Report of the Task Force on the Evaluation of Faculty Teaching

Introduction

Teaching is an important responsibility of university faculty. One aspect of the evaluation of faculty teaching is evaluation by students. Student evaluation of faculty teaching is recognized throughout the academic community to be a useful part of the overall formal evaluation of faculty. However, the increased emphasis on student evaluations does require an increase in the veracity of the results of the evaluations. A substantial increase in the number of student responses a limited, uniform, and consistent format, and a System-wide set of assessment items for student evaluations is required if the results are to be used to evaluate faculty effectiveness.

Created by The University of Texas System Office of Academic Affairs, the Task Force on the Evaluation of Faculty Teaching (Task Force) has been charged to:

1. Identify an appropriate, consistent, and limited set of faculty teaching evaluation questions that can be administered System-wide;

2. Recommend a process consistent across all campuses that incorporates the critical questions which evaluate faculty teaching at the end of each semester;

3. Identify mechanisms to provide faculty feedback throughout the semester.

The co-chairs of the Task Force are Samantha Dallefeld, Chair of the University of Texas System Student Advisory Council, and Timothy Craig Allen, M.D., J.D., Chair of the University of Texas System Faculty Advisory Council. Members of the Task Force included students, faculty, and administrators representing both the academic and health institutions. Dr. Pedro
Reyes and Dr. Wanda Mercer served as members from The University of Texas System Office of Academic Affairs. The Task Force also consulted with the Office of General Counsel. In its performance, the Task Force membership held three full-day meetings. The Co-chairs, along with Dr. Reyes or Dr. Mercer, performed day-long on-site visits with students, faculty, and administrators at the University of Southern California, a private institution, and the University of Maryland-College Park, a public institution. Both universities are nationally known for their successes with student evaluation of faculty. The Co-chairs, along with Dr. Mercer, had lengthy discussions with MyEdu personnel, including an on-site visit to the MyEdu facility. The Task Force received a presentation by MyEdu personnel to better understand the online system’s faculty-student feedback mechanism.

**Charge 1: Evaluation Questions**

A Task Force subcommittee chaired by Dr. Dan Formanowicz reviewed student evaluation questionnaires from all the System campuses and a number of others across the country to identify common questions or items. After determining which themes were most important and impactful to the evaluation of an individual faculty member, the five items below were formulated and ultimately approved by the Task Force.

The Task Force recommends that each campus administer the following five survey items, in this specific order and with this specific wording, for System-wide end-of-course student evaluation of faculty:

1. The instructor clearly defined and explained the course objectives and expectations.
2. The instructor was prepared to teach for each instructional period.
3. The instructor communicated information effectively.

4. The instructor encouraged me to take an active role in my own learning.

5. The instructor was available outside of class either electronically or in person.

The response scale should appear as follows:

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<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
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The items should be presented in the numerical order listed above, and utilize the response scale in the numerical order shown above. All items should be considered mandatory, so that each of the five items must receive a response before the evaluation is considered complete and can be submitted. These items should be the first five items of every institution's end of course evaluation, and any additional items, specific to each institution, college, department, or faculty member may follow. Attention must be paid to the length of the survey, as longer surveys lead to lower response rates and less accurate responses. The Task Force recommends that no single, all-encompassing, overall impression item be included, as it would be overly broad, largely subjective, and thus uninformative. The above five questions provide a more complete method for establishing an overall impression.

**Charge 2: Consistent Process for End-of-Course Evaluations**

Faculty emphasized the use and importance of teaching evaluations. The Task Force agreed that it is important to improve student participation in the completion of these evaluations because the results are commonly used in the formal evaluation of faculty. To this end, the Task
Force recommends withholding student access to grades through the official university grading records for three weeks. During this time, students will be allowed to complete course evaluations and have their grades released upon completion of all course evaluations. At the end of the three weeks, evaluations will cease and all grades will be released. The Task Force recommends that each institution establish a procedure to allow student access to grades as soon as possible after completion of a survey if the student does not complete them by initial grade release date. The Task Force also recommends that faculty be encouraged to include in their syllabi the expectation that course evaluations be completed and provide verbal reminders of this requirement periodically.

While the University of Texas System Student Advisory Council is largely opposed to punitive measures to force students to complete evaluations, the Task Force members feel the above measures are an appropriate compromise and highlight the importance of this evaluation process. The University of Texas System Faculty Advisory Council is also in agreement with this method for implementing mandatory evaluations.

Charge 3: Continuous Feedback

The Task Force, after due consideration and examining available options, recommends the University of Texas System campuses utilize MyEdu as a tool that will aid in the provision of continuous, ongoing student-faculty feedback during a course. The MyEdu program allows students and faculty to provide and receive valuable information about a course as the course is ongoing. The continuous, ongoing feedback mechanism in MyEdu is not meant for faculty evaluation, but may be employed as a communication tool between the teacher and student.
Certainly, a faculty member can elect not to use MyEdu, or to edit the comments, but this mechanism provides opportunities for discussion between classmates and between students and professor, about any and all issues related to the class.

Campus Implementation

The Task Force has developed a Best Practices guide to campus implementation of the Task Force’s charges, attached as Attachment 1.
Attachment 1


Teaching is one component of a faculty member’s academic responsibilities, and student evaluation of faculty teaching is one component of the overall evaluation of a faculty member’s teaching. Student evaluations play a role in determining faculty pay, promotion and tenure. The Task Force on the Evaluation of Faculty Teaching has recommended a set of on-line evaluation items, which will be utilized as part of the overall evaluation of faculty teaching, and a non-evaluative continuous feedback tool utilizing MyEdu. This Best Practices guide was developed by the Task Force from its discussions. It is meant as a supplement to the recommendations of the Task Force on the Evaluation of Faculty Teaching.

