

**Meeting of the Villanova University
Academic Policy Committee**

Friday, March 20, 2020
1:30 - 3:10 AM
via Zoom

Minutes

Present: Jennifer Altamuro, Scott Dressler, Stephanie Katz, Christopher Kilby (chair), Stefanie Knauss, Rory Kramer, Adele Lindenmeyr, Eric Lomazoff, Bette Mariani, Wen Mao, Stephen Napier, Christine Kelleher Palus, Elizabeth Petit de Mange, John Shindelar, Javad Siah, Craig Wheeland, Andrea Welker plus James Trainer and Kenneth Tsang (OSPIE)

Absent: Sherry Burrell (sabbatical), Kathy Byrnes, Matt Clarkin, Elizabeth Greco, Stacey Havlik, Marylu Hill, Zuyi (Jacky) Huang, Michael Posner, Joyce Russell (NIA), Ani Ural (NIA)

Administrative Items

- 1) Christopher will conduct vote to approve minutes from APC's February 26, 2020 meeting electronically. [Addendum: approved with 10 "yes", 0 "no", and 9 "abstain."]

New Business

- 2) Status of university offices

Christopher relayed reports from faculty of staff in administrative offices reporting that the university is closed and that they could not support faculty in mission critical tasks such as hiring. Craig indicated that this might be miscommunication; functions that require being on site (e.g., generating hiring letters) might be impeded but the majority of work should be proceeding as staff work remotely.

- 3) S/U grading

APC debated at length whether Villanova should follow some other schools in allowing students to take courses on a Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory (S/U) basis, given the move to online instruction and the other disruptions caused by the coronavirus pandemic. A wide range of concerns and options were discussed:

- Should certain courses that cannot easily move online be switched to S/U?
- Students with marginal academic records could be adversely impacted if forced to switch courses from graded to S/U; this could impact their ability to graduate.
- Explicit guidance from the university would be helpful for decision making at individual colleges.
- Having the option of taking a course S/U instead of graded may relieve student anxiety.
- Currently a grade of C or better translates into an "S" while lower grades translate into a "U." Although this does not impact the student's GPA, the student does not receive credit toward graduation.
- Could students select S/U after seeing their letter grade for the term?

- Can any option be made college-specific? In some settings (e.g., nursing), an incomplete may be better than an S/U option.
- If an S/U option is made available, other department, college, and university requirements/limitation related to S/U would be waived for this semester.
- Continuity and normality are important to maintain as much as possible to provide our student with a stable and structured learning environment; a wholesale switch to S/U would undermine this dramatically.
- Each student needs to consider their own situation carefully and understand any implications of an S/U grade replacing a letter grade for financial aid, grad school, etc.
- Would it be better to provide an S/U as the default and then have students “opt out” to get a letter grade?
- Should students be required to talk to their advisor before selecting the S/U option? The consensus was that this would place too much demand on advisors, some of whom have more than 100 advisees.
- Should the cut-off for an “S” be lowered to a letter grade of “D”? This would create a problem in Nursing (where past experience shows that a letter grade of “C” or better predicts passing the nursing licensing exam). The combination of a change in the S/U deadline and dropping the cut-off to a “D” would also dramatically undermine student incentives.
- Some schools have a “P/F” option where the cut-off is a “D” but Villanova does not have this.
- Should any change in “S/U” also apply to courses that were online to begin with? Some said no because the nature of the course has not changed. Others said yes because these students still face many of the challenges and disruptions caused by the pandemic. Applying the same standard to all classes would also address situations where the same course was offered with online-only sections and face-to-face sections (e.g., Engineering).

Christopher offered to draft a recommendation from APC to the Vice Provost for Academics. He will circulate this for additional suggestions and then put it to a vote via email.

4) Revisions to syllabi

APC discussed a few instances where faculty have made what appear to be unwarranted revisions to their syllabi (e.g., dropping core elements of the course and not replacing them with something comparable) and some ideas that had been floated (e.g., cancelling the final exam and not replacing it with a final paper). The consensus was that such changes were not appropriate but that the university needs to trust their faculty in making syllabus changes; hopefully instances of inappropriate changes will be few and far between. For faculty looking for advice about adjusting their syllabi and teaching approach, VITAL is the appropriate resource to draw on.

Old Business

5) CATS presentation

Ken Tsang (assisted by Jim Trainer) presented an overview the CATS.

Ken first reported that we are on-track to have 100% online reporting of CATS results this spring, with results planned for release the day after grades are due (May 12; the earliest date allowed by university policies). Results will be released simultaneously to instructors, chairs, and administrators. The legacy NOVASIS system will continue to house old CATS reports for the time being but new reports will not be added; all available online CATS (those on NOVASIS and new ones) will continue to be available via the Blackboard system APC piloted earlier in the term.

The next topic was an analysis of CATS response rates. OSPIE has rerun past data where students who WXed a class were still counted in the denominator in calculating response rates; both the new and old data housed in the CATS system now exclude students who WXed the course. (Legacy reports available on NOVASIS were not updated with new calculations.) In addition, the old data (paper CATS) still miss some types of on-line and short courses that are covered by the newer online data; for logistical reasons, those courses CATS were not captured during the “paper era.” This change accounts for a portion of the growth in the number of course sections covered by the data; in Fall 2010 number of course sections covered was about 1900 while in Fall 2019 it was about 2300. Across all measures, response rates have dropped. Ken presented these data to APC in a chart that showed, for example, that: the 75th percentile of response rates dropped from 96% in Fall 2016 to 92% in Fall 2019; the 50th percentile of response rates dropped from 88% in Fall 2016 to 80% in Fall 2019; and the 25th percentile of response rates dropped from 75% in Fall 2016 to 59% in Fall 2019. As suggested above, the 25th percentile drop is due in part to compositional changes; that said, the drop in response rates cannot be attributed to this alone. The drop happened immediately with the switch to online administration and has not trended downward since then. Survey data suggests that faculty have been less likely to strictly follow CATS instructions since the move online; student behavior, of course, has also changed. The data indicate that in recent years the percent of students who do not fill out CATS for any of their courses is stable at around 13%; the percent who fill out CATS for all of their courses has trended down (from 61% percent to 50%). Next fall will be the first traditional undergraduate student cohort to have no experience with CATS on paper, so APC and OSPIE will have to be particularly vigilant to see if there are additional changes.

The final topic was the Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) questions. The key findings from the analysis of Fall 2018 data that OPIR (now OSPIE) presented to APC on April 3, 2019, were replicated using all subsequent data (Spring 2019 to Fall 2019). These CATS question responses do not show evidence of the problems suggested by the Climate Survey question (i.e., that Black and Hispanic students do not feel as comfortable at Villanova as White students); this might be due to the narrower scope of CATS questions (course-specific) as compared to Climate Survey questions (which cover a student’s overall experience). There was no difference across race, gender, religious affiliation, or citizenship status in how D&I responses are related to other responses. Within CATS responses, the completion rate for the D&I questions in AY 2018-19 were slightly lower than for questions that come earlier in the survey, possibly because these questions come after an open-ended response question (which also has a lower completion rate).

However, there was a further drop in D&I question response rates in Fall 2019, with the nonresponse rate approximately doubling from 1.5% to 3.3%.