

Academic Affairs End of the Year Report

Submitted by Katie Alexander; Academic Affairs Chair 2018-2019

Committee Members: Maddie Sarasio Meyer (voting senator), Sam Tillman (secretary), Eric Ngo (associate senator)

Section 1: 2018-2019 Ideas and Projects

GPA Requirements for Scholarship Retention

Status: Ongoing

In the discussions surrounding mental health on campus, many students expressed how strict the requirements are to retain full scholarship amounts. The current requirement is a 3.25 GPA -- above a B average. Students are routinely told that earning a B in a class is a fine grade, so we're also concerned that students could be doing well and still not earn their full scholarship amount. We discussed the issue with Dr. Gooch, and she told us the administration is looking into how many students lose some of their scholarships from not being able to meet this standard. I encourage future chairs to continue this discussion.

Freshman Academic Guide

Status: Ongoing

One of our biggest ideas for the year was to create a guide to academics at Truman for first-year students. We planned to incorporate information like an explanation of the LSPs and the advising process and also include advice such as how to build a schedule and study effectively, and [student profiles](#) with personal advice and fun facts about their experience at Truman.

After suggesting the idea to the body, the chairs of all the standing committees also wanted to be included in the guide, so we revised the idea to be a general guide to life at Truman. Over the course of the year, we met with Jack Holcomb twice about the guide. He loved the idea and also encouraged us to use the guide as a way to redefine and shape Truman culture. He suggested that the guide be printed for every freshman student and said his office would be willing to explore funding the guide. Dr. Gooch also loved the idea and would be willing to explore funding from the Academic Affairs budget.

Each chair wrote their section of the [guide](#), although some ideas still needed to be drafted out. This document has also been shared with Mr. Holcomb, who offered suggestions.

Unfortunately, I received an email from the Admissions Office in April that they had also been working on a guide for freshman students. I met with Shari Fieser, who's been leading their project, and their guide was essentially completed, so we tabled our project for the remainder of the semester. However, there is still a lot of room for chairs to be involved in creating a guide next year. The Admissions Office guide was a lot of institutional knowledge, whereas our guide offered a student perspective. Shari thought collaborating with us next semester would be very beneficial for the guide for future students. I have the link to the Admissions Office guide so please ask me if you would like to see their work. Shari was really open to collaborating next semester so I strongly encourage reaching out to her in the beginning of next year.

Course Threads

Status: Ongoing

Another one of our major ideas this year was to create an interdisciplinary certificate program called "Course Threads." We had the idea for this project in the summer and have worked on it all through the school year with the support of Dr. Gooch and Dr. Bridget Thomas. Dr. Thomas helped us refine our ideas and allowed us to initially present the project to the Interdisciplinary Committee, which was also supportive.

This program is modeled after a program called Course Threads at the University of California- Berkeley. For an explanation of the program and our vision, please see this [proposal](#) that we brought to UGC in the spring.

The faculty were very supportive of our idea after proposing the project to UGC, and Dr. Jarvis added the project to the task list for the "Big Ideas" committee he wanted to create through UGC. However, because the committee's main job was to tie loose ends together for the curriculum, and the curriculum was delayed, the committee was never formed.

For several weeks, the committee contacted different faculty members on university governance to gather support for making a separate Course Threads committee. Many professors were interested in serving, and we formed a rough committee with Katie and Dr. Gillette serving as co-chairs. We planned to propose the committee at the last UGC meeting, but Dr. Paul Parker motioned for the committee to be formed at the second-to-last meeting, and it passed unanimously. We would love for the future Academic Affairs chair or a member of Academic to be involved on this committee next year.

Credit/No Credit Disclosure Policy

Status: Ongoing

Keaton brought it to our attention in the winter that the Registrar's Office had contacted his professor when he decided to take a course credit/no credit. He felt this was an invasion of his privacy and asked us to look into the credit/no credit disclosure policy. We talked to Dr. Gooch about the issue, and she discovered the the faculty had passed a [resolution](#) in 2014 so that they would be informed when students take classes credit/no credit. The Student Government passed a [resolution](#) asking that faculty not be notified, but that made no ground in faculty governance.

