

## MEMORANDUM

**To:** Mark Lussier, Chair, University Academic Council  
**From:** John Shumway, Chair, Student Faculty Policy Committee  
**Date:** April 22, 2013  
**Subject:** Year-End Report

In AY 2012-13, the Student Faculty Policy Committee focused on student course evaluations. We met six times, and collected data outside meetings. We are presenting a report of our findings at the April meeting of the University Senate.

The study on student course evaluations was initiated by faculty concerns about online course evaluations. In spring, 2012, the University adopted a policy of only providing support for online evaluations, so many departments switched to these paperless evaluations. Some faculty were concerned that low response rates and systematic biases towards lower evaluation scores could hurt tenure and promotion cases and could weaken the case for merit raises.

The committee reviewed faculty emails outlining concerns and solicited feedback at senate meetings. We received valuable input from Assistant Vice-Provost Duane Roan about procedures and rationale for online evaluations from the Provost's office. We met with leaders of student government in February. In March we met with Shelly Potts, the senior director of the University Office of Evaluation and Education Effectiveness (UOEEO).

One of our key findings is that many instructors do not know that the content of student evaluation forms is determined at the unit level. This limits what SFPC can and should do to improve evaluations.

We produced a report on student evaluations, which is posted on the University Senate web page. We do not argue for a return to paper evaluations, though units may choose to use them if they pay for supplies and processing. Instead we give guidelines to instructors to improve response rates and guidelines to departments to improve the quality of the evaluation materials.

In particular, we give the following advice to units: (i) Chairs and Deans should facilitate unit-level discussion about evaluations and response rates, (ii) Units should regularly review their questionnaire using current research as a guide for improvements, and (iii) Units should post their questionnaire on their web site with an explanation for students of the purpose and value of the course evaluations. Posting questionnaires on unit web sites is also a useful resource for other departments to see other departments' procedures to develop their own best practices. Departments who wish to improve their questionnaire should submit their changes to UOEEO by late June for use in the fall semester, or late September for use in the spring semester.

During our meeting with leaders in student government, they gained a greater appreciation for the value of student evaluations. Student government is promoting the issue while student evaluations are open in late April.

I am thankful to the SFPC committee members, especially Prof. Duane Roen, for their hard work and many contributions to the committee.