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AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

11 June 2010

Professor Robert Powell, Chair
Davis Division of the Academic Senate of the University of California

Dear Bob,

Attached please find the report of the Special Committee on Student Evaluation of Teaching. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the excellent hard work of the committee over the last six months. This was an extraordinarily engaged group of individuals, and each member made significant and valuable contributions to our discussions and to the report. I am particularly appreciative of the participation of our Academic Federation, ASUCD, GSA, and ADMAN representatives and I am extremely grateful for the guidance and support of our advisor, Edwin Arevalo. In addition, as noted in the report, several campus faculty and staff took time to meet with us and provided helpful information to the committee, and their contributions are gratefully acknowledged as well.

I thank you and the Executive Council for requesting the appointment of a group to work on this important issue. It has been a pleasure to serve on this committee and I hope you will find our report of interest. Please contact me if you have any questions.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Dan Potter".

Dan Potter

Chair, Special Committee on Student Evaluation of Teaching

Report of the Special Committee on Student Evaluation of Teaching 11 June 2010

Committee Members: Dan Potter, Plant Sciences (Chair); Niels Grønbech Jensen, Applied Science; Charles H. Langley, Evolution & Ecology; Miroslav Nincic, Political Science; George Roussas, Statistics, John Payne, Physiology & Membrane Biology; Jared Haynes, University Writing Program (Academic Federation Representative); Rod Cole, Physics (Academic Federation Representative); Tracy Lade (ADMAN Representative); Christopher Dietrich (ASUCD Representative); Mara Evans (GSA Representative); Kaitlin Walker (GSA Representative).

The Special Committee on Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) met six times during the winter and spring quarters of 2010. At our first meeting (January 14), we discussed our charge, reviewed background information consisting of a report from the Academic Senate Committee on Information Technology and one from the Davis Division of the Academic Senate on the status of SET on the Davis campus, and came up with a tentative action plan to complete our work. At our second meeting (February 5), we interviewed representatives from several units on campus (Ms. Kerry Hasa, School of Education; Dr. John Drummer, School of Medicine, Dr. Jan Ilkiw, School of Veterinary Medicine; Dr. Kathy Ferrara, Department of Biomedical Engineering) about their experiences with implementation of on-line SET systems. Campus Counsel Steve Drown attended our third meeting (Feb. 9) to advise us on legal aspects of SET. Dr. Jamal Abedi, School of Education, and Ms. Barbara Mills, Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, attended our fourth meeting (March 4) and shared with us their expertise and advice on the content and format of questions to be included in SET. Our last two meetings (April 16 and May 28) were devoted to finalizing this report.

Based on our discussions, the committee has developed a set of recommended guiding principles, policies, and procedures for the administration of SET, and for the interpretation and use of the resulting data, at UC Davis. As there are currently no existing regulations specifically pertaining to SET on our campus, we hope that our recommendations will be adopted and appropriately codified by the Davis Division of the Academic Senate.

I. Purposes of SET

Student evaluations of courses and instructors¹ administered by the Davis Division of the Academic Senate provide students a forum in which to anonymously express their opinions about the quality of instruction they receive. The results of SET are to be used for two purposes only:

- 1) to be included in instructors' personnel files in order to provide data used in the evaluation of their instruction in connection with job performance reviews, such as merit and promotion actions;
- 2) to provide information to instructors and departments about students' perceptions of instruction, which may be useful for improving the effectiveness of the instructors' teaching and the quality of their courses.

Because data from SET convey information about students' opinions of an instructors' teaching in a given course offering, they are by definition subjective and limited in scope. They nonetheless constitute an essential part of the material needed to understand an instructor's effectiveness and they can provide valuable information relevant to the purposes for which they are intended, provided they are organized and presented in the appropriate format. However, SET should not be the sole means by which the teaching portion of a faculty member's job performance is assessed, and all departments should be strongly encouraged to develop and implement regular and thorough peer evaluations of teaching to complement the data from SET.

