Committee on Instruction Annual Report 2020-2021

BMCC Academic Senate

Members: Jean Amaral - Library
Andrés Colapinto - Social Sciences, Human Services, and Criminal Justice
Miguel Castro Nunes Fiolhais - Science
Lisa Grace - Health Education
Maureen Keenan - Music and Art
Lisa Rose - Social Sciences, Human Services, and Criminal Justice
Michael McGee - Health Education
Scott Tulloch - Speech, Communication, and Theatre Arts

Chair: Andrés Colapinto
Secretary: Michael McGee
Representative to the Executive Committee: Andrés Colapinto

Contents of the report:

1. Resolutions concerning student evaluations and peer observations

Fall 2020 was the first semester at BMCC where instruction was conducted almost fully online, in response to the health emergency created by the Covid-19 pandemic. Given the novel, difficult, and involuntary situation in which professors and students found themselves, the Instruction Committee determined that the College should not currently take a "business-as-usual" approach to the evaluation of instruction.

To that end, we proposed that (a) peer observations for Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 be used for "formative" purposes only, and not be included in decisions concerning reappointment, promotion and tenure (unless this was the express preference of the faculty member); and (b) that student evaluations of teaching be treated in the same way, and—additionally—that faculty could choose to have their student evaluations for Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 excluded from their personnel files. These resolutions are attached (See Attachments A and B.)

These resolutions were debated on the Senate floor, and put up for a vote (11/25/2020). A large majority of Senators in attendance voted for the resolutions. However, attendance at that point in the meeting was relatively low, and the resolutions did not receive "yes" votes from a majority of the full body, as required. The resolutions did not pass.

It should be noted that response rates for Fall 2020 student evaluations ended up being extremely low, and so were likely to be effectively ignored in most cases. (This much was communicated by the Chair of the Senate in a Spring 2021 Senate meeting.)

2. NC grading policy

It was brought to our attention that BMCC's NC (No Credit) grading policy was in violation of CUNY policy. Whereas our policy permitted grades of C- or below to be converted to NC, CUNY allows only F grades to be so converted, so long as the student meets other relevant criteria. The Instruction Committee was asked to submit a resolution to change the policy accordingly, which we did. This resolution (see Attachment C) passed in the Senate (2/24/2021).

The Committee was also invited to consider whether BMCC should now adopt a CR policy, wherein students can receive non-graded credit if their final grade falls within a determined range above F. We did not feel we had enough information to make such a proposal at that time. At a later meeting, we concluded that decisions about NC/CR grading policy are not properly within the purview of the Instruction Committee. These grades are assigned after professors submit their final grades, and so do not impact instruction or grade assignment. NC/CR options are meant to benefit students, and it is a student's choice whether to exercise such options. We suggest that the Committee on Student Affairs be charged with future consideration of NC/CR grades.

3. Reform of Student Evaluation of Teaching: the "Student Experience Survey"

The bulk of our work this year, and especially in the Spring 2021 semester, was devoted to the ongoing project of revising the way students provide feedback to instructors. The motivations and objectives of this project are discussed in detail in the Committee's reports from 2019-2020 and 2018-2019, as is previous work on this project. This work had resulted in a draft for a new survey instrument, which is framed as a "Student Experience Survey" (SES) rather than a "Student Evaluation of Teaching."

This year, we further revised this instrument after soliciting feedback from both students and faculty. An online focus group was convened with 70 students, who tested the SES and gave feedback in smaller breakout groups led by Instruction Committee members. Faculty were invited to use a Google Forms version of the SES as a mid-semester check-in for their own classes (Spring 2021), in order to then share their impressions with us (and those of their students, if possible). Eleven faculty members shared feedback with the Instruction Committee.

Using this additional feedback, the Committee further revised the SES in the Spring 2021 semester. We then submitted a resolution that the SES be used in a college-wide pilot at the end of Fall 2021, with volunteer tenured faculty (see Attachment D). This will involve coordination with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Analytics. The resolution passed the Senate on 4/28/2021. Next year's Instruction Committee should be charged with carrying out this pilot.

One additional note: BMCC recently ended its contract with SmartEvals, the survey software which had long been used for end-of-semester student feedback. Currently, BMCC is using Qualtrics software for this purpose. Its functionality is limited in comparison to SmartEvals, and may pose some obstacles to implementing the proposed survey. The Committee will need to work closely with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Analytics to determine how best to implement a survey that is as close as possible to what the Committee has proposed.

