

Date 4/18/17

To: Dinesh Mehta, Senate President
From: Senate subcommittee on Student Evaluation: David Marr (chair), Holly Eklund, Vibhuti Dave, Courtney Holles, Tissa Illangasekare

Dear Dinesh,
Over the course of several meetings, the committee has considered your questions regarding student evaluations and have included responses below.

The broad charge to the committee is to make recommendations on improving the evaluation of faculty teaching without generating excessive overhead for faculty or administration. Some specific suggestions based on my conversations with faculty are:

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1. A recommendation on the window in which to make the online evaluation system available to students. Faculty lost control of the timing of the process when we moved from paper to online evaluations - some have suggested that we move back to paper evaluations.

The committee recommends that the institution remains with a 2-week window. However, to avoid overlapping with finals week, we recommend that the window be shifted forward to include the week before and the week of dead week. Because this period (at least anecdotally) includes periods when fewer projects and exams are due, we believe response rates will be higher and perhaps evaluations more reflective of the entire course. Supporting this, we include in Fig. 1 the school-wide response rate for Fall 16 where responses are generally higher at the start but drop over the course of the current open window.

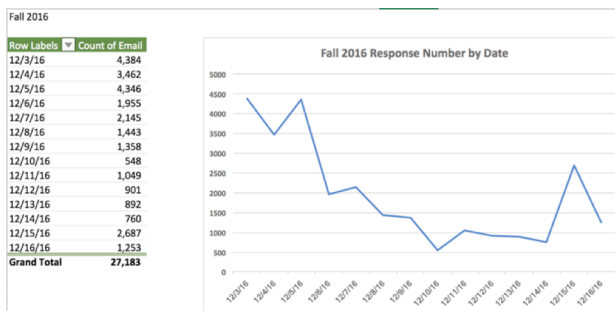


Fig 1: School-wide student evaluation response during the 2-week open window (Fall 16).

The committee believes that we should stick with online evaluations and agree that loss of control of timing has driven faculty interest in returning to the previous system. To address this concern, the committee recommends that 10 minutes be set aside in class to complete evaluations online with available mobile devices. While this is currently possible, to facilitate implementation and increase response rates, we also recommend the Senate consider allowing faculty to remain in the classroom during this time as the use of mobile devices should alleviate concerns of faculty interference.

2. Consider whether other questions should be added to the survey. One specific suggestion I received was to add back the question on whether students found the class rigorous. (A lower evaluation number may be offset by the perceived difficulty of the class.)

The committee recognizes the quality of the current questions and the significant effort that went into choosing them; however, we feel that the most useful information provided by students is in the form of additional comments. Our recommendation therefore is to significantly

reduce the number of questions in the survey from the current 14. Fewer questions should encourage higher response rates and provide opportunities for students to elaborate and comment. Specifically, we propose the following four questions (each with a required comment section) in which we have included one question to address rigor and removed questions with potential grading bias:

- 1) Rate the intellectual challenge of this course
- 2) Instructor facilitates student learning (CSM #6) (perhaps “through effective methods”)
- 3) Instructor demonstrates a positive attitude toward helping students (CSM #5)
- 4) Overall the instructor is effective (CSM #11)

3. Recommendations on how student evaluations should be used by DHs and DDs (and also Promotion & Tenure committees) to evaluate faculty teaching.

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First and foremost, the committee recommends that both faculty and DHDD's read them, especially comments provided by students. As many worries with regards to the evaluation process appear to arise because of concerns with how administration may or may not be using them, we recommend that DHDD's be trained in evaluation procedures and potential biases. With regards to specific recommendations for use, these should focus on identification of instructional strengths, identification of red flags, identification of areas for continued growth, and as a measure of student engagement. Here, we feel that each yearly FDR include a plan for teaching improvement for the coming year.

As a note on the P&T process, both letters from the departmental committees and the DH should include summaries of teaching evaluations and how these were used (or weighted) in generating their recommendations.

4. Recommendations on additional methods to evaluate faculty teaching that do not rely solely on student input. While student satisfaction is an important component of teaching, it should not be the sole metric on which we are evaluated. There is a perception that we may be weakening the quality of our classes because of a general awareness of student evaluations.

Institutional expansion of required evaluation process will likely increase current service loads. To minimize this, the committee suggests the Senate consider a Teaching Mentoring Committee be established in each Department. This committee would have access to teaching evaluation comments (not currently available in the library) and would use these to provide recommendations and feedback to faculty directly. This could be done outside of the DH and the annual evaluation process to make continuous teaching improvement less stressful and more constructive. Note the committee could be tasked with informal classroom visits as part of mentoring and “triangulation” which includes external (cross departmental), peer, and student evaluation used in concert.