II. Privacy Issues

Because they represent subjective evaluations of an instructor's job performance and are an integral part of the individual's personnel file, the data from SET are confidential and protected. Therefore, they may not be shared with anyone who is not authorized to review the instructor's personnel file, unless explicit written consent is granted by the individual².

SETs raise additional concerns for students, especially if administered online. Students must be assured that all of their responses will remain strictly confidential. This includes a guarantee that appropriate measures will be taken to protect respondents' anonymity where small sample sizes occur, especially if students' responses on evaluations are reported separately based on factors such as the final grade the student received for the course (see III.9). Students should also be informed that results of end-of-term (as opposed to midterm; see below) SETs will not be made available to instructors until after final grades for the course have been posted.

Due to these concerns about confidentiality, it is essential that implementation of an on-line system, as we are recommending as an option, adhere strictly to current university regulations that prohibit the transmission of personal data about university personnel and students to outside parties, including contracted third-party vendors. Thus, any gathering and handling of SET data must be conducted entirely within a campus infrastructure that is capable of securing personal and sensitive data throughout the process.

III. Recommended policies and procedures for SET

1. Each instructor of each UC Davis course offering should receive evaluations by the students enrolled in that course. Exceptions could be made for internships, research units, individual study courses, and courses with enrollments under some threshold number.

2. The decision to adopt on-line evaluations or to continue with paper-based evaluations should be made at the department level in consultation with the Faculty after due consideration of the pros & cons. On the con side, there are potential concerns about privacy and participation; these issues, as well as measures to address them, are discussed in this document. On the pro side, there are several unique benefits of an electronic format. First, it will enhance efficiency by reducing staff time required to compile and process paper evaluations. Second, it will have the possibility of automatically generating reports that show how different groups of students (based on grades in the course, prerequisite course requirements, etc.) responded, allowing more meaningful interpretation of the results. Third, an on-line system can be set up to create more uniformly formatted and effective reports on teaching evaluations for merit and promotion packages.

3. Under Academic Senate oversight³, a campus-wide on-line system for SET should be developed and made available to all instructors on campus. In order to ensure that uniform policies and standards are applied across campus, academic units opting to use online evaluations should be required to participate in the campus-wide SET system rather than develop their own on-line systems.

4. The procedures for SET, whether administered in electronic or in paper format, should be standardized across the campus. We recommend the following:

A) The evaluation form should consist of a series of statements about the course and/or the instructor, to which students are asked to select a rating from 5 – 1, where 5 signifies "Strongly Agree," 4 signifies "Agree," 3 signifies "Neutral", 2 signifies "Disagree" and 1 signifies "Strongly Disagree." An additional response option of "N/A" should also be provided for each item.

B) In addition to numerical ratings, each question should include a field for written comments. Space for additional comments should also be provided at the end of each evaluation form.

C) Two questions should be common to all evaluations. The goal of the first question is the assessment of the students' perceptions of the overall quality of the course. The second should aim to assess their view of the instructor's teaching in the course. We recommend the following:

1. Overall, this is an educationally valuable course.
2. Overall, this instructor is effective in teaching this course.

We recognize that these questions are quite broad, but we feel it is important to include them as the minimum common elements of all evaluations across campus, in order to provide a brief summary of the overall opinions of the students in a particular course offering and to allow comparisons across courses and instructors.

D) Due to the acknowledged limitations of the two minimum required questions listed above, departments, instructors, and TAs should be strongly encouraged to include additional optional questions for particular courses. These optional questions should be designed to assess specific aspects of the course content and the instructor's teaching. They should precede the two more general questions listed in item C, which ideally should be the final two questions on the evaluation form. We also recommend that the evaluation form start with one to several "priming" questions about the student's participation in the class, e.g., asking about the frequency with which the student attended lectures and whether (s)he had taken required prerequisite courses. A menu of suggested optional questions should be provided to instructors and departments when preparing their evaluation forms; a list of possible questions is included in the Appendix to this report. Individually customized questions written by the instructor or department should also be allowed, and we encourage instructors and departments to consult with the staff of the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning in developing questions to be used in SET.