One of our biggest concerns about the faculty resolution was that the faculty wanted to group students in classes by who was taking the course for a traditional grade and who was taking the course c/nc. Other reasons they wanted to know was for student safety, because they may report concern about a student who stops coming to class or completing assignments. They argue that because students who take classes c/nc often show less dedication to their classes, professors may unnecessarily worry and report them to students of concern.

Our concerns about this policy are that students would be discriminated against in class out of the assumption that they don't care about their work like a student on a traditional grading scale. We are also worried professors may not report students with actual problems because they're taking the class c/nc. Dr. Gooch believes we have ground with these arguments.

We've discussed the idea in faculty governance and sent out a [survey](#) to faculty about the policy. I believe opinions on faculty governance are mixed but they're very open to discussion. I strongly encourage the future chair to pursue a resolution on this topic about the policy that explains our stance on the issue (whatever that is after you review the surveys and think it over).

New Curriculum

Status: successfully delayed, participation ongoing

Deanna Schmidt, Keaton Leppanen, and Katie all participated in lengthy discussions with the faculty about the new curriculum. We were particularly concerned with the new Perspectives requirements and the new freshman experiences: the Symposium and the Self and Society Seminar.

The Freshman Symposium piloted this fall and the results were less than successful. The pilot had a very large drop rate and poor feedback from both students and the SAs

facilitating discussion. Major elements of the program needed to be redesigned, but there were no plans to run a second pilot. The Self and Society Seminar was also planned to be integrated with the Symposium, but plans for that integration were not being discussed, and we had similar concerns that the seminar would need a pilot to identify problems before running a full implementation. Some progress was also stalled on the various Perspectives committees, and we were concerned that not enough time was put into developing that piece of the curriculum.

We voiced all of those concerns in a resolution linked later in this document. Our resolution garnered significant support from the administration and also from some faculty members, and threw us into the conversation second semester.

Our concerns about the Self and Society seminar were assuaged in the second semester. This piece of the curriculum was better organized and the faculty were very excited to teach their seminar courses. However, we still felt that it would be best for the incoming students if we delayed the Symposium and the Perspectives. The Symposium in particular was supposed to set the tone for students' experience at Truman. We felt that if the Symposium was poorly done, it could have significant negative effects for Truman freshman.

Many faculty members and administration shared this opinion. On Thursday, March 21, a historic joint meeting of Faculty Senate and Undergraduate Council voted to go forward with the seminar and new wellness requirement, but to delay the Symposium and the Perspectives.

Students will continue to have a critical voice in the development of the curriculum next fall. One of the major jobs of the Academic Affairs chair will be to participate in this discussion.

Letter to Prospective Students

Status: Completed

In her fall meeting with the Admissions Office, Melody Chambers (director of admissions at the time), invited Katie to write a letter to prospective students highlighting leadership opportunities that are available for students at Truman. Katie completed and submitted this [letter](#), but never heard anything back, probably because of the changing leadership in the office.

Additionally -- the Admissions Office invited the Student Government to go back to their high schools over break to speak about Truman to prospective students. A few students

from Student Government did this and had a good experience. Future chairs could also facilitate this experience for Student Government members in coordination with the office.

Student Commencement Speakers

Status: Completed

In the beginning of the year, Dr. Gooch invited the Academic Affairs committee to facilitate selecting the first-ever student speaker for the Fall Commencement ceremony. We were so excited for the opportunity and we created a process for the fall. Our basic timeline was as follows:

For six weeks: have applications open. Put ad in Truman Today. Get list of all graduating seniors from ITS and send out email reminders.

Read applications with committee and select finalists. Send feedback to finalists on how to improve their speech.

2 weeks before graduation: invite finalists to perform their speeches in person to selection committee. Committee consisted of Dr. Gooch, the Academic Affairs committee, Dr. Self and Dr. Shapiro (as heads of the Communications and English departments). Select speaker.

This went so well in the fall that we were also able to do it in the spring. In the spring, we also had a semi-finalist stage where we sent out advice for edits before we chose our finalists.

Here is our application for the [fall](#) and our application for the [spring](#).

Academic Accolades Banquet

Status: Completed

The Academic Accolades banquet and the selection process went super well this year. We advertised through the Truman Snapchat, posters, emails sent to departments, the Student Government all-school email, and Truman Today. We received over 150 nominations for our two awards and the new award combined, which was less than in previous years, but we did see an increase in the quality of our nominations. We think this is because students who would've nominated their professors for non-academic reasons had an award where they could do so instead.

