Post-COVID Task Force Final Report

Submitted to the Academic Senate, to the Provost, and to the Campus Community
California State University, Fresno
October 28, 2022

Process

The Fresno State Academic Senate voted in May 2021 to create the Post-COVID Task Force to explore university operations, specifically with respect to assignment of class modalities, once crisis operations recede. With students, faculty, and staff having significant experience with online operations as a result of the COVID pandemic, the Senate wanted to thoughtfully consider what had been learned, and whether permanent changes to campus operations should be made to reflect those lessons.

The charge of the Task Force was to investigate some specific questions about campus operations and to make recommendations to the university community. This report provides our answers to those questions and our recommendations.

The Task Force was constituted in Fall 2021. Faculty representing their colleges were self-nominated and selected by the Executive Committee of the Academic Senate. All other members were appointed by the office that they represented. Membership consisted of:
- Kathleen Dyer, representing the Council of Chairs, elected Chair of the Task Force
- Katy Tarrant, representing the Jordan College of Agriculture, elected Vice-Chair of the Task Force
- Jim Mullooly, representing the College of Social Sciences, elected Secretary of the Task Force
- Marcus Crawford, representing the College of Health and Human Services
- Lizhu Davis, representing the Craig School of Business
- Amanda Dinsore, representing the Fresno State Library (served through May 2022)
- Ginny Barnes, representing the Fresno State Library (added in September 2022)
- Zoulikha Mouffak, representing the Lyles College of Engineering
- Karl Oswald, representing the College of Science and Mathematics
- Virginia Patterson, representing the College of Arts and Humanities
- Yuleinys Castillo, representing the Kremen School of Education and Human Development
- Kathleen Rindahl, representing the Academic Policy and Planning (AP&P) Committee
- Ray Hall, Chair of the Academic Senate
- Jim Schmidtke, AVP of Faculty Affairs
- Lorin Lachs, representing the President's Office
- Honora Chapman, representing the Provost's Office
- Bernadette Muscat, representing deans
- Bryan Berrett, representing the Center for Faculty Excellence (served through May 2022)
- Natalie Munoz, representing the Center for Faculty Excellence (added in September 2022)
- Belinda Munoz and Deb Reba, representing the Staff Assembly
- D'Aungelique Jackson, Caroline Alvarez, Kalyan Madoori, and Anou Vang, representing Associated Students, Inc (served through May 2022; no replacements identified)

The group met once in November 2021 to elect officers (noted above as K. Dyer, K. Tarrant, and J. Mullooly) and formulate a plan, and then met regularly (twice monthly) in Spring 2022. We collected all of the relevant institutional data and published scientific research we could locate as the basis of our discussions and brought in guests to report on specific issues. We regularly assessed the opinions of task force members through the use of google polls. In May 2022, we presented some preliminary recommendations to the Academic Senate, and at that time we shared some of the

institutional [data](#) that we had compiled. While we never achieved total agreement on these very difficult issues, our preliminary recommendations all had the approval of at least ⅔ of task force members.

In early Fall 2022, we visited chairs' meetings or full-faculty meetings in all 8 academic colleges to present those preliminary recommendations and gather feedback. In addition, we used Tableau to compile data about the percentage of classes delivered face-to-face in all departments across campus for several years prior to COVID up through the current semester. What we learned was summarized [here](#). We then discussed our recommendations again, in light of what was learned, and agreed upon the final recommendations included in this report.

The members of the Task Force are diverse in their opinions, and we do not have unanimous support for every recommendation in this document. However, these recommendations represent the results of anonymous votes, and they garnered support from the vast majority of members of the Task Force.

Questions Addressed by the Task Force

Q1: To what extent do students want largely online courses and office hours (with little in-person contact with faculty)?

We used [data collected from student ratings of instruction during Fall 2020](#), Spring 2021, and Fall 2021. Every student ratings form included the question: "If we were not in a pandemic, my preference for the delivery of this course would have been…." In Fall 2021, based on 48,000 completed student rating forms university-wide, 12% stated a preference for online-synchronous, 14% stated a preference for online-asynchronous, and 16% stated a preference for hybrid. The remaining 58% stated a preference for face-to-face. These numbers varied somewhat by department, college, and class characteristics, but there are no classes in which all students agree on the best modality for that class. Student preferences seem to be driven by circumstances of their own lives rather than by the nature of the content of the class.