E) Instructors should not be present during the administration of course evaluations.

5. Students should be educated about and regularly reminded of the purpose, importance, and appropriate completion of evaluations. We suggest that such information be included as part of orientation materials and presentations and in the General Catalog and course syllabi. We also recommend that email messages about the importance of evaluations, issued jointly by the Academic Senate and the Administration, be sent periodically to all students. Brief statements of the purpose and importance of the evaluations should also be included with the on-line evaluation form for each course.

6. Instructors should be educated about the purpose, importance, and appropriate interpretation of evaluations. We suggest that this information be included as part of materials presented in new faculty and graduate student orientations and discussed periodically at department faculty and course TA meetings. In addition, instructors should be made aware of available resources to discuss teaching practices, such as departmental peers, the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, etc.

7. As described in item 5 above, student participation in evaluations of teaching should be encouraged through positive feedback mechanisms that reinforce the perception of course evaluation as a matter to be treated with seriousness and professionalism.. Because they would undermine efforts to promote this perception, we recommend against mechanisms that would provide incentives such as the possibility of monetary, or material

rewards, e.g., through a raffle to students who complete evaluations. We also recommend against the use of academic rewards, such as points toward the course grade, for completion of evaluations, unless a compelling case can be made that the process of evaluation is integral to the subject matter of the course. For similar reasons, we strongly oppose any measures that would force students to complete evaluations, for example by withholding their grades or their ability to enroll in classes for the following term until they had done so.

8. Evaluations should be available for the last week of instruction by an instructor. In most cases this would be the last week of a course, but in the case of a course with multiple instructors, each instructor could have their evaluations completed during the last week of their instruction in the course. When possible, online evaluations should be administered during regularly scheduled class time in order to increase class participation.

9. The statistics that should be reported for each question are: the median score (out of 5), the first and third quartiles, and the number of students who responded with each score of 1-5. Inclusion of the mean score and standard deviation should be optional. All written comments should also be included in the report.

10. In order to allow more meaningful interpretation of the data from SET, evaluation reports should include, for each question, correlations between the scores selected by students and the following factors: Grade received in the course; Grade received in prerequisite courses (specified by the instructor); Year in school (including undergraduate vs. graduate); Major.

Of course, small sample size will limit the value of such partitioning of responses and no statistical sampling should be conducted if the sample size is below a certain number.

11. Results of the end-of-term SET should not be released to the instructor(s) until after final grades for the course have been posted.

12. In reviewing results of SET, instructors, their departmental colleagues, and faculty personnel committees should consider not only the overall numerical scores but also the written comments of individual students, and, when available, how these differ by different groups of students as described in item 9.

13. The on-line evaluation system should be designed so that it can be used not only for end-of-term evaluations as described in items 1-11 above, but also for mid-term feedback. The questions for mid-term feedback would be selected by the instructor and the results should be available only to the instructor to use for improving effectiveness of his or her teaching. The inclusion of the mid-term evaluations to the instructors personnel file (for use in merit and promotion considerations) should be optional and decided by the instructor on a course-by-course basis.

Notes:

¹Throughout this document, the term “instructor” is used to refer to any UC Davis employee who, as part of his or her regular job responsibilities, participates in the teaching of one or more UC Davis courses. This includes ladder-rank faculty, lecturers, and TAs who participate directly in classroom instruction.

²There is a broad range of opinions as to the appropriateness and advisability of making data from SET publicly available for a variety of purposes. In particular, many think such data could inform students in their selection of courses. University policy and state law, however, are clear in prohibiting this public release of such information from the faculty member's personnel file. This fact should be emphasized in communications to faculty if and when any changes, such as those recommended by this committee, are publicly considered and

implemented. A clearly stated policy may allay faculty concerns, especially with respect to the increased risk of inappropriate dissemination of the data from electronically administered (online) SETs.

³ We recommend that either the Academic Senate Committee on Information Technology, or, if necessary, a special Implementation Task Force, be charged with working out the details of the on-line system in accordance with the general recommendations provided here.