We decided to accept all student nominations this year instead of selecting professors to move forward from student nominations. We decided to invite every nominated professor to move forward because deciding between student nominations is a very subjective process. Some students believe they should write a more detailed response than others, and we felt some professors would be unfairly passed over because of this issue.

We invited 50 professors and about a dozen research mentors to submit an essay or non-traditional response to the prompt: What is your vision of the ideal educator, and how do you embody that vision inside and outside of the classroom?

I would suggest that future chairs continue to accept non-traditional responses because some professors were very creative, submitting videos and virtual presentations. I would also suggest that future chairs create a separate prompt for research mentors because there was some confusion there for the professors.

We received 30 responses for EOTY and 8 responses for RM. From these, we selected 12 EOTY finalists and 4 RMOTY finalists. These were good numbers for finalists and I wouldn't suggest doing any more than this, because it's a lot of work for the committee in the finalist process.

For the finalist stage, we observed each professor for 20-30 minutes in their classroom and interviewed each research mentor for about the same length of time. We made a Facebook group and used the live feature to record the observations and interviews for everyone and that worked super well.

The finalist committee needs to consist of additional students outside of Academic Affairs. I would suggest contacting the Pershing Society, McNairs, and Leadership Scholars at least a month in advance of when you plan to start observations, because they were hard to reach.

We did some different things for the banquet this year that worked really well. Our budget allowed each finalist to bring a plus one, which they really appreciated. We also provided a quartet from the band as guests were coming in to the banquet and we created programs. I think those elements of the banquet added to the experience and I encourage the future chair to do those again if the budget allows.

Also make sure you reach out to Tim Barcus for photography a few weeks ahead of time. You also have to order certificates from Winston Vanderhoof and also the diploma covers. Also make an appointment with Sodexo to plan the meal like a few months in advance and make sure you send them an updated guest count with dietary information a week before.

And you need to get possible dates for the banquet in the fall semester so that the Georgian Rooms are reserved and the president can pick a date she's available.

Also lol MAKE SURE you are collecting email addresses on the nomination form so that you can easily invite students to the banquet who nominated a finalist. Other people invited to the banquet include the department chairs of the finalists, Dr. Gooch, Dr. Thomas, and Janna, the heads of the schools, and [previous winners](#).

I would also suggest making the list of finalists publicly available, like posted on Truman Today, because I got several emails from schools asking for who was a finalist from their departments and it was time consuming to answer all of them.

Academic Majors Videos

Status: Tabled

Early in the fall, Katie met with the admissions office to discuss ideas for showcasing Truman academics to prospective students. The committee was concerned with the enrollment decrease this year and wanted to contribute to the solution from the perspective of the student body. After reviewing the Truman website for academic majors, the committee believed one way to make Truman academics more appealing to prospective students could be to create relatable videos that showcased each major. The committee envisioned videos that were about five minutes long and were more casual, fun, and relatable than the current building tour videos on the website. The videos would be led by a student in the major, and the student would have general [talking points](#) about what their experience has been like as the major. The student would be like an "academic ambassador." The student would take the video while walking around in one of the academic buildings and/or the library.

The admissions office was excited about this idea and invited us to submit an example video. We recruited Caleb Dewitt, who was the treasurer at the time, to make a video about his experience as a chemistry major. Caleb did make an amazing [video](#), but we were looking for something a little more personal, and his video was more of a general overview of the major.

We planned to continue exploring this project, but the year became very busy as we explored other projects. Because the Admissions Office was undergoing some major internal changes, we decided it would be best to table for the project for now, but I encourage future chairs to explore this project. I think it would be a great way to showcase Truman academics from a student perspective and make our website distinctive.

Syllabi Availability Ahead of Registration

Status: Tabled

The committee explored the possibility of having class syllabi available for students before they register for classes. We felt this would make it easier for students to build their schedules, because they would know what each class would expect from them before the first day of class. We discussed the idea with Dr. Gooch, who told us this would be very difficult for professors. Professors can be building their syllabi leading up to the start of class, and it would be really hard for them to have an exact syllabi for the next semester available by registration. It would be stressful, but it would also limit their ability to explore new ideas over the summer or winter breaks, and having an incorrect syllabi available would hinder students or have liability issues. Based on Dr. Gooch's feedback, we've tabled this idea.

