

Provost's Advisory Council
Summary of February 28, 2008 meeting

Attending:

Pat Byrne	Kay Lemon	Anthony Annunziato
Kaitlin Foley	Paul Davidovits	Kay Schlozman
Pat DeLeeuw	Larry Ludlow	Dick Cobb-Stevens
Bert Garza	Ferna Phillips	Barbara Hazard
Emily Reeves	Gilda Morelli	Alberto Godenzi
John Williamson	Adam Baker	Anita Tien
Ray Madoff	Don Hafner	Callista Roy
Pat Maney	Mary Crane	Kevin Bedell
Mary Cronin	Rosanna DeMarco	

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1. The summary of the November 29, 2007 meeting will be circulated. Members are asked to submit any comments and/or changes to the Provost's Office by Tuesday, March 12. If no comments are received, the summary will be considered to have been approved and will be forwarded to the President's Office.
 2. Gilda Morelli presented research that examines the role of a person's gender on course evaluation ratings. Most of the studies reviewed used summary evaluation scores as their dependent measure and were non-experimental in nature. She noted that a reasonable conclusion based on the research was that a person's gender in and of itself was not statistically related to ratings in a significant way when other factors were taken into account. These included: characteristics of the course (e.g., lower or upper level; required or elective; subject matter that was racially or politically charged), characteristics of the student (e.g., gender; interest in course) and non-gendered characteristics of the instructor (e.g., ethnicity, native English speaker, teaching style).

The ensuing discussion focused on whether selected information from the University electronic course evaluations should be made public. Among the questions and comments that were raised:

- Is the information from course evaluations imprecise (i.e., either exaggerating or understating a finding), or is inaccurate (i.e., conveying an incorrect finding) as well?
- Should a preface be added to the online form to advise students about who will see which responses?
- What about the effects of public release upon grade inflation and workload?
- Would public release to students undercut what may be better ways in which students already assess courses?
- A key question would be how the evaluations were to be used. Could this be discussed or presented in a way that demonstrated how the information would help to improve the course?
- It would be helpful to publish trends, not only one data point.

- It might be useful to include information about the design of the course--e.g., mostly lectures, mostly discussions, mostly papers, mostly tests, etc.
- Sharing information would ultimately give students access to information to make informed decisions.
- If there are some degrees of bias, certainly those biases are present (or even exaggerated) in the PEPs. In the absence of publishing the University course evaluations, the PEPs become overimportant.
- Student use of PEPs has shown that students want this kind of information, and that additional information apart from the PEPs would be useful.
- There was also a question about whether it would be possible to collaborate with the UGBC PEP. It might be worth exploring joining forces with the students.
- Several people suggested (1) excluding tenure track faculty from the process for a 3-year period; (2) excluding student comments; (3) excluding the question about workload.
- For faculty concerned about releasing information the evaluations, they might be assured by the observation that what is important is teaching effectiveness--and the University is not relying only on the course evaluations to measure teaching effectiveness.
- Faculty who advise students have frequently have had the experience of not having answers to students who ask about specific courses or syllabi. If the evaluations are published, at least advisers can give information to students about how to assess the evaluations.

Additional observations:

- The intradepartmental process for teaching effectiveness could be strengthened.
 - It would be important to make sure that the evaluations have an impact on the teaching program.
 - Linking the evaluations to published syllabi may provide additional valuable information for students when they are reading the evaluations.
 - Adding information about enrollment might be particularly helpful.
 - Evaluations raise the question of whether anything will result from student feedback. Students would need to understand what the impact of the evaluations will be.
 - There was a suggestion that students might benefit from hearing, at the beginning of the year, about the biases and weaknesses in evaluation instruments.
 - Should evaluations be completely anonymous? It was felt that losing anonymity would create a chilling effect and might raise concerns of reprisals.
3. It was agreed to defer the other agenda item, a discussion about course-based and credit-based systems of counting for degree requirements. Incorporating information about credit hours recognizes the inherent variation in courses (e.g. lab courses), gives faculty greater flexibility in curriculum, and also gives faculty greater flexibility in planning workload over the course of the year. However, relying solely on a credit-based system would mean that a student would be able to graduate with fewer than 38 3-credit courses, since theoretically one could "bundle" labs, Cornerstone courses, etc. It was noted that Student Records have the capacity to handle a credit-based system.

The Council will begin a full discussion of this topic at its next meeting.