III. Appendix

Suggested standardized end-of-term SET form (on-line or paper) for the UC Davis Campus

Introduction:

Thank you for participating in the evaluation of this course. Your honest and thoughtful feedback is greatly appreciated.

Student evaluations of courses and instructors administered by the Davis Division of the Academic Senate provide students a forum in which to anonymously express their opinions about the quality of courses and instruction they receive at UC Davis. The results of these evaluations are used for two purposes:

- 1) to be included in instructors' personnel files in order to provide data used in the evaluation of their instruction in connection with job performance reviews, such as merit and promotion actions;
- 2) to provide information to instructors and departments about students' perceptions of course and instruction, which may be useful for improving the effectiveness of the instructors' teaching and the quality of their courses.

In order to achieve these purposes, your responses and those of your fellow students are reviewed by your instructors and their colleagues, and the results of course evaluations will have impacts on the career(s) of the instructor(s) and the experiences of future students in the course. Thus, by participating in this evaluation, you are both providing an important service to the university and taking on a very serious responsibility, and you are requested to keep this in mind as you respond to the questions below. Please be assured that your responses will be kept anonymous and that the results of your and your fellow students' evaluations will not be released to your instructor(s) until after final grades have been posted.

Instructions:

The evaluation form consists of a few background questions about your participation in the course, followed by a series of statements about the course and/or the instructor. For each item, you are asked to select a rating from 5 – 1, where 5 signifies “Strongly Agree,” 4 signifies “Agree,” 3 signifies “Neutral”, 2 signifies “Disagree” and 1 signifies “Strongly Disagree.” An additional response option of “N/A” is provided for each item; please select this option only if you feel that you do not have sufficient information or experience to respond to a particular item. In addition to numerical ratings, each question includes a field for comments and space for additional comments is also provided at the end of the evaluation form. Please use these spaces to enter thoughtful, frank, and specific feedback about the quality of the course and the instruction you have received.

A. Optional Background Questions (to be selected by the instructor):

I attended all or nearly all of the class meetings for this course.

I was very engaged in this course.

I devoted appropriate amounts of time to studying for this class outside of regular class meetings.

I consulted frequently with the instructor outside of class.

Before taking this course, I was strongly interested in the subject matter.

After taking this course, I am strongly interested in the subject matter.

I expect to earn a grade of (5=A, 4=B, 3=C, 2=D, 1-F) in this course.

B. Optional questions about the course and the instructor (to be selected by the instructor):

The instructor made the course objectives clear.

Lectures and discussions were clearly related to course objectives.

The instructor provided helpful examples to clarify points.

The instructor clearly explained the grading standards for written work.

Paper assignments were clear.

Paper topics were generally challenging.

I learned a lot from this course.

This course helped improve my problem solving skills.

The instructor lectures according to the published syllabus.

The instructor provides timely information regarding homework, exams, or other course requirements necessary for examination and grading.

The prerequisites required for this course are appropriate and sufficient.

I would recommend this course to others.

The instructor's presentation of the material is well organized.

The instructor is well prepared for class.

The instructor welcomes questions and discussion.

The instructor tries to help when I ask.

The instructor is available and helpful to students outside of class.

The instructor enjoys teaching.

The assigned problems helped me to learn the course material.

The assigned readings helped me to learn the course material.

The course lectures and assignments helped me to prepare for the examinations.

The instructor's use of visual aids is helpful and effective.

The on-line materials provided for this course are helpful and effective.

This is an enjoyable course.

The instructor's presentations held my interest.

The instructor effectively encouraged student participation.

The instructor was sensitive to issues of diversity.

The instructor was open to and encouraged a variety of opinions.

This course challenged me intellectually.

This course encouraged me to think critically.

The readings from the course were intellectually challenging.

Comments on written work were sufficient and informative.

C. Required questions about the course and the instructor (to be included on all end-of-term evaluations):

Overall, this is an educationally valuable course.

Overall, this instructor is effective in teaching this course.

D. Additional comments