1. The APD met with Bill Rando, director of the Yale Teaching Center to discuss the present situation and future prospects of online education at Yale. Graduate students were concerned that they had a very limited role in ongoing discussions about online education. These discussions involve a committee, led by Dean Mary Miller, and the Office of Digital Dissemination. Graduate student concerns include the potential negative impact of online courses on educational standards at Yale and, in particular, as online education could affect graduate student teaching preparation. If graduate students were required to TF for online courses as part of their four semesters of priority teaching, this new form of pedagogical practice could dilute an already small allotment of pedagogical training.

2. Bill Rando summarized the “Report of the Committee on Online Education,” published in December and accessible at: http://news.yale.edu/2012/12/19/report-committee-online-education. Generally, the report recommended cautious progress in online education: there were four Yale courses offered online last summer, and there would be 4-6 offered this summer. However, one APD representative suggested that there may in fact have already been significantly more than four online summer courses offered. Secondly, the report recommended that Yale should look at a MOOC (massively open online course) platform as a further development of the Open Yale Courses.

3. In general, there are several different forms of online courses – Open Yale Courses represent one possibility, credit-granting courses, either as limited-enrollment or MOOCs are another. Yale has said no to credit-granting MOOCs.

Graduate students responded with a number of concerns:

- Online education brings with it the risk of over-eager adoption of new technology: what can online teaching do that ‘traditional teaching’ cannot? Is this primarily a question of pedagogical practice or one of making money or strengthening the Yale ‘brand’?

- There was a considerable amount of frustration expressed about the lack of transparency in discussions surrounding Yale’s policy on online education

- Professors who teach online without developing the necessary IT knowledge displace this obligation onto IT professionals or graduate TFs. Transforming traditional courses into online courses without due consideration of the difficulties involved could make the task of the TF considerably harder.

- Online courses threaten person-to-person contact, which, many would argue, is one of the essential features of college pedagogy and the university experience in general.
- Online courses, especially of the MOOC model, are well suited to broadcasting knowledge, but not to the production of knowledge through open-ended person-to-person communication.

  - However, Rando responded that some educators claim that learning is as good or better online. He stressed that, in general, online education may force a rethinking of many of the assumptions of ‘traditional education,’ including assumptions related to its efficacy.

- As online education becomes more widespread, does online teaching become a separate training path in graduate school?

- Why does Yale not stop to ponder the choices presented by online education rather than accepting technologically motivated transformations in education as a matter of inevitability?

- Yale has long lacked a central place to talk about teaching, including online education and matters of large-scale policy.

- How to maintain an open conversation about the merits and/or possibilities of old and new methods of education? How to make graduate student voices a meaningful part of the conversation?

- What is the goal of online classes?

  - The consensus of the group was that no one knows.

- Rando observed that online education offers the possibility of studying teaching and learning on an unprecedented level. Assessing new models also gives us an opportunity to assess old models. Graduate students responded by stressing the importance of a system where findings, for example regarding the relative efficacy of different kinds of teaching could be implemented. The danger is that widespread enthusiasm for online education could render findings about the superiority of ‘traditional education’ irrelevant.

- The Teaching Center will dedicate its annual spring forum this year to “Online Teaching, Student Learning.” Graduate students discussed how they could be more involved in this event, and Rando welcomed any suggestions. (william.rando@yale.edu)