

Academic Affairs Committee End of Year Report

Submitted by Sutton Purinton: 2020-2021 Committee Chair

Members:

Santino Bono (Incoming Senator)

Joshna Karki (Voting Senator)

Jessica Venvertloh (Associate Senator)

The Year in Review and Some General Notes

This committee was very project focused, so going forward the committee might want to delegate more time to resolution writing. Our committee hopes that projects like the Symposium Investigation and the Undecided Student Project will continue to be improved and work on. We also gathered a lot of information that could be used in the future for more policy focused goals (specifically in regards to diversity and advising). Overall, our committee would like to extend congratulations to the future members and say good luck to them in their Academic Affairs endeavors.

Projects

Civics Exam, Symposium Investigation, Diverse Demographics of Truman Students and Diversity in Faculty, Faculty Appreciation, Undecided Student Project, Educator of the Year, Research Mentor of the Year, Fall Commencement Speaker, Spring Commencement Speaker, and Faculty Appreciation.

Civics Exam

Status: *Completed*

Description: As a requirement to graduate, the civics exam is important to students' academic success. Many students were struggling to receive a passing score on the exam even after multiple attempts. The overall pass rate was 72%, and the first time rate was 62%. According to analytics performed on test attempts, there were a number of questions labeled as "poor." The civics exam committee brought together faculty and a student representative to review the entire question set, with a particular focus on revising the poor questions in order to bring them in line with the federal citizenship test as well as the study materials provided to students to help prepare for the exam. Faculty governance also passed a resolution to create an online, non-proctored exam as another way to help improve the pass rate. These efforts have both produced promising results in lessening the burden on students and fostering their success on the civics exam. Future efforts regarding the civics exam should include improving the study materials, or creating a learning module for students to engage with the material and civics education.

Symposium Investigation

Status: *In progress*

Description: A new requirement for all Truman Freshman to take, the symposium course was met with criticism in many social forums which led to a collection of data from Freshman students. This data collection process was held by both members of our committee as well as Owen Smith of the student affairs committee. After certain conclusions were made based off of the first data collection (which received over 80 responses), a follow up survey (which also garnered a large number of responses) was conducted to ensure that the original conclusions were correct. The results of the survey showed a general distaste towards the “passport” feature of the course as well as a lot of frustration regarding the disorganization of the class overall. These conclusions were brought up in a Symposium Committee meeting in which these problems and their post-Covid plan for the course were discussed. The committee has invited us to put a member on their body next semester in order to provide more student feedback as the course continues to develop, which we plan to follow through with.

Diverse Demographics of Truman Students and Diversity in Faculty

Status: *In progress*

Description: Making tables and charts representing the demographics (race, ethnicity, gender, age) of recent graduates of different schools and academic departments. This serves to be very resourceful especially as external websites when talking about campus demographics have outdated information which doesn't reflect true numbers and could deviate/misinform potential students. In an effort to start on the project of diversification of faculty, we could start keeping a track record of external and internal job posting websites deployed to hire professors and instructors. Potential partnership/collaboration with NCORE and other similar institution to hire and retain diverse faculty (The position for the director of CDI was posted on this website: https://www.ncore.ou.edu/media/jobs/uploaded/Dir_of_Diversity__Inclusion_HR_Job_Desc.pdf) Close coordination with the HR department for detailed analysis of the website, tools, marketing & promotion materials and platforms used to develop job descriptions and post opportunities. Development of a committee that serves as a voice for student representation when making decisions for developing job description, category, collateral and for opting certain tools and platforms to post these jobs.

Faculty Appreciation Posters:

Status: *Completed*

Description: Due to the difficult circumstances presented by the pandemic, and because Academic Affairs is meant to strengthen the relationship between faculty and students, we decided to participate in Faculty Appreciation Week. However, due to the poster order not being

fulfilled on time, this was delayed, but nonetheless the posters were delivered. We sent out a form (Through Truman Today, the Student Government email, and on Student Government's social media) to students asking them to submit messages for a professor or staff member that had really made a difference during the pandemic. We received multiple messages for faculty and staff, and we separated them into six posters. One for each school and one to go in the U&I for staff members specifically. We also sent a PDF of the posters to Human Resources, so the posters could be seen virtually as well.

Undeclared Student Project

Status: *In progress*

Description: One of our committee's main missions was to invent a "program" to help undecided students find their purpose. While undeclared majors are not the majority at Truman, there are a cohort of students who feel unsure about what their purpose (and therefore major) should be. Jonathan Vieker, the CAE, and our committee want to remedy this by creating videos showcasing each major (and even some minors). We hope these videos will aid in the process to find a major and will be a tool used by Dr. Gleason, who is an advisor specifically for undecided students. Watching one or two of these videos will qualify them to be cleared for Fall/Spring registration. This project came together late this semester, so we do not have many of the videos complete, but our deadline for having 75% of the videos complete is mid-Fall.

