

Minutes  
Academic Policy Committee, Faculty Senate  
Regular Meeting: 9/30/2014

Senators Attending: Derek Aday (Co-chair), Sarah Ash, Roy Borden, Richard Spontak, David Auerbach.

Guests: Jo-Ann Cohen (Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, COS), Jeff Joines (Associate Department Head, Textile Engineering, Chemistry, and Science)

1. Introductions

Meeting began at 4:00pm with introductions of those in attendance.

2. Student Evaluations

Jeff Joines joined the meeting today as a representative of the University Evaluation on Teaching Committee (UETC) to discuss the student evaluation process and to receive feedback from the APC before the UETC produces a proposal, expected sometime next spring, for changes to the evaluation process.

Initial discussion focused on specific questions on the current student evaluation questionnaire and the desire to update certain questions to reflect current teaching practices and standards. Concern was expressed that the current survey isn't communicating to students the specifics of what we want to learn, and that there is substantial disconnect between the feedback we hope to get and what students think that they are providing.

One example question was discussed, question #1 of the survey, and the focus was on trying to determine what that question is attempting to measure. It was pointed out that the question, like some others, predates new policies that may make certain questions obsolete.

Further discussion focused on whether specific questions would provide answers that will be useful to faculty and to administrators in the RPT process. Jeff suggested a number of potential modifications that are currently being considered by the UETC. The APC discussed some of these and offered suggestions for modification.

The APC wondered whether the UETC had considered the comments of David Austen about the effectiveness and fairness of the student evaluation process and whether the UETC had considered the available literature on the subject. Jeff indicated that the UETC was aware of the available literature and had considered it.

There was discussion about whether the current instrument could, or is intended to, measure student learning. It was pointed out that the context of these evaluations – including size and topic of class – is important when evaluating student responses. There was further discussion

about the importance of providing peer review of teaching as context to help interpret student evaluations.

There was discussion about how we evaluate research more holistically than we do teaching. A comment was made that for teaching there is only student and peer evaluations, and the APC wondered whether there were other options for evaluation of teaching, particularly for the RPT process. Jeff suggested that teaching portfolios might be an option, as might teaching letters of recommendation from current or former students.

A suggestion was made by the APC that perhaps we need a much simpler instrument than we currently have, something similar to a consumer satisfaction survey. The goal would be to ask a few very simple questions and then evaluate temporal trends for individual instructors. It was proposed that this approach might open the door to discussions with individual faculty members about the quality of their teaching.

Considerable discussion focused on whether the purpose of the survey was to provide formative or summative results, and how answering that question might influence the design of the student evaluation instrument. The APC wondered whether it might be possible to completely redesign the survey by asking faculty what they want to learn from the surveys (formative section) and then including a few summative questions for the RPT process. Concern was expressed that these tools are used for comparisons among faculty. Student bias based on gender, race, etc. can unfairly drive comparisons. There was discussion of a prior survey conducted at NCSU that addressed some of these concerns. Jeff indicated that he could send this report to the APC.

There was discussion about how the data from the surveys are intended to be used, and the consensus view was that the data would be used to both improve teaching and to evaluate teaching as part of the RPT process. A suggestion was made by the RPT that perhaps department heads collect all of the teaching reviews and then provide a summary of teaching effectiveness to college committees for the RPT process. In this case the committee would not actually evaluate the raw numbers from student evaluations. This led to discussion about the possible need to redo the peer evaluation process, requiring perhaps a focus on two key areas: what aspects of teaching can be improved, and what is being done exceptionally well that others can learn from.

There was additional discussion about a few key questions on the current evaluation form, such as #12, which states: "This course is excellent". Discussion here focused on the potential need to completely redo the likert scales for some or all of the questions to more accurately reflect student opinions.

A suggestion was made that there should be a change to the RPT reporting procedure to make reviewing easier and to prevent faculty from cherry picking the best student comments to include in the dossier.

**Status of this issue:** Student evaluations: Closed (in terms of comments), but the UETC will return to the APC and/or the full senate, perhaps next spring, with a proposal for changes.

**Action:** There was general agreement among APC members that strong consideration should be given to separating summative and formative questions and the associated information streams that those provide. The formative questions could be used by faculty and department heads to improve teaching, whereas the summative questions would be used as part of the RPT process. The APC remains open to reviewing any proposal provided by the UETC.

The meeting adjourned at 5:00pm

*Submitted by Derek Aday*