TO: Steering Committee

FROM: Student Feedback Task Force

RE: Preliminary Recommendation on Student Evaluation of Teaching

DATE: March 30, 2018

Introduction

In May 2017, Steering approved the creation of Student Feedback on Teaching Task Force to meet in the fall semester of 2017 in order to address concerns raised by the Student Government, as articulated by an email from Alex Molder on behalf of the Student Government, and to review the literature and to make recommendations for changes to the form or its administration.* The Student Government requested a review of the content and process for administering the student feedback forms for the evaluation of courses and faculty, noting student concerns with the content of the form and with the current process for administering the forms. Previously, the Steering Committee had charged CAP in November 2010 with making recommendations concerning the content of the student feedback form as well as the procedures by which the student feedback form is administered.

*After the meeting on Oct. 11, 2017, the task force requested an extension to continue its work until March 2018 to effectively complete the work.

Charge

The Steering Committee requested that the Student Feedback on Teaching Task Force would review literature regarding nationwide research and best practices on student feedback on teaching. The Task Force was also asked to solicit preliminary testimony from various stakeholder groups on campus, including the Faculty Senate Executive Board, Academic Leaders, and the Deans Council regarding faculty and administrators concerns with the current form and procedure.

Background to the Recommendations

Based on the charge from the Steering Committee, the Student Feedback on Teaching Task Force was formed in Fall 2017. The Task Force members are:

> MinSoo Kim-Bossard (Chair)
> Cathy Liebars (Vice-chair)
> Angela Capece
> Chu Kim-Prieto
> Nadya Pancsofar
> LaMont Rouse (Center for Institutional Effectiveness)

Julia Cintron-Burch (Student Representative)

The Task Force reviewed the literature provided by Academic Affairs, as well as additional literature identified by members of the Task Force. Research on the use of student course evaluations in higher education has revealed certain trends that need to be considered as the College reviews its current policy and procedures. In particular, the results of this research suggest that student evaluations may not be a good indicator of teaching effectiveness, especially for culturally and linguistically diverse professors and female professors, as multiple studies have indicated student bias in completing course evaluation forms. The research offers some guidance in the use of course evaluations, recommending that Colleges consider the full score distribution, rather than averages, emphasize qualitative narrative responses by students regarding their experiences, and look holistically at teaching performance using additional indicators, such as syllabi and course materials and instructor use of strategies that are known to correlate with student success. Student feedback forms should be tested with students to be sure that the students are interpreting the individual items in the same way, and students and faculty should have a voice in the development of these evaluation materials. Please see Appendix A for the list of references that the Task Force reviewed.

The Task Force members solicited testimony from various stakeholder groups on campus, including Student Government, Faculty Senate Executive Board, Dean's Council, Academic Leaders, and Office of Information Technology, using focus groups and online surveys. Please see Appendix B, C, and D for the summaries of preliminary testimony the Task Force received. The complete testimony is available upon request.

<u>Recommendations</u>

Across all the various groups from which the Task Force solicited the testimony, there was a significant amount of concern regarding the content (e.g. questions), the format (e.g. the platform for the student feedback), and the use (e.g. how students fill out the form, how the data is used) of Student Feedback on Teaching. While it was hard to discern a consistent trend across all the stakeholder groups, the low response rate for the Student Feedback on Teaching was a concern expressed from all the groups. Based on the responses, it was evident that the feedback forms are not working as intended and the task force recommends that the content and format of the feedback be revised. Following are long term recommendations based on the collected testimony:

- Consider alternate feedback methods such as discussion groups with the students and a moderator that then reports to the results to the professor
    - A pilot study is currently being conducted by Kit Murphy
- Distribute the feedback forms earlier in the semester. Expand the window for submitting feedback (so that students have more time to fill it out)
- Revisit the questions to determine if they should be changed or augmented
    - Enable departments/instructors to tailor their own questions on the form

- ○ Consider changing order of questions (e.g. putting open-ended questions first)
- ○ Reduce the number of multiple choice questions
  - ■ Not all questions apply to all the courses
- ○ Reduce redundancy across questions
- ○ Clarify questions by defining terms and phrases such as accessibility, timely, relevance, and intellectually stimulating
- ● Conduct formal mid-semester evaluations rather than at the end of the term
  - ○ Recommend school-wide conversation about mid-semester evaluation

