

CLA Senate Meeting Minutes: Monday 21 October 2019

1. Approval of Agenda

Agenda approved unanimously at 2:32 PM.

2. Approval of the minutes from September 2019

Approved unanimously at 2:33 PM.

3. Dean's Report

The Associate Dean, filling in for the Dean, opens the floor to Senators for questions. The Moderator asks for follow-up on Senate concerns about the Academic Master Plan (AMP) and the process for assigning TAs to faculty, given recent complaints about TA assignments.

1. *Academic Master Plan*

The Associate Dean reports that the Dean was surprised by the Senate's complaint about the "short timetable" for department input on the AMP, since he felt the November 1 deadline announced at the September 18 Chairs meeting was adequate warning. He will need to submit his summary to other Deans before their November 8 meeting. He emphasizes the need to "minimize" this task, aiming for half to two-thirds of a page at most. He will be submitting just an early-stage bullet list to clarify plans already in progress and set priorities for future planning. New programs, for instance, need only a 2-3 sentence rationale with the desired timetable and a brief note about the resources (revenue, faculty) needed to support the proposed program, including what the department itself will bring it.

The Moderator comments that this sounds like a scaled-back request, given language in the Provost's email about departments communicating their "aspirational vision" etc. The Associate Dean characterizes this stage as an opening to the conversation, a "rough draft" rather than a "polished document." The Moderator confirms that this document will not be used for "immediate resource distribution."

There are no questions for the Associate Dean on this matter.

2. *Assignment of TAs*

The Associate Dean describes the process of determining TA assignments for large enrolment (LE) classes (using formula of 1 TA per 70 students), which includes consulting with GPDs about how best to meet departmental needs. Departments with graduate programs and LE classes typically assign TAs from within their department. Otherwise, CLA has department-specific arrangements for assigning TAs, with Ph.D.

students from the McCormack School going to Political Science and Economics faculty, and graduate students in English mostly going to courses in Art, Cinema, Performing Arts, Communication, Asian Studies, and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. CECS students tend to be assigned to courses in Africana Studies and Labor Studies, as requested by those departments. Timing of TA assignments is also a factor in how decisions are made, since LE classes that can be counted on to fill have TAs assigned before newer or less certain LE classes. Typically, a handful of such courses every semester are not assigned TAs until a few weeks before classes start. Another problem is that some departments don't accept or grant funding to graduate students until the last minute. The system is "less than ideal," but she believes that serious cases of inappropriate TA assignment (e.g. a "science-y" student assigned to a humanities class) are rare and haven't happened for many years.

A Senator identifies herself as a recent (perhaps 2017) recipient of a TA who was "out of her depth" and unable to grade students' work. The Associate Dean believes this was the last time a mismatch of this kind occurred.

There are a lot of questions for the Associate Dean about this item.

- i. A Senator asks whether a LE class with 140 students should receive two TAs, according to the formula, and if so, whether this is the reason her department recently capped her LE class (despite being writing-intensive) at 125, limiting her to one TA. She also asks whether it might be possible to build a quick interview into the assignment process, to filter out TAs who would not be good matches for particular courses. The Associate Dean explains why the latter would be difficult, since many graduate students decide to come to UMB because of guaranteed funding offer and so cannot be left without a TA assignment. A preferable option would be for faculty to provide information about what they need in a TA, to enable her to make more informed decisions. She asks the Dean's Executive Assistant to make note of this idea. The Moderator asks how early that information would need to be provided. The Associate Dean says that no TA assignments are made until recruitment is (mostly) finished.
- ii. A Senator asks whether TAs receive any training. The Associate Dean replies that all are required to attend an Orientation day, however the scope of this session is limited to communicating basic information (e.g. hours of work per week) and advice on how to deal with students in distress. There is little to no training related to teaching.
- iii. A Senator asks if rumors about not allowing TAs to lead discussion sections are true. The Associate Dean is not aware of any discussions on this subject.

- iv. A Senator asks if there is anything he can do about the fact that his TAs' schedules sometime don't allow them to attend his class. Because the Senator is from Political Science and those TAs come from the McCormack School, the Associate Dean cannot answer. However, she has told GPDs in MGS that TAs do need to attend lecture, and suggests that they can make language around this point more explicit.
- v. A Senator asks if there is any evaluation structure in place for TAs, to "incentivize" and clarify faculty expectations. The Associate Dean responds that she has been thinking CLA should do more along these lines, e.g. a mid-semester survey. She did request feedback from GPDs at the end of the spring semester, and received mostly positive reports.
- vi. A Senator asks for confirmation that LE classes with 140 students or more receive two TAs. The Associate Dean says yes, or else one TA full-time.
- vii. A Senator whose department has created an informal contract for TAs and faculty suggests that the Senate might consider developing something similar for CLA as a whole. The Associate Dean notes that their union contract says TAs don't have to be on campus until the day before classes start, so the timing could be difficult.
- viii. A Senator notes that due to incomparable course content and assessment methods (e.g. Scantron tests vs. writing assignments), we might want to consider using different metrics for assigning TAs, e.g. designating some courses as a .25 assignment instead of .5. The Associate Dean states that this is something they have discussed, however there are no more .25 appointments, beyond a few exceptional circumstances.
- ix. The Moderator suggests that the Senate to could create a standing committee to oversee this matter and make recommendations.
- x. A Senator suggests that it might be helpful to create a rubric for faculty to prioritize their TA needs, including language (developed in conjunction with the union) to ensure expectations of the position are clear and equitable. The Associate Dean agrees that this would be helpful, even within departments, so that TAs can be matched by their experience.
- xi. The Moderator asks whether something along these lines could be distributed to all TAs in the OFD's fall Orientation session. The Associate Dean agrees that TAs need to understand what their job entails and that it would be helpful to have a written document to distribute. However, timing again complicates how this information is communicated. Ideally it would happen before the TA and assigned faculty meet for the first time, which would require TAs to come to campus earlier than union contract requires.