Educator of the Year

Status: *Completed*

Description: (This applies to both EOTY & RMOTY) Based on the nominations we received, we cross-referenced the nominations for 2019 and 2020 and chose the applicants that had continuously had a myriad of wonderful nominations. We then sent four short essay prompts for these professors to respond to (of which they were to choose two) and read through their replies. We then selected our finalists to interview. We had six finalists this year, and a Pershing Scholar was present during the interviews to help us make our final decision. The criteria for choosing this award was as follows: An educator is any professor that engages students and innovates new methods/explanations for their classroom. They support students academically and personally, by interacting with them and providing extra academic resources. This year, we excitedly chose Dr. Wendy Miner.

Research Mentor of the Year

Status: *Completed*

Description: Similar to our process for Educator of the Year, our committee reviewed the responses to our short essay prompts and then we held interviews for the three finalists. We had input from a McNair scholar and a Pershing Scholar. The criteria for choosing this award was as

follows: A mentor that inspires community within their lab group, but allows students to grow their independence and responsibility. This faculty member also shows the possible career options and work that can be done with this particular research or field of study. For this award, we excitedly chose Dr. Brett Berke.

Fall Commencement Speaker

Status: *Completed*

Description: There were two commencement ceremonies this semester, so our committee got the opportunity to choose two speakers. Our prompt was: William Arthur Ward said, "Feeling gratitude and not expressing it is like wrapping a present and not giving it." In a year that has been filled with a lot of loss and after four years of hard work and dedication, share who/what you are most grateful for and why. Who is someone that you are grateful for that might not know? What is an experience that you did not expect, but are grateful for now?

Spring Commencement Speaker

Status: *Completed*

Description: There were seven ceremonies this semester, and luckily our committee had enough applicants to choose seven speakers. Our prompt for this semester was: 1. "What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make." - Jane Goodall. How has Truman influenced your personal growth and supported your view/realization of the difference you desire to make in the world?

Events

Academic Accolades Banquet

Academic Accolades Banquet

Date: April 22nd 2021

Location: Zoom

Status: *Complete*

Description: We had fifteen finalists in total (seven for Faculty Wellness Honoree, six for Educator of the Year, and three for Research Mentor of the Year, one professor was a finalist for two awards). We let the finalists know beforehand if they had won or lost, and invited them to the banquet regardless of the outcome. We held a virtual banquet where we talked about each finalist in detail and recognized their incredible impact on campus. There was no cost to this event, and every winner was given the chance to speak about this process. Dr. Gooch and President Thomas also spoke. Great fun was had by all!

Future Project Ideas:

Undecided Student Project: In the end, we like for the undecided student project to be completed and have a video for each of the forty-eight majors. Jonathan Vieker asked that 75%

of them be completed by mid-Fall 2021. There would need to be some adjustment on how we could reach more people without setting up times to film. We think creating a google form with questions that each student could upload a self-taped video to would fix this problem. There could also be some videos made showcasing different minors.

Post-Pandemic Plans: We would like to survey students asking them what educational aspects they have enjoyed during COVID-19. Not everything has been bad about this pandemic, and many students have mentioned that having things like recorded lectures has been helpful. Things like this should be addressed to faculty/staff and we encourage the future committee to write a resolution on how to incorporate the best educational gifts from COVID-19 into regular collegiate education.

Expansion of free add/withdraw week: We would like to see the expansion of the free/add drop deadline. For immediate purposes, we would ask that this deadline be extended until the Friday of the second week of class. Since most classes during the first week only focus on the syllabi/easing students into the course, it is not representative of the stress that students might face because of that course. Similarly, students should be able to explore their courses, before adding another option to make sure they are not overwhelming themselves. Possibly vouchers from registrar or specific departments covering the cost.

Academic Accolades: We would like to see the process of Academic Accolades altered to allow for even more student involvement. A lot of the nominations we received were from Student Government members, and while they have an important voice, we want to make sure we are representing all students. Continuing to do in class surveys, or reaching out to departments directly, are good solutions, but our committee feels that there could be more ways to make this process more objective. We would also recommend making a permanent, in writing, relationship with McNair and Pershing. This year, though we had great help, it was a struggle to find many volunteers.

Special Thanks

Thank you for making this year and our committee work more fun than we could have imagined and for supporting us in our goals. We appreciate you and the work you do!

Dr. Gooch (Fearless & Wonderful Leader)

Miss Bethany Gibson (Joyful & patient secretary that saved the not-good-at-time-management chair)

Mr. Vieker (Honest & Incredible Superior)

Dr. Self (Intelligent & Helpful Assistant in Commencement Process)

Dr. Shapiro (Gracious, lovely, & helpful assistant in Commencement Process)

Josh Grandstaff (Knowledgeable & dependable Self and Society Rep)

Owen Smith (Symposium survey expert)

Laura Bates (Without her reassurance, input, and general sage guidance, our committee would have been lost in the ocean that is Academic Accolades)

Kennedy Cooper (Diversity & Inclusion Chair who gave intelligent, encouraging feedback to an ever frazzled chair)

Shania Montufar (Diversity & Inclusion Chair who took the time to explain the problems facing our university's education and how our committee could help)

Maddie Meyer (who graciously shared the former AA folder with the chair, and answered all of her questions with transparency)

Entire general body (who are so great to work with and for inspiring us with their own work/dedication)

Respectfully Submitted,
The 2020-2021 Academic Affairs Committee