

Provost's Advisory Council
Monday, December 9, 2019
8:30-10am, Lynch Center, Fulton 515

In attendance:

Sharon Beckman (Chair)	Gregory Kalscheur, S.J.	David Quigley
Anthony Annunziato	William Keane	Catherine Read
Joseph Carroll	Jonathan Laurence	Tracy Regan
Mary Ellen Carter	John Mahoney	Ronnie Sadka
Thomas Chiles	Mason Marek	Akua Sarr
Joseph Du Pont	Allison Marshall	David Scanlon
Kristin Flower	Madeline McCullough	Billy Soo
Yonder Gillihan	Gilda Morelli	Thomas Stegman
Stacy Grooters	Karen Muncaster	Sasha Tomic
Angela Harkins	Claudia Pouravelis	Thomas Wall
Regine Jean-Charles		

- 1. The summary of the November 7, 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. Proposed revisions to course evaluations: Kathy Baily, Chair of the University Council on Teaching and Billy Soo, Vice Provost for Faculties**

Billy Soo began with an update on the work that the University Council on Teaching (UCT) has been doing for the past year and a half regarding course evaluations. Based on feedback from faculty and students, a UCT sub-committee was formed to review the existing course evaluation questions and online instrument.

The committee, which was composed of faculty from each school and some students, met with constituents across campus and reviewed the literature on course evaluations and survey instruments. Feedback from students suggested that the existing questions were vague and confusing. The literature suggested that course evaluations might be biased against women and faculty of color. The committee consulted with other universities who engaged in similar reviews, and looked at instruments used by peer institutions. Based on their findings, the committee developed a number of recommendations. These recommendations have been shared with the Council of Deans and the next step is to meet with Department Chairs and faculty more broadly to discuss the recommendations.

Kathy Bailey discussed the recommendations, which include:

- *Revising some of the existing questions.* The recommendation is to change some, but not all, of the current questions. Research suggests that questions relating to how the material is learned are more useful than questions about instructor qualities.

- *Conduct a study of potential bias in the existing evaluation instrument.* In speaking with peer universities, some report a slight bias based on a number of factors including gender, ethnicity, age, class size, type of class (required versus elective), etc., while others report no bias. The committee recommends that the Office of Institutional Research and Planning conduct a study on whether there is bias in our evaluations.
- *Allow departments and schools to supplement questions in the survey by providing a question bank.* A question bank already exists, but is not widely used. The bank would provide schools and departments with a list of well-thought-out questions. They would also be able to add questions to the bank. The question bank would also allow departments to have conversations about what is valued in their faculty and courses, and develop new questions measuring them.
- *Facilitate the ability to offer a mid-semester course evaluation that is accessible only to the instructor.* Student feedback suggested that they were more likely to provide thoughtful evaluations during the semester when it could still have an impact on the course. This is a tool that would not be used to evaluate teaching, and the results would be available only to the faculty member. There was also the suggestion that faculty be provided with guidance on interpreting their evaluations, and that they be asked to write a short reflection on their teaching during their annual reporting.
- *Allow in-class administration of the online course evaluation.* Providing students with dedicated time to complete their evaluations may result in responses that are more thoughtful. However, some feel that administering the evaluation during class could exert undue influence over responses, and that students should experience the full class, including the final exam, before completing their evaluations. In-class administration would not be mandatory. Further conversations are needed before deciding whether to allow for in-class administration.
- *Prevent students who commit an academic integrity violation in the class from completing the evaluation.* Faculty members expressed concern that a student on whom they reported an academic integrity violation could retaliate via the course evaluation. Student services has indicated that they can prevent the student from completing an evaluation for that course with the existing instrument.
- *Emphasize to the deans, department chairs, promotion and tenure committees, and other faculty or committees who evaluate teaching, that student ratings are only one measure of teaching effectiveness.* The committee recommends that it be made clearer that any evaluation should be holistic and include, at a minimum, peer reviews, and a teaching portfolio. The committee also recommends that peer evaluators be provided more guidance and materials with metrics for their evaluation in an attempt gather more consistent and reliable information.
- *Centralize collection and submission of class syllabi.* Students expressed a desire to include descriptive questions regarding teaching methods, type of class requirements, and the assessment method(s) in the course evaluation. This, however, is information that should be included on a syllabus. There is an option in Canvas that allows students to search for syllabi, but fewer than 10% of syllabi are actually available and posted. The committee recommends that there be a more concerted effort to make syllabi accessible to students. While the collected syllabi may not be in time for the current semester, a prior semester's syllabus could still be used to give students a basic understanding of what to expect from the course.

A council member noted that many schools are incorporating online/hybrid courses to the curriculum and asked if that had been considered in the review of the evaluation questions and tool.

Billy responded that it would not be feasible to have separate evaluations for in-class and online/hybrid courses, but that the question bank would provide subsets of questions that could be asked about different types of courses.

A council member asked about the timeline for implementing changes to the evaluations.

Billy responded that the goal is to have conversations with department chairs and faculty in the spring, in hopes of implementing the new instrument during the 2020-2021 academic year.

A council member expressed support for making syllabi available earlier as it helps students make informed decisions about their course choices. They also asked why course evaluations have historically had to be completed before grades come out.

Billy answered that BC has a response rate on student evaluations of nearly 90%, which is unusually high. This is due to the grade release incentive that allows students to see their grades early if their evaluation have been completed.

A council member suggested that a Likert scale of 1 through 5 may be confusing, that students may flip the high and low, and suggested adding text descriptors for the scale.

Kathy responded that the scale for responses will be explored with the new evaluation.

