Course and Teaching Peer Review committee processes

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This is a draft report reflecting the views and recommendations of the committee only.

# Concept

This stems out of the 2016 “Proposal for peer instruction/course review” produced in S15, implemented over S16 – S17, and revised based upon experiences in the implementation. This is backwards compatible with what we are in fact doing now, but incorporates new processed developed with experience in conducting such reviews for the last year.

This process is meant to supplement, and not replace, separate course and teaching reviews by the students (the IIT student course evaluation), and the administration. Those processes occur under separate authority and are not within the purview of this committee. However, this peer review process brings an added perspective from the viewpoint of professional educators which is missing in those reviews.

# Committee’s structure.

The committee will be composed of

1. 3 reviewing members from BIO.
2. Rotating 3 yr terms, one member replaced each year.
3. Outgoing member serves in non-reviewing capacity, with no course review duties, but sits in on meetings for policy matters, help review and edit the reports, and serves to ensure continuity of process as the committee turns over). i.e. what joseph is doing.

If this effort is expanded university wide as efforts within the UFC hint at, we can see every dept doing this, and having an external member from a different dept sitting in in this non-reviewing role. This might ensure consistency of process across IIT, as well as cross-fertilization of teaching and curriculum development ideas to improve the institution as a whole. But that is only a possibility in the future.

In all reports, the committee acts as a whole. While individual members may be assigned as primary contact and reviewers for specific courses, they are expected to work with the full committee, and all final reports shall be reviewed by and represent the opinion of the entire committee, and be authored by the committee as a whole. Every effort shall be made to reach productive consensus between all members as well as the instructors of the reviewed classes. In the event that irreconcilable differences of opinion arise, either in the committee, or between the committee and the instructor, separate commentary sections outlining the position of each shall be incorporated into the report. This report is meant to review courses and bring issues to light, not to impose any specific outcomes.

# Schedule and course selection

Courses for review shall be selected based on the following criteria:

1. Except under exceptional circumstances, do not review courses of current CTPR committee members to avoid even appearance of conflict of interest. If absolutely required for P&T or at administration’s request which must be justified, the member whose course is being reviewed will recuse themselves from committee actions with regard to that course. However, they shall participate fully in all instructor activities. This is a non-ideal contingency, and should be avoided.
2. Select 3 courses, one per member per semester ≡ 6 per year.
3. Review all courses. Prioritize:
   1. Core classes
   2. Instructors who need this for P&T or for retention of Category II faculty
   3. Classes suggests by the chair or administration.
4. General policy, once #1 and #3 above are satisfied: 1 lab, 1 UG, 1 graduate class
5. Attempt to achieve fairness in how frequently an individual faculty member is selected, as this is a bit of a burden.

We have ~46 courses (2017), so this is an 8 yr cycle if all classes were equal. The graduate to UG ratio is about 1:2. With prioritization, this likely means core classes on a 5 or 6 yr cycle and non-core 10 yr - which seems to jibe with accreditation needs as well as ensuring we have things for P&T for new people (and possibly a second round with same class for them if desired or necessary, e.g. to be able to document “*innovation and improvement in teaching*” which might help?)

Instructors of courses being reviewed shall be notified in advance, preferably before the end of the prior semester, so that they can more easily provide the required input.

# Review mechanism

The course instructor will prepare a dossier about how the course is run. This should include:

1. The course syllabus, including LOs
2. An optional brief (1-2 page) narrative of how the courses is run including:
   1. What the course is trying to deliver and its place in the degree curriculum
   2. Mechanism of content delivery
   3. Administration of course activities
   4. Mechanism of grading and grade distribution
   5. Any history of innovations, or how the course has evolved / is evolving
   6. Problems and challenges of the course, and possible solutions
3. Sample student work on the high and low ends (or possibly examples at all ABCDE grade levels)
4. At the end of the semester, the instructor provides final grad distributions, as well as data concerning how well students achieved LOs as needed for accreditation.

This is meant to be as light a burden as possible; we already have syllabi, student work and grades; all that is supplemental is the optional 1-2 page narrative. This narrative is optional, but may be helpful in allowing the review committee to understand how the instructor has implemented the course.

## Recommended Timelines

While the process should be flexible, depending on the needs of the department, instructor and committee members, the following timeline is suggested:

* *Before the end of the prior semester:*
  + The instructors and chair are informed of the courses to be reviewed, and any discussion of the courses selected occurs, with possible revision of this list.
* *by one month into the semester:*
  + the instructor prepares a dossier of the course. this should include *(*
    - the syllabus and other relevant course organization documents (lab manuals, grading rubrics, exams, assignments etc.)
    - any other documents the instructor wishes that illustrate what and they are doing with the class and why they are doing it.
* *by the midterm grading deadline:*
  + samples of student work at the {10th, 50th 90th} percentile to illustrate how good, average and poor students are responding
  + the committee and the instructor have an initial discussion about the course
  + a class visit is scheduled
* *by 2 weeks prior to the end of the semester*
  + The committee will also solicit input from the biology faculty in general.
  + The committee reviews all material, observations, and discussions and prepares a first draft report which is
    - shared with and
    - discussed with the instructor who may provide feedback
* *before the start of the next semester*
  + This feedback is used to revise the report if necessary. The instructor is encouraged to suggest revisions that the committee may consider, or to submit their own comments for inclusion in the final report*.*
  + The Committee prepares a final report which is given the chair and to the instructor.

# Aspects of the report

The report shall consist of

* *Course overview*

What is material is covered in this class? How does it fit into the curriculum? Why? How is the class implemented? How are grades awarded? What do students need to do, and why was this mode of pedagogy chosen? How do students view receive this structure?

* *History and future*

This section tries to put into perspective how the class has evolved over time, especially in response to outside concerns such as staffing, scheduling and other departmental concerns, as well as student abilities and outcomes and achievement.

* *Student outcomes*

This includes grade distributions, as well as LO achievement data, with commentary and analysis thereof.

* *Challenges*

What are the issues that this course faces? This can be in terms of pedagogy, administration (including regulatory burden, especially in lab classes) or any other issues identified.

* *General Comments*

Any other pertinent discussion.

# Overall curricular review

The initial proposal suggested that the outcome of these individual reports on specific classes be used to drive an overall curricular review at the program level. Since a program comprises many courses, some outside the department, this is a larger undertaking, and probably requires participation of the full faculty. The proposal (supported by the chair at the time) called for devoting one faculty meeting a semester to reviewing the findings of the committee for that semester with 5-6 10 minute course presentations. This is up to the chair to implement. However, the committee shall still consider the course in relation of the degree program as whole, notwithstanding the implementation of a full program review

# Disposition of the Report

A discussion should be had with the full faculty, and a policy developed as to the distribution of these reports. Are they to be made available within the department? Or are they to remain confidential to the instructor and chair? In departmental meetings in F16, it was proposed that they be made generally available. If this is to be policy, this must be clear to all parties concerned from the outset. It is also likely that these reports, especially if they are provided with other supporting documents involved in the review process (syllabi, lab manuals, student outcomes, and student work) might provide a significant benefit to new instructors, as faculty move in and out of courses. As such, we might want to develop a repository of this, by class, within the department as a resource.