There being no further questions, the Moderator thanks the Associate Dean for attending. Dean's Report ends 3:14pm.

4. Moderator's Report

[I don't have separate notes on this...my memory is that we went straight from the discussion with Jane to the program items below—is that correct?]

5. Motion from the Majors, Honors, and Special Programs Committee to approve the following NEW programs:

- Latin & Classical Humanities Post-baccalaureate
- Classical Languages Post-baccalaureate

A Senator asks for clarification on the different language requirements of the two programs. Another Senator requests more information about their target audience.

Programs unanimously approved as a block at 3:17pm.

- Food Studies minor

Approved unanimously at 3:20pm

6. Motion from the Academic Affairs Committee to approve the following NEW courses:

- Art 220
- Art 224

Following up on a Senator's question about Section C categories checked for these courses in the One Form, the Moderator asks the Dean's Executive Assistant when the new online system replacing the One Form will end. The latter anticipates that it will be piloted in the spring.

- Asian Studies 335L

Moderator explains the 15 course pre-requisite. Instructor wants this new course to be broadly available, but not open to freshmen.

- English 268

Senator suggests whether the statement in the One Form identifying this course as a Mellon Humanities grant recipient should be made more visible.

- LatAm 160
- Music 210
- NAIS 488
- Phil 376
- Poli Sci 370
- Port 385
- WGS/CINE 412L

Courses unanimously approved as a block at 3:27pm.

7. Motion from the Academic Affairs Committee to approve the following course CHANGES:

- WGS/ANTHL 243L
- JAPAN 305

Changes unanimously approved as a block at 3:28pm.

8. New Business

The Moderator returns to the earlier discussion about creating standardized language for TAs, not necessarily a “contract” but text framed as recommendations for graduate students and faculty. She asks Senators what we think such a document should include, stipulate, or clarify?

A Senator reads her department’s “Grad assistant responsibilities” document, referred to in previous discussion. It includes language about the requirement for TAs to attend trainings and classes, to take notes in class and make them available for students who miss class, to maintain professionalism and model appropriate behavior with undergraduates, to be available to meet with faculty as needed, to take attendance, to lead small group discussion or help with large group discussion if asked, to follow up with troubled students, to grade homework assignments, to be prepared to show a video or lead discussion if professor is absent. The document also includes (as recommended but not required) that the TA lead one class at the instructor’s request, and write an end-of-semester comment about his/her experience for the GPD. The Senator says this document has been very effective when handed to TAs in their first meeting with the professor and used as an “opening conversation” to set general expectations for the assignment.

The Moderator asks for input for a CLA-wide document that could be distributed at the OFD Orientation and posted on the CLA website. Suggestions from Senators included:

- i. Faculty should also be reminded not to overburden their TAs beyond the nine required hours per week.
- ii. Faculty should consider practical issues such as the need for TAs to have a place to meet with students, do review sessions, etc.
- iii. Do a mid-semester check-in.
- iv. Clarify that the assignment is defined as a strict weekly maximum of nine hours, not an average of nine hours per week.
- v. Use “grade-norming” for TAs, e.g. give them graded papers or tests to model expected grading standards, or use a rubric to clarify assessment scale.
- vi. Clarify who has the authority to authorize extensions, make accommodations for students in difficulty.
- vii. Clarify the TAs grading responsibilities and limits, e.g. whether TAs can grade papers, since there is a lot of “slippage” and uncertainty around this issue. Perhaps the Senate should take a position on the kind of grading we would accept, e.g. there must be a rubric, or the professor must review the TA’s graded work. Since we have TAs who are doctoral students expecting to become faculty one day, there needs to be some flexibility around grading restrictions. Similarly, TAs should feel confident that professors will “have their back” when grading decisions are challenged.

The Moderator states that the Executive Committee will draft these recommendations and circulate them before the next Senate meeting for further discussion and revision. She invites Senators to send her any additional ideas in the meantime.

On the Chancellor search, the Moderator reports that she contacted the search committee for an update but has received no response yet. She has only been told that they are in the midst of signing confidentiality agreements and will let the Moderator know when they have decided what they can tell us.

The Moderator reminds Senators of the upcoming lecture (Thursday 3:30pm, Alumni Lounge) by Christopher Newfield, an expert on public universities and humanities education. This is the first event of the Center for the Humanities, Culture, and Society.

The meeting adjourns at 3:45pm.