I. Background

In the 2013-14 academic year, Provost David McLaughlin charged the Undergraduate Academic Affairs Committee (UAAC) with exploring whether the following two recently implemented initiatives aimed at supporting and enhancing teaching at NYU meet faculty needs:

- **The Center for the Advancement of Teaching (CAT).** Formerly known the Center for Teaching Excellence, the CAT was renamed in 2013 to reflect a renewed focus on providing faculty across the University with tools to improve, innovate, and be more effective in their teaching.

- **The Enhanced Service Model for Instructional Technology Support (ESMITS).** This initiative resulted from a recommendation of the Faculty Committee on the Future of Technology-Enhanced Education at NYU in its interim report of July 2013. The goals of ESMITS are to help instructors more easily locate instructional technology support services; to develop new services to address unmet needs; to capture metrics to identify emerging trends; to facilitate ongoing improvements; and to leverage collective strengths and skills across the participating University units (i.e., Information Technology Services, Global Technology Services, the Libraries and the CAT). As part of this initiative, a new website ([www.nyu.edu/instructional-technology-support](http://www.nyu.edu/instructional-technology-support)) was created to provide answers to common questions. In addition, a common service protocol was developed across the units to ensure that, however faculty access the ESMITS services (e.g., through the new website, over the telephone, or in person), they would be directed quickly to the appropriate University-level resources.

Since these two initiatives are very recent, and since both are being evaluated, the committee understood its charge to be primarily fact-finding and experiential—viz., to learn more about each initiative and to make use of the services they provide, in order to advise the Provost on whether their overarching goals are aligned with the needs of instructors at NYU.

II. Analysis

To that end, a subcommittee of faculty members was formed. The group began its work by formulating a series of general questions from which to gauge how effective the two initiatives can be at meeting faculty needs, based on the members’ experiences as faculty representing a cross section of the University (CAS, Gallatin, Libraries, Steinhardt, Nursing, and Stern). In meetings with representatives from the CAT and ESMITS—including Debra Szybinski (Executive Director, Office of Faculty Resources), Anne Ward (Associate Director, Office of
Faculty Resources), and Ben Maddox (Deputy Chief Global Information Officer)—the following questions were discussed:

- **Visibility.** In order to be effective, the initiatives need to be known. What is being done to alert faculty across the University that these programs exist, what they offer, and how they can get access to them? And are those efforts yielding fruit?

- **Overlap.** What is the relationship between what individual departments and schools provide in terms of teaching support and what the CAT and ESMITS provide? Is there redundancy? Why, for example, would a faculty member at Stern (where teaching is frequently assessed and updated, and where there are already significant resources available to faculty for this purpose) even want or need to approach CAT or ESMITS? Is the idea to centralize efforts, to provide a resource for faculty of schools where there isn’t such support? Or would it make most sense to let individual schools develop the kinds of teaching support that best suit their faculty, and then open up those services to faculty from other schools?

- **Adaptability.** Considering that NYU is a large and complex institution, whose individual schools do some things that appear similar but are in fact tailored to meet their own needs, are these all-University services meant to be adaptable from school to school and from department to department? Or do they aim, rather, to provide some common denominator of support for faculty from all schools? In other words, how adaptable are the CAT and ESMITS across schools, disciplines, and platforms?

With regard to the CAT, for example, beyond anonymous instruction assessment and feedback services (i.e., recording and evaluating class sessions) that cater to individual faculty, the subcommittee was impressed by the Center’s efforts to create spaces where faculty can come together, either around a specific topic of interest (e.g., a seminar on how to “flip” a course) or informally to discuss teaching approaches (e.g., get-togethers at the Tap Room in the Torch Club). The subcommittee felt, however, that offering opportunities to delve more deeply and interactively into a given instructional topic could be an effective complement to this programming. With this in mind, the subcommittee was pleased to learn that, beginning in fall 2014, the CAT will begin to offer not just one-time seminars but more extensive workshops.

