Provost's Advisory Council
March 21, 2019 Meeting
8:30-10am, Lynch Center, Fulton 515

In attendance:

Laura O'Dwyer (Chair)	William Keane	
Anthony Annunziato	Jonathan Laurence	David Quigley
Sharon Beckman	Karen Lyons	John Rakestraw
Mary Ellen Carter	John Mahoney	Patricia Riggin
Chris Constas	Allison Marshall	Akua Sarr
Thomas Crea	Theresa O'Keefe	Billy Soo
Joseph Du Pont	Mariela Paez	Sasha Tomic
Gregory Kalscheur, S.J.	Claudia Pouravelis	Thomas Wall

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1. **The summary of the February 14, 2019 meeting was approved.** It will be sent to the President's Office. All summaries are posted on the Provost's Office website; members are encouraged to share them with colleagues.

2. **Ongoing review of the course evaluation system: Kathy Bailey, Professor of the Practice and Co-Director of the Gabelli Presidential Scholars Program, Chair of the University Council on Teaching**

   The University Council on Teaching (UCT) began a review of the course evaluation system a year ago. The Council met with UGBC representatives, a group of faculty and department chairs recommended by the deans, and then over the summer, with members of the promotion and tenure committees. Based on these meetings, the Council made the following assessments.

   The current system is used primarily by three different constituencies, for different reasons, and with varying levels of success:
   - By faculty members to improve their teaching.
   - By deans, department chairs, and P&T committees to aid in annual review and promotion and tenure decisions.
   - By students to find information about courses, teaching styles, and learning outcomes.

   The consensus was that the current tool is an imperfect instrument, and that evaluations could dig deeper and provide better diagnostic information. There are also other instruments available that can generate conversations about improving teaching. Department chairs noted that they are especially interested in two questions: *How would you rate this instructor overall as a teacher?* and *How would you rate this course overall?*

   Kathy continued, discussing some other issues with the existing system.

   - Some evaluations can display bias, particularly against women, faculty of color, and faculty with an accent. The questions are overly broad and phrased in a way that may

open students to bias as they are not tied to a particular teaching methodology or objective.
- The more specific the questions, the more useful the evaluation feedback will be. Course evaluations are sometimes referred to as student satisfaction surveys and can take on the feel of a popularity contest.
- Course evaluations may discourage innovative teaching or approaching difficult topics, especially by non-tenured faculty members.
- Course evaluations may lead to grade inflation.
- The current tool has no diagnostic element. The questions have been in place for years without any significant changes.
- Core and science classes, and large section courses, are evaluated more harshly than humanities and seminar courses.

Kathy gave an overview of some of the trends and features of newer course evaluations and instruments used.

Research shows that "umbrella questions," such as *How would you rate your professor?*, are less likely to generate useful feedback. Newer tools ask students more targeted questions on learning objectives and outcomes. Some tools attempt to help students see themselves as stakeholders in the learning experience, by asking questions about how they are engaged.

Research also shows that narrative comments are often overly subjective, can stray off topic, and that the number of free-response questions should be limited to one. This approach, however, could result in a loss of the additional feedback that is sometimes buried in the free response questions beyond the first one.

Billy Soo added that feedback from the deans and department chairs indicated that while they do read the comments, they generally focus on the two primary questions that rate the professor and the course on an overall basis. Free-answer questions can also be very inconsistent. Kathy added that students easily get off task and talk about things unrelated to the course or the instructor in the open answer section.

There is also a trend of asking faculty to complete an annual reflection narrative on their teaching for the year based on the course evaluations.

As a result of the findings, a subcommittee was formed to look at the existing system, and suggest alternatives. The hope is that a new course evaluation system will be in place the year after next. The subcommittee is looking at two primary questions:

- What kind of questions will provide the most meaningful feedback?
- What kind of report is going to help faculty make sense of, and act on, the feedback?