This report is respectfully submitted by the Chair of the Instruction Committee 2020-2021,

Andrés Colapinto

Attachment A

Resolution Concerning Student Evaluations of Teaching for Fall 2020

WHEREAS many faculty members did not self-select to teach remotely and had very little prior experience and training in remote instruction, and

WHEREAS thousands of students currently in online courses had originally registered for face-to-face learning, and

WHEREAS the results of SETs can influence decisions regarding reappointment, tenure and promotion, and

WHEREAS some faculty may prefer not to have student evaluations from this semester in their personnel files,

BE IT RESOLVED that during the Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 semester, student evaluations be used as formative rather than summative assessments of faculty teaching. The evaluations should be utilized to improve teaching and learning, and specifically should not be used in decisions to deny re-appointment, promotion or tenure.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that faculty can choose to have their student evaluations for Fall 2020 and/or Spring 2021 excluded from their personnel file.

Attachment B

Resolution concerning Peer Observations of remote teaching during pandemic

WHEREAS in April of 2020, the Academic Senate passed guidelines for peer observation of online courses that are aligned with the contractual procedures for online peer observations and

WHEREAS a large number of classes have exceeded enrollment of 25, which was agreed upon as the appropriate maximum number of students of for online instruction, and

WHEREAS many faculty members have not elected to teach remotely and have had very little experience training in remote instruction and,

WHEREAS no faculty member can assume instructional or pedagogical expertise in teaching in a remote environment in which students have not elected to learn in a remote environment,

BE IT RESOLVED that during the Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 semesters, all peer observations only be used "formatively," for the benefit of the observed professors; and that these observations not be included in decisions concerning reappointment, tenure, or promotion, unless it is the expressed preference of the observed faculty member.

Attachment C

BMCC: Academic Senate Instruction Committee

RESOLUTION REGARDING THE N/C GRADE

WHEREAS BMCC's current NC policy converts earned letter grades of C- or below to an NC for students who have opted in, and

WHEREAS CUNY policy requires that only earned F grades can be converted to NC,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that BMCC's NC policy should read as follows. (The relevant change is to item #5 only).

1) All degree programs may opt-in, opt-out, or adapt the NC grade option for individual classes within their department, subject to the approval of the BMCC Academic Senate.

2) The option to take a course as NC will only be offered to freshmen.

3) A freshman is defined as a student who has earned 30 credits or less, including transfer credits. Non-credit bearing remedial classes will not be included in these 30 credits.

4) A freshman may apply to take a maximum of 8 credits, or 2 classes, as NC.

5) A student who requests and is granted the NC option, and earns an F grade, will receive an NC grade instead. A student who requests and is granted the NC option, and earns a grade of D- or above will receive their earned grade.

6) Students should be encouraged to consult with their instructor when requesting the option of an NC grade, ideally via a pop-up or certification on the NC application form.

7) Students who opt for an NC grade can participate in the student evaluation process.

Attachment D

Instruction Committee Resolution – Pilot a New Student Experience Survey in Fall 2021

WHEREAS the current instrument used for end-of-semester student "evaluations" of teaching is not ideally suited to help instructors improve their teaching; and

WHEREAS national research demonstrates that student evaluations are prone to bias on the basis of the instructor's race, ethnicity and gender, among other characteristics; and

WHEREAS the Instruction Committee has developed a new survey instrument—a "Student Experience Survey," which is intended to address these concerns (see attached); and

WHEREAS the Instruction Committee has solicited feedback from students and professors, and will incorporate them into a revised survey by the end of Spring 2021,

BE IT RESOLVED that BMCC should pilot this new survey instrument at the end of Fall 2021, using it only for tenured faculty who agree to participate. The Instruction Committee will work with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Analytics to deploy this survey using the available survey technology. The pilot will be evaluated in Spring 2022, with the aim of adopting a new survey college-wide at the end of that semester.

This survey will help your instructor better understand your experience in this course.

It is specific to the instructor of this particular portion of the course (lecture, lab, discussion, recitation, etc.). Please focus your feedback on the specific portion of the learning experience over which they have control.

This survey is anonymous, and your answers cannot be traced back to you.

