

**Strategic Planning and Academic Freedom (SPAF) Committee
Vanderbilt University Faculty Senate**

**Report on Trans-Institutional Programs (TIPs)
Academic Year 2017-2018**

1. Committee Members:

Robert Carnahan, Chair, Medicine
Leslie Hopkins, Nursing [Executive Committee Liaison]
Sam Chang, Medicine
Jennifer Green, Medicine
Michael Miga, Engineering
Kevin Murphy, A&S
Tedra Walden, Peabody
Christopher Wright, Medicine

2. Committee Charges

Charge #1: Generate guidelines to improve communication between senate and faculty

Relevant committee activities

Following on the recommendation from the 2016-2017 SPAF committee, the committee defined a process and the necessary tools for regular presentation of senate activities and accomplishments to the faculty of their respective schools by all senators. In collaboration with the Executive Committee (EC), a short slide presentation was assembled and approved (see addendum #1). This presentation informs general faculty in these key areas:

- Senate selection process, composition, and leadership
- Senate roles and responsibilities
- Senate communication and information distribution tools
- Recent notable Senate accomplishments
- Current priorities of the Senate
- Senator Contact information

This slide deck was presented to the full senate at the January 2018 meeting and updated according to Senator feedback.

Outcomes and recommendations

Our recommendation for the next academic year is for the committee and the EC to work together to launch a program to begin sharing of these slides across all Vanderbilt University schools by Senators representing the school. We recommend the following activities:

1. Prior to each academic year the Senate EC will review and update the slide deck as needed.

2. At the commencement of each academic year, the EC and the Faculty Senate Administrative Manager will circulate the updated slide deck (or a link to the file on the Senate portal) to all Senators. The EC will also appoint one person from each school (preferably not a current committee chair) to organize and submit a school-specific implementation plan. A list of Senators organized by School/College and their contact information should be provided to the appointed school Senator.
3. Each school-specific plan should include:
 - Whether faculty presentations will be on a school, department/center, or division level.
 - Specific assignments of school Senators to these presentation venues.
 - How feedback from constituents will be relayed to the EC.
4. The EC will also notify Deans of schools/colleges that Senators from their respective school will pursue these goals, and asking for support in allowing these senators an opportunity to speak at the appropriate faculty gathering(s).
5. Each presentation should have two major goals. One is to improve faculty awareness of the Senate and its activities. The second is to solicit feedback from faculty about these activities and additional areas where the senate should consider action.
6. We also recommend that at full senate meetings, the EC feature this implementation and progress towards the overarching objective of presentation of these slides across every school in the university.
7. Finally, we recommend that near the end of the academic year, the senate leadership present the results of this program with a focus on the collective feedback obtained from faculty through these presentations.

Charge #2: Consider whether faculty have concerns about TIPS funding and if concerns exist take appropriate steps to consider these concerns.

Relevant Committee actions

1. September 2017 SPAF committee meeting. The above charge was finalized. It was also agreed that as relevant institutional leaders, John Geer (Vice Provost of Academic and Strategic Affairs, VU), Padma Raghavan (Vice Provost for Research, VU) and Jennifer Pietenpol (Executive Vice President for Research, VUMC) would be invited to a future SPAF meeting(s) to discuss this charge.
2. October 2017 SPAF committee meeting. all committee members agreed to solicit faculty feedback from colleagues at their respective schools regarding their experiences with TIPS program.
3. November 2017 SPAF committee meeting. Feedback received from faculty was discussed and organized into an agenda (see below) for meetings with institutional leadership. The finalized agenda was sent to all committee invitees as a preparation for our joint meetings.
4. January 2018 SPAF committee meeting. Hosted Jennifer Pietenpol and John Geer (notes below).
5. March 2018 SPAF committee meeting. Hosted Padma Raghavan (notes below).