The subcommittee has looked at the existing platform (Blue) and an alternative (IDEA). One benefit to Blue is that the school owns the instrument. BC has autonomy to create or change questions. There is additional functionality within the tool that is not currently being utilized that could be explored. An added positive to continuing to use Blue is that there could be a pilot of any new evaluation instrument.

IDEA has four instruments with differing numbers of questions (7, 12, 18, and 40), including questions on learning goals selected by the instructor. It provides a comprehensive diagnostic with feedback for the faculty member, as well as the ability to create a report that provides information on the course to students. IDEA can also be aligned with NECHE standards, thus centralizing data for accreditation needs. IDEA would however come at an additional cost and BC would not be able to run a pilot before adopting it.

A council member asked about the inherent bias in blind evaluations. Kathy explained that blind evaluations were administered in a controlled experiment where a faculty member taught two online sections and was unidentifiable by the students. In one section, the faculty member was denoted as male and in the other, female. The evaluations from the female-identified faculty member were significantly lower than the one where the same faculty member was identified as male. Kathy added that by focusing the questions on methodology and course organization, the student will be forced to answer based on those areas.

A council member noted that there is the ability for faculty members to reflect on their courses in the faculty annual report, and suggested that it might be good to ask students why they took the course. Another council member added that asking why a student takes a required course may impact their answers and create bias. Kathy agreed that there is that type of bias, but more sophisticated evaluation tools can help tease that out.

A council member suggested that it would be helpful to have demographic information on the respondents, especially if a faculty member is using the evaluation instrument to gauge experience of diversity bias. Kathy explained that she has not come across an instrument that does that. Billy added that it is very important to protect the anonymity of the students.

A council member asked if there was consideration given to students providing feedback on the questions being asked. Kathy indicated that student feedback has been solicited, and Billy added that there are four students on the subcommittee.

3. **Overview of the Montserrat Office: Yvonne McBarnett, Director of Montserrat and Jeremiah Jefferson, Assistant Director of Montserrat**

Laura introduced Yvonne McBarnett, Director, and Jeremiah Jefferson, Assistant Director, of the Montserrat Office.

Yvonne provided an overview of the Montserrat Office, an initiative under University Mission and Ministry. The Montserrat Office assists students who demonstrate the highest level of financial need, providing a welcoming environment for students to seek assistance, guidance, and mentorship.

The Montserrat Office currently serves 2,200 students who are selected based on their individual financial need, as determined by federal and institutional guidelines. Decisions on

Montserrat inclusion are made by the Office of Financial Aid, and while a student's aid package may change from year to year, they remain a Montserrat student throughout their four years at BC.

Jeremiah provided some additional information on need-based financial aid. Need-based financial aid assumes that the parent and student are primarily responsible for financing college costs, and a family's ability to pay is determined through standard methodologies:

- Federal Methodology – determines eligibility for Federal and State funds
- Institutional Methodology – determines eligibility for BC funds

In the past, students were selected on Pell Grant eligibility. But in recent years, BC reevaluated how need was being determined, and Pell eligibility was removed as a determining factor. Institutional Estimated Family Contribution (EFC) provides a more accurate depiction of need and is now used to determine Montserrat eligibility. Students who fall into the "high need" range, with an EFC of $24,485 or below, are eligible for the Montserrat program.

Yvonne then talked about resources that Montserrat is able to provide to students, through partnerships with a network of offices on campus, including Athletics, Campus Ministry, Learning to Learn, Student Affairs, UGBC, and the Volunteer and Service Learning Center, among others. These collaborations allow for Montserrat students to have access to passes for athletic events, tickets to campus events and plays, socials, funding for trips and retreats, and direct access to representatives from partner offices.

Through a partnership with Information Technology Services, Montserrat was able to start a laptop loan program, which allows students to check out a laptop for use during the semester. Additionally, the Office has cultivated a lending library which currently houses over 1300 books, primarily donated by faculty, which can be lent out to students. If there are books that are needed but not available in the library, Montserrat will purchase them. The School of Nursing has an established relationship with the Office, and provides direct funds for books and nursing-specific needs, such as scrubs.