3. Political Science Department proposal for Koch Foundation Funding: Jerry Easter, Political Science Department Chair, Bob Ross, and members of the Political Science Department

David opened the discussion on the Political Science Department's proposal for Koch Foundation funding. Since the last meeting, there has been no forward movement of the proposal, but talks are ongoing. Many faculty have asked whether BC has a formal gift policy, and at this time, there is no formal gift acceptance policy. The governance for gift acceptance ultimately lies with the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees.

Sharon introduced Jerry Easter, Professor and Chair of the Political Science Department, and Bob Ross, Professor of Political Science.

Jerry began by discussing the proposed program briefly and steps that have been taken thus far. The program, motivated by post-Cold War US foreign policy, would aim to offer an alternate approach to international relations and foreign policy, and would seek to build on the department's existing strength in Security Studies. The department has taken a close look at a number of issues raised relating to academic integrity and truthful scientific research. At the

core, this is a good program that would benefit both BC and the common good, albeit from a potential funder with a bad reputation.

Bob added that the department understands the concerns about Koch Foundation funding, but noted that in doing research, there was a surprising agreement between the Foundation's research agenda and that of the BC faculty. Accepting funding does not constitute an endorsement of the full Koch Foundation agenda, but there are issues on which there is agreement. The Foundation has funded research at a number of peer institutions, including Catholic University, Harvard, MIT, and Notre Dame, and in consulting with peers in the field who had received funding, there were no instances of issues with the Foundation meddling with academic freedom. To address a number of the concerns and integrity issues, the proposed solution is to establish an advisory board, which would oversee the activities of the program and be charged with monitoring violations of norms of academic integrity.

Jerry concluded, addressing some of the themes that have emerged from those opposed to the program. While the Koch Foundation has a number of agenda items that are concerning, they do support a number of issues that could be seen as more progressive, including supporting a restraint of the military. The foundation's deliberate work against truth seeking and scientific research on climate change has been the most substantial and legitimate concern. With the proper advisory board structure in place, engaging with the Koch Foundation would not undermine the integrity of the campus community, but would allow for a greater engagement in this specific pursuit.

Sharon introduced Yonder Gillihan, Associate Professor in the Theology Department and David Deese, Professor in the Political Science Department, to discuss concerns from BC faculty.

Yonder began with an overview of four of the main concerns.

- The Koch Foundation's practices contradict fundamental academic values. The most urgent concerns surround the Koch family's role in undermining public engagement with scientific knowledge surrounding climate change. The Koch family has committed millions of dollars to confusing public discourse and undermining the ability to confront the challenges of climate change politically. Rather than pursuing open public discourse, they look to hide facts and motives.
- The Koch Foundation opposes fundamental Catholic teaching on the environment and the economy. Few institutions can speak as effectively as the Catholic Church on matters of the economy and the environment, and BC is an extension of that institution. A partnership associates BC with entities that historically and currently have prioritized environmental and tax deregulation as well as engaging in deception about climate change.
- An opportunity to lead in an academic environment that needs leadership. Colleagues at peer institutions have urged for careful consideration of such funding opportunities, in light of fallout from accepting funding from not only the Koch Foundation, but also other similarly divisive entities. In rejecting support from an entity whose practices

- contradict academic values and establishing a clear policy on gift donations from potentially problematic entities, BC would be leading by example on these issues.
- The Koch Foundation’s historical and current support for far-right and anti-civil-rights causes. The Koch Foundation’s support of anti-democratic causes illustrates values that are manifestly in opposition to the values of BC. The risk of discord and harm to members of the campus community increases by inviting Koch Foundation funding onto campus.
 - Dependence on Koch funds is dangerous to academic integrity and freedom. Koch funds are explicitly identified as tools for promoting Koch interests through the transformation of American institutions, including those in academia. While initial grants may not constrain academic freedom and intellectual integrity, there is no guarantee that subsequent grants would contain the same minimal involvement by the Foundation. Some faculty feel that the language in the existing proposal already reflects self-censorship.

David Deese echoed these concerns, emphasizing that the Koch Foundation violates BC’s core values as a Jesuit, Catholic institution of higher learning. The Kochs stand in opposition to the foundations of liberal education, science, and humanism. A U.S. strategy project that excludes the climate crisis ignores what is arguably the most profound threat to U.S., regional, and international security. Additionally, the African and African Diaspora Studies Program faculty note that “What is often missing from this discussion ... are the deeply rooted racial implications and racist ties of the Koch Foundation.”

He continued, expressing concerns over “lending BC’s good name” to the Koch Foundation. There are concerns that this grant will divide and polarize the community.

He concluded, reiterating that a number of faculty and groups across campus have urged the University to put the proposal on hold until a formal policy on grant and gift acceptance can be formalized. In the absence of a clear policy on external funding, many peer institutions are pulling back from private funding sources that may be embarrassing to the University.

A council member asked how best to engage in the discussions surrounding the grant proposal.

David Quigley responded that questions or feedback can be submitted to Sharon or Billy, and that there will be time at future for Council meetings for additional conversation on the topic.

A council member asked if the International Studies department as well as Political Science would use the funding.

Jerry responded that the International Studies department will not receive any potential funding.

4. Provost's Report – David Quigley

David provided some brief updates.

- Just over 600 students were admitted to the class of 2024 via Early Decision 1. The transition from Early Action to Early Decision has been productive, with a very strong cohort of admitted students so far.
- The February meeting will, as usual, be dedicated largely to an update on University plans for budgets and construction.
- The City of Newton this week voted to move forward with an eminent domain claim on part of the 300 Hammond Pond Parkway property.