Outcomes

1. Below is the agenda assembled by the SPAF committee members (in black), with a combined summary of feedback from institutional leaders at the January and March SPAF committee meetings (in red)

Tips agenda and Questions

Selection Process

Faculty Feedback to SPAF

- Many faculty have concerns about the criteria for scoring well.
- There are many examples of proposals with highly positive reviews, that do not get funded.
- There is a lack of clarity, even from those who have served on review committees, about the extent to which new cross-campus collaborations are prioritized, or if they are, in the awarding of grants. Apparently, some of the proposed projects already existed, or were existing initiatives tweaked through the inclusion of additional faculty member(s) from another unit, as opposed to entirely new initiatives. There did not seem to be specific criteria or instruction to address this disparity in the evaluation process.

Topics for discussion

- **Scoring Criteria:** Are there ongoing efforts to more clearly define scoring criteria? Are there any efforts underway to clarify what is appropriate for Vanderbilt Initiative Awards (VIA) versus Vanderbilt Re-investment Awards (VRA)?
 - A new process has been put in place for AY17-18.
 - Initially VRA and VIA were reviewed by the same committees. To increase clarity and effectiveness, these two types of proposals are now reviewed independently.
 - VIA process is essentially the same as it has been.
 - VRA process now includes individual meetings with the applicant group. The purposes are to:
 - Increase understanding of the program, its expectations, and commitments by the applicants
 - Increase understanding of the proposal by the committee.

- **Reviewer training/instruction:** Are reviewers being actively encouraged to be honest and forthright? Is there a sense that reviews are written to be overly positive out of concerns about perception, etc. by the reviewers? Is there any effort to ask reviewers to align their reviews with their scores (similar to what is done in NIH study sections)?
 - This has already been a point of emphasis for the current AY.
 - Leadership formerly met only with committee co-chairs. They are now holding a series of meetings with all committee members. The goal is to standardize program goals, expectations, scoring, etc.
 - They are working towards an SOP for review process.
 - They are working on procedures to help reviewers more closely align scoring with comments both prior to, and during committee sessions.
 - They are working towards requiring a summary paragraph provided to applicants at the end of the review process. This would more clearly lay out the strengths and weaknesses of the proposal.

- **Reviewer training/instruction:** Regarding new/novel initiatives versus retooling of existing programs, should some specific criteria or consideration be implemented to evaluate whether a project represents a new trans-university collaboration?
 - Not Discussed

- **Reviewer training/instruction:** From some feedback to us, the question would be whether there should be some consideration of whether the project represents a new trans-university collaboration or not?

- **Not Discussed**
- **Committee Interviews:** Interviews between applicant teams and review committees are very short. There are some concerns that the time is not optimally spent. Are there any efforts to provide a framework or structure to optimally utilize these small time blocks?
- **Continuous Improvement:** Is the administration actively reviewing refining and updating this process?
- **See comments above.**

1. Single track process

Feedback to SPAF

- Regarding Humanities proposals
 - These teams might typically have less infrastructure and experience in writing grants
 - Might have very different target impact from other types of awards
- Concerns exist regarding the feasibility of a diverse committee with wide-ranging areas of expertise reviewing proposals that may often be quite complex and subject-area/domain specific.
- How can one program serve such diverse groups and needs?

Topics for discussion

- **Proposal/Committee Diversity:**
 - How can such a diverse community judge complex and detailed proposals from areas outside of their expertise?
 - Is there a concern that there may only be one or two members on any given committee competent to judge the merits of a given proposal?
- **Program Tracks:**
 - Have there been any consideration of multiple tracks for this award?
 - Individual tracks tailored to different schools or domains (e.g. humanities versus infrastructure versus research)?
- **In summary, the above items were discussed and it was communicated that a multi-track process was not in keeping with the trans-disciplinary focus of the program.**
- **As to the relative applicant success from various disciplines, it was stated that there is little discrepancy across disciplinary focus or school, when adjusted for number of submissions. For example, while social science focused proposals may have received fewer TIPS**

awards, this is consistent with the comparatively lower number of applications from this area.

- Relatedly, there was a discussion point that a straightforward approach to allaying faculty concerns with funding discrepancies across school, topical areas, etc., would be for the TIPS website to host more summative data regarding the programs (such as number of different types of proposals submitted, number of each type funded, etc.). Some basic analyses of both applications and awards would be useful to past and future applicants.

