

Faculty Senate
Monday, Oct. 15, 2007
4 p.m. Birkeland Lounge

After a flurry of word-smithing amendments, and amendments to amendments, Faculty Senate passed two motions regarding the implementation of a new instrument for student evaluations of teaching. It was the third Senate meeting devoted to discussion of the motions. The amended and adopted motions, brought by the Task Force on Student Evaluation of Teaching, read as follows in italics:

Motion 1:

That the following instructions for the administration of student evaluations of teaching be adopted and included in Chapter 3 of the Faculty Handbook.

Procedures for Administering Course Evaluations

The integrity of the course evaluation process depends upon the uniform administration of the evaluations and the absolute confidentiality of student comments and ratings. It is critically important that students have complete confidence in the process and must be guaranteed that their evaluations cannot be traced back to them. To insure that these conditions are met, the procedures described below have been established.

In order to ensure an environment in which students can freely express their judgments about a course, faculty shall:

- (1) Ensure that sufficient time is allowed to complete the course evaluations;*
- (2) Not engage in conduct which may unduly influence the outcome of the evaluation;*
- (3) Not remain in the classroom while students complete the evaluations;*
- (4) Not distribute student evaluations during final examinations.*

Faculty should not collect student evaluations – they should be collected in a manila envelope by the departmental secretary, another colleague, or a student from the class and brought directly to the departmental office. The evaluations will then be taken to computer services to be scanned. After the evaluations have been returned to the departmental office, student comments should be typed and saved in a secure computer in the departmental office until they are distributed to the appropriate

individuals. The evaluation forms should then be destroyed, because faculty are not permitted to examine their individual evaluation forms. Summaries of the evaluations can be viewed after grades have been posted, with the following exceptions: Summaries of evaluations shall be provided to faculty who are the subject of regular, formal evaluation, along with the committee report.

Motion #2: *That all faculty defined by any one of the following points (a) through (c) administer the new student evaluation of faculty teaching instrument when collecting student evaluations:*

- (a) rank of tenured Professor or;*
- (b) rank of Associate or Assistant and have yet to conduct an evaluation during their term of service within their respective rank or;*
- (c) any rank hired during and after the 2007-2008 academic year.*

Faculty pursuing tenure or promotion who have collected the previous evaluation instrument as part of their record to support a change in rank or award of tenure may, at their discretion, administer the new or old instrument when collecting student evaluations of teaching.

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The meeting began approval of minutes from the Oct. 1 Senate meeting and approval of the agenda.

Discussion then turned to Motion #1 as amended at Oct. 1 meeting. The amendment added the following three sentences to the last paragraph of the motion (before the rationale): “*Summaries of the evaluations can be evaluated after grades have been posted, with the following exceptions: Summaries of evaluations shall be provided to faculty who are the subject or regular, formal evaluation, along with the committee report.*”

Cynthia Carver (Division Chair-Professional Programs/CSTA) offered an amendment to correct a wording error in the amendment. She said the sentence in the amended motion that begins “Summaries of the evaluations can be evaluated after grades have been posted...” should read: “Summaries of the evaluations can be viewed after grades have been posted...”

Carver’s amendment, seconded by David Sprunger (English), passed on voice vote.

Jonathan Clark (Chair, German) offered an amendment to Motion 1.

The amendment would strike the motion from the paragraph beginning “Prior to...” through the bulleted points. Clark’s amendment read as follows:

The integrity of the course evaluation process depends upon the uniform administration of the evaluations and the absolute confidentiality of student comments and ratings. It is critically important that students have complete confidence in the process and must be guaranteed that their evaluations cannot be traced back to them. To insure that these conditions are met, the procedures described below have been established.

In order to ensure an environment in which students can freely express their feelings about a course, faculty shall:

- (1) Ensure that sufficient time is allowed to complete the course evaluations;*
- (2) Not engage in conduct which may unduly influence the outcome of the evaluation;*
- (3) Not remain in the classroom while students complete the evaluations;*
- (4) Not distribute student evaluations during final examinations.*

Connell seconded Clark’s amendment.

Dean Krejci said he would entertain a motion to table the amendment to give Clark time to write the amendment for Senate examination and consideration.

No motion was offered, so discussion returned to Clark’s amendment.

Clark said the motion’s first six bullet points, in laying out various ways faculty could influence the outcome of student evaluations, trivialized the point. He suggested omitting the specific examples, and said his amendment summarizes “the spirit of what is being said here” without detailing them in a way that, when included in the Faculty Handbook, would reflect negatively on faculty.

Michelle Lelwica (Religion) asked if the task force had thought it helpful to offer these examples.

Task force member Nick Ellig (Chair, Sociology) said that the group anticipated that Senate would ask for examples, but that he would be pleased to defer to Senate if it wished to eliminate them.

