Task Force Exploring Fresno State Operations in a Post-COVID World

By spring semester 2022, COVID should be behind us and Fresno State can resume pre-pandemic operations. But to what extent should we? Before the pandemic, many faculty were wary of online teaching, but now circumstances have forced us all to learn to teach online. A tipping point has been passed, and arguably a majority of faculty now know how to teach online effectively, whether synchronously or asynchronously. Students too, willingly or unwillingly, have had to adapt to exclusive online learning. Furthermore, we have all learned how to have committee meetings online, allowing us to continue to pursue our service online.

We are accumulating more and more evidence that our students do not want to continue exclusive online learning. The majority want to be back on campus and have at least some of their classes in person. Many students may not learn as effectively in an online environment as in person and prefer to interact with their professors and peers in person. Yet many students may also have found it easier to care for children and other family members, as well as hold multiple jobs with the flexibility of online learning. Should students be permitted to pursue degrees with classes that are entirely (or almost entirely) online?

We do not yet know whether a significant number of faculty will want to continue to teach entirely (or largely) online once the pandemic is over, but some are suggesting that this is what they would prefer. Furthermore, there have been requests to change university policy regarding office hours to allow faculty to do all of their office hours online. Some faculty have even expressed an interest in moving out of California while continuing to teach full-time at Fresno State. Should our policies be altered to facilitate this or prevent this? What impact does this have on student mentoring, equitable distribution of service, and our ability to work and grow together as a university community?

To explore these difficult issues, the Academic Senate is establishing a task force to investigate these questions and make recommendations to the university community. The task force, which will begin work in the fall semester of 2021, will consist of the following:

* Chair of the Academic Senate (or designee)
* Chair of AP&P (or designee)
* University President (or designee)
* University Provost (or designee)
* ASI President (or designee)
* One dean (appointed by the Provost)
* Chair of the Council of Chairs (or designee)
* AVP for Faculty Affairs
* One faculty member elected from each college / school (including the Library)
* Three students appointed by ASI
* One representative from the Center for Faculty Excellence
* Chair of Staff Assembly (or designee)

The task force will identify and reach out to different university stakeholder groups among the faculty, staff, and students to assess their opinions and concerns, as well as take stock of the availability of data on student learning and technological resources. If necessary, a survey of faculty and students, or focus groups of those constituencies, may be done. The task force will then report to the Academic Senate with advice on how the university shall approach teaching and the use of online education with the over-arching goal of what appears to work best for our students. The task force will also recommend any changes to policy should they be needed.

Questions:

* To what extent do students want largely online courses and office hours (with little in-person contact with faculty)
* To what extant can course content and effective teaching be done without in-person contact with students
* Are there inequalities in workload that might develop among faculty if some faculty rarely (if ever) come to campus?
* To what extent does our accreditor, the Western Association of State Colleges, require us to teach in person versus online teaching?