We also note that student preferences may have changed since then, but we have no way to know since we are no longer asking the question.

We have no data on student preferences for office hours. However, we note that office hour meetings may be analogous to advising meetings. Once most colleges started offering face-to-face advising again, in Fall 2021, students were far more likely (96%) to choose online advising meetings rather than face-to-face.

Q2: To what extent can course content and effective teaching be done without in-person contact with students?

The vast majority of student respondents in the Rapid Response Surveys conducted by OIE in Fall 2020 reported that, when all of their classes were online, they had a very hard time staying motivated and concentrating as usual. OIE's analysis of pass rates in Fall 2020 as compared to previous years, indicated that high performing students performed fine during the fully online experience of Fall 2020, but that weaker students (those with lower high school GPAs) had fail rates that jumped from 25% to 45%. Furthermore, data on fail rates over many semesters, up to the present, suggests that DGT CAMP classes (typically taught by faculty who were trained in online instruction prior to the pandemic, with significant interest, expertise, and experience doing so) have fail rates identical to face-to-face classes, but fail rates in all other online modalities (including hybrid and hyflex) are systematically and consistently higher than face-to-face classes by 3-5%. (For details, see the [data pack](#) presented to the Academic Senate in May 2022.)

There were other things going on in the world, of course, that could help explain the Fall 2020 difficulties. And it is true that much of the online instruction in Fall 2020 was conducted by inadequately trained faculty members who were teaching online for the very first time. When faculty training is more extensive, when interested faculty get to choose to teach online rather than being forced to do so, and when students intentionally choose an online class rather than being forced into that modality, we believe that the outcomes might be different.

Therefore, we cannot come to a purely data-driven answer as if this was an entirely empirical question. Instead, we came to a position statement that is informed by data, but also a statement of our values and aspirations for our institution.

The Task Force concluded (with 88% Task Force agreement) that students may benefit from flexibility in course modality, and online coursework can be effective in some cases, but that we do *not* want Fresno State students to be permitted to pursue undergraduate degrees that are entirely (or almost entirely) online.

Note that we were unwilling to say the same about graduate programs. We believe that their target students and the nature of graduate programs are significantly different from undergraduate students and programs.

Q3: Are there inequalities in workload that might develop among faculty if some faculty rarely (if ever) come to campus?

Until the pandemic started, we had vanishingly small numbers of non-resident faculty. Therefore, we cannot answer this question empirically. However, it is a very strong position of the Task Force that workload inequalities would be inevitable if some faculty rarely (or never) come to campus. As a regional campus, and as a community-engaged campus, we believe that our core faculty simply must be here, on this campus and in this community, in order to meet the needs of our campus community and student body.

The Task Force concluded (with 94% Task Force agreement) that teaching and committee work can sometimes be achieved remotely, but that tenured and tenure-track faculty also bear responsibility for creating and maintaining our intellectual campus community, and that they can only do so if they are physically present for a meaningful fraction of their workload.

We recognize that the CSU system only mandates that faculty live in the state of California, and that Faculty Affairs has made agreements with small numbers of existing faculty during the pandemic to allow them non-resident status permanently. But we do not want this to become normative, and we do not want it to be an option for new hires.

Q4: To what extent does our accreditor, the Western Association of State Colleges, require us to teach in person versus online teaching?

According to WASC, if 50% or more of a program could possibly be completed online, the program must be approved as a "distance-education" program. As of May 2022, only a tiny handful of Fresno State programs had such approval. But WASC announced early in 2022 that it had changed the way it would count units in programs; it started including general education courses. Since all GE areas include at least one online course offering, every single program at Fresno State suddenly met the criteria for being "distance-education". Administrators at Fresno State are still working on some kind of batch approval process to get our programs in compliance, and WASC has extended the grace period until January 2023. But once that is completed, there will be no external accreditation issues that constrain class modality.

The Post-COVID Task Force recommends that Fresno State Academic Senate urgently create a policy to require that programs get approval before moving a majority of classes online. The process previously required by WASC (which included approval of the Dean, Provost, and Academic Senate) could be required internally now that it is no longer required externally.

