University Council Committee on Academic and Related Affairs
2009-2010 Final Report

2009-2010 Membership
Chair: Michael Topp
Liaison: Karen Lawrence
Staff: Ralph Dispigno
Faculty: Kathleen Boesze-Battaglia, Joan Davitt, Nancy Hanrahan, Jon Merz, Sohrab Rabii, Paul Shaman and Kathleen Stromberg-Childers
Graduate students: Rachel Bunbury and Kara Herbertson
Undergraduate Student: Ariel Rosenblum and Daniel Urgelles
PPSA: Susanne Donovan and Laura Foltman
WPSA: Peter Rockett

General Committee Charge
(i) 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; (09-10) (07-08) (06-07)

(ii) shall consider the purposes of a University bookstore and advise the Council and the management of the University bookstore on policies, development, and operations; (06-07)

(iii) 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; (09-10) (08-09)

(iv) shall advise the vice provost and director of libraries on the policies, development, and operation of the University libraries; (09-10) (08-09) (06-07)

(v) 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 (07-08) (06-07)

(vi) 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.
2009-10 Specific Charges

1. Consider and discuss new admissions programs with Dean of Undergraduate Admissions, Eric Furda including Penn’s recent partnership with the Posse Foundation, and the implementation of new technologies to expand student outreach.

2. Discuss issues associated with podcasting including the adequacy of current facilities, and consider the formulation of best practices.

3. Consider how decisions are made concerning the health and safety of students and faculty engaged in overseas programs.

4. Review and discuss the committee’s general charge and identify two or three issues that should be given highest priority for the committee’s work in AY 2010-2011.

Final Report - April 2010

Podcasting

The Committee met on November 9, 2009 in the Weigle Information Commons to address the specific charge:

Discuss issues associated with podcasting including the adequacy of current facilities, and consider the formulation of best practices.

The guest participants were:
Anu Vedantham, Director, Weigle Information Commons (WIC) - Podcasting Demonstration and Training Overview
Gates Rhodes, Director, Penn Video Network - iTunesU, YouTube, and campus-wide coordination
John MacDermott, Director of Instructional Technology, SAS - Integration Into Course Activities

There was an impressive graphical presentation in the WIC, almost all of which involved discussion of video presentations in one form or another at an institutional level. It was noted that a number of institutions post material on iTunesU, notably MIT. The value of University-level productions for publicity purposes was acknowledged. There was some classroom-related discussion, for example regarding the prospect of recording lectures on a routine basis. Despite the enthusiasm among the presenters for expanding information dissemination, it emerged that recording academic presentations, in particular course work, is not widely adopted on campus.

According to Wikipedia: "A podcast is a series of digital media files (either audio or video) that are released episodically and often downloaded through web syndication." Other reference sources tend to limit the definition to audio files. Apart from the Medical School, there seem to be few instances where Penn personnel engage in "podcasting", in the sense of systematic recording and posting of academic content. Facilities for recording lectures at an audio or video level do exist elsewhere on campus, such as in Wharton, although as far as the Committee could determine, even where the facilities are in place (again excepting the Medical School) they do not appear to be used
programmatically to any great extent. It was recognized that Blackboard has been broadly adopted by faculty, staff and students on the Penn campus, as a medium for posting lecture material, including slides and videos, although the mode of usage, interactivity, etc. varies substantially.

Audio recordings of lectures in some disciplines are made both at a Department level and also informally by students. Replaying audio recordings is straightforward on I-pods and similar devices, and is routinely used by students in some areas. On the other hand, the audio-only approach is likely to be of limited use in a science and engineering context, and in other areas where spoken lectures require visual reinforcement. Such visual aids would commonly involve slide presentations and chalkboard illustration, but also some videos and bench top demonstrations.

From a technical perspective, a fixed-camera approach for video recording of lectures is likely to be of limited use, considering the need to focus on a mobile lecturer and to highlight different points of interest on chalkboards ranging over a wide area at the front of a large lecture room. For example, a typical large Chemistry lecture (120 students) will fill several large chalkboards, several times over during a lecture, often supported by Power Point slides. Sometimes the interest will focus on a small-scale demonstration (where one can definitely argue for the need for video capture) and other times, the discussion will shift to questions from the auditorium. The argument can therefore be made that adequate video coverage requires multiple cameras and microphones. The difference in resource overhead (including technical personnel) between the audio and video approaches is considerable to the point that many departments are likely unwilling to consider the resource commitment. Certainly, this seems to have been the case so far.

