Online Preparedness Task Force
Faculty Readiness Working Group

Recommendation 3 – Provide a clear process by which Faculty and Teaching Staff can apply early on for funds needed for materials to support their teaching

Instructors teaching remotely require specialized equipment to perform their job effectively.

A. This equipment may involve basic tools including microphones and headphones. For these basic materials, the Task Force recommends a clear process through which course and lab instructors can indicate their needs ASAP with the university supplying these essential materials through bulk purchases and best pricing opportunities.

B. For more specialized teaching materials, such as tablets for writing and displaying formulas, mini-document cameras, lab kits, and/or software licenses, the Task Force also recommends establishing a clear process by which course and lab instructors can identify their required needs early on AND a process through which they can apply for funds (as needed) to purchase those teaching tools.

Rationale:

Making Requests Early: One of the effects of the pandemic has been a disruption in supply chains, which has affected the availability and pricing of materials for remote delivery of courses, including microphones, headsets, and document cameras. Further, because of increased demand and staffing shortages brought on by Covid-19, shipping has been unreliable and delivery times are often significantly longer than in the recent past. As such, it is important to identify essential and specialized teaching materials needed NOW so that they can be ordered and arrive well before classes begin allowing course and lab instructors sufficient time to prepare for their teaching.

Funding:

A. For essential teaching materials identified (e.g., headphones and microphones), the university should cover the complete cost of these materials in the same way that they would a laptop. These items are essential to the job of teaching.

B. In cases where specialized teaching materials are needed, additional funds may be required. Where possible, full-time faculty with access to unused/unspoken for professional development funds (PDF) could use these funds to purchase some of these teaching materials. These funds, however, may be insufficient to cover the total cost of specialized teaching supplies. Additionally, not all instructors have access to PDF or to the full amount (e.g., contract faculty can access only a portion of these funds). Further, it should be pointed out that a recent LOU between the AUT and the University outlines that "the Professional Expense Fund may not be used to subsidize the University's provision of equipment and supplies necessary to conduct the Member's regular duties (Article 1.22: 1.3)". Further, caution is warranted at expecting these costs to be covered by the various Departments and Programs as they already operate with tight budgets and cannot be expected to absorb these costs. It should also be pointed out that this

expectation could introduce inequities as some Department budgets may be better positioned to support these online teaching expenses than others.

Therefore, the Task Force recommends making additional funds available for the purposes of purchasing these essential and specialized teaching materials for the online environment for all teaching staff.

What's Next:

- Allocate a budget for the purposes of addressing the essential and specialized teaching needs. [AVP]

Recommendation A:
- C&DE, IT Services, Health & Safety (Janet Beaton), and others, as needed could work together to create a list of recommended tools to meet the essential needs for remote teaching and learning. For example, C&DE or IT services could recommend a headset (headphones + microphone) that would produce high quality sound online and be comfortable to wear. [C&DE, IT Services, Health & Safety]

- Once the list of recommended essential tools is developed, a request form can be created and shared with course instructors via Chairs and Coordinators. Course instructors would then indicate their individual needs on this form by a particular deadline (e.g. July 8). Procurement can then place a bulk order. This will help to ensure quality materials, equitable access, and better pricing (could be purchased in a bundle). [Financial Services or Procurement in collaboration with Volunteer TF members]

- A second call of requests in August should be shared again with the Chairs and Coordinators to ensure contract faculty and lab instructors whose contracts do not start until August have the opportunity to submit requests. Once again there should be a fixed deadline (e.g.., Aug 18) with Procurement once again placing a bulk order. [TF Co-Chairs could share the second call of requests]

Recommendation B:
- Create, a 'Special Teaching Materials request form'. [Financial Services or Procurement in collaboration with Volunteer TF members]

- Chairs and Coordinators can share this form with their teaching staff (in a similar fashion as above ASAP and then again in August). Forms are returned to the Chairs and Coordinators for initial approval and then to the Dean for final approval. [Chairs & Coordinators, Deans]

- Before requests for Special Teaching Materials are approved, applicants must connect with IT through the ticketing system to ensure security of technology; privacy issues; and integration of technology (e.g., Moodle and/or Collaborate integration). [IT Services]