

Report from the Roundtable of the 4-year public schools – January 23, 2021

It should come as no surprise that the challenges of the COVID pandemic and our various responses to it dominated the conversation of the representatives of the 4-year public schools. We discovered a wide disparity in administrative plans for course delivery as the current semester progresses, as well as plans already made for summer sessions and even for the fall semester of 2021.

Hyflex courses seem to be highly favored by many institutions. However, some adhere strictly to the synchronous delivery of courses to face-to-face students and virtual participants, often requiring the latter to attend with video turned on. Most record classes for asynchronous delivery, but again vary on the accessibility to that option. Some allow that form of engagement freely while others require students to request permission to access a class that was not attended at the scheduled time. Concerns arose regarding the level of student engagement, efficacy of the instruction for students attending virtually, and the external challenges of quality internet service and adequate broadband access.

Many institutions are continuing predominantly online instruction of academic courses. We were alerted to the NASM concerns regarding the trend and the possibility that institutions who begin to deliver more than 40% of their curriculum online may have to apply for plan approval for an online degree. The question arose whether that would be 40% of the total curriculum or just of the music components. Institutions that offer the ability to complete the general academic core completely online would be challenged by the 40% threshold.

We shared conversation regarding the return of live performances and again found a wide range of protocols in place. Some are moving toward increased performances with limited audiences, where others will not allow performance, especially by larger ensembles, this semester.

Discussion then turned to the tenure and annual review process. Some institutions are allowing flexibility, with the option to suspend the tenure clock for one year, while others are not. The impact on third-year review candidates presents a special difficulty unless they are permitted to add the year prior to the review rather than at the end of the tenure process. Also critical to the conversation is the inherent inequity that exists between academic faculty, whose opportunities to publish are not adversely affected by the pandemic, and the creative faculty, who are unable to present live performances in fulfillment of their requirements. Institutions are permitting those faculty to count engagements that were in place but cancelled. However, after the spring of 2020 and continuing into the spring of 2021, those opportunities are not even being offered, meaning that faculty have nothing to report.

One perennial discussion point that once again presented itself is the load calculation for both full-time and adjunct faculty. Clearly the “time to credit” model does not reflect the actual time faculty teach, and many institutions appear to be trending toward using actual contact hours to determine load. Some debate occurred regarding inherent inequities in the approach whereby a faculty member teaching a one- or two-credit class might receive the same load credit as one teaching a three-credit class. The concern centered around how best to award credit for time spent outside the classroom. Ultimately, it seems that the nature of our discipline means we have to accept those inequities as inherent in the field each faculty member teaches.

A quick survey of what institutions plan regarding summer music camps revealed that most will not offer camps in the coming summer, some will offer virtual camps, and a couple are holding off on a decision in hopes of being able to go forward with some form of a live event.

Director Hansen asked Gary Wurtz to share Stephen F. Austin University's scheme of minors in music for music majors with the group. It is a response to the inability to create a full load of required courses for upper division students who enter the program with a large number of dual-credit hours, thereby putting federal financial aid at risk. The minor added to the junior and senior years increases the number of required hours in the degree plan, even if the student does not ultimately complete it. Examples of such minors include chamber music, opera, or jazz studies. A similar approach is in place at UTSA, and may be useful to us all in our own institutions.

As always, a lively and robust conversation made the time pass quickly. Given the success of the periodic Zoom meetings held in the summer and early fall, we agreed to continue to hold those meetings going forward as we continue to adapt to the uncertainties of the COVID pandemic. We have learned that our collective wisdom serves as a valuable resource to guide the decisions we must make in our own programs.

Respectfully submitted,

Robert Hansen, Director, 4-year schools.