

To: USC Academic Senators
USC Academic Unit Faculty Council Chairs

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Subject: Committee on Information Services Annual Report (AY2020-21)

Committee’s Charge for 2020-2021 Academic Year

The charge of the Committee on Information Services (CIS) is to identify the IT needs of USC faculty and students. Outcomes of the committee’s work have included providing feedback on planned upgrades of USC network infrastructure, technology-related policies, and information resources and services, as well as recommending the use of new technology to support teaching and research. The committee advises the Chief Information Officer (CIO) and the Academic Senate and coordinates with USC Libraries on matters of joint concern. Given the circumstances of the pandemic, USC went from an institution with a small percentage of on ground learning and teaching to 100% online learning and teaching in the span of one week. Over 2020-2021 this committee has explored a year of innovative teaching and learning by faculty and students alike and seeks to understand how we can incorporate the tools we have acquired to deliver the most equitable and inclusive student learning experience possible.

Discussion Topics for 2020-2021 Academic Year

Our discussions targeted the efforts of three subcommittees, each posing key questions:

1. **Online learning:** Can we define the characteristics of a superior on-line student learning experience, identify the resources needed to achieve it, and establish benchmarks to measure our progress to those objectives? What is the role of the on-line modality in the future?
2. **Online teaching/advising:** How will the university ensure all faculty and staff have access to adequate and appropriate technology devices, services, and reimbursement costs that meet and exceed California’s minimum standards for providing ITS equipment and services to home-based employees? Meet and exceed competing universities’ standards for ITS equipment and services?
3. **Classroom technology:** What technology is needed to enable hybrid-flexible (hyflex) classrooms using Zoom Rooms and what are the faculty training needs to successfully teach in hyflex classrooms?

CIS Memo to Senate Sent December 1, 2020

As budget planning was underway for FY2021-2022 in December 2020, the CIS Committee sent a memo to Faculty Council (FC) Chairs/USC Academic Senators recommending that they coordinate with their respective Council Members, Senior Business Officers (SBOs), and Deans to review the information technology (IT) Services and Equipment standards, staffing, and budgetary allocations in order to make recommendations that advance access and equity in the provision of IT equipment, services, and funding to all faculty and staff. To read the full memo, [click here](#).



Subcommittee Efforts

Three subcommittees were formed to address three targeted efforts by the committee: Online Learning, Online Teaching and Student Advising, and Classroom Technology.

Online Learning

In past work, and supported recently by University and School surveys, the subcommittee has found impediments to effective on-line education including disparity in students' ability to afford required equipment and to access an adequate learning environment. Pedagogically, there is also a lack of discipline-specific course strategies to deliver on-line courses and no existing benchmarks to adequately test the courses' effectiveness.

The Senate might consider these questions:

- Is the University prepared to provide students with the resources to achieve an equitable and excellent on-line student learning experience? Currently there are no minimum standards for personal computer hardware and software for students and in-class equipment varies across academic units.
- Benchmarking: Will the university add a section to the current end-of-semester student survey to capture the learning experience from an online/tech perspective? The University-wide end-of-semester student survey is one way to understand the student "learning experience" across several domains: Course Design, Instructional Practices, Inclusion Practices, Assessment Practices, and Course Impact. Areas to consider: Optimal class capacity, informal learning experience (e.g., students' sense of community, DEI considerations, individual students' financial constraints, and the impact on their learning online).

Online Teaching/Advising

From spring 2020 - spring 2021 faculty have remained in the online teaching and remote work environment to maintain the mission and meet the education requirements while also managing their individual impact from the COVID-19 pandemic. As plans shift back to potential hybrid (students in a classroom and some on Zoom) and (vaccine pending) in person classes resuming to pre-COVID operations, this subcommittee continues to focus on faculty members adversely affected by inequitable remote work conditions.

The Senate might consider these questions:

- Faculty remaining remote: What kind of financial support will be provided to faculty who continue to work from home? What standards for reimbursement will be provided for technology purchased? Maintaining technology being used? If based on the Department Dean, how will they be informed by their faculty on what they need. Based on [USC FEEC February Survey Results](#), faculty are struggling and need more support.
- Faculty teaching hybrid (define): How does the university define this arrangement and/or the minimum expectations across academic units? Does this mean: Faculty member is remote with some students online and some in the physical classroom? Faculty member and some students are in physical space while some students are on Zoom? All of the students and faculty are in person in the same physical space or on Zoom at the same time for a certain number of classes?



Classroom Technology

The current plan is to resume a normal range of campus activities in the Fall, including primarily in-person classes. Schools will be using their usual curriculum and planning processes to determine the choice of teaching modality for each course. While USC is well-equipped and -prepared to offer classes either in-person (as we have done in the past) or completely online (as we have done during the pandemic), it is not clear if USC is equally equipped or prepared to offer classes where some students are in the classrooms while others remain off campus but continue to participate live using cameras, speakers, and microphones.

The Senate might consider these questions:

- Definitions and Expectations: How does USC define “flipped classrooms,” “hybrid classrooms,” and “hybrid-flexible (or ‘hyflex’) classrooms,” what teaching and learning activities does the Senate expect to be supported in each, and what is the minimum set of standard classroom technologies that should be required in each of those classrooms?
- Quality Assurance, Training, and Support: Since few USC classrooms have ever been used to deliver actual hybrid or hyflex instruction, how can we test and remedy the technical capabilities of each classroom -- both in person and remotely -- prior to the start of the fall semester?
 - Since few USC faculty have hands-on experience teaching in hybrid or hyflex classrooms, how can we prepare faculty with hands-on experience to learn how to use and teach in those classrooms prior to the start of the fall semester?
 - Since hybrid and hyflex instruction requires increased levels of technical support beyond what is required for traditional in-person instruction, how can we modify TA training so that the TAs are prepared to step in and fill the inevitable support gap?

We hope these considerations advance IT equipment, support, and service equity across all 22 academic units and wish you a safe and joyful conclusion to the 2020-2021 academic year.