DEFINITION OF FACULTY

Faculty, to which the recommendations of the Task Force on the Evaluation of Faculty Teaching apply, are defined as the courses’ instructors of record. Faculty deliver the curriculum and are identified by the campus as the courses’ responsible parties.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Confidentiality of student evaluations of faculty teaching must be protected, and it is important that the methods used to maintain confidentiality are clearly demonstrated to students. As such, evaluations will not be administered for any class containing fewer than five (5) people
as of the day after the final university drop date. If a class contains five (5) or more students, but fewer than five (5) evaluations are ultimately completed, the evaluation data will be utilized. All collected data will be reported to the University of Texas System. Breaches of confidentiality will only occur in instances of immediate personal threat.

RESPONSE RATES

Because student evaluations will be a formal component of faculty teaching evaluations, significant student evaluation response rates are critical to the success of the student evaluation process. Current data on the use of online evaluations obtained, from within the University of Texas System and other academic institutions, shows that online evaluations are typically left to be completed on the students own time, resulting in extremely low response rates not suitable for use as part of the formal evaluation of faculty.

To maximize response rates, the online evaluations should be administered whenever possible in the same manner as traditional paper evaluations; i.e., in the classroom, during the last week of class, and prior to beginning the class. On that day, students should be encouraged to take personal computers, smartphones or other electronic devices compatible with the evaluation system to class. Smartphone capability should be encouraged, as it greatly simplifies the evaluation process. Additional personal computers or computer lab visitation may need to be provided in some circumstances. Students should be able to complete evaluations outside of class if they choose to do so. With time, as mandatory evaluation of faculty teaching becomes more accepted as a student responsibility, classroom administration may decrease in importance as a compliance tool.
Currently, faculty support is arguably the most essential component to significant student response rates. Faculty can increase response rates in a variety of ways, including verbally reminding students to complete the evaluations, sending electronic reminders, and mentioning the expectation of completion of the student evaluation on the syllabus. Student governments can increase response rates by providing publicity and increasing student acceptance and understanding of the goals and process for student evaluation of faculty. Methods used by student governments could include YouTube videos, interactive flyers, posters, yard signs, and word of mouth tactics to increase response rates.

STUDENT ACCEPTANCE

Student acceptance will largely occur through transparency. Students must understand the increased weight their evaluations of teaching faculty now carry. Students need to know that evaluations are used not only by faculty to make changes to teaching style or course material but also for promotion and tenure purposes. Students must understand that tenured faculty are reviewed regularly, and that student evaluations are meaningful to this process regardless of tenured status. Students must also understand that decisions about continued employment of contingent faculty will utilize student evaluations of faculty teaching.

SYSTEM-WIDE ADMINISTRATION OF EVALUATIONS

Evaluations will be administered to all graduate and undergraduate organized classes—lectures, seminars, and labs—including on-line and blended classes, containing five (5) or more
students as of the day after the final university drop date. Evaluations will be administered for all instructors of record for each course. Each institution will establish a written policy for courses taught by multiple instructors. Responsibility for administering and assuring confidentiality is that of the institution’s administration. Evaluations will be made available for students to complete for a period of time no less than the last full week of the class.

ONLINE EVALUATIONS

In this era of information technology, an online evaluation system is an inevitable necessity. It is economical and sustainable, provides quicker results, and offers greater ability to perform data analytics. An online system should send out notifications and reminders to evaluators and allow one-click access to evaluation forms. To limit email spam as much as possible, initial email notifications should be sent only once to all students with reminders as necessary. Online evaluation systems must interface with registration and scheduling systems. The implementation will likely require an implementation liaison within each college. Courses change often, so this is essential for ensuring the correct evaluation is submitted to each student and that all courses are accounted for.

IMPLEMENTATION

Any evaluation system should be developed to completion and undergo pilot testing before full implementation. After successful pilot testing, it is important to fully implement the evaluation system rather than a staged implementation process, as a staged implementation is likely to result in student and faculty confusion, frustration, and hesitation. Educating students,
faculty and administration regarding the student evaluation of faculty teaching process should be an integral part of the implementation in order to increase understanding and subsequent acceptance by all stakeholders. Faculty must be reassured that, although student evaluation of teaching is now a formal part of faculty evaluation that will be used for pay, promotion, and tenure purposes, it is only one component of the overall evaluation process. Further, because of its importance, isolated extremes in student evaluation typically will not be considered.

CONTINUOUS FEEDBACK

Continuous feedback is non-evaluative, and will not, under any circumstances, be utilized as part of faculty evaluation for purposes of promotion and tenure. The Task Force’s position on this is firm.

A survey of past recipients of The University of Texas System Regents Outstanding Teaching Award recipients revealed what those recipients considered important for successful faculty-student feedback. They firmly believe that student feedback must be systematic and frequent in order to be most effective. The recipients recommended feedback be given to students in some form at least once a week, predominantly through discussion; however, specific questions were popular as well. They urge faculty to “be willing” and “don’t wait” to receive student feedback. Indeed, on the first day of a course, starting with the course syllabus, student feedback should be regarded as an integral component of the course. The working relationship should be such that students receive feedback from professors and provide feedback to faculty.

To provide student feedback to faculty throughout the semester, the Task Force on Faculty Evaluation identified MyEdu as a tool that will aid in this process. MyEdu software
allows students to evaluate various components of a course in order to provide valuable
information to other students about what to expect in the course. Students can provide
information about type of testing, lecture style, and attendance requirements, among other things,
so that other students can start to find courses that best cater to how they learn. Students can also
converse with faculty and other students in a particular course, allowing for questions and
comments to be provided throughout the semester. In addition, they can recommend faculty and
provide comments. Regarding faculty recommendations, faculty have complete control of what
recommendations become publically accessible.