Report of the Student-Faculty Policy Committee
on Student Course Evaluations

To: Mark Lussier, Professor
President, University Senate

From: John Shumway, Associate Professor
Chair, Student Faculty Policy Committee

Date: April 22, 2013

Re: Findings and Recommendations

Background

In order to save money, ASU has discontinued support for paper evaluation forms for student course evaluations. Because of this, many departments have transitioned to using online course evaluations, which are supported by the university.

Some faculty have expressed concerns about online evaluations. A primary concern is a possible low rate of student response, since the instructors do not directly administer evaluations in their classrooms. An additional concern is that online evaluations may result in lower overall ratings, as students who are unhappy with courses may be more likely to take the time to fill out an online evaluation.

Several questions have been raised: (i) Can we return to using paper evaluations? (ii) What strategies are available to give instructors more control over the timing and execution of student evaluations? (iii) Who is in charge of course evaluations, and how can faculty improve the process?

Findings

We were surprised that the design and administration of course evaluations is at the unit level. Units are allowed to use paper evaluations (and some still do), but if they chose to do so they must cover the cost of materials and processing. Because of the cost of paper evaluations, we did not pursue a plan for the University to return to paper forms.

The Provost's office and the University Office of Evaluation and Educational Effectiveness (UOEEE) both provide guidelines for improving student response rates. We have summarized the methods we thought were most helpful in our recommendations, later in this report. Some additional suggestions were offered, including the possibility of deploying laptops to classrooms at evaluation time, but the committee thought this could be expensive and impractical.

The committee met with Shelly Potts, the senior director of UOEEE, in early March. She provided us with data on response rates for face-to-face, hybrid, and i-courses.

Fall 2012 Session C by Course Type	Response Rate	Enrollment Count
In-Person	65%	156330
Hybrid	64%	9520
ASUONLINE	57%	681
ICOURSE	58%	25014
Grand Total	64%	191545

Response rates range from 58% to 65%, and were lowest in iCourses.

A very useful piece of information from UOEEE was the timeframe for making changes to a unit's online courses. Because of the technical work to update the questionnaires for individual units, they recommend about a three-month lead to introduce new changes. For example, if a unit wants to change their questionnaire for the fall semester, they should submit their changes by late June. Similarly, changes for the spring semester should be submitted in late September.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Instructors

1. **Communicate the rational for course evaluations with your students.** Students' time is valuable, so it is important for faculty to explain we want students to take the time to give thoughtful responses. Many students are unaware of how their responses are used. Students appreciate explanations or concrete examples of how you have improved your course in response to student feedback.
2. **Watch progress of your students' responses.** During the evaluation period (April 19 through May 1), you can watch the response rate online. Go to http://my.asu.edu and look for the "Course Evaluations" link in the "Teaching and Student Support Tools" section.
3. **Consider ways to help students complete their evaluations.** Some possible approaches include: (i) Allowing students to use laptops or smartphones at the class period to complete the course evaluation, (ii) release students 10 minutes early to go to a campus computer lab to complete the course evaluations, or (iii) provide students with the hyperlink and information on how to log on to the CourseEval system, http://asu.edu/evaluate.

Recommendations for Units:

1. **Chairs and Deans should facilitate unit discussion on response rates.** High response rates are crucial for getting an accurate sampling of student opinions. Discussing response rates at the unit level raises awareness among instructors and provides an opportunity for units to discuss their unique circumstances and how they can improve their questionnaires and procedures.
2. **Regularly review unit questionnaire using current research as a guide.** Units are responsible for their own questionnaires and evaluations. Questionnaires

should not be too long, and questions should be designed to collect information that is most useful for departments.

3. **Post current questionnaire to unit website.** This serves two purposes. First, this is a convenient way to communicate to students and instructors how the evaluations are used by the unit and the decisions that go into the design of the questionnaire. Second, if all units post their questionnaires, this is a useful resource for departments that want to survey what other units are doing to develop their own best practices. This openness would also give students a chance to suggest improvements if they felt a questionnaire missed issues important to them.

Recommendation to the Provost's Office

1. The content on the web site (https://provost.asu.edu/resources/teaching/course) should be updated to reflect procedures for online evaluations.
2. The information Provost's web site should be synchronized and linked with the corresponding information on the UOEEE site (http://uoeee.asu.edu/online-course-evaluation-faqs).
3. The online Academic Calendar should include the window for online student course evaluations (for example, April 19 through May1, 2013).