One may also consider the following points of view. Presumably, the University wants to encourage the maximum amount of faculty-student interaction during lectures. Random comments, or responses during Q&A may take on a different significance if the proceedings are being archived; the presence of one or more cameras or microphones could well constrain the interaction. Academic freedom and student confidentiality concerns also need to be considered; it is already difficult to have students ask questions in a large lecture class. On the other hand, it is just those types of unscripted questions and responses that often distinguish a presentation, and which would not be captured in any other way. "Exactly how did the professor respond to that question that I didn't properly hear?" "What was the question that prompted a particular response on the chalkboard?". Also, it is likely that many faculty would simply prefer their lectures, as far as possible, to be "off the record", which is the status quo for the most part. It is worth noting that many academic professional meetings (e.g. Gordon Research Conferences) are deliberately not archived, in order to allow the uninhibited exchange of ideas.

Some locations (e.g., Wharton, Medical School) are currently equipped for routine video recording of lectures, although it seems that the Medical School is the only place where recordings are routinely made. On the other hand, even there, the extent to which this material is routinely accessed after the fact was not clear from Committee discussions. In the Wharton School, we understand that the recordings are made at the discretion of individual faculty members, although here it was not clear how many people routinely use the service. Anecdotally, we heard about cases of covering religious holidays - for students who missed class - but no other routine use.
Some students already can generate their own (limited) video recordings of lectures through
laptops, although from personal observation, this appears to be a small minority at present, and the
quality of such recordings from webcams cannot be that high. It seems clear that many students would
appreciate the ability to review lecture presentations on-line, after the fact. On the other hand, one
needs to weigh this possibility against the likely drop in attendance at lectures, unless additional
incentives (e.g., clickers) are supplied for attending class. Certainly, the pre-posting of Power Point
material on Blackboard can suppress lecture attendance.

Our understanding is that most lecture rooms are equipped with contemporary computer
projection devices, and lecturers can conveniently mike-up, so that audio recording is relatively trivial.
Audio recording has been used effectively, such as in the case of students with hearing difficulties or
other situations, in conjunction with Student Disabilities Services. Yet, our impression is that only a
small percentage of lectures are in fact recorded, even at the audio-only level. It seems a logical course
of action at this point to determine the likely demand among faculty/students for regular recording of
lectures in either audio or video format.

As a side comment here, there is also a good case to be made for spending additional resources
on more effective tutoring and other one-on-one contacts between students and instructional personnel.
This could help students at all levels of ability in a way that simply recording lectures would not.

There remains also the question in the minds of Committee members about the effectiveness of
"podcasting" per se as a general technique for dissemination of information. Although file formats
remain relatively standard, the display technology, memory storage, etc. are constantly evolving.
Also, as noted above, existing content-rich, cross-platform, interactive resources such as Blackboard
are being effectively used in a variety of different ways by faculty in different disciplines. It would
probably be a good idea to review the innovative ways in which Blackboard is being used by the
University Community.

It seems clear that, if the University wishes to move in the direction of recording lectures on a
more routine basis, faculty members need to be convinced of its value. Despite available resources,
recording of lectures is not widespread in the University community. Moreover, a number of
Departments for whom this opportunity exists presumably view the cost to be a major deterrent,
considering all the other demands on Department budgets.

The idea of depositing archives of lectures, etc., on a central, external repository, such as
ITunesU was met with some skepticism by the Committee. Some faculty have expressed opposition to
posting such material outside Penn. Issues such as academic freedom, intellectual property rights,
other copyright issues, and the idea of "providing a free education" were all raised. Certainly, some
outreach was considered highly desirable from the point of view of visibility of the University (e.g.,
MIT has some prominence in ItunesU, why not Penn?), but here it is likely that a more professional
level of production would be needed. Certainly, this would not apply to the routine case.