2. Post-award process

Feedback to SPAF

- Definite concerns exist regarding the rigidity in usage of funds.
 - Restrictions regarding salary, tuition, etc.
 - No course buy-out options
- There is a sense that this is overly risk averse and does not adequately empower faculty to make decisions that are best for the goals of the funded initiative.
- A desire to see more data regarding the program. Are there trends regarding faculty enthusiasm for the program?

Topics for discussion

- **Spending restrictions:**
 - Is this being discussed or considered at the administrative level?
 - Are there a specific rationale for this approach?
- It was communicated to the committee that it is very unlikely that these restrictions will change. These restrictions are considered fundamental to fostering the goals of the program. Previous award programs allowing such spending have had some sub-optimal outcomes due to usage of funds for faculty salary, course buy-outs, etc.
- While not ruled out, there was hesitation to implement an appeals process for situations where spending restrictions could be removed if suitable justification could be provided.
- **Program trends**
 - What are the year-to-year totals for submissions, funded awards, etc.?
 - The original proposal was for 10 years. Is this still the case? What is the expectation for the TIPS program beyond this time period?

- The TIPS website does list and describe awardees for each year. However, there is little information about the underlying process statistics or updates on outcomes. There was broad agreement across both meetings with leadership that it would be beneficial for more summary statistics to be made available. There was also discussion of inclusion of some form of updates or outcomes data from the awardee programs.
- It was clear in the discussions that the scope of the TIPS program will be limited to the originally announced total funding as described within the Academic Strategic Plan.
- There was a discussion of the need to ensure Deans, Department chairs, and other relevant leaders are prepared for end of funding commitments by the TIPS program to the awardee programs. There is concern amongst faculty that some previous centrally funded programs, have had difficulties at the conclusion of the funding. In particular, there could be proactive discussions with TIPS leaders and their respective Deans and Departmental leaders about sustainability planning beyond the TIPS funding.

Recommendations and Responses

The SPAF Committee recommends the following:

1. The committee enthusiastically supports the development of expanded training for TIPS committees and development of an SOP for TIPS committee operations already underway. This SOP could be adapted for similar programs beyond the TIPS program. Standardization of these committees is a reliable method to forestall future concerns and criticisms of variable committee outcomes. Ultimately, an SOP could clarify:
 - committee training and instructions
 - procedures to help reviewers/committees more closely align **final** scoring with comments both prior to, and during committee sessions
 - requiring a summary paragraph provided to applicants at the end of the review process. This would more clearly lay out the strengths and weaknesses of the proposal
2. The committee recommends that the TIPS website hosts more summative data regarding both applicants and funded programs. Some basic presentations of trends in applications and awards, including Colleges and Schools, topical areas, and other relevant summary metrics.
3. The committee also recommends that funded TIPS programs provide short annual updates to also be posted on the TIPS program website.

4. While the committee appreciates the complexities involved in implementation and execution, nonetheless, the committee recommends implementation of an appeals process for TIPS spending restrictions. This process would adjudicate situations brought forth by applicants regarding suitable justification for exceptions to the standard spending restrictions.
5. The committee recommends that the relevant institutional leadership develop a communication plan to ensure Deans, Department chairs, and other relevant leaders are prepared for end of funding commitments by the TIPS program to the awardee programs. Ideally this would speak to the importance of developing documented sustainability plans and commitments. Alternatively, a description of how this concern is already being addressed could be provided to the Faculty Senate.

Charge #3: "Explore the current state, future plans, and faculty experience regarding the burgeoning number of online education initiatives happening across campus."

Relevant Committee actions

1. September 2017 SPAF committee meeting. The above charge was finalized. It was also agreed that John Sloop (Associate Provost for Digital Learning) and Andy Finch (Assistant Professor of the Practice of Human & Organizational Development) would be invited to a future SPAF meeting(s) to discuss this charge.
2. October 2017 SPAF committee meeting. All committee members agreed to solicit faculty feedback from colleagues at their respective schools regarding their experiences and feedback regarding online education programs at Vanderbilt University.
3. November 2017 SPAF committee meeting. Feedback received from faculty was discussed and organized into an agenda (see below) for meetings with institutional leadership. The finalized agenda was sent to all committee invitees as a preparation for our joint meetings.
4. February 2018 SPAF committee meeting. Hosted John Sloop and Andy Finch (notes below).

