Preliminary Report on Fall 2020/Winter 2021 Planning Survey of Instructors

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BACKGROUND

Teams from the Office of the Provost, the Coordinating Committee for Instructional Planning, and SACUA jointly prepared the survey in a matter of a few days. The survey opened Monday, October 19, 2020 at 12:00 p.m. and closed Thursday, October 22, 2020 at 5:00 p.m.

9,923 instructors received the survey:
- 3,022 GSI
- 1,486 Lecturers
- 2,196 Clinical
- 3,219 TT

We sent the survey to four Instructor Groups (Tenured/Tenure-track, Clinical, Lecturer, and GSIs) in four separate batches, allowing us to view responses by track. All groups received the same survey content. The survey includes approximately 23 questions for respondents who taught one (1) FA20 course, with approximately 8 questions for respondents for each course taught in FA20. Exact number of questions answered by any given respondent depended on how many courses respondents taught in fall, whether respondents were teaching in both semesters, and respondent choice.

CAVEATS

The response rate is only 22% of the entire set of possible instructors (n = 9,923) for fall and winter. By track, response rates were as follows:
- T/T = 25.9%
- Clinical = 7.3%
- Lecturer = 32.8%
- GSI = 23.7%

The respondents were overwhelmingly from the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts (n = 956 or 43.5%) with the next highest group being the College of Engineering (n = 237 or 10.8%).

INITIAL FINDINGS

Medium of instruction

The vast majority of respondents indicated that they were teaching in some form of virtual instruction (this includes those who responded “other,” a significant number of whom named other types of virtual formats).

Change in medium of instruction

Averaged across responses for 3 courses and across tracks, 43.9% of respondents indicated that the medium in which they were teaching at the point of taking the survey was not the medium in which they had intended to teach at the beginning of the semester. The percentage responding that the medium changed did not vary significantly by course offering.
Clinical faculty respondents were over-represented in response to the change of medium at 58.3%. GSI respondents were under-represented in response to the change of medium at 37.6%.

In other words; a greater percentage of clinical faculty respondents than respondents in all other tracks indicated that they were teaching in a medium other than that which they intended, whereas a lesser percentage of GSI respondents than all other tracks indicated that they had changed their medium of instruction.
Reason for change in medium of instruction

The vast majority of respondents indicated that concerns over safety (virus transmission) led them to change the medium of instruction. This was the dominant response across tracks.

Graduate student instructors were less likely than all other tracks to indicate their own health concerns as a reason for changing the medium of instruction.

A very small number of respondents indicated that they changed their medium of instruction due to students not attending in person, although the T/TT faculty respondents (10.4%) were the most likely to indicate that students’ absence from class shaped their decision to change the medium of instruction.

Quality of course

The vast majority of respondents indicated that their courses were going as expected (57%) or better than expected (25.5%), across all tracks, producing close to a normal distribution in responses, with the poles (“far exceeding expectations” and “well below expectations”) representing extremely small numbers of responses.

GSI respondents and clinical faculty were overrepresented in the response that the course was going “below expectations,” both at 11.5%, compared to 8.2% for T/TT faculty respondents and 5.6% for lecturer respondents.
Resources Desired for More Effective Teaching

Surprisingly, the majority of respondents (37%) reported that they needed no additional resources because they felt comfortable with the medium in which they were teaching. Approximately 13.6% of the respondents indicated that nothing would help because the medium would be ineffective.

The remaining responses were scattered across categories. Given that respondents could select more than one support and that responses were somewhat evenly distributed across the choices, it seems that instructors would appreciate any or all of the supports indicated, which included (a) IT support or coaching, (b) a teaching assistant to monitor technology, (c) professional development in how to use particular tools, and (d) new or additional technologies.

GSI respondents reported desiring the latter two supports in greater numbers (PD 14.2% and new technologies 16.7%) and were less likely (7.3%) than faculty respondents (15.8%) to indicate a desire for a teaching assistant.
Winter Semester Preferences

The vast majority of respondents (~67.6%) indicated a preference for some sort of virtual teaching in the winter semester. This likely undercounts the preference for virtual instruction because a cursory review of the Other category indicates that those who combine synchronous and asynchronous virtual instruction often chose Other. An additional 10% of respondents indicated some sort of response in the Other category, which remains yet to be analyzed.
Reasons for winter semester preferences are the same as those for fall choices of medium of instruction: Concerns over safety/virus transmission (70.6%), followed by lack of trust in public health protocols (~23%) and concerns over student behavior (25%). Health concerns do appear to play a role in choice of medium, but in smaller numbers than other concerns (17% indicate personal health concerns; 21.6% family health concerns. Only ~11% of respondents indicated that they are choosing virtual media for instruction due to students not attending in person.

