

Academic Policy Committee (APC) 2020 – 2021 Annual Report

Members

Deb Franko, Ex officio

Enrique Moreno, Co-Chair - COS - Physics

Steven Vollmer, Co-Chair - COS - Marine and Environmental Sciences

Kellianne Murphy, Roux Institute - Experiential Learning

Harvey Shapiro, CPS - Graduate Programs

Ke Zhang, COS- Chemistry and Chemical Biology

2020 – 2021 Committee Charges

1. The committee shall conduct a full-time faculty survey on faculty satisfaction with the workload policy implementation in their unit and report on findings and recommendations.
2. The committee shall take the lead and work with student/faculty groups, Registrar's Office, CATLR, Director of Institutional Assessment, Associate Deans, and Provost's office to develop and implement customized TRACE or other Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) instruments for common categories of classes, including lecture, online, hybrid/remote, labs, pop-ups, and DOCs (Senate resolution #19, 3/18/20). Include the inclusivity of learning environment recommendations from SGA (Senate resolution #13, 3/18/20).
3. The committee shall develop policy/guidelines for inclusion of a formative midcourse SET.
4. The committee shall follow up on implementation of the new merit/compensation process in the Faculty Handbook (Senate resolution #1 10/02/19).
5. Other charges may be determined by the Senate Agenda Committee as new priorities arise.

Charge 1 – Full-time Faculty Workload Policy Implementation Satisfaction Survey

The Academic Policy Committee was given the charge to “conduct a full-time faculty survey on faculty satisfaction with the workload policy implementation in their unit and report on findings and recommendations.” The committee conducted this survey in December 2020. The survey consisted of six questions polling faculty satisfaction with: their unit's workload policy, its implementation, and whether their workload distribution accurately reflected their actual teaching, research and service responsibilities. The survey evaluated satisfaction on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (“Not at all satisfied”) to 5 (“Extremely satisfied”).

A full analysis of the report is included in the appendix. A summary of the analysis follows:

In all, 254 full-time faculty responded the survey, which is a 17.5% response rate.

Faculty satisfaction with each unit's workload policy and its implementation was high across all survey questions. Median scores were 4 or greater.

Median satisfaction for each unit's workload policy was 4, with 27.8% of faculty choosing 5 and 33.5% selected 4. This contrasts with the percentage of faculty that indicated dissatisfaction: 7.7% for 1 and 9.7% for 2.

Median satisfaction with the implementation of the new workload policies was 4; 26.9% of faculty chose 5 and 31.0% chose 4. The numbers associated with dissatisfaction were 11.8% (choice 1) and 9.8% (choice 2).

Median satisfaction with each faculty's workload distribution was 4; 29.1% of faculty chose 5 and 27.9% chose 4. Similarly, the numbers associated with dissatisfaction were low, with 8.5% selecting 1 and 13.8% selecting 2.

For survey questions of whether faculty workload matched their responsibilities in research, teaching, and service, the median values were all 4.

Satisfaction scores across colleges were similar, with slightly higher satisfaction for Khoury College and the College of Science. Satisfaction among faculty with varying years of service were comparable.

Faculty were also asked to comment on the strengths and weakness of their unit's workload policy. The committee used an inductive qualitative approach to analyze all of the faculty comments. Eight themes emerged from this analysis (4 themes for the workload's strengths and 4 themes for its weaknesses).

The four identified strengths of the workload policy were that it was: (1) adaptable (n = 37 comments); (2) transparent (n = 36); (3) balanced (n = 28); and (4) equitable (n= 20). The four weaknesses were that it was (1) rigid or narrow (n = 54); (2) non-transparent (n = 28); (3) unrealistic or unreasonable (n = 33); and (4) inequitable (n = 26). Interestingly, these strengths and weaknesses are in complete opposition to each other.