Yvonne concluded by asking faculty to reach out if there is a student who is struggling. Their goal is for all BC students to thrive and be successful.

A council member asked how faculty can identify Montserrat students in their classes. Yvonne answered that a faculty member can send their class list to the Montserrat Office and they will identify the students.

A council member asked if it is possible for donors to give a restricted gift, specifically for Montserrat.Yvonne responded that donations are always welcome. David added that a number of partners across campus have built funding for Montserrat into their budgets, and additional funding comes from alumni and members of the community.

A council member asked, beyond financial need, what other type of support do first generation students most need. Yvonne noted that first generation students are often afraid to ask for assistance, so the goal is to provide a safe space to have difficult or uncomfortable conversations. She talked about the overlap with the Learning to Learn Office which also provides significant support to first generation students. Jeremiah added that the office strives to help them navigate financial aid and billing, a process that is complicated for many students, and not just first generation.

A council member asked if there was a way to connect first generation students with faculty who were first generation students themselves beyond the work that athletics does in that regard. Another member noted that many faculty and staff may not be aware of the work that Montserrat does, but who might be willing to donate if they were made more aware. Yvonne responded that there is a first generation group on campus, and that the Office is working on ways to more meaningfully connect students and faculty members, and to get the word out on the needs of the students.

4. Provost's Report: David Quigley, Provost and Dean of Faculties

David introduced Tom Wall, University Librarian, to talk about upcoming library initiatives.

Tom began by talking about proposed policy changes regarding electronic theses and dissertations. Based on input from the schools, the library is proposing a pilot program enabling electronic signatures for dissertations. The other proposed change requires that dissertations become part of the BC institutional repository of eScholarship.

Electronic signatures have already been implemented at the School of Theology and Ministry. The hope is to have a pilot in the summer or fall, with a fully functional electronic signature system in place by next spring. He added that BC is one of a few universities that doesn't have an open access policy and is lagging in this regard.

David urged those with questions or concerns to speak with Tom or the graduate deans at their respective school.

Billy Soo talked briefly about faculty compliance for the annual Conflict of Interest/Commitment disclosure. To date, 92% of faculty have completed their disclosure, and in the course of reporting, a few issues arose that faculty should be aware of.

The first were cases of faculty members teaching, on the side, at another institution. As per the faculty handbook, teaching outside of BC requires annual permission from the Provost. This pertains to full-length courses. While guest lectureships should be disclosed, they do not generally require permission. There were also a few cases where a faculty member was teaching during a sabbatical. Sabbaticals are meant to support research and scholarship, not for additional teaching or income.

Additionally there were cases of a faculty member devoting more than 300 hours annually to outside consulting. The faculty handbook limits outside commitments during the academic year (September through May) to one day per week.

Finally, there is a question about conflicts that may arise when a faculty member assigns their own textbook to the class. It is very traditional for faculty to use their own textbooks, but as books can be very expensive, there is a question of who is profiting from the sales of the book. Conversations are underway on how to manage these types of conflicts.

Billy continued, noting that after the review, potential conflicts were circulated to the Deans and they have been asked to follow up with the faculty member(s).

A council member asked how these issues generally should be communicated to the faculty. David answered that an email can be sent, but noted that the handbook is clear on the need to ask for permission to teach elsewhere. Billy added that the handbook is referenced on the disclosure form itself, and in the email that is sent requesting faculty to complete the disclosure.

David then provided some updates.

Admissions decisions will be released on Friday, March 22, 2019. By early May, the profile of the incoming class will be more clear.

At the board of trustees meeting in March, the first phase of construction on the Schiller Institute was approved and the project will begin the day after commencement.

The faculty and staff survey is underway. Faculty are encouraged to participate.

The new curriculum committee for University-wide initiatives has met and approved the global public health minor.