RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE 21ST CENTURY LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS TASK GROUP

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Recommendations from the 21st Century Learning Environments Task Group

The Task group was formed under the direction of the Provost to help foster healthy and inclusive learning environments in our classrooms, which is central to our mission of academic excellence and student success. The creation of this task group was motivated by UTSA's commitment to being an exemplar university, and was a key recommendation from faculty internal investigation into the classroom management practices.

The charge of the Task Group was to consider what is needed to create a learning environment that encourages critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity, and acknowledges the social and cultural changes that have occurred from the 20th to 21st century and the readiness of faculty and students to negotiate adapting to these changes. It also considered the professional development needs of both students and faculty to create this learning environment.

In addition, a tiger team was established by the Provost to discuss and create open dialogue among faculty, students, and staff about the classroom environment at UTSA at the start of the Spring 2019 semester. This tiger team ended at the end of March 2019; however, many of these members were also a part of the Task Group to help continue the conversation and develop recommendations based on best practices, resource and training needs, and current or proposed guidelines.

The Task Group includes broad representation of undergraduate student representatives including from Student Government Association and the President's Student Advisory Council, faculty representatives from both tenure-track/tenured and non-tenure track, a representative from faculty senate, Deans, the Vice President of Inclusive Excellence, and staff from Academic Innovation, EOS, Student Affairs, and UTSA police.

The Task Group focused on reviewing best practices that can be derived from the literature as well as relevant other institutions and reviewed current UTSA policies, guidelines, or other materials that are provided to faculty and students from various offices on-campus. This background information was then used to generate the recommendations for creating 21st Century Learning Environments. When developing these recommendations, the following areas were considered ways to use restorative dialogue, communication plan, inclusive teaching practices, standard syllabi language, ground rules for classroom discussion and management, training for faculty and students, implicit bias, etc.

The full Task Group convened in late Spring 2019, September 2019, and October 2019, and smaller working groups met between these times to provide background information and further develop the recommendations developed by the Task Group.

Recommendations

The Task Group has the following recommendations to create a learning environment that encourages critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity, and acknowledges the social and cultural changes that have occurred. The recommendations have been sub-grouped into three areas, which are curricula integration, co-curricular integration, and training and process creation and improvements. Once some or all of the recommendations are accepted, then working groups can be formed and led by the appropriate units on campus to develop the plans needed to implement the approved recommendations.

Curricular Integration

These recommendations focus on pieces that relate to how courses are developed and the resources used to create course materials.

- Revamp syllabus template and create a support document for faculty to develop the syllabus. The reformatting of the syllabus should include but is not limited to the following:
  - Reimagine the syllabus for Gen Z
  - Require a teaching philosophy statement
  - Include expertise or training in pedagogy, culture intelligence, etc. that a faculty member has
  - Change the word "office hours" to "student hours"
  - Contain a brief, relatable faculty bio
  - Using intentional and key wording in the syllabus (growth mindset, inclusive language, etc.)
  - Communicate expectations to student on the use of Blackboard (LMS) communication, grades, materials, etc.
  - Refer to HOP 5.09 on absences
  - Add information on numbers/links for faculty and students on the BIT, and other student support resources
  - Wording on the use of social media, technology, etc.
- All courses should contain student learning outcomes and further integration of student learning outcomes with program marketable skills into the course
- Faculty should implement evidence-based or high impact strategies for teaching (e.g. active learning; collaborative learning, inquiry-based learning, cultural competency, reflection, modalities, portfolios, best practices for large enrollment courses) and this should be supported through annual evaluations, etc.
- Multi-section courses with different professors adopt similar pedagogies to the course
- Create modules for students based on their major for general education courses

- Create proper classroom settings for evidenced based/high impact practice pedagogies including greater access to collaborative classrooms for both faculty and students
- Create a translator document/website/etc. for both faculty and students that helps interpret what faculty mean when they say… or what students mean when they say… and include general information on implicit bias and how this factors into interruption of the message
- Educate and encourage faculty to use student ownership in the classroom, shared guidelines students and faculty compile together at the start of a semester
- Create "Don't Cancel that Class" program and ensure a deliverable to the instructor when used
- Acknowledge the stress and anxiety faculty and students experience and make accessible information on mental health and well-being
- Encourage faculty to introduce themselves and discuss what they do outside the classroom both professionally and personally as a way of creating a collaborative environment
- Consider a common reading/video (may be course, department, college to university level) and programming that accompanies this reading/video to help educate and spur discussions on relevant topics

Co-Curricular Integration

These recommendations focus on pieces that relate to education and integration into the classroom environment for faculty and students.
- More education about freedom of speech and 1st amendment rights for university employees and students.
    - Emphasis on protected and unprotected speech
    - Impact of SB 18 on public University campuses
    - Include Council of Student Organizations and Student Government Association on training sessions (train the trainer/peer education)
- Education on what is considered a protected class in the US
- Faculty and student learning committee integration (multiple communities on multiple topics) also staff
- Deeper dive into academic freedom for faculty and students
- Development of the Campus classroom (leadership, engagement with organizations, etc.)
    - Engage faculty outside the classroom both on campus and off-campus
    - Faculty involvement in campus initiatives through Living Learning communities, Faculty in Residence, First-Year Interest Groups (FIGS), and campus-wide events
- Humanize both faculty and students

- Mental health and well-being for faculty and students (mental health first aid training with an ally development model)
- Include graduate students in teaching and learning and provide robust training for them. They can be a strong bridge between faculty and students

Training and Process Creation and Improvements

To demonstrate excellence in a 21st Century Classroom, faculty and students must be exposed to strategies and tools.
- Inclusive Teaching – Increasing Perspective and Conversation Creating a 21st Century Classroom begins with expectations. Faculty, be they tenured, tenure track, or non-tenure track, need a blueprint of how to excel in the classroom. When faculty join UTSA, they need to be provided with how their teaching responsibilities will be supported. There are two recommendations for faculty:
  - o Create and provide a Continuing Education Program as an expectation of the faculty position. Hairstylists, Social Workers, Lawyers, and Psychologists are just some professions that require practitioners to obtain continuing education credits. Requiring continuing education operates under the premise that being effective requires continual exposure to learning.
    - Topics to be covered could include the 21st Century Learners, Protected Class, Emotional Intelligence, Cultural Intelligence, Mental Health, Universal Design, Classroom Management and Student Motivation Strategies, Applicable Laws, Grievance Policies.
    - Each class and workshops will focus on demonstration of skills.
  - o Incentivize a Certificate Program with potential course release
    - The Certificate Program would include the following:
      - SIP (Strong Instructional Practices)
      - Town Halls / Open Forums
      - Podcasts
      - Online workshops
      - In Person workshops
- Student Education Students must be given the opportunity to voice their ideas on their education, which will help faculty better understand the 21st Learner. Suggestions for making this happen are as follows:
  - o Capitalize on spaces outside the classroom and offer ways to get to know the faculty perspective.
  - o Offer standing social opportunity "Ask a Faculty" or social opportunity/town hall.
  - o Town Halls/ Open Forums - "What is it like to be a student? What is it like to be a faculty member?

- o Offer 2-3 faculty/staff members a "course equivalency/course release" to host a semester long series of events with students. Faculty must create a proposal that promises weekly engagement and public spaces for students and faculty to exchange ideas.
  - Podcast series with Faculty and Students
  - Meal series on key issues between Faculty and Students
  - Book club lead by faculty/staff/student
  - San Antonio field trips with faculty and students and dialogue about San Antonio
- Faculty student evaluation comments should be shared with Chairs and Deans in order to facilitate improvements and/or support for faculty

The Task Group thinks that if these recommendations are approved and implemented that it will create an inclusive learning environment that encourages critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity in which both faculty and students feel supported.

Task Group Members

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- Dr. Hector Aguilar (Senior Lecturer Chemistry)
- Dr. Myron Anderson (Vice President of Inclusive Excellence)
- Dr. Mark Appleford (Associate Dean of Undergraduate Studies COE and Associate Professor of Biomedical Engineering)
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- Jose Escobedo (Student Government Association Chairman Business Affairs)
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