Clark said the motion's specificity would appear trite to incoming faculty.

Bryan Luther (Chair, Physics) said the specific examples send a message of distrust about the faculty. "They seem to imply that we are not bright enough or ethical enough to figure out" what practices to avoid, he said. "The bulleted list seems a bit much. We can simply say don't attempt to influence the evaluations."

Luther then offered an amendment to the amendment saying faculty should not "unduly influence" the outcomes of the evaluations, since faculty indeed influence outcomes by the manner in which they teach their courses. The amendment to the amendment was seconded by Heidi Manning.

This amendment to Clark's amendment passed by voice vote.

Polly Fassinger (Sociology) asked why the motion prohibited administering teaching evaluations during the last week of the course.

Ellig said the task force felt that students become increasingly concerned about professors' possible retaliation during the last week of the course, close to when grades are posted.

Jonathan Steinwand (English) said this is also the time when students have the most to say about the course.

They can say it during the second-to-the-last week, Ellig replied.

Bill Tomhave (Mathematics and Computer Science) asked the student Senators if they found it problematic to administer evaluations during the last week of the course. None indicated they thought this was a problem.

Tomhave then offered an amendment to the amendment striking "the last week of the course or" so it would read "during final examinations." This amendment was seconded, and passed on voice vote.

Discussion then turned to Clark's amendment.

George Connell (Philosophy) offered an amendment to Clark's amendment to change the amendment from: *In order to ensure an environment in which students can freely express their feelings about a course ... to: In order to ensure an environment in which students can freely express their judgments about a course...*

This amendment to the amendment passed on voice vote.

Fassinger asked what the task force intended concerning students who are absent when evaluations are administered. She asked if the assumption is that absent students could not participate, or if the motion would allow faculty to distribute the evaluation instrument to these students in alternate ways. Senators then offered a number of suggestions for including absent students in the evaluation process.

Luther spoke for Clark's amendment, saying the current motion is "overly prescriptive."

"We just demonstrated that faculty generally make good judgments and can figure out how to deal with contingencies," Luther said. "Are we really afraid faculty are running around trying to prevent students from evaluating them? We are going the wrong direction. Let's preserve the essentials [of the motion] and let faculty work it out."

The motion passed on voice vote.

Discussion then turned to Motion #2.

Hank Tkachuk (CSTA) noted that the motion refers to "the new student evaluation of faculty teaching instrument (attached)..." and asked if, by passing the motion, Senate meant to preclude any changes to the instrument itself. He then offered an amendment to the motion to strike the parenthetical word "(attached)."

Dean Krejci and task force members clarified that "(attached)" was for the benefit of Senators, and that the motion did not imply endorsement of the evaluation instrument. Faculty Senate is not charged with approving the instrument.

Carver asked how the evaluation instrument had been validated.

Ellig said the task force solicited senior faculty to volunteer to use the evaluation instrument. They then collected and compared the data to that collected by the previous instrument. They checked for errors in the instrument and noted discrepancies and patterns, he said.

Carver asked about the ramifications of the 10-point scale. She asked to what degree the task force found that students could discern between, for example, ratings of six and seven or seven and eight.

Ellig replied that the task force compared the average scores rendered by the new instrument to those produced by the old one, and although, he said, "the new scores seemed to escape the Lake Wobegone numbers of the previous evaluation instrument," there was no reason for concern about the 10-point scale.

Tkachuk asked about the instrument's validation process. The data produced by the new instrument should have been compared to those produced by the old instrument in the same classes, he said.

Task force member Mark Covey (Division Chair, Natural Sciences and Mathematics; Psychology) allowed that the procedures followed were not optimal, but that the task force looked for internal consistency.

Tkachuk said there is a difference between reliability testing and true validation.

Covey replied that given the task force's pressures and limitations, it did a good job and produced a valid instrument.

Tomhave said he was troubled that Senate will not have a chance to discuss or approve the instrument, but that he had no problems with procedures concerning the administration of the instrument.

Drew Rutherford (Chemistry) asked if, according to Motion #2, tenured associate professors would need to use the new instrument only once.

Covey said the intent of the motion is to provide continuity and to not disadvantage a faculty member who had previously used the old instrument.

Tkachuk said he was bothered that the new instrument "loses measurement of whether students interact with faculty outside the classroom." This is especially troubling, he said, because Kay Schneider (Director, Assessment and Institutional Research) had noted the college ranks low on that criterion in institutional assessment. He asked if we would find another way to measure faculty-student interaction.

Krejci said that the college would indeed assess student-faculty interaction, just as it would assess "becoming responsibly engaged in the world."

Motion #2 passed unanimously in voice vote.

Senate adjourned at 4:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine McMullen
Faculty Secretary