July 16, 2014

Dr. Dean Neikirk
Secretary of the General Faculty and Faculty Council
ENS 635 (C0803)

Dear Dean:

I write to give my approval to the “Proposal From the Educational Policy Committee to Make Changes to the Basic Form Course Evaluation,” Documents of the General Faculty 11504-11507. The report was approved by the Faculty Council at its meeting of April 14, 2014. On May 17, 2014, the report received the endorsement of Executive Vice President and Provost Dr. Gregory Fenves. This legislation will bring the University of Texas at Austin into compliance with the new UT System mandate to incorporate five specific mandatory survey questions to strengthen performance evaluations.

Sincerely,

William Powers, Jr.
President

WP/lac

Enclosures

cc:  Dr. Gregory Fenves, Executive Vice President and Provost
     Mrs. Patti Ohlendorf, Vice President for Legal Affairs
     Ms Debbie Roberts, Executive Assistant, Office of the General Faculty
April 21, 2014

William Powers Jr.
President
The University of Texas at Austin
MAI 400
Campus Mail Code: G3400

Dear President Powers:

Enclosed for your consideration are required and proposed revisions to the Basic Course Evaluation (D 11504-11507). On April 14, 2014, the Faculty Council approved the proposal. Final approval resides with you.

Please let me know if you have questions or concerns regarding this matter.

Sincerely,

Dean Neikirk, Secretary
General Faculty and Faculty Council

Enclosure
DPN:dlr

xc: Gregory Fenves, executive vice president and provost
    Charles Roeckle, deputy to the president
    Patricia Ohlendorf, vice president for legal affairs

ec: Hillary Hart, chair, 2013-2014 Faculty Council
    Mary Rose, chair, Educational Policy Committee
DOCUMENTS OF THE GENERAL FACULTY

PROPOSAL FROM THE EDUCATIONAL POLICY COMMITTEE TO MAKE CHANGES TO THE BASIC FORM COURSE EVALUATION

On March 31, 2014, and on behalf of the Educational Policy Committee, Professor Mary Rose (committee chair, sociology) submitted the following proposal recommending modifications to the Basic Form Course Evaluation. On March 17, 2014, Professor Rose presented a report of required and recommended changes to the Faculty Council seeking feedback (D 11450-11460). The final proposal is a result of the committee's hard work and the thoughtful comments and recommendations made by Council members.

The Secretary has classified this as general legislation. The Faculty Council will act on the motion at its meeting on April 14, 2014.

Dean Neikirk, Secretary
General Faculty and Faculty Council

Posted on the Faculty Council website (http://www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/) on March 31, 2014.
PROPOSAL FROM THE EDUCATIONAL POLICY COMMITTEE TO MAKE CHANGES TO THE BASIC FORM COURSE EVALUATION

Background, Proposal, and Policy Rationale
As described in a detailed report to the Faculty Council (dated February 27, 2014), UT Austin must revise its current course evaluation forms in order to come into compliance with a UT System mandate that requires five specific questions to appear on each UT campus’s course evaluation form. EPC began with edits to the Basic Form, which is the default form (i.e., instructors must affirmatively ask for the Expanded Form) and which, according to CTL, is the most commonly used form. (We will shortly have a proposed Expanded form for Faculty Council to consider). EPC extensively discussed what the Basic form should look like and how to use the mandate as an opportunity to improve the whole of the current form. The Faculty Council Executive Committee made its recommendations about content to EPC, and at the March, 2014 meeting, Mary Rose oversaw a discussion with the full Faculty Council. Based on feedback from that meeting, discussed then and sent in email to Chairperson Hart, EPC re-considered its recommended form and now submits a final version for vote to Faculty Council.

The bulk of decisions are detailed in the February 27 report. I hear summarize the changes made in response to the excellent suggestions that arose at the March Faculty Council meeting. These edits are:

1. **Instruction at beginning:** The Executive Committee recommended, and EPC agrees, that the form should contain an instruction to clarify that the “Neutral” category is NOT the same as “Nct applicable.” (As described in the February 27 report, some departments, for example in Fine Arts, feel that their instructors are penalized when particular issues – e.g., the assignment of texts – are not relevant to their courses, but students do not know how to convey that on the form. They may select “Neutral,” which artificially lowers a score). We propose that an instruction at the beginning of the form says something like:
   “Note: In the scales below, "Neutral" means "no strong opinion one way or another," not "Not applicable/cannot rate."

