advanced levels without a strong grasp of foundational principles and approaches.” Relatedly, others point out that the partner units involved in combined majors often don’t work together to ensure cohesion, which might appear to be “just a collection of courses from disparate departments,” leaving the work of integrating the two fields to students: “the farther apart the majors, the less combined majors work.” This perceived lack of depth and cohesion may disadvantage these students on the job market, in comparison to students who complete traditional majors: “I have yet to see any data that they [combined major programs] give students any advantage on the job market over a major/minor combination”; “the #1 challenge is creating employment situations that view less skilled but broader-based students as highly valuable.” Still others argue that Northeastern’s incentives for offering combined majors are driven not by pedagogical concerns but rather by factors related to enrollment management; that is, they argue, the value proposition of combined majors to the University is primarily an economic one (an “effective marketing tool,” suggests one respondent) and not necessarily related to academic excellence: “How will they [combined major students] become deep experts on any subject matter?”

Theme 5: Faculty Support

Analysis: Several participants requested special support for faculty teaching combined major's courses. Some faculty manifested little knowledge about combined major issues, so they considered any basic training as useful (“Any training at all”, “I do not know much about this topic, any training would be helpful”). Others requested more specific support including funding for professional development and technology, adequate resources, and support for curriculum development of co-taught courses (“Create dedicated time and space for training and development outside the regular semester schedule and provide payment for those who are not full time, compensation for attending training or networking activity”, “funding and curriculum development for integrated co-taught courses”). Many faculty showed concern about not fully comprehending the distinct needs of students in combined majors. They also expressed the need for communication and collaboration between the different units affected by the major (“faculty conversations first of all with our biggest collaborating units”). Finally, it is worth mentioning that some faculty expressed no need for special training to instruct students in combined majors (“I don't know what I should be doing differently for combined majors than I would do for any other students”, “understand why students in combined major would need a different kind of support of students with one major”).

Recommendations:

- The Provost’s Office, in conjunction with the Colleges, will facilitate effective collaboration and communication across Colleges and units pertaining to combined majors.
 - Provide clear information to faculty and advisors about combined major programs’ curricula and learning outcomes.
 - Promote conversations between the units involved in combined majors, to understand the needs and interests of the students.
 - Incentivize co-taught and/or cross-listed courses offered as components of combined majors to facilitate and enrich collaboration and the integrative component.
- Regularly evaluate/assess individual combined majors in terms of impact and effectiveness. These data can be used to assess/promote the effectiveness, viability, and ROI of combined majors, both internally and externally (e.g., with prospective students, co-op employers, etc.). This might include:
 - Quantitative and qualitative input from current combined major students.
 - Feedback from co-op employers and alumni on combined majors’ preparedness and competitiveness for the job market.
 - Revise combined major curricula as needed to reflect these assessments.
- Strengthen the advising available to combined majors:
 - Standardize access to advisors in both units of combined majors across the University.
 - Student Advisors and Co-op Advisors should receive additional professional development to support combined major students better, including advising them on co-op and post-graduation employment trajectories.
- Develop and promote resources for faculty teaching combined majors.
 - Develop programs for faculty on best practices for supporting combined major students (possibly by CATLR).
 - Provide professional development funding for faculty seeking external resources and support for teaching combined majors.

Charge 2: The Faculty Senate continues to hear significant concerns from faculty related to perceived inadequate communication (i.e. timeliness and transparency) from multiple levels of NU administration. Faculty have relayed that this perceived communication inadequacy results in faculty disenfranchisement, challenges in morale and faculty value, and concerns related to faculty governance erosion related to suboptimal faculty input into the operations of the University. In collaboration with the Provost’s office, the Inclusion and Development Committee and the Faculty Handbook Revision Committee, the FDC shall identify communication strategy best practices (i.e. methods, technology platforms, frequency etc.) to create a more inclusive, engaged, and informed University community.

Process: In our internal conversations about **Charge 2**, the FDC came to understand that we need much data to understand the scope and scale of the problem from several perspectives. For 2022–23, the FDC chose to document the scope of the perceived communication inadequacy described in **Charge 2**. Many such communications occur at the College level and lower (i.e., within individual academic units), including opportunities to provide meaningful input into the

operations of the University (e.g., through a College’s representative[s] on a University-wide committee) and opportunities for professional advancement and development. We emailed the Dean’s Offices of all Boston-based Colleges and requested information pertaining to the methods, timeliness, and frequency of communication related to faculty advancement and assessment, curricular initiatives, professional development opportunities, shared governance participation, and strategic planning. We also asked about any mechanisms for faculty to provide feedback to their Dean’s Offices. Our goal was to identify commonalities and differences in communication strategies across and within Colleges; these data could then inform future recommendations for communication strategy best practices. Simultaneously, we met with the Inclusion and Development Committee and the Faculty Handbook Revision Committee to learn about their activities this year and their recommendations to create a more inclusive, engaged, and informed university community. 7 Colleges responded to our request for information: Bouve, CAMD, CoS, CPS, CSSH, DMSB, and Law. 2 Colleges were unable to accommodate our request: CoE and Khoury.

