Minutes of the University Council on Teaching
Monday, November 20, 2006
9:30-11:00 a.m., Bourneuf House
Present: Chris Hepburn (Chair), Sue Barrett, James Gips, Mary Joe Hughes, Bill Petri, 
Eve Spangler, Danny Willis, Fred Yen
Guest: University Provost Bert Garza

Electronic course evaluations

The UCT discussed four agenda items as suggested by Chris Hepburn:

1. Approve the plan to withhold grades for students not completing the 
evaluations until the end of the exam period for this fall semester.

The UCT approved the plan but stresses that student input should be sought as plans for 
the evaluations go forward.

2. Discuss what other versions of the evaluation are needed or desired.

The group discussed whether or not all current versions of the university evaluation need 
to be available in the electronic form. A possible alternative to multiple versions is the 
addition of batch customizable questions; for example, courses with multiple sections, 
such as Cornerstone or Religious Quest, might have a common set of questions they 
would like to include in addition to the common questions. Bill Petri agreed to bring this 
suggestion to the e-evaluation committee.

3. Investigate the instrument itself. Are the questions asked the correct ones?

It has been many years since the current questions were developed and it seems to the 
UCT like a good idea to see if they still elicit relevant and useful feedback. The 
committee hesitates to take on this task, however, before a clear process for 
implementing any revisions has been established. Would our suggestions have to be 
approved by various committees on campus, for example?

4. Continue our discussion of the question of making the results of the standard 
portion of the evaluations available to students and other faculty in addition to 
the administrators who can see them now.

The UCT agrees that they would like to make a final recommendation on this question 
after further research and discussion.

Dr. Garza joined the group to discuss the evaluations. He talked about his idea of 
bringing together groups of faculty to talk about what sort of feedback would be useful to 
them in improving their teaching. He outlined the three purposes of teaching evaluations: 
to provide information help faculty improve their teaching, to provide information to
students, and to provide information for deans and chairs. The ideal evaluation instrument would fulfill all three functions, although the primary function of evaluations is to help faculty improve their teaching.

He would like the UCT to take on the project of potentially revising the current evaluation questions. He suggests that we first organize and run some small, informal but representative focus groups of faculty to find out what they would like the instrument to do. Next, we should decide if the current instrument is meeting those needs, possibly bringing in experts from the Lynch School as consultants. Finally, we should use the faculty input to revise the questions and implement the new evaluation.

As to the question of the final revision process, he thinks this can be done informally. We can develop a revised evaluation instrument and implement it without extensive discussions with every department. Develop it and try it out, remembering that it can always be revised again.

He is not in favor of outside consultants.

Another topic he would like the UCT to consider is grade compression.

The next meeting was set for December 11 at 9:30.