Recommendations Regarding Course Modality

We propose that the text of this recommendation be inserted into APM 206 and become policy.

I.   Principles

Because Fresno State is a regional campus of the CSU system, created specifically to provide access to an equitable and high-quality education to all eligible students in our local region, we are committed to providing classes in various modalities while maintaining a focus on the integrity of the campus community as the nexus of our work.

The principles that drive decisions about class modality include:

1. Decisions about class modality should be made collectively by the faculty of the institution, not by administration or by individual faculty members. Departments are charged with making decisions about class modality within constraints established by the Academic Senate.
2. Promoting both *equitable access* for students and *effective student learning* are the most important considerations in determining class modality both for specific courses and for whole programs of study. Faculty preferences are a secondary consideration, but not irrelevant.
3. While students may benefit from flexibility in course modality and effective online coursework is possible in some classes, the education of a student at a comprehensive regional campus must also involve participation and inclusion in a vibrant and diverse campus culture, which requires students to be physically present on campus and in the local community for a meaningful fraction of their coursework.
4. While teaching and committee work can sometimes be achieved remotely, tenured and tenure-track faculty bear primary responsibility for creating and maintaining the intellectual community of the campus, and they can only do that if they are physically present on campus and in the local community for a meaningful proportion of their workload.

II.   Guidelines

Therefore, a majority of classes at Fresno State should be offered in a face-to-face modality, but with substantial opportunities for "distance-learning" modalities as defined by our accrediting body, WASC. This includes fully online (both synchronous and asynchronous), hybrid, and hyflex classes. This will be achieved by the following guidelines:

1. Faculty may only teach in a distance-learning modality if they have been appropriately trained and certified per APM 206. Even then, full-time tenured and tenure-track faculty may teach no more than 50% of their instructional WTUs with a distance-learning modality per semester. For those faculty with an odd number of WTUs of teaching per semester or 4-WTU courses, the ratio can be balanced between semesters within the academic year, with at least one 3- or 4-WTU course face-to-face in each of the two semesters. The 50% limit will not apply to other instructors (e.g., lecturers, FERPers, TAs).

        a.   Note: According to WASC, the entire course (and all of its WTUs) is classified as distance-learning if it is hybrid or hyflex. We will count the same way for the sake of consistency.

        b.   Exceptions may be considered by the department chair and college dean, in consultation with Faculty Affairs and the Provost, for reasons related to legally protected disabilities and family medical leave only for classes that the department faculty have approved for potential distance education, and by faculty who have been appropriately trained according to the requirements of APM 206. Even under these circumstances, such a request may not necessarily be granted. It is also noted that not all ADA or FML accommodations require a distance education teaching modality.

2. Each department may offer no more than 33% of its undergraduate instructional WTUs (excluding supervision classes, independent study, and classes offered as part of an approved distance-education program) in a distance-learning modality per semester.

        a.   Note: According to WASC, the entire course (and all of its WTUs) is classified as distance-learning if it is hybrid or hyflex. We will count the same way for the sake of consistency.

        b.   Temporary one-semester exemptions can be granted by the college dean when there are extenuating circumstances. Requests for exemption must come from the department chair, not from individual faculty members.

III. Department Policies

Each department must produce a departmental policy on course modality.

1. Department policies must include:

        a.   A list of courses to be offered via a distance modality because they are part of an approved distance-modality degree program.

        b.   A list of departmental course offerings that may be offered via a distance-learning modality. This list should be reviewed and updated regularly.

        c.   Additional constraints on course modality based on external accreditation.

        d.   Any additional constraints that the department wishes to impose on course modality, so long as they are compatible with those outlined in sections II.1 and II.2 above.

        e.   How testing will be handled in classes using a distance-learning modality. If testing will be employed, what safeguards will be in place to prevent cheating? (Respondus required? Proctored tests at the Bulldog Test Center?)

2. Department policies must be approved by the college curriculum committee, and kept on record by the College Dean's Office.