At the same time, EPC recognizes that because formatting needs/spacing may require changes in the actual wording of the instructions. Therefore, EPC’s recommendation is that CTL (who is responsible for generating the actual form) be given leeway to edit the instruction as they see fit. Thus, we say: “The precise wording of the instruction can be edited for formatting spacing purposes, but it must convey the above substance.”

2. **Course organized:** Per Faculty Council request, we are adding one item that asks, "The course was well organized." This actually retains an item we deleted because we had concerns about overall form length. Representatives of CTL have reported that the addition of this item should not impair their ability to represent information on one page or produce response fatigue in students.

3. **Student feels he/she learned:** Per Council request, we have added one item: "Overall, I learned a great deal in this course." This will be the last item in Section 1 and replaces an alternative item we proposed about whether the student felt the instructor was interested in student learning.

4. **“About right” for middle category on workload:** Unlike other items, for the workload question in Section 2, the two endpoints are both “bad” (workload is excessive or insufficient at each end), whereas the middle category is the positive rating. In the current version, this item has the wrong word in it - “Average” – and EPC previously proposed fixing it. Consistent with all survey designs that have two negatively-valenced endpoints, we opted for “About right” as the positive/middle category. This structure is commonly used in survey design (e.g., when interviewers ask something akin to: “Would you say Too much/too little/or about right?”). The strengths of “About right” are that it is commonly used, clearly complimentary in valence, but allows for slight deviations from ideal (e.g., it doesn’t say “Perfect”). Although a faculty council member critiqued this response category as potentially colloquial (and perhaps hard to decode for students who are non-native speakers), EPC continues to recommend it because,
compared to other alternatives (which we researched), it is the clearest in meaning.¹ We prefer a response that is most commonly used when questions take this form.

The structure of the proposed Basic Form appears on the next page.

¹ Some suggestions have been “sufficient,” “appropriate,” and “satisfactory.” The first one is limited because, in addition to gauging a student’s feeling on the level of the workload, some may also ask, “sufficient for what?” which adds measurement error. The other two raise concerns about alternative meanings (“appropriate” can mean “not offensive”; “satisfactory” can sound like a less-than-ringing endorsement because it can be construed to mean “so-so”).
Final Version of the Basic Course Evaluation Form
As recommended by the Educational Policy Committee, March 31, 2014

To revise the Basic Form to meet new UT System mandates, we recommend the following structure to the first section of the form (note: questions 1 – 5, including the response categories, are mandated and cannot be altered):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The instructor clearly defined and explained the course objectives and expectations.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The instructor was prepared for each instructional activity.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The instructor communicated information effectively.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The instructor encouraged me to take an active role in my own learning.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The instructor was available to students either electronically or in person.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The course was well organized.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. The instructor made me feel free to ask questions, disagree, and express my ideas</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. The course materials (e.g., text and supplemental materials) were helpful to me.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Overall, I learned a great deal in this course.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We propose that the second section will read:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very unsatisfactory</th>
<th>Unsatisfactory</th>
<th>Satisfactory</th>
<th>Very Good</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10. Overall, this instructor was</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Overall, this course was</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. In my opinion, the workload in this course was</td>
<td>Excessive</td>
<td>Somewhat high</td>
<td>About right</td>
<td>Somewhat light</td>
<td>Insufficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. My overall GPA to date at UT is</td>
<td>Less than 2.00</td>
<td>2.00 – 2.49</td>
<td>2.50 – 2.99</td>
<td>3.00 – 3.49</td>
<td>3.50 – 4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. My probable grade in this course is</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to the above items, EPC requests that CTL add the following instruction to the form: “Note: In the scales below, ‘Neutral’ means ‘no strong opinion one way or another,’ not ‘Not applicable/cannot rate.’”

TL can edit the precise wording for formatting/spacing purposes; but it must convey the above substance.