Analysis: Our findings are broken down into outbound and inbound communications.

The FDC was pleased to learn that outbound communications originating from the various Dean’s Offices appear to be very well structured overall. Most Colleges have a robust set of communications strategies utilizing a variety of different methods, facilitated by several Dean’s Office representatives, unit heads, and College-wide committees. Communications methods include town hall meetings, intranet/Teams groups, regular newsletters or memos, communications timed and targeted to specific constituencies (e.g., faculty eligible for promotion), and ad hoc communications to address more timely matters (including events). The robustness of the communications vary depending on each College’s specific context, including variables such as the size of the faculty and the degree of hierarchical complexity. For example, Colleges with a larger number of faculty tend to have larger Dean’s Offices that can accommodate a more formal, structured set of communications; Colleges with a flatter hierarchical structure rely less on top-down communications and more on peer engagement through shared governance. Some Colleges schedule regular communications: one or two town hall meetings per semester, for example, or weekly or monthly email memos sent from the Dean’s Office to all faculty highlighting opportunities and deadlines for faculty development (among other topics).

Inbound communications that enable faculty to provide meaningful feedback to their Dean’s Office are better formalized at some Colleges than others. Effective methods include town hall meetings, scheduled group and individual meetings with the Dean’s Office (including open office hours), anonymous online feedback forms, and other communications further down the hierarchy such as via reporting chains (i.e., unit heads), College-wide committees that solicit feedback, and College Senators, among others. Again, as with outbound communications, the robustness of the inbound communications methods vary based on College’s size and hierarchical complexity. Several Colleges have no such formal methods of inbound communications at all, relying on the normal business of shared governance and an “open door” policy in the Dean’s Office for such matters instead of specifically soliciting feedback from faculty, whether in general or on specific topics. The FDC recognizes that there are a variety of reasons for which the lack of formal feedback mechanisms, including anonymized inbound

communications, may inhibit some faculty from voicing their concerns and ideas to the Dean's Office.

Recommendations:

- All Colleges should schedule regular outbound communications on topics related to faculty development and shared governance.
- All Colleges should establish formal methods of inbound communications, including anonymized methods, to solicit feedback, concerns, and ideas from the faculty. Regularly remind faculty of these methods and the resources available via the Ombuds Office.
- Given the scope of this charge, we recommend that the FDC continue working on this charge in 2023–24 informed by these data collected in 2022–23, attending specifically to surveying faculty about their perception of the effectiveness of communications and opportunities for feedback within their College and the University at large.
- We further recommend that the FDC collaborate with the Ombuds Office in 2023–24 to survey the extent to which the lack of effective communications might contribute to faculty disenfranchisement.

Other activities: In our conversations about both of these charges, members of the FDC discussed the extent to which each reflected faculty disenfranchisement. **Charge 2** states explicitly that faculty disenfranchisement is partly a result of the University's internal communication strategies. And as we noted in our analysis of **Charge 1**, many faculty question the value of combined majors as an enrollment strategy instead of a pedagogical strategy, a perspective which may also reflect and (re)produce faculty disenfranchisement.

During these conversations, we considered other possible contributors to faculty disenfranchisement. One such contribution is the disparity in working conditions experienced by non-tenure-track faculty in contrast to their tenure-line colleagues, despite the University's "One Faculty" ideal, including unequal office spaces, professional development resources, service loads (above any contracted administrative assignments), and compensation, among others. Anecdotal evidence suggests that these disparities are present even during recruitment, when Colleges routinely host tenure-line candidates for in-person on-campus interviews but provide little-to-no budget to host non-tenure-track candidates. The message received is that the institution simply values non-tenure-track faculty less than their tenure-line colleagues. Faculty who feel marginalized, disempowered, and materially undervalued are less likely to invest in the University community. We suggest documenting these disparities, perhaps in collaboration with the Full-time Non-tenure-track Faculty Committee.

We also suggest that it would be worthwhile to document the extent to which cross-appointed tenure-line faculty contribute effectively to shared governance (instead of, e.g., their effectiveness being diluted as a function of their cross appointment), given the University's strategy of focusing on cross-appointment tenure-line hires in 2022–23 and 2023–24 (necessitating that disciplinary-specific hires take place within the non-tenure-track ranks).

Finally, we suggest clarifying the extent to which faculty on Northeastern’s various global campuses participate in shared governance, including via Faculty Senate representation.

To these ends, our final recommendations suggest possible charges for the FDC to pursue in 2023–24. These data might be used to make recommendations to achieve a more equitable, inclusive, engaged, and informed One Faculty.

Recommendations:

- Collaborate with the Full-time Non-tenure-track Faculty Committee to substantiate and document the disparity in the recruitment of and working conditions experienced by non-tenure-track faculty (in contrast to tenure-line faculty).
- Document the degree to which cross-appointed tenure-line faculty contribute effectively to shared governance.
- Regarding faculty on Northeastern’s global campuses, clarify:
 - How they are represented in the Faculty Senate.
 - What opportunities they have to participate in shared governance.
 - What opportunities they have to provide meaningful feedback to the institution.

Respectfully submitted,
Andrew Mall, co-chair (CAMD)
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