Another issue was raised about the production of videos of laboratory and other technical
demonstrations. One could certainly argue that there is a need to replace this ad hoc system, and for
the greatest effectiveness, a centralized, professional level of production seems optimal. Some video
productions of lecture demonstrations are available on the internet. Although some of the internet
versions are quite useful, these clearly cannot address more than a fraction of local requirements, and it seems that there is a need to produce some of these of types of videos locally. These could then be posted, such as on Blackboard, as needed.

One of the more lasting recollections from Committee discussions on the issue of recording lectures, is that some members were impressed that lectures in many departments are actually supported by computers. Apparently, the classroom technology that some departments take for granted is not uniformly available. Whatever the reason, it seems that a high priority should be placed on bringing all departments up to a similar level of classroom technology. Internet access from the classroom and the ability to project electronic materials has to be considered a minimum requirement of education in the modern era.

Recommendations

1. Dissemination of ideas to the faculty of the capabilities of Blackboard, supplemented with anecdotal information, could be a relatively inexpensive way to improve the effectiveness of this valuable resource. The Committee recommends that further efforts be made to popularize Blackboard, and that there be an additional effort to disseminate ideas to faculty, staff and students about how this valuable facility could be optimally used.

2. It is clear that not all classrooms are equipped with either basic projection facilities or internet access. Such limitations, which can restrict academic curricula, should be addressed as soon as possible. The Committee strongly recommends that classroom facilities campus-wide be brought to a similar level of technology.

3. The Committee proposes that, if the University wishes to advance the cause of internal "podcasting", a small number of courses be selected on a trial basis outside the Medical and Wharton Schools, to examine the pedagogical value and financial viability of such a program. Most important, faculty members need to be convinced of its value.

International Programs

The Committee met on January 25, 2010 to address the specific agenda item: "Consider how decisions are made concerning the health and safety of students and faculty engaged in overseas programs".

The guest presenter was Anne Waters, Executive Director, Office of International Programs (OIP). Erika Gross, Associate Director, International Programs, was also in attendance.

This excellent, informative presentation supported by a set of Power Point slides designed to anticipate many Committee questions, gave an extensive analysis of the purview of OIP. Some of the essential components are transcribed below http://www.upenn.edu/oip/:

1. Services and support to international students, scholars and their families who apply for U.S. visas for work or study
2. Partner with departments and admissions offices in schools to support international recruiting efforts
3. Administer Penn Abroad programs and services to undergraduates; ensure programs meet current curricular goals and requirements
4. Build greater alignment between faculty international research activities and study abroad opportunities
5. Expand international internships by leveraging existing partnerships (e.g., India, Botswana, China) and identifying new organizations
6. Develop service learning programs to enrich student international experiences and provide pre-professional work experiences
7. Support faculty international research projects
8. Consult with School and University administrators to develop risk management guidelines for Penn-sponsored international programs
9. Provide pre-departure orientation/training for international program leaders and students

For information, Penn ranks fourth in the nation in the percentage of international students of all kinds (19%).

Penn Abroad involves approved programs at universities in other countries for semester or full-year, regarded as equivalent to Penn standards; students earn Penn credit. There is some emphasis on cultural immersion, where 40% of the courses are in taught in local languages (presumably not including English). There is a range of programs for languages less commonly taught (at Penn), including Arabic, Chinese and Japanese. Exchange programs permit direct enrollment at partner universities; classes are with local students and local faculty.

Penn now sponsors a wide range of innovative, school-specific international programs, including: Global medical education, International design seminar (e.g., Landscape Architecture in Mumbai), Wharton’s Global Consulting Practicum, Faculty-led field trips linked to specific courses, Summer or semester-break study trips and Internships or service learning opportunities.

The **Penn community can call upon I-SOS, an international risk management service, for assistance in a crisis.** Penn students, faculty and staff are strongly encouraged to register with I-SOS prior to departure. Compliance ranges from ~100% for undergraduate programs such as Penn Abroad, to much smaller numbers when faculty, graduate students and postdoctoral associates are considered.