Outcomes

Introductory information from each guest (each met individually with the committee).

John Sloop

1. Associate Provost for Digital Learning was created approximately three years ago.
2. Key mission of his office is optimizing online education at VU.
3. Important to realize that revenue is not a key metric for his office in this process.
4. The Provost has been clear that faculty input and approval, in addition to Dean- and Chair-level approval, should be part of all online educational programs.
5. Vanderbilt has numerous non-credit courses being offered through Coursera, a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) platform.
6. There are currently two schools, Peabody and Nursing, offering online degree-granting programs.
7. VU has a partnership with 2U Inc. for use of their delivery platform for the Peabody courses. 2U Inc. is an educational technology company that oversees development and operation of the platform to deliver courses. They operate in conjunction with VU and are not directly visible to the students. VU and 2U Inc. have a tuition sharing model of operation.
8. VU is finalizing development of an in-house platform for delivery of non-degree course.

9. Faculty Compensation
 - a. School dependent
 - b. Provost-led course initiatives are paid similarly to A&S course. But there are opportunities for licensing-related income.
10. Intellectual property for all current online platforms stays with the faculty member. Online platforms like Coursera only own that particular delivery of the material.

Andy Finch

1. In September 2016, 2U Inc. conducted market research and identified his program as one with an available market within the online educational space. This is a Masters-level program in school counseling
2. VU and 2U Inc. chose a roll-out date of August 2017 for launch of the degree program.
 - a. This is a blended online degree program, with asynchronous online components, weekly live online components, and required on-campus activities.
 - b. Roll out date selected by VU and 2U Inc was aspirational and was difficult to achieve. While all deadlines were achieved in the process of course launch, future efforts should consider a longer runway to launch.
 - c. The online program operates largely on the same schedule as the analogous on-campus program, with the exception of a required summer session for on-time graduation from the online program. There is also a rolling admission process across the entire calendar year.
 - d. 2U Inc. Particulars
 - They propose recording video lectures once every three years. Watching recorded lectures is a course requirement.
 - Faculty member oversees weekly live sessions with students via 2U Inc. online video platform.
 - 2U Inc. asserts that online offerings through their platform actually increases applications for residential programs.
3. Feedback on the current approach with 2U Inc.
 - 3-5 year plan with video recording lectures may not be realistic. In actuality, most fields change more rapidly than this pace. At a minimum, small portions of lectures will become outdated after 1-2 years.
 - However, lecture recordings are done at the 2U Inc studio (Arlington, VA), not locally. Therefore, re-recording lectures is not trivial for the faculty

member, and would incur extra cost for 2U Inc and the university.

- The rolling admissions process also represents an increase in workload for those directing the program. Rather than a dedicated timeline for annual admissions, this approach requires constant attention, as current process has three new admission cohorts per year.
- A strong benefit of the online program is that it has decidedly increased the class diversity.

Below is the agenda assembled by the SPAF committee members (in black), with a combined summary of feedback from our invited guests at the February SPAF committee meetings (in red)

Tips agenda and Questions

Equivalence of online or blended programs

Feedback to SPAF

- Numerous comments indicate that Faculty have clear concerns regarding the equivalence of fully or partially online degrees to residential programs.

Topics for discussion

- What is institutions position regarding equivalence?
- Is there any discussion to consider these as separate degree programs? Or to indicate in educational records the delivery format?
- Are programs being specifically evaluated to ensure that these programs meet the same standards as residential programs?
- Is there data to support the general validity of online and/or blended approaches to degree programs?
- Sloop: 2U Inc. will not allow segregation or distinguishing online versus residential degrees in any way.
- Sloop: Regarding equivalence, 2U Inc. has substantial data that learning outcomes are equivalent with online education. VU does not yet have substantiating internal data.

Faculty workload

Feedback to SPAF

- The unanimous feedback we received is that overseeing a fully or partially online course represents a substantial workload increase, as compared to a residential course.

