1 Committee Participants

Committee Members: Gabe Delaney, Paula Henthorn, April Herring, Andrew Jakubowski, Martin Keane, Steven Kimbrough (chair), Yun (Rose) Li, Michael McGarvey, Ani Nenkova, Suzanne Oh, Mechthild Pohlschroder, Barbara Riegel, Peter Rockett, Jon Shaw, Marilyn Sommers, Peichun (Will) Wang

Administration Liaison: Leo Charney (Provost’s Office)

Staff: Raisha Price (Provost’s Office)

2 Background and Charge to the Committee

The Committee has a very broad charge that covers a considerable portion of the University. For the 2012–3 academic year, the standing general charges were as follows.

General Committee Charge

The Committee on Academic and Related Affairs

1. shall have cognizance over matters of recruitment, admissions, and financial aid that concern the University as a whole and that are not the specific responsibility of individual faculties, including the authority to carry out studies on existing recruitment and admissions procedures and their relationships with existing policies on admissions and financial aid and to recommend changes in policy to the Council;

2. shall consider the purposes of a University bookstore and advise the Council and the management of the University bookstore on policies, development, and operations;

3. shall review and monitor issues related to the international programs and other international activities of the University, including advice and policy recommendations in such areas as services for international students and scholars, foreign fellowships and studies abroad, faculty, staff and student exchange programs, and cooperative undertakings with foreign universities;

4. shall advise the vice provost and director of libraries on the policies, development,
and operation of the University libraries;

5. shall have cognizance over recreation and intramural and intercollegiate athletics and their integration with the educational program of the University, including the planning and provision of adequate facilities for various sports and recreational activities; and

6. shall have cognizance of all matters of policy relating to research and the general environment for research at the University, including the assignment and distribution of indirect costs and the assignment of those research funds distributed by the University, and shall advise the administration on those proposals for sponsored research referred to it because of potential conflict with University policy.

2.1 2012-2013 Specific Charges

For the 2012–3 academic year, the specific charges were as follows.

1. Continue discussions concerning Academic Integrity. Follow up on ways to communicate to the Penn community the Best Practices that were drafted by the committee in consultation with Vice Provost for Education, Andy Binns. Consider engaging the Senate Committee on Students and the Educational Policy in this discussion. Discuss ways to increase the communication between the Office of Student Conduct and the faculty so that they can provide mutual support. Discuss how to enhance the coordination among the schools in the area of academic integrity in order to avoid duplication of effort as individual schools further investigate academic integrity.

2. Continue discussions on expanding the opportunities for undergraduate research. Consider an inclusive clearinghouse for undergraduate research opportunities. In consultation with the Office of the Vice Provost for Research, Steve Fluharty, discuss new Conflict of Interest Policy reporting requirements for undergraduate research and travel. Develop a set of FAQs for appropriate and inappropriate faculty funding sources for undergraduate and graduate students engaged in research.

3. Monitor recruitment and admissions policies and practices and Dean Eric Furda’s efforts to increase the diversity of Penn’s student body.

4. Monitor International Programs and Vice Provost Zeke Emanuel’s efforts to expand Penn’s offerings for students.

5. Review and discuss this Committee’s general charge and identify two or three issues that should be given the highest priority for the Committee’s work in AY 2013-2014.
3 Narrative

CARA met four times during the 2012–3 academic year. The first meeting had to be cancelled and rescheduled because Hurricane Sandy closed the University on the planned day of the meeting. The Committee met once in fall and three times during the January–March 2013 period. In consequence of the disruption and follow-on problems with scheduling, what was logically our second meeting was chronologically our first and our chronological second meeting was (more) logically our first.

In the event, the Committee’s first two meetings focused on academic integrity and on monitoring recommendations and topics from the previous year.

After introductions and general discussion, the Committee’s chronologically first meeting focused on academic integrity. Michele Goldfarb, Director of the Office of Student Conduct, attended the meeting and made a substantial presentation, discussing the chronic and indeed global issues related to CARA’s charge addressing academic integrity. She focused primarily on student conduct with respect to academic honesty (viz. her position at OSC). She reported that SAS is discussing new ways to handle academic dishonesty along with the Honor Council, the Faculty Senate, and the Council for Undergraduate Research. She further reported that while Penn (through her Office) sees approximately 60–70 cases of academic dishonesty per year, this is only a fraction of total. Many, even most, academic integrity cases are handled by the professor or instructor and do not come to the attention of OSC. The University has not frowned upon faculty dealing with academic integrity.

After her presentation, the Committee engaged in a spirited discussion with Director Goldfarb. A rather broad variety of views, or rather concerns or issues, were expressed. There were many cases of conflicting principles presented. Examples include:

• That OSC and Penn in general are too harsh on students accused of academic dishonesty and that OSC and Penn are too lenient.

• That there should be a Penn-wide uniform policy for treating academic dishonesty and that it is important for instructors to have discretionary powers in handling the students under their responsibility.

(Think: “Nothing ventured; nothing gained” and “Better safe than sorry” or “Look before you leap” and “He who hesitates is lost.” Folk wisdom is replete with such pairs.)

In its (chronologically) second meeting, the Committee heard from Vice Provost Andy Binns, who provided a response to the Committee’s report from last year by describing a number of ongoing activities at Penn that are actively addressing various issues related to academic integrity. He also provided a conceptual overview of the subject, as seen from his perspective.

Vice Provost Binns emphasized the importance of having an ongoing dialogue and information transmission, explaining that Academic Integrity is essential to the
University. Key issues here are:

1. Student awareness
   How can students be made more fully aware of rules, policies, and options associated with academic integrity?

2. Faculty awareness
   How can students be made more fully aware of rules, policies, and options associated with academic integrity?

3. Process
   By this he meant the substance of the rules characterizing academic dishonesty and the responses to apparent violations.

On the process issue, Vice Provost Binns indicated that a major report on academic integrity is being developed by the School of Arts and Sciences’ Committee on Undergraduate Education and will be delivered to the Undergraduate Deans. Binns recommended that CARA review the report once it is finished. This report has not yet been made available to CARA.

After the second meeting, the Committee reconsidered its agenda for the remainder of the year. Strong sentiment was expressed in favor of moving on to topics other than academic integrity. Upon suggestion from several Committee members, our third meeting introduced and focused on the subject of course management software systems, of which Blackboard, Webcafé, and Canvas are examples that have been used at Penn. These systems impact the entire Penn community immensely, their use is pervasive and increasing, there are multiple options, and very much about them is in flux. For these reasons alone, the Committee took initiative to survey the situation.

Robert Ditto and Dave Comroe, from Wharton Computing and Instructional Technologies (WCIT), and Rob Nelson from the Provost’s Office, presented their views and engaged in discussion with the Committee at its third meeting of the year. The WCIT representatives presented the history of Wharton’s recent adaptation of Canvas to replace Webcafé. The impetus for the change was the fact that Webcafé is an old system with an antiquated feature set, and maintaining it in the face of changes to modern browsers and other software elements is increasingly expensive. This led the vendor to announce that it would no longer update the system. Wharton was then faced with the problem of finding a replacement system quickly. Over the period 2008–2010, WCIT undertook studies and field-tested a number of systems, including Canvas, and came to the conclusion that Canvas was the best choice for Wharton. Beginning in the fall of 2012 Canvas was fully supported at Wharton and no new classes were put into Webcafé. The WCIT representatives report both positive and negative responses, but on balance they believe that Canvas is serving Wharton well and has gained broadly-based cheerful acceptance.

Rob Nelson, Executive Director for Education, discussed with the Committee the
interest that the Provost and Vice Provost for Education have in course management systems. The Provost’s Office recognizes that there is a greater need for coordination among technologies – technologies centered around the Schools to support their educational missions. Blackboard was initially offered as a centrally-operated system and was first launched in 2000 in Engineering. After having Blackboard at the University for 10 years, it was deemed time to look at it again and try to bring coordination among the Schools’ technology. GSE has adopted CANVAS and LPS is adopting Canvas this year. The Dental School and the Law School, too, are preparing to adopt Canvas. Canvas is fast becoming an industry leader as an alternative to Blackboard. Just recently, the Council of Deans met to discuss the issue and to look at a campus-wide agreement with Canvas, thus reducing cost among the Schools. The University’s next step is to consult with Instructure, the company that owns Canvas. The leading contender was SAKAI CLE, however it offered no new technological advancements and its foundation decided to halt development of a newer version. Instructure is a young and small company, which is a concern, but Nelson and his courseware management group are trying to mitigate those concerns. Blackboard, though large and established, has had some major problems. Canvas is also well-established and very well-funded. As an early adopter, Penn will have some leverage in the negotiations.

The Committee engaged in a spirited discussion jointly with all three presenters and the members expressed a diversity of judgments and opinions. These issues stand out as fairly representing a general consensus on the Committee:

1. Course management software does indeed present a number of important policy issues to the Penn community and CARA should monitor activity in this area beginning next year.

2. A particular issue of interest is whether and if so, how, there should be a Penn-wide, common course management system product in use. Points in favor include leverage with the vendor and reduction in learning costs for students taking courses in different parts of Penn. Point against include centralized management (Is it desirable? If so, how? ) and concerns about Procrustean chopping and stretching.

3. Akin to the awareness issues identified by Andy Binns with respect to academic integrity, the Committee noted that features in and uses of course management software have been and can be expected to be in continual flux. How can the Penn community make most efficient use of the information generated (both successes and failures) in this evolving context? How can the Penn community receive the best possible benefits of such systems?

In the fourth and final meeting of the year, the Committee focused on hearing reports on undergraduate research. Rob Nelson, Executive Director of Education, Office of the Provost, Harriet Joseph, Director, Center for Undergraduate Research & Fellowships
(CURF), and Wallace Genser, Associate Director, CURF attended as visitors, presenting information to the Committee and engaging in discussion with the Committee.

Both Harriet Joseph and Wallace Genser have joined CURF fairly recently. After an overview, their remarks focused on a fairly new program—Penn Undergraduate Mentoring Research (PURM)—that nevertheless antedates their arrivals at CURF. PURM matches and funds undergraduates with faculty early on in their careers for mentorship and has often proved to produce a transformative experience for the students and faculty involved. The program has to be judged a tremendous success, but is limited by the funds available.

Discussion ensued that raised ideas for improving awareness of the program, and for wider publicizing of Penn undergraduate research accomplishments, perhaps incorporating results from efforts not funded by PURM.

Finally, the Committee did not explicitly address items 3 (recruitment and admissions policies and practices) and 4 (international programs) in the charges for 2012–3. Since these were addressed by other committees, and the CARA chair attended meetings at which these issues were discussed, the Committee opted to give these matters lower priority for this year.

4 Recommendations

1. On academic integrity, the Committee recommends that it should continue to monitor developments, especially policy matters such as those identified by Vice Provost Binns. However, absent new developments that call for evaluation and discussion, the Committee’s sense is that this should be a lower priority matter for the next academic year, since there do not seem to be either glaring lacunae or glowing opportunities in this policy area at the moment.

2. On undergraduate research, the Committee recommends that advertising and public relations efforts be increased, aimed at students, faculty, and indeed the general public. Also, the Committee hopes that program funding can be increased. Finally, the Committee recommends that this topic be a high priority item for the Committee next year, in part to explore ideas for increasing the scope of undergraduate research opportunities and the visibility of the results. Intriguing ideas were raised this year and the Committee hopes to explore them further next year.

3. The Committee believes that its initiative on examining course management software has proven rewarding and that there are many important related issues to monitor and explore. The Committee recommends that it be explicitly charged with this task during the next year.

5 Fall 2012 Pilot Assessment of Canvas
The following report was produced by the University of Pennsylvania Libraries and made available to CARA during its deliberations.

5.1 Background/Methodology

The pilot and assessment of Canvas over the fall 2012 semester is part of the Libraries’ continuing efforts to evaluate potential learning management systems to support teaching and learning on the Penn campus. This assessment follows a similar evaluation of the Sakai CLE learning management system in Fall of 2011. In addition to focusing on aspects of Canvas such as overall satisfaction and potential user issues, this assessment attempts to answer the key question of how the product affects pedagogy — Are there improvements or hindrances to the teaching and learning processes that are a direct result of Canvas? To find out the assessment team used the following methodology:

- Faculty/student tracking interviews over the course of the semester. At the beginning of the semester, the assessment team focused on five classes. A member of the assessment team was assigned to each class. This assessment team member discussed the pilot periodically over the course of the semester with both the instructor and selected students. The goal was to be able to gain a sense of how instructors and students were using Canvas and how their teaching and learning evolved (or didn’t) over the course of the semester.
- Direct observation of class sites.
- Post-pilot survey administered to participating faculty (not including those in the five classes referenced above).
- Continual monitoring of additional feedback from faculty and students.

General Conclusions

- Overall response to Canvas was positive for a large majority of participants and 4 of 5 faculty for tracked classes and all 9 survey respondents reported a positive general impression.
  - A number of these reactions were highly positive and enthusiastic.
- Most faculty respondents reported that courseware has at least some effect on pedagogy.
- Faculty interviewed and surveyed tended to have a more positive view of Canvas relative to other learning tools, particularly Blackboard.
- Use of Canvas varied by instructor and some made extensive use of the tools and functionality, while some used it primarily for document delivery and grading.
- While overall sentiment was positive, participants did list specific problems/issues with the product (see below).
Interesting uses of Canvas

• One instructor used the video capability of Canvas to convert the class to a “flipped” model in which lectures were posted online and class time was spent on assignments and group activities. Both the instructor and students in this class were very enthusiastic regarding this model, although one student noted that one could not ask questions as the lecture was occurring.

• A different instructor mentioned that he considered a similar (although one-time) approach, when class was canceled due to Hurricane Sandy. He ended up not proceeding due to the power outages associated with the storm.

• The instructor of the American Sign Language class also praised the video capability, noting that it was a critical feedback tool, particularly for adjuncts who have no office hours and that the video capability along with the general efficiency of Canvas allowed her to streamline the class to such a degree that she had time to include more material than she would have otherwise.

Most Positively Received Aspects of Canvas

• General ease of use and intuitive interface
  • As referenced above, a number of instructors commented on Canvas’s ability to facilitate a more efficient teaching and learning experience. Students also commented on the ease of navigation and use, particularly in comparison with Blackboard.

• Video capability (see above)

• Gradebook was praised as fast and efficient

• Facilitation of collaboration via the following features:
  • Discussion boards
  • Video
  • Wiki
  • Commenting

• Modules

Issues/Problems

• Chat feature did not work properly and was removed mid-semester with no notice.

• User analytics is provided at a basic level; more granularity is desirable.

• Removing files is not as seamless as the “drag and drop” functionality to add files.

• Discussion board functionality lacks display in reverse chronological order, which makes it difficult to find new posts, and it isn’t possible to communicate with subgroups (as in Blackboard).
• Mobile app sometimes hangs during updates.
• Compatibility issues with Chrome and Safari browsers and some complaints of videos not playing on Macs.
• The abundance of notification options and the lack of control of default settings creates confusion.
• While the Speedgrader tool was well-received, there were some specific criticisms about functionality (rubrics, exporting, grade calculation).