The Task Force has also identified some recommendations that can be applied in the interim that can serve to increase the response rate and help provide meaningful feedback for faculty until new content and formatting can be developed. Following are immediate recommendations based on the collected testimony:
- ● Inform students about the purpose of student feedback, that the process is secure, and to be careful to select the correct class
  - ○ Train faculty members to effectively administer the student feedback
  - ○ Consider doing it in class
- ● Conduct mid-semester feedback informally
- ● Consider bias when the feedback result is used for tenure/promotion (by the Tenure/Promotion Committee or Dean)
  - ○ Women and minorities tend to be viewed less favorably
  - ○ Not all questions may be appropriate for all departments/courses
  - ○ Scores of 3 should not be penalized as this means the student agrees with the statement
  - ○ Avoid relying on average scores, and instead look closely at trends in qualitative feedback and consider the full range of scores.
- ● Investigate more user-friendly platform options
  - ○ These other options must be accessible on Smartphones, provide the option to change questions, and enable benchmarking against other schools

Appendix A

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Appendix B

Summary of Testimony (Purpose)

What is the purpose of the feedback forms from your vantage point?

The responses indicate that the purpose of the feedback is to: (1) determine if there is a problem with the course content, instructor, or environment, (2) assess teaching effectiveness and quality, (3) provide constructive feedback for the faculty, (4) gather information on the students' experiences in the course, (5) assess student-instructor interactions, and (6) provide an assessment tool for evaluating faculty for reappointment, promotion, and tenure. A summary of the responses in more detail is given below.

Some stakeholders thought there was no valid purpose for student feedback of teaching. Others thought there was no clear purpose. Also, there were some stakeholders who thought student feedback of teaching provided students with ammunition against faculty who they don't like.

(1) To determine if there is a problem with the course content, instructor, or environment.
   To check that the instructor is performing their minimum duties and determine if:
   ● The instructor is meeting the class
   ● The instructor is prepared for class
   ● The instructor is presenting appropriate content
   ● The instructor returns work in a timely fashion
   ● The instructor is on time
   ● The instructor is responsive to student questions
   ● The instructor is available to students

(2) To assess teaching effectiveness and quality and determine:
   ● If the learning goals and methods described in the syllabus are being met
   ● How learning outcomes were assessed and met
   ● How well the course is organized
   ● The clarity of the instructor's assignments and grading
   ● The quality of the instructor's delivery
   ● If the instructor demonstrates content expertise
   ● The quality and clarity of assignments
   ● The usefulness of required resources

(3) To provide constructive feedback for the faculty on:
   ● Their pedagogy
   ● What course materials, resources, teaching strategies, and activities worked well
   ● What could be improved

- How to improve course effectiveness

(4) To gather information on the students' experiences on:
- How they are feeling in the class
- The faculty performance
- Their experience
- The learning environment
- The class atmosphere

(5) To assess student-instructor interactions and determine if the instructor is:
- Responsive to students
- Open to different learning styles
- Respectful
- Responsive to inclusiveness

(6) To provide an assessment tool for evaluating faculty for reappointment, promotion, and tenure.
- To document faculty performance in the classroom
- To document faculty success in the classroom
- To document faculty teaching effectiveness
- To provide a rating system for faculty teaching that has larger variability than other teaching assessments

Appendix C

Summary of Testimony (Concerns)

What were the concerns raised about the student feedback forms?

Many concerns were raised about the forms by the various stakeholders. The most prevalent concern is that **there is a lack of consistency and clarity about the purpose of the forms and how they are being used across campus**. This concern was raised by every stakeholder group that was questioned. Other common concerns that were raised were the **length of the form**, **lack of student understanding of the form, the quantity of surveys students get, the timing of the distribution of the form (end of semester), and the response rate**. Some stakeholders voiced that even when students are given time in class to complete the forms, the response rate is still often below 50%.

Other more specific concerns that were raised by at least one stakeholder are as follows:

- The form does not adequately target the variety in the types of classes we have: small classes aren't getting feedback; in large courses, the course coordinator gets the reviews, but most student time is spent with other faculty (e.g. in engineering classes or in clinical environments).
- Summer/blended/online/off-campus courses need different feedback options.
- Irrelevant aspects influence the results – sex, ethnicity, appearance, etc.
- Results are often over-interpreted, and aberrated results are given too much credence.
- Too much weight is placed on the numbers: A rating of 3 means that the student agrees with the statement. Faculty should not be penalized for scoring below a 4.
- Access to comments is cumbersome. Student comments need to be accessed more easily.
- Some information is lost when switching from paper to online. With paper, it's clear if someone just picked all 1's or all 5's, and you may be able to add an appropriate weight to those responses. Online you don't have that resolution (or you can't see it as easily).
- Students often select the wrong dial and comments are in opposition with the ratings.
- Students don't appear to care about the form unless they 'love or hate' the instructor.
- The form may not be very good at responding to different pedagogical styles or when pedagogy changes (suddenly).