TEACHING AND LEARNING ELEMENTS

For each of the following teaching and learning elements, please indicate whether it has been beneficial to your learning, neither adds nor detracts, or needs improvement to help your learning. In the next section you will be asked to indicate which one was the MOST helpful to your learning, and which one is the MOST in need of improvement.

The way I am welcomed and included in this class: *

- is beneficial to my learning
- does not affect my learning
- gets in the way of my learning
- no opinion

The level of challenge in this course: *

- is beneficial to my learning
- does not affect my learning
- gets in the way of my learning
- no opinion

The degree to which the course includes active learning (e.g., role play, group work/breakout rooms, polls, using What's App, Padlet, or other connecting technologies., etc.): *

- is beneficial to my learning
- does not affect my learning
- gets in the way of my learning
- no opinion

The opportunities for interaction with fellow students in this course (e.g., Discussion Boards, breakout rooms, group work): *

- are beneficial to my learning
- do not affect my learning
- get in the way of my learning
- no opinion

The course readings or other materials used: *

- are beneficial to my learning
- do not affect my learning
- get in the way of my learning
- no opinion

The clarity of assignment instructions: *

- is beneficial to my learning
- does not affect my learning
- gets in the way of my learning
- no opinion

The assignments or projects in this course: *

- are beneficial to my learning
- do not affect my learning
- get in the way of my learning
- no opinion

The clarity of grading policies in this course: *

- is beneficial to my learning
- does not affect my learning
- gets in the way of my learning
- no opinion

The feedback provided by the instructor: *

- is beneficial to my learning
- does not affect my learning
- gets in the way of my learning
- no opinion

The instructor's use of technology:

- is beneficial to my learning
- does not affect my learning
- gets in the way of my learning
- no opinion

What's been MOST helpful to your learning? *

Instructor communication: *

- is beneficial to my learning
- does not affect my learning
- gets in the way of my learning
- no opinion

What's been MOST helpful to your learning? *

Choose only one.
- The way I am welcomed and included in this class
- The level of challenge in this course
- The degree to which the course includes active learning (e.g., role play, group work/breakout rooms, polls, using What's App, Padlet, or other connecting technologies., etc.):
- The opportunities for interaction with fellow students in this course
- The course readings or other materials used
- The assignments or projects in this course
- The clarity of assignment instructions
- The clarity of grading policies in this course
- The feedback provided by the instructor
- Instructor communication
- The instructor's use of technology
- None of the above elements are helpful to my learning

What specifically about your answer to the last question helped you learn? If you chose none of the above, say more about how none of the elements are helpful to your learning.

- Your answer
-

What could MOST use some improvement to help you learn? *

- The way I am welcomed and included in this class
- The level of challenge in this course
- The degree to which the course includes active learning (e.g., role play, group work/breakout rooms, polls, using What's App, Padlet, or other connecting technologies., etc.):
- The opportunities for interaction with fellow students in this course
- The course readings or other materials used
- The assignments or projects in this course
- The clarity of assignment instructions
- The clarity of grading policies in this course
- The feedback provided by the instructor
- Instructor communication
- The instructor's use of technology
- None of the above elements need improvement to help me learn

What specific change in the item you selected in the last question would help you learn? If you chose none of the above, say more about how none of the elements above need improvement to help you learn.
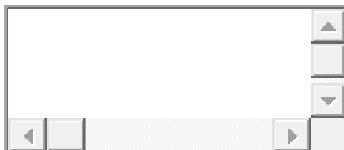
- [text box]

How did you support your learning?

How often do you attend class?

- 90% of the time
- 75-90% of the time
- 50-75% of the time
- 25-50% of the time
- 0-25% of the time
- This was a fully online class

Why did you attend the class for the amount of time you selected above?

Your answer

[text box]

How many hours per week do you spend on this course (not including any face-to-face class time)?

- More than 10 hours each week
- 8-10 hours per week
- 6-8 hours per week
- 4-6 hours per week
- 2-4 hours per week
- 1-2 hours per week
- 0 hours per week

Approximately how many times have you interacted with the instructor outside of the class (e.g., by email, office hours)?

- 1-3 times in total
- 4-6 times in total
- 7-10 times in total
- More than 10 times in total
- I have not interacted with the instructor outside of the class (e.g., by email, office hours)

Is there anything you would like to say about your learning experience in this course?

Your answer