Academic Policy Committee
Minutes
January 17, 2017

Members present: Sarah Ash, Alton Banks, Marina Bykova, Jeremy Feducia, Kerry Havner, Greg Young, Paul Huffman, Donna Carver

Members Absent: Chang Nam, Neal Parker, Sophia Kathariou, Jennifer Kuzma

Guests: Nolan Watts, student representative to the Evaluation of Teaching Committee; Valerie Wust, chair of the Evaluation of Teaching Committee

Topic: ClassEval: Student Experience Add-on Questions

- See Student Senate summary of the issue that follows these minutes.

1. Discussion re the suggestion that the added questions would increase overall ClassEval participation rate.

   - How does the Student Senate know that the students who responded to the HOWL survey are not the students who already fill out the ClassEvals? This matters because it questions the ability of the additional questions to increase overall ClassEval participation rate, as suggested.

   - In addition, if students can see the results without having to fill out the survey, it may not help response rate at all.

   - At Johns Hopkins, what increased pptn rate was not the availability of information from the survey but a policy to not release the student's grade in the class until s/he had completed the survey.
     o In the past, NCSU's Registration and Records has been unwilling to do this. Unclear why. Perhaps because it is coercive or because it's seen as an incentive.

   - Evaluation of Teaching committee does think that the additional questions would likely increase pptn. And regardless, the information gathered would still be better than that currently available via RateMyProfessor, etc. But neither EOT nor the Student Senate has info on the experience at those universities that make some portions of course evaluations public.

2. Discussion re the questions themselves

   - Focus is on the "student experience." For example, student who works 40 hours/week might not want a class that requires group work; can be important to know if an expensive textbook is really necessary; students like to know how the class is delivered (lecture, discussion, flipped, etc.).
     o What about availability of syllabi? Is it better for students to have access to the syllabus ahead of time to compare across sections and courses?
        ▪ But does the syllabus really reflect the true nature of the class. For example, the everyday classroom experience.
     o A professor may decide to change the way s/he teaches a class from one semester to another. So what happens when a student comes into a class and it has changed?

- There would be no open-ended questions; questions would be developed with the help of those with expertise with survey development.

- Don't students already know what they want to know—aren't grade distributions the most important?

- Maybe helpful for first year, first semester students, but likely less so after that. Once students are on campus, they quickly learn what classes to take.

3. Discussion re the quality of the information

- How would you know that the information is any better than the variability that is seen with current ClassEval? Does everything just end up in a "mushy middle?" Will it just be the same people responding, at the extremes?

4. Alternative strategies to increase ClassEval pptn.

- Could there be an "event" tied to the completion of ClassEval?
  - Could be like Thank Your Professor?

- Could be helpful to have some examples of best practices to increase response rate, for example, setting aside time in class.

5. Other issues

- What about going to the professor ahead of time to find out what the class will be like?
  - Should be encouraged, but is that scalable?
- This would be a companion to the initiative to provide "fast facts" to students as is done via DELTA for DE classes.

General consensus of the Academic Policy Committee is that until response rates are improved, adding extra questions is not going to provide valuable info.

ClassEval: Student Experience Add-on Questions

<u>To the members of the Academic Policy Committee:</u>
NC State University solicits ClassEval information from students about the instructors and courses in which they are enrolled. While this highly valuable data is used in RTP decisions, as a protected part of employees' personnel files students do not have access to it. Much of the student academic experience hinges on the professor. As such, we, as representatives of the student body, believe it to be in the best interest of NC State students to have access to data from additional ClassEval questions. These questions would be distinct from the ClassEval core questions and housed in a protected area accessible only via UNITY credentials. Similar mechanisms are in place at the University of Florida, Colorado State University, Johns Hopkins University, the University of Virginia, Clemson University, and the University of Maryland. By focusing on the 'student experience' in the classroom, students registering for classes would better understand the realities of a course, rather than relying on hearsay from other students or incomplete descriptions currently included in the MyPack Enrollment portal.

When student Government began this proposal, a poll was distributed to the Student Body in the weekly HOWL email on January 26, 2016. From this survey, out of 598 respondents we found that 84% of respondents said they were 'likely' or 'very likely' to complete course evaluations knowing students had access to the results. The knowledge that the responses were going to benefit their peers was highly influential on the likelihood of students completing ClassEvals. One of the current goals of the Provost's Committee for the Evaluation of Teaching is to increase ClassEval response rates as they are key in RPT decisions. The current proposal would require students to answer the core ClassEval questions before being redirected to additional 'student experience' questions. Our initial poll results suggest that add-on questions reflecting the student experience would increase response rates.

In that same poll we also found that 79% of students already use third party sites like *RateMyProfessor.com* and *Koofers* when choosing courses. The information on these sites is inadequate for several reasons. Not all professors are rated. For those who are, the responses are limited in number. Moreover, the comments tend to represent extreme opinions; that is to say deviations from the norm. Ultimately, our proposed solution would reach all students who are enrolled in courses at NC State.

The student body at NC State wants valid and reliable data about the courses in which they are enrolling. We believe the reputation of professors is being unfairly tainted by these third party sites which disseminate unsubstantiated views on faculty members. We do not see this initiative as compromising the current core ClassEval questions or their intended use. The student experience questions reflect the nature of courses and the learning environment. We want to work with the faculty and the administration to optimize the classroom experience for students and faculty alike.