Charge 2 – Evaluation of customized TRACE or other Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) instruments

The Academic Policy Committee was charged to “take the lead and work with student/faculty groups, Registrar's Office, CATLR, Director of Institutional Assessment, Associate Deans, and Provost's office to develop and implement customized TRACE or other Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) instruments for common categories of classes, including lecture, online, hybrid/remote, labs, pop-ups, and DOCs (Senate resolution #19, 3/18/20). Include the inclusivity of learning environment recommendations from SGA (Senate resolution #13, 3/18/20).”

To address this charge, the committee analyzed the feasibility of developing and implementing customized TRACE and/or SET instruments that could: (1) account for the diversity of class types in the charge; and (2) include the inclusivity of learning environment recommendations from last year (Senate resolution #13, 3/18/20).

To determine if customized TRACE and/or SET instruments could be created for each class type, the committee first agreed that TRACE and not an alternative SET instrument was the correct mechanism for evaluation. The APC then reached out to the Provost's and Registrar's offices to determine if this was feasible, within the university's current TRACE infrastructure, to customize common categories of classes within TRACE. After consulting with the Registrar's office, the Provost's Office ex officio committee member learned that the customization of TRACE for this purpose with our existing vendor would not be feasible or cost-effective. The committee agreed with this assessment.

The committee reached out to the Provost's office and confirmed that the inclusivity of learning recommendations in Senate resolution #13, 3/18/20 had been added to the TRACE evaluation by the Registrar's office in Fall 2020.

Charge 3 – Development of formative midcourse Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) guidelines and policies

The committee recommends a non-mandatory, formative midcourse survey to gather student feedback. Mid-term feedback helps the instructor understand students' perceptions of the course, enables mid-course adjustments, and builds mutual trust. Among the many forms of surveys (e.g., in-class or online questionnaires and polls), online surveys are a convenient, yet powerful mechanism for feedback gathering that can be easily implemented in Canvas.

To facilitate faculty adoption of this practice, the Center for Advancing Teaching and Learning Through Research (CATLR) has developed four midterm or early-course surveys:

- a short survey with 3 questions, to gather general, open-ended feedback;
- a 7-question survey, to gather quick feedback on specific teaching practices;
- a longer 35-item survey, to gather feedback on specific teaching practices and learner experiences; and
- a 16-item survey specifically tailored to the Hybrid NUflex modality.

These surveys will be made available in the Commons section on Canvas and can be modified by faculty to suit the needs for specific courses. The committee recommends that course instructors deliver one or more of these mid-course surveys through Canvas. The committee has worked with Academic Technologies to enable a balloon notification in the Canvas course page, which will remind instructors about deploying the formative midcourse survey and the availability of the survey templates. CATLR has prepared detailed information regarding early/midterm course feedback and offers consultation on implementing various feedback gathering strategies (<https://learning.northeastern.edu/midterm-course-feedback/>).

Below are the committee's specific guidelines regarding the formative midterm surveys:

- Deliver the survey early in the course, preferably before midterm.
- Make it clear that the survey is anonymous.
- Highlight the goals and importance of the formative midterm survey. Goals may include: understanding students' perception of the course, identify helpful and unhelpful instructional practices, and providing the students the opportunity to reflect on their own learning.
- Give students 5-10 minutes of class time to complete the survey to generate a higher response rate and demonstrate how much you value student input.
- Hold follow-up conversations with the students regarding the survey data collected and discuss changes to be made to the course (if any). The instructor should: (1) thank students for sharing their perspectives and feedback, (2) describe the results of the survey, especially major themes or patterns, and (3) explain how the results of the survey will be adopted to modify or improve the course.

Charge 4 – Follow-up on the Implementation of the new merit /compensation process

The committee was asked to “follow up on implementation of the new merit/compensation process in the Faculty Handbook (Senate resolution #1 10/02/19)”. We could not evaluate the implementation of the new merit process given that merit raises were tabled in 2019-20 due to the on-going pandemic.

Charge 5 – Other Senate Agenda Committee Charges

The committee was not given any additional charges during the year.