Final Exam Review Period

Status: Tabled

Another idea the committee explored with Dr. Gooch was creating a period in the beginning of the semester where students could go review their final exams from the previous semester with their professors. We felt this could facilitate students' continuous learning, especially in classes that build on previous ones, like foreign language classes. We felt students may be unwilling to reach out to their professors on their own to review their final exam, or may be unaware that they could ask. Dr. Gooch advised us that this idea would be difficult to administer from the perspective of a professor and that students who wish to review their final exams should reach out on their own. She advised that unless we had heard of students not being allowed to review their exams, it would be a more efficient use of our time to concentrate on other ideas. Based on her advice, we also tabled this idea.

Flexible Credits for Music Courses

Status: Tabled

In the beginning of the semester, Maddie Meyer and Sam Tillman were interested in exploring a new design for band credits. They wanted credits for marching band to be flexible, so a student could take marching band for 0-2 credits. They felt this would help students design their schedules as music majors. If a student had a full schedule but still wanted to participate in marching band, they could take the class for no credits, for example. Or, if a student needed more credits, they could take it for 1 or 2, because marching band is worth at least that much work on a weekly basis. Sam and Maddie were

inspired by some of the theater classes that use this system. Maddie met with several professors in the music department, who weren't very encouraging of this idea because they didn't feel it was an issue for many band students. After discussing the idea with band students, Maddie came to the same conclusion, and we tabled the project.

Changing Semester Credits to 11-18 instead of 12-17

Status: Tabled

President Keaton Lapanon suggested that we look into adjusting the range of credits that students can take in a semester for the standard tuition rate. We believed that taking 11 or 18 credits could help students in a few different situations. Students who have to take several demanding classes that are only 1 or 2 credits, such as labs in the sciences, could benefit from only taking 11 credits. Students who are trying to fit in final classes for a major or minor could benefit from taking 18 credits instead of 17.

We discussed the idea with Dr. Gooch, and she told us the minimum needs to be 12 because that's the national standard for a full course load. However, students can take 11 credits in a semester with no penalty. As long as a student takes a total of 24 credits for the academic year, one semester can have fewer than 12 credits. Dr. Gooch was also not in favor of extending the credits to 18, because she believes that would be unhealthy for students. She doesn't want to normalize course overloads. We agreed with Dr. Gooch's perspective and decided to table the issue.

Section 2: Resolutions

[Resolution 118.005 - A Resolution in Continued Support of the Proposed Changes to the Current Course Repeat Policy](#)

This resolution was to voice our support for the proposed changes to the course repeat policy brought by Professor John Quinn last year. Quinn proposed that when a student took a course for the second time, the new grade they received should replace the old one if it was a better grade, instead of the current process where the grades were averaged. We supported this idea to encourage students to try again to take classes that were difficult for them. Quinn's proposed changes passed, so the new policy is now in place.

[Resolution 118.006 - A Resolution for the Student Government to Publish a Yearly Freshman Guide to Truman Academics and Student Life](#)

This resolution was brought to support the Freshman Guide that we worked on this semester. Although some of it is now outdated, it still justifies working on the guide next

fall. If you want the new chairs to contribute in another major way, you may need to pass another resolution.

[Resolution 118.008 - Resolution to Delay the Dialogues](#)

We brought this resolution in December of 2018 as the faculty were discussing implementation of the Dialogues to voice our concern that the new curriculum would not be ready for the fall. This resolution was effective in gathering support from the administration and many faculty towards delaying the Dialogues.

[Resolution 118.009 - A Resolution to Support an Interdisciplinary “Course Threads” Certificate Program](#)

This resolution was passed to voice the official support of the Student Government towards developing Course Threads. This resolution justifies future work on the project by the Academic Affairs committee.

[Resolution 118.014 - A Resolution Supporting the Double Counting of Dialogues Courses](#)

Some details of the Dialogues are being worked out in governance this semester, including how courses will be counted towards completion of the Dialogues requirements. We chose to support a compromise option between two double counting plans that allows some LSP courses to double count towards a students graduation requirement. We felt allowing some double counting would ease some stress and difficulty for students, while still requiring them to explore classes in different disciplines.