IV. Approval for more Extensive Distance Education

There are two circumstances under which a department must formally request approval from the campus, despite WASC status as a "distance-education program", for more extensive distance education offerings:

1) When a department wants to routinely offer more than ⅓ of their undergraduate classes in a distance-education modality – this may involve a department that offers a large number of general education classes or other university requirements, and there is a reason for those classes to be offered online more often than is otherwise recommended.

2) When a department wants to offer a program (undergraduate or graduate level) in which more than 50% of program courses are available in a distance-education modality. This is what WASC used to call a "distance education program", prior to COVID, before they started including general education classes in their calculations. To calculate this on the Fresno State campus, we will use only the program requirements, not general education and other campus requirements. If a student could possibly meet more than 50% of the program requirements with distance-education classes, then the program must seek campus approval.

To be approved for more extensive distance-education at Fresno State, the department/program must get the approval of the department chair, the college curriculum committee, the university curriculum committee, the Academic Senate, and the Provost. The proposal must describe:
1. A list of classes with a plan for which ones will be offered in a distance-modality, and whether or not they will also be offered face-to-face.
2. In what way the content of the curriculum is suited for online delivery, and reason for believing that the content will not be diminished at all by being taught online.
3. In what way the online offering will serve a population of students that cannot be served by face-to-face instruction.

Additional Recommendations Regarding APM 206 - Online Teaching
http://www.fresnostate.edu/academics/facultyaffairs/documents/apm/206.pdf

In addition to recommending the sections on assignment of course modalities and approval for distance education programs, described above, the Task Force also has additional recommendations regarding APM 206. A possible red-lined version is offered for consideration of AP&P, the committee charged with maintaining this policy.

1. Adopt the language of our accrediting body, WASC. (e.g., https://www.wscuc.org/resources/covid-19/) Instead of "technology-mediated", APM 206 should use the term "distance-education".

2. Redefine the various types of distance-education classes. When doing so:
   - Use percentages that correspond to WASC rules. WASC counts a class as "distance education" if 50% of the class is delivered online. Our current policy describes "Blended 1" as 20-66% online, and "Blended II" as 67-99% online. Let's instead line this up with WASC, and use "hybrid" instead of "blended", by calling Hybrid I 10-49% online, and Hybrid II 50-99% online.
   - Define "Online-Synchronous," "Hy-Flex," and "CSU Online" classes. We also need to specify what makes something "CSU Online".
   - Specify that all online classes may require face-to-face testing on campus, except for CSU Online classes. Many classes could be taught online except that high-stakes tests in competitive disciplines are severely compromised by cheating if they are administered online. Therefore, we propose making very clear which classes might include an on-campus component, especially testing, and which ones might not.

3. Address the issue of instructional time/contact hours and how those should be achieved in Hybrid classes. Use the CSU Course Classification System, which specifies "weekly class time" (aka instructional time) per credit unit for each type of class. How should asynchronous and hybrid classes estimate instructional time for the asynchronous component of the class, and how is that different from required reading and other assignments that are often conducted out of class, but not considered "instructional time"?

Recommendations Regarding APM 338 - Office Hours
http://www.fresnostate.edu/academics/facultyaffairs/documents/338.pdf

The Task Force supports the APM 338 policy change proposed by MCJ to allow instructors to offer office hours in the modality of their choice.

Specifically, we propose:

1. Allowing instructors to determine the modality of their office hours, eliminating the requirement that 40% of office hours always be face-to-face. The only exception to this is that we propose that if an instructor teaches a fully online class, they must offer at least some online office hours because the class might enroll non-resident students for whom face-to-face hours would be impossible.

2. Renaming "office hours" to become "student support hours". This is based on a recent finding that first-generation students sometimes misinterpret "office hours" as time that the instructor spends in their office and should not be bothered. We propose keeping the words "office hours" in the document so that it can be found when someone searches that term, but we hope that changing the name will start to change the way we (and our students) see this part of the job.

3. Eliminating the reference to "consultation hours" in the policy since it would be difficult to keep track of how much time is spent responding to student emails, and downright impossible to monitor this on a regular basis. Therefore, we propose that the policy say that student support hours should be offered in addition to asynchronous digital communication with students, but leave that out of calculations related to how much time is required.