Appendix D

Summary of Testimony (Suggestions)

Various stakeholders provided a wide range of suggestions. Some of the suggestions conflict with one another, and the list of suggestions is not necessarily coherent across and within stakeholder groups. The suggestions are grouped the following themes below: (1) questions, (2) format & access, (3) communicating the importance, (4) administration, (5) alternative method, (6) interpretation (use of collected data), and (7) other suggestions. The scope of suggestions varied greatly, ranging from addressing the current student feedback and exploring alternatives.

Questions

- The student feedback process could benefit from changing the form to a format that gives feedback tailored to that specific class.
- Revising questions could improve the quality of student feedback (e.g. Interest in course before and after taking it.)
- The student feedback form could provide example of appropriate comments or give choices (both good and bad) for the comment questions.
- The student feedback could use a standardized form supplemented by three or four questions (by faculty).
- It would be helpful to provide additional open-ended questions and more short answer questions.
- It would be helpful to reduce the number of questions/different questions.
- Please consider putting the comment questions at the beginning or the middle instead of the end.

Format & Access
- Student comments need to be accessed more easily (by dean and others).
- It is difficult for students to access the feedback forms via PAWS.
  - Please consider ways to reduce the complexity of accessing the form by moving away from PAWS and/or making it be few clicks to access it.

Communicating the Importance
- It would be helpful to educate the students about how important the feedback is.
  - There is a disconnect between students and how it is used.
  - It should be communicated to students how the form is being used.

Administration

- Please consider facilitating mid-semester feedback sessions.

- It would be helpful to give students proper instructions and/or training on how to give the feedback.
- It would be helpful to make student feedback forms accessible on a smartphone.
- The period for giving feedback could be extended.
- Faculty members could facilitate student feedback in class.
- It would be helpful to make sure that students are actually filling out for the correct class.
    - With online form, students fill out for the wrong class at times.
- Please consider making student feedback compulsory (e.g. Tie completion of feedback to release of course grade).
    - Making it mandatory would work, but that's also problematic because students will just click "down the row" in order to see their grade, instead of actually filling it out. At least now, when students do fill it out (unless they click the wrong class by mistake), we can be assured that they are filling it out to give some kind of feedback, and not just putting in random clicks.
- The student feedback process could target a variety of courses (e.g. small classes, a large course with multiple sections – so that coordinators are not receiving feedback for other instructors teaching the classes.)

Alternative Method

- It would be helpful to train students to do observations of different classes to obtain a student perspective (Kit Murphy has some experience with these).
- Please consider carrying out focus groups.
- Instructors could generate their own forms that students complete in class.
- Utilizing off-the-shelf software in use by other institutions could be an option.
    - This may allow us to tailor the questions and allow ourselves to benchmark against other schools.
- Please consider starting from scratch and utilizing a backward design based on what are we trying to accomplish and what tools are most effective.
- It could be an option to use apps that provide real-time feedback in the class

Interpretation (Use of Collected Data)

- Please consider analyzing results / comments over the long term, while looking for patterns over time, rather than focusing on one particular class or semester.
- It might be helpful making the student feedback be only one of the ways we evaluate our instructors, while reducing the weight placed on these forms.
- The weight of feedback should be different depending on which year students are in (e.g. freshman, sophomore).
- Liberal learning courses should be weighted differently than major courses.
- Please consider soliciting input from our graduates.

- In hindsight, how well did their courses and professors prepare them for their chosen career or future studies? Sometimes students "hate" a course and only in hindsight understand the value and relevance.
  - It should be standardized across departments about how feedback is used.
  - Summer/blended/online/off-campus courses need different feedback options.

Other Suggestions

- It would be helpful to ask the departments with the highest response rates what they do and then share those solutions with all of the departments.
- Please consider having faculty write a narrative to encourage self-reflection, describe how they have addressed prior student feedback, how they modify/edit courses to adapt to different learning styles, etc.
- A more holistic approach is needed for evaluation of teaching, such as utilizing portfolios.