INSTRUCTOR WORK-LIFE BALANCE

The following list summarizes open-ended responses to the question: "Which of the following would help you with your boundary setting when working from home?" and offers specific commentary drawn from respondents.

1. Encourage leaders (and everyone) to reduce frequency and length of meetings; also encourage people to restrict meetings to typical workday hours.
   a. Cancel nonessential zoom meetings where decisions and/or conversations can be just as efficient and effective via email.
   b. Consider meeting length:
      i. Schedule meetings similar class times- start on the hour and end at 10-till the hour to allow faculty to "transition" to their next task, use the restroom, eat or take a short walk.
      ii. Reduce lunch-time meetings so faculty can eat, walk, and feed at home children.
   2. Allow faculty to work in their offices as needed:
a. Faculty respondents were frustrated that they did not have unlimited access to their offices for quiet spaces because they had many distractions in home offices.

b. Respondents indicated feel they can work physically distanced and be safe while in their offices.

3. Reduce or compensate service demands:
   a. Reduce unnecessary service requirements and programming to help reduce overall work load and so that faculty can focus on teaching and research.
   b. Compensation for extra time that is being put in for all the extra service requirements that may or may not be necessary.

4. Consider changes to tenure expectations:
   a. Place higher value on teaching and service.
      i. Suggestion of a greater percent load awarded per class because creating and running the online course takes significant more time than before
   b. Reduce expectations for number of publications and grants (but not for quality)
      i. Many concerns about faculty inability to continue with their research endeavors as effectively and timely which may lead to promotion delays. Would like the administration to consider some changes to the promotion expectations for this time during their “clock” (this would apply to 100% clinical track faculty too- who go through the same tenure processes without tenure).

5. Increase administrative support for the idea of a moratorium on email communication (but also attend to the fact that some students are in different time zones and will need to communicate at varied times).

6. Provide support for childcare.
   a. Faculty who responded to this survey indicated their desire for schools and childcare centers to be re-opened.
   b. They also asked for considerations for more childcare help from the University, including extra funding for those with childcare needs.

**SUMMARY**

To conclude, the overwhelming preference expressed by the instructors who responded to the survey is for fully virtual synchronous instruction in the winter. That said, some instructors indicated the desire to teach in hybrid or in-person formats in the winter (~15%).

What’s more, 10% of respondents indicated “Other” for mode of instruction, and these open-ended results have yet to be analyzed. However, a cursory review suggests a number of creative virtual formats are included in that response.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

We have reviewed the survey responses, identified themes, trends, and predominating observations, etc. We offer here our best thoughts, to provide guidance and recommendations to the Provost and President in planning for a safe and successful WN21 semester for all concerned (students, faculty, and staff). We remain mindful that our recommendations are based on instructor survey responses representing views of approximately 22% of all instructors invited to respond, not a census or a random sample of UM instructors. We are also mindful that the instructor survey is but one source of input in a complex decision-making process and that there are real and substantive differences in quality and efficiency of different modes of instruction (traditional residential, fully online, hybrid, distance, and other blended institutional modes). With these considerations in mind, we offer the following recommendations:

- Continue to offer winter semester as planned, with students encouraged to return to campus if their courses are offered in person or in hybrid formats and if they feel comfortable engaging in such instruction formats.
- Invite instructors to teach in the medium of instruction in which they feel most comfortable.
• Require units/departments to declare up front whether they have in-person instruction and for what reason, and post both the policy and the rationale publicly, so that students, parents, and instructors can all see it.
• Maintain designated instructional medium unless we experience a virus surge and/or a stay-at-home order is issued thus requiring a change to instructional medium to comply with such an order.
• To protect the core U-M mission for educational excellence, increase teaching supports for instructors, with hybrid teaching prioritized and then synchronous virtual teaching as a second priority for support.
• Consider adding single day "mental health breaks" throughout the semester, which would require a change in the semester end date.
• Offer guidance to central campus, unit, and department leaders about how to manage meeting frequencies and lengths.
• Establish a task force to review and recommend ways to address challenges to early- and mid-career faculty in regard to tenure, promotion, and merit reviews.