Section 3: Ideas for 2019-2020

➤ Voting power on UGC:

- We were very active and informed this year on UGC and we believe the Student Government should continue to have a strong presence on faculty governance. There might be enough momentum after this year to look into getting students a vote on UGC. I would encourage coordinating with the next executive board to look into this idea.

➤ Outlining expectations for students on faculty committees:

- Dr. Gooch suggested that because we’ve had so many students involved on faculty committees this year, we draft a resolution that outlines expectations for students and faculty members when working together on committees. Students should know that attendance is expected, faculty members should make every attempt to accommodate students schedules when creating a

meeting time, and there should be a path for communication over the summer. I encourage the future chair to write this resolution not because there were major problems this year, but just to make sure we have communication about expectations between the two groups.

➤ **Bringing students at large into committees**

- Dr. Gooch also suggested that we search for students for committees from students at large and not just the Student Government. There are a lot of opportunities to serve on committees in UGC and not a lot of senators. I encourage the future Academic Affairs chair to advertise places on academic committees to the student body. This could be done by sending emails through department secretaries.

➤ **Academic mindset campaign-**

- There's been a lot of discussion this year on campus about Truman's academic culture. I think a positive academic mindset campaign could be valuable for students next year. This idea was supported by Dr. Gooch in the fall, but we weren't sure how to get the idea off the ground. Some things we'd like to bring to student's attention are healthy ways to choose and balance extracurriculars (like doing things because you're interested in them, and not just for a resume) and keeping a positive attitude while working hard on school. A future chair could explore programming options possibly in collaboration with HWS or Student Affairs. Or, you could incorporate these ideas into the freshman guide or a similar way to reach out to students.

➤ **End of course reviews accessibility**

- One of the ideas for our committee at the beginning of the year was to look into end of course reviews and how they could be better and more accessible for students. We asked several questions about course evaluations on the [student survey](#), and most students responded that they use the evaluations when selecting their classes and that the evaluations are helpful. However, we also received feedback that the questions could be more specific to classes. There may be room for improvement in this process and I encourage future chairs to look into the evaluations.

➤ **Test outs for essential skills**

- Last year we fought a pretty big battle to test out of COMM 170, and while students are not currently allowed to test out, there may be room to explore test-out options for COMM 170 and other essential skills. This is a pretty big can of worms to open with faculty governance but it would be worth exploring.

➤ **Collegiate readership program**

- The student body voted in the spring to look into online options for the Collegiate Readership Program. We'll be exploring this more in the fall and it'd probably be relevant for the Academic chair to be involved.
- **Reassigning commencement speaker process**
 - This process was beneficial under Academic Affairs because of our regular meetings with Dr. Gooch, but it was stressful in the spring to plan both the commencement speaker and Educator of the Year. I also feel selecting the speaker would fit better under Student Affairs than Academic. I recommend that the future chair communicates with Dr. Gooch to see how she would feel about moving the job to a different committee.

Section 4: Advice for Future Chairs

- Take detailed minutes
 - For organization and continuity, I wish I had a document with minutes from all of our meetings so I could easier see how projects had developed over the year. This would also be helpful for committee members working on specific projects.
- Bond with your committee
 - It's so much easier and more fun to be a chair when your committee members like being there! We always spent a few minutes catching up and talking about our weeks in the beginning of our meetings and I think it helped us become a team.
- Semi-authoritarian rule
 - Since we're at a university, you could argue that everything is technically tied to academics and therefore every committee could be incorporated into academic affairs. I encourage the future chair to consider consolidating power in this way to create a hegemonic regime. I can confirm that the next executive administration is interested in pursuing this project.
- Delegation
 - Your committee members are there because they want to be involved! Trust them and give them projects and tasks to do on their own. Make sure you give clear deadlines so that everyone knows what the expectations are.
- Communicate about meetings with Dr. Gooch
 - Make sure you tell the body ahead of time that you're meeting with Dr. Gooch. People usually have things they want you to ask her about.
- Ask for advice
 - While we're talking about administration -- don't be afraid to reach out to them for help and advice. Dr. Gooch and Laura have been invaluable resources to me this year and they are always more than willing to help! And

asking the exec for their advice is really great if you feel stuck or need a second opinion!