4. We propose a new (but not very different) mechanism for determining how many office hours must be offered. We want to reduce the number of required hours by just a little because "consultation hours" should no longer be included. Instead, we suggest a "per credit unit" calculation on a sliding scale: 20 minutes of office hours per credit unit.

5. Finally, we suggest specifying that the requirement for student support hours is applicable to all instructional faculty, not just full-time faculty. We understand that student support is required by all instructors covered by the Collective Bargaining Agreement, so this should be reflected in our APM as well. Note: We have been told that Graduate Teaching Assistants may not be required to offer student support hours because they are subject to a strict time limit for how much they can work per week. If this truly does not allow for a requirement regarding availability to students, we leave it to you to add an exclusionary clause. If that is the case, we suggest that departments may need to find another way to provide student support availability to students enrolled in such classes.

<u>Recommendations Regarding APM 337 - Faculty Workload</u>
<u>http://www.fresnostate.edu/academics/facultyaffairs/documents/apm/337.pdf</u>

Propose an "on-campus" requirement as part of this policy. Perhaps this statement could be added: "Faculty workload requirements can only be met satisfactorily by full-time tenured/tenure-track faculty who are present on campus and in the local community for a meaningful fraction of their workload."

And while this is not directly relevant to the work of this Task Force, like others who have looked at this policy, we suggest that the policy be revised to reflect the research/scholarly activity requirement that we are already expected to complete, but that is not currently reflected in the policy.

APM 235 - Cheating and Plagiarism

http://www.fresnostate.edu/academics/facultyaffairs/documents/apm/235.pdf

Published empirical research suggests that cheating on exams is much more common in online classes than in face-to-face classes where exams are proctored. Plagiarism rates do not seem to change. The problem of cheating on exams cannot always be solved by using non-exam forms of assessment. We believe that this issue needs to be explored further. Perhaps the Academic Standards and Grading Committee, or the Online and Blended Education Committee could do so. All instructors need to be supported in their efforts to reduce cheating, not only those who teach classes that can use writing prompts for assessment and evaluation.

APM 322 - Evaluation of Teaching Effectiveness

http://www.fresnostate.edu/academics/facultyaffairs/documents/apm/322.pdf

More rigorous and modality-appropriate evaluation of teaching may be necessary. We want authentic evaluation of all classes, and we want the procedures to be similar such that some classes are not held to a higher standard than others. Some of the questions that come up: Should peer evals of distance education classes use criteria specific to online teaching? If so, who is qualified to evaluate distance education classes? How do we protect those qualified from bearing a significant workload burden related to peer evaluations? We encourage the Personnel Committee to review this policy with these considerations in mind.

APM 242 - Assignment of Grades

http://www.fresnostate.edu/academics/facultyaffairs/documents/apm/242.pdf

Should the Academic Standards and Grading Committee review grades by modality and make recommendations about which courses are "working" online or not? What other indicators of success are important for considering the success of our classes? Can the right to teach a class online be retracted if we find that it is not working? And if so, what group should be responsible for tracking outcomes?

APM 339 - Final Exams

https://academics.fresnostate.edu/facultyaffairs/documents/apm/339.pdf

This policy is written in such a way that only face-to-face classes are represented. In March of 2019, the Academic Standards and Grading Committee made extensive suggestions for revisions to this policy in order to align it with various teaching modalities and to address the issue of when students are allowed to reschedule final exams, and submitted them to AP&P. Those proposals were never brought before the Senate. We would like to get an update on the status of those proposals, and to suggest consideration of multiple teaching modalities.

Non-APM Recommendations

Staff Telecommute

- The taskforce is in support of developing a process for providing opportunities for flexible telecommuting arrangements for staff. Job descriptions vary widely across campus, and some may not be able to work remotely, but that should not prevent others, with different job descriptions from doing so. We urge administrators to develop a timely and responsive

process for evaluating telecommuting requests. It should involve consideration of the perspective of the staff member making the request, that person's supervisor(s), and the constituencies being served by the job. Decisions should ultimately be based on how students are best served. Requests must include a justification that addresses this, and denials must be accompanied by a justification that addresses this.

Library Services
- We recognize the vital role of the Library to support instructors and students, both for online and face-to-face instruction, and we encourage continued support of the resources they offer to the campus community.