Topics for discussion

- Is there any discussion to account for this increased workload via faculty course load per semester or salary adjustments?
- Finch: 2U Inc. promotes the position that once launched, an online course represents an overall load reduction for the faculty member. So far, this proposition is inaccurate. This premise seems to be based on the reduction of lecture time. While the relative distribution of lecture time, live interactions, and electronic messaging with students varies between online versus on-campus, a comprehensive review of total time allocation by Dr. Finch shows an equal amount of weekly faculty time is required for both options. This does not include the course development time required for the 2U Inc online course (online materials, video recordings, etc.).
- Finch: He was paid 2 course equivalents for preparing the materials, recording video lectures, and generally overseeing development of the course in collaboration with 2U Inc. Each faculty member is also offered the option to take one of these as course release time, and he took both course equivalents as salary.
- Several SPAF committee members noted that additional salary or course release time was not standard in their respective schools, where development of new online materials was not recognized in this way.
- Committee: Numerous members of the SPAF committee with experience in online education indicated that leading an online course represents a significant increase in workload not a decrease. This is an inherently more complex process to oversee. Also, there is a considerably higher level of interaction per student.
- Sloop: There is currently no centralized program to mandate or encourage faculty course load adjustments for online course oversight. Though development of a VU Principles and Best Practices document could be a vehicle for such recommendations.
- Sloop and committee: A town hall to solicit feedback from faculty leading online courses would be useful and informative.

Student workload

Feedback to SPAF

- Another concern was that blended programs in particular can represent a substantial increase in workload for the student.

Topics for discussion

- Is there a person or team reviewing these programs in comparison to their residential equivalents to ensure they are harmonized?
- Are comparisons of breadth and depth of course and programs are harmonized and appropriate?
- **Sloop and Finch: There are no centralized processes examining student workload or residential/online harmonization. These are handled at the school/college and/or departmental level.**

Recommendations and Responses

The SPAF Committee recommends the following:

1. The committee highly recommends a town hall led by the Associate Provost for Digital Learning targeting faculty leading online course. Key points to include: faculty workload, faculty compensation, student workload, appropriate course/degree launch planning.
2. Following this town hall, the committee also highly recommends development of a recommended practices document by the Provost and Associate Provost for Digital Learning. This could detail the VU experiences so far and have recommendations regarding:
 - a. Options and descriptions of online course delivery at Vanderbilt University.
 - b. Realistic timelines for development of online degree programs and courses
 - c. Inclusion of program and faculty leaders in decision making processes regarding online initiatives.
 - d. Considerations regarding faculty effort and course load.
 - e. The availability of the office of the Associate Provost for Digital Learning in assisting with all of these matters.
3. The committee also recommends establishment of new SPAF committee charges for the 2018-2019 academic year to coordinate with the Associate Provost for Digital Learning and assist in implementing the above recommendations.

Charge #4: Is there now a need for appropriate groups to reconsider student and staff freedom of expression on campus?

Outcomes and recommendations

In communications between SPAF committee and Dean of Students Mark Bandas, there was a clear appreciation for the previous engagement of SPAF with student leaders in developing a statement of academic freedom. Dean Bandas is continuing to engage with students on furthering this issue. Given the very different relationship to the institution, and governance structure of students versus faculty, it was agreed there is no further role for SPAF in this issue. Similarly, it was decided that there was no clear role for SPAF to engage in the area of an academic freedom statement for staff.

Other Charges

The SPAF committee reviewed additional continuing charges from the previous academic year (see below) and concluded that there were no further actions for SPAF in these areas.

Identify the role of Vanderbilt's new Chief Diversity Officer/Office in circumstances involving allegations of violations of faculty academic freedom of expression.

Identify and outline any circumstances which limit a Vanderbilt faculty member from utilizing her/his Vanderbilt affiliation in public speech.

The General Counsel's office expressed a desire to hear from Faculty Senate on whether there would ever be a circumstance in which Vanderbilt would disinvite an outside speaker from visiting campus to give a talk. Identify current procedure and policies related to this issue.