With regard to ESMITS, two subcommittee members (especially as novices to the process) found the experience of using these services very useful but also a bit overwhelming. After submitting a question about pedagogy via the website, the query was directed to several people, all of whom responded solicitously and arranged group meetings with the faculty members to address their particular interests and needs and to offer further direction on where to find appropriate resources. Whereas the services provided and the attention conferred tended to focus on how best to deliver content, the subcommittee members felt that they would have benefited most from advice on how to break down difficult concepts and then, with the support of technology, to deliver them to students. This experience highlights the need for instructional technologists who have expertise in or familiarity with broad disciplinary areas, such as the sciences, humanities, social sciences, education, and management.
III. Recommendations

On the basis of the subcommittee’s consultations, as well as discussions in plenary session, the UAAC submits the following observations and recommendations:

- **Clarify the relationship between the CAT and ESMITS.** There is a need for greater clarity about how the CAT and ESMITS relate to one another. Both aim to offer instructional support, but whereas ESMITS is primarily geared towards incorporating technology in the classroom, the CAT’s mission is to help improve teaching in areas that may or may not include technology. Insofar as there are areas of overlap, we did not get a sense that there is much communication or collaboration between the two services. Either collaborating more closely in areas of overlap or delineating more clearly respective areas of service may help to clarify the relationship between the two services and could help to leverage resources more efficiently.

- **Integrate resources and services where appropriate:** The committee found three major areas where greater integration of teaching support services may prove beneficial for faculty.
  
  - The first area is integration of resources between the CAT and ESMITS. Among the 16 new staff members hired in GTS as part of the ESMITS initiative, 11 are instructional technologists with expertise in course and curriculum design. A few of these individuals might, perhaps, have a percentage of their time dedicated to the CAT, such that they would serve as liaisons between the two initiatives. Having such liaisons in place would improve communication between the two units, facilitate collaboration, and clarify the complementarity of the services that they provide.

  - The second area is integration of content/subject knowledge, technology, and pedagogy. It was observed that both CAT seminars and ESMITS services seemed to focus on providing general teaching tools and services. As noted above, what appears to be lacking is assistance on how best to teach specific content, especially difficult concepts that may be particular to specific fields or subject areas. Support specialists with broad areas of expertise (e.g., social sciences, humanities, public policy, medicine, sciences) would have a better sense of the concept being taught, which might allow for more effective follow-up questions and more robust advice. The following diagram illustrates how such an integrated support model might be conceptualized:
With this in mind, we are encouraged that, at the request of the Provost and with financial support from that office, recruitment is already underway for school-based instructional technologists, at least one of whom would be based in each NYU school. Since these individuals will have disciplinary backgrounds relevant to their home schools, they may be better positioned than the CAT or ESMITS to organize teaching workshops that are targeted to particular subject areas. At the very least, they should partner with those University resources.

- A third (and related) area is the relationship between University-based and school-based resources. It may prove helpful for the Provost’s Office to map what current non-centralized services are offered to support teaching in individual schools, departments, and programs, and to determine how these services interface, if at all, with the current University-based offerings. One possibility might be for the CAT and ESMITS to monitor broader national and international trends in teaching and learning and to channel this information to school-based resources. Another possibility might be for the CAT or ESMITS to play a specific programmatic role within a given school, e.g., by providing basic pedagogical training to its graduate students.

- **Create opportunities for students to provide input on effective teaching practices.** Course evaluations should not be the only mechanism through which NYU students can communicate their perspectives on effective teaching practices. The CAT and ESMITS should consider creating venues for students to express (e.g., through surveys, panels, even filmed testimonials) their sense of what works best, not only in the classroom but also in various online formats.
Recommendations specific to the CAT. The committee recognizes the level of commitment that the CAT demonstrates to providing new services to help faculty innovate and improve their teaching—e.g., adding more extensive workshops on specific instructional areas. We were encouraged to learn that more and more faculty from across the University are attending CAT events and making use of the CAT’s services. We would like to make the following recommendations:

- **Extending services to faculty at global sites.** Faculty at NYU’s global sites who wish to use technology to enhance their teaching have access to ESMITS services, through the “Instructional Technology Support” website (see above, page 1). In addition to facilitating contact with the University’s tech support team, the website contains a number of helpful tutorials (e.g., setting up a website using WordPress, “flipping” a class). Faculty seeking other kinds of pedagogical assistance, however, cannot depend on the same level of support, since the CAT does not provide service to the global sites. We strongly recommend that teaching support be extended to the global sites. One way of doing this has recently been identified, viz., to record selected presentations and teaching workshops organized by the CAT and to make these available for asynchronous viewing by faculty outside New York. Another is to film short, TED-like talks by faculty from across the University on topics related to teaching (e.g., how to get discussions going, how to build more writing into content courses, and how to teach and assess in ways that make it difficult for students to cheat).

- **Website.** The CAT’s current website is not only outdated but also difficult to navigate (both to and within). We understand that a re-launch is scheduled for fall 2015. Beyond improving functionality, we suggest including the site as one of the highlighted links in the Teaching and Learning Resources page of nyu.edu (currently comprised of “Technology Support,” “Technology Services,” and “Faculty Resource Network”). In addition, a library of the TED-like talks described above would be a valuable enhancement to the website.

- **Open classrooms.** One way to address the issue of content/subject knowledge referenced above might be to have the CAT identify and solicit NYU faculty with demonstrated records of teaching excellence to “open” their classrooms for interested faculty to observe. This would allow faculty to know when a particular topic of interest is being taught by a strong teacher, and to sit in.

- **Learning communities.** Along the lines above, the CAT might consider promoting learning communities among faculty with similar pedagogical expertise, communities that other faculty may tap into. This would allow us to harness the richness of the resources we already have at NYU, especially in schools like Steinhardt, but also through a broader network of excellent teachers.

- **Metrics.** As more and more faculty attend CAT events and workshops, it may make sense to collect more systematically information that could assist the Center in identifying trends and areas of interest/concern among the faculty. A survey
administered to faculty users might include such questions as: *How did you learn about the CAT? What kinds of topics would you like to see addressed? How many/which previous CAT events have you attended?* Such a survey might help to identify and address a known issue, viz., that use of instructional support services tends to be self-selective. In other words, faculty interested in improving or innovating in their teaching are the ones most likely to make use of the services offered; but these are faculty who likely already make teaching a priority in their work. In order to reach out to other faculty who may benefit from instructional support, it may be more helpful and effective to know not just who is attending workshops but also who is *not* making use of such services.

- **Clarify and enhance the role of school liaisons.** Currently, the CAT has formally designated faculty liaisons in individual schools. The role of these individuals could, however, be developed further to make them more effective communicators and articulators of teaching support services at the local (rather than University-wide) level. If, for example, faculty receive notifications from someone with whom they are more likely to be familiar, they might be more inclined to seek out or respond to opportunities for teaching support and innovation.

- **Faculty Resource Network, and teaching practices at other universities.** While separate from the CAT, the Faculty Resource Network (FRN) is billed as a key part of the slate of resources available to faculty to promote and develop teaching excellence. On NYU’s Teaching and Learning Resources website ([http://www.nyu.edu/faculty/teaching-and-learning-resources.html](http://www.nyu.edu/faculty/teaching-and-learning-resources.html)), it is highlighted alongside “Instructional Technology Support” and “Technology Support”—and above the CAT—as one of the three primary resources available to faculty. Given its prominence, the relationship of the FRN to the CAT is unclear, as is its international dimension. Furthermore, since the FRN works primarily with faculty from other institutions (rather than with NYU faculty), its inclusion in this list of resources is somewhat misleading. This is a minor point having to do with clarity of mission and use of resources. More broadly, surveying other universities—whether or not part of the FRN consortium—for additional ideas and examples on how to improve access and content of teaching and learning support services may prove beneficial.