Penn’s membership in I-SOS provides all members of Penn community (students, faculty, staff) with assistance while traveling abroad: Pre-departure travel advice, Centralized tracking of travel itineraries, Global intelligence network for safety and security risk assessment, Guidance and referrals for local medical services while abroad, Emergency evacuation services for medical treatment and Emergency evacuation in cases of civil unrest.
OIP proposes a structured approach to consult with Penn’s academic and administrative leaders to assess programs in high-risk locations or under other potentially dangerous conditions. Decisions will be guided by these priorities:

1. Health, safety and security of students, faculty, and staff (with specific attention to safety of undergraduates)
2. Academic progress for students or faculty research effort
3. What would be the impact on students/faculty/staff if the program were to be interrupted?
4. What would be the impact of deferring an international program to subsequent semester?
5. Long-term viability of the academic exchange and ongoing research collaboration

OIP risk assessment is guided by a range of travel advisories and consultation with Penn experts:

- World Health Organization, U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC), U.S. Department of State.
- The State Department issues travel advisories for American citizens and American interests abroad:

1. **Travel warnings:** “issued to describe long-term, protracted conditions that make a country dangerous or unstable.”
2. **Travel alerts:** “issued to disseminate information about short-term conditions, generally within a particular country that pose imminent risks to the security of U.S. citizens. Natural disasters, terrorist attacks, coups, anniversaries of terrorist attacks, election-related demonstrations or violence … are examples of conditions that might generate a travel alert.”
3. The **Global Activities Project** is proposed as a replacement for the external/commercial vendors currently used, such as I-SOS. OIP identified some immediate needs:
   a) The importance and scale of Penn’s international activities require dedicated tools to support greater coordination and collaboration
   b) Current reliance on self-reporting to external vendors (AmEX or I-SOS) to track whereabouts of over 2000 Penn students in an academic year (plus faculty and staff) is inadequate as a long-term strategy

The anticipated benefits of this new strategy include:

a) Significant benefits to be realized from improved reporting of international scholarly activity and contributions
b) Enhance Penn’s emergency notification protocol in high risk or crisis situations
c) Improve data capture and accuracy of international scholarly work and research for sponsored research proposals and grant reporting requirements
d) Identify opportunities for closer interdisciplinary and/or cross-school collaboration on research and global operations
e) Track activity and growth of international operations for improved planning, capital allocation purposes
Recommendations based on International Programs

I-SOS (Penn's current registry for personnel traveling abroad) does not seem to be widely used, other than by the undergraduate student body, who are required to sign up. Nevertheless, the likely benefits of such a registry - safety while abroad, consolidation of research work - are substantial. By supporting the OIP's Global Activities Registry, this Committee is primarily taking these benefits into account. However, this recommendation in support of the Global Activities Registry comes with two caveats.

1. This new registry should be used to consolidate all information needed by Penn, and should be used to facilitate travel abroad, creating no new impositions. For example, Penn personnel would only need to submit their health information to the Global Activities Registry and not separately to I-SOS. The system itself should allow for synchronization with I-SOS.
2. This new registry must be adequately promoted/advertised to ensure broad participation and compliance, without which it would fall short of the advertised goals.

Recommendations of the Committee for Future Business

1. The Committee felt as a whole that, while some useful conclusions can be reached by a non-specialist committee, considerably greater benefit could be obtained through the use of more focused subcommittees, each of which would deal with a particular agenda item. It was felt that such sub-committees would be more effective if they incorporated ex-officio members from the relevant responsibility areas (e.g., Admissions, Athletics, Library, Classroom Technology), who would attend regular meetings, to provide authoritative input for committee deliberations. In particular, reviewing the general charge of the Committee, it is unclear why the areas: (v) relating to "athletics and their integration with the educational program of the University" and (vi) relating to 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 environment," fall under the purview of the Committee as currently constituted. It seems that these areas would be ideal candidates for specialized committees, including appointed experts.

2. From experience in the current year, we recommend that the issue of Admissions practices, outreach, technology and longer-term strategies be examined by a more focused committee. One particular area of interest for future study should be to consider the effect of Early Admissions policies on the makeup of the incoming class.