

Faculty Senate Meeting
Tuesday, May 15, 2007
MINUTES

Susan Youens, Nominating Committee Chair, called the meeting to order.

Nominations and elections for Executive Committee members:

The following members were elected Faculty Senate Executive Committee positions:

- Chair – Colin Jessop
- Vice Chair – Mark Dehmlow
- Secretary and Co Secretary – unfilled, no current volunteers
- Treasurer – David Klein
- Colin Jessop then assumed control of the session.

Guest, Dennis Jacobs, Associate Provost, discussion of online TCE's

Refinement of the teacher course evaluation process had been brought to the Academic Affairs Committee. At that time, it became apparent that the University was considering moving TCEs to an online format. This proposal sparked comments among Faculty Senate members, many of whom solicited the opinion of colleagues in their home departments.

Jessop summarized the concerns that had been brought forward by these members:

- Compliance – Under the current in-class paper format, the professor has at least some control over compliance. Since the TCE is relevant for the tenure and promotion process, it is important to collect this information as thoroughly as possible.
- Technical concerns – If students were to experience technical difficulties that often accompany online surveys, would they be motivated enough to work through the problems and complete the survey?
- Student motivation and sample bias – There is concern that only those students with a grievance would be motivated enough to complete the online survey, and therefore produce a biased sample.
- Comparative evaluation – If students complete evaluations of all courses at once, there might be a tendency to score them in a ranked or comparative fashion. This might exacerbate the rating differences between required vs. elective, or large vs. small courses
- Environment – Some faculty felt that it was more appropriate to conduct the TCE in the classroom environment which they had created during the semester.

Jacobs described the process which led to the proposed changes to the TCE. The process began with an attempt to expand the factors used to evaluate quality of teaching beyond the TCE. Weaknesses in the TCE itself were also identified, including: rigid questions that are not always applicable, misinterpretation of scores, focus on a single score, and lack useful feedback for improvement.

Jacobs noted the following benefits of moving to an online system:

- Chain of custody - The current system has several places where chain of custody and control of the TCE is weak, both in the classroom administration and collection of completed forms. In an online system, each student would log into the system, and complete only one evaluation per enrolled course. This system would not prevent absent students from completing an evaluation. Jessop asked whether there was any concern about student anonymity with an online system. Jacobs responded that no identifying data is linked to the evaluation once it is submitted. While the University would need to create a policy statement to confirm this anonymity, peer institutions who have implemented an online system have not found this to be a problem.

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- Tiered questions – An online system would provide more flexibility to design a tiered question set. The first portion of questions would be used across the University, followed by questions that are college or division specific, then environment specific (large lecture, discussion, studio, laboratory), and finally instructor specific questions. The resulting data can be brought back into appropriate divisions for comparisons. Students and instructors would see a more appropriate set of questions for their course.

Jacobs addressed some of the concerns expressed by faculty:

- Response rate – With the current system, University-wide response rate is in the mid 70% range. Peer institutions with online systems generally have a response rate of 70-80%. In cases where the instructor stresses the value of the evaluation, response rates can be in the 90% range. Jacobs does not believe that the response rate would be vastly different if the University switched to an online format.
- Potential for biased response – Vanderbilt University compared paper vs. online evaluations across sections and semesters, and found no significant difference in the mean scores.

Godmilow asked whether the results of free response questions would still be kept private. Jacobs confirmed that the faculty members would still have full control over the free response comments. There is no change of policy being proposed for this information. Jacobs added that true anonymity on the free response questions was one of the advantages of the online system. There have been a number of cases, in particular in the Graduate School, where students have complained that their comments were not treated anonymously due to recognition of their handwriting by the faculty member.

Stamper asked how the online system would be introduced and whether a pilot study would be conducted. Jacobs responded that the ACPET (Advisory Committee to the Provost on the Evaluation of Teaching), is currently considering both the types of questions that could be asked in the tiered system and evaluating the technical requirements and commercial products available.

A member of the Senate asked whether the automated system was more cost efficient and could a faculty member see linked responses from an individual student. Jacobs believes that an online system would be cost neutral, with lower costs and time required for administration, but an increased cost of software licensing fees. He was unsure about the reporting of information, and whether it was possible for an instructor to see responses from each individual.

Godmilow asked whether departments could design their own questions, given that this information would then be used for tenure decisions. Jacobs responded that departments could design their own questions in the tiered system, and the results would also be compared within the appropriate tier. Cross-listed courses could be evaluated under either department tier and for team taught courses, specific questions could be provided for each instructor.

A senator followed up on the issue of availability of free response comments. He noted that making comments available would provide more information to students, and in fact a biased subset of comments is already available on NDToday.com. There was concern that an online format might promote more irresponsible comments, given the NDToday example. Jacobs responded that the informing course selection initiative will make available some student comments. He felt that students would buy into the system if the online evaluation were implemented along with the other initiatives.

Jacobs reported that the technical evaluation team is currently exploring software options, and that the ACPET will continue to meet over the summer to design questions. At the earliest a limited pilot would be run in December 2007, with the earliest implementation in Spring 2008. All question content will go through Academic and College Councils for approval. Godmilow

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requested increased representation on the ACPET from the Arts, and indicated that she would participate as a representative for the Arts from the Faculty Senate.

The Senate discussed the possibility of incentives to encourage student participation in the TCE. Jacobs noted that Yale requires evaluation (with an opt out option) to access semester grades. This has resulted in a very high response rate. The committee is considering other methods including, repeated email reminders, Ipod raffle, or selective release of Course Selection information.

A senator asked whether the real issue with the current TCE was in fact the instrument itself, not the method used to collect the data. If this is true, then how could the new system be justified? Jacobs cited increased customization as one of the key benefits to an online system. The senator expressed concern about evaluating teaching across divisions with a variety of instruments being used. High stakes tenure and promotion decisions might in the end be made only based on the University-wide questions.

Jacobs indicated that he would accept continued comments on the matter via email. (Jacobs.2@nd.edu)

Nomination and election of Standing Committee Chairs

Members recessed to standing committee sessions and selected a committee chair and outlined committee agendas.

- Academic Affairs selected John Robinson as Chair (pending confirmation of his participation). The Committee agenda includes: changes to the TCE, representation on TCE committee, information for selecting courses, grade inflation, University drop date, University Calendar, University Libraries, and classroom space shortage.
- Administrative Affairs selected Seth Brown as Chair. The committee plans to follow revision of Academic Articles, Catholic identity and hiring policy, and ECDC expansion.
- Benefits Committee selected Nasir Ghiassedin as Chair. The Committee will address rate of salary increase, inconsistency of death benefit, and the overall sense of community.
- Student Affairs selected Tom Noble as Committee Chair. The committee