

Statement on IT, Office 365, and Part-time Faculty for the CCSU Faculty Senate

Background

In August of this year, the Information Technology Department leadership made a unilateral decision to relegate part-time faculty to a lower and less costly Office 365 license. This decision would allow them access only to the inferior online versions of the Office 365 apps on their home computers. Faculty were not consulted when this decision was made. Part-time faculty were not informed that any change in access to Office 365 was in the works. They started to get deactivation notices in their apps just as they were starting to prepare for the fall semester. Part-time faculty thought they would soon lose access to Office 365, including access to all their work stored on the CCSU-owned OneDrive.

We now understand that this decision was made in response to a larger than expected bill from Microsoft. It should be noted that the other three CSUs also received these bills, and they did not decide to take full access away from part-time faculty. CCSU is supposed to be in better financial shape than the other schools, which shows how out of step this decision was.

The decision makers in the IT Department also assumed that part-time faculty already had access to the full version of Office 365 through their full-time jobs. Better, more accurate information on part-time faculty working conditions was readily available from national surveys (e.g., American Federation of Teachers), and from the AAUP. It was also possible for IT to briefly survey part-time faculty at CCSU. In fact, part-time faculty most often do not have access to a work computer, as most full-time employees would understand the term. Their home computers are their work computers, in large measure.

The part-time faculty now have full access to Office 365 restored, but this should never have happened. While this decision most obviously impacted part-time faculty, other groups on campus were also affected. Department chairs, program coordinators, and supervisors were left to figure out why this happened to their part-time faculty. Helpdesk and client services personnel in IT were left to resolve a problem not of their making, including dealing with upset part-time faculty. Finally, our students were impacted when their part-time faculty were not fully able to prepare for the fall semester.

The Problems

The principle of shared governance was entirely ignored. Faculty, including part-time faculty, are supposed to play a role in decisions involving instruction and instruction-related processes. The university has a specific committee (Information Technology Committee) that is supposed to serve this purpose. That committee was also bypassed when this decision was made.

Established procedures for changes in information technology resources were not followed. When new versions of Blackboard or other programs are made, a limited pilot has been undertaken before the full-roll out. Faculty in the pilot have been able to make observations and suggestions, noting what was good or bad about the proposed changes. No such pilot was done.

This decision was made with inadequate information about part-time faculty and the crucial role they play in the academy. When the majority of the faculty are part-time, there is no excuse for decision makers to not understand the unique working conditions and needs of the part-time faculty.

Communication from the Information Technology Department has been quite poor throughout the process. Part-time faculty were not informed that full access to Office 365 was being taken from them. The first information they received was from CCSU-AAUP. Communication about the resolution of this problem was also quite scant.

Resolution

Be it resolved:

The Information Technology Department leadership should affirm that they understand and operate according to the principle of shared governance. Faculty, including part-time faculty, should have a voice.

The Information Technology Committee should investigate why they were bypassed, and shared governance was not followed when this decision was made. They should also determine why past practices were not followed in this case. They should report their findings to the Senate when their investigation is complete.

The Faculty Senate believes that all decision-makers at CCSU who control instructional resources should redouble their efforts to use better information in their decision-making processes. They should also better communicate to faculty (including part-time faculty) when their choices impact instruction and the success of our students. They should affirm that our part-time teaching faculty, counseling faculty, library faculty, coaching / athletic training faculty, and those who supervise future nurses, teachers, social workers, and other professional employees, will have the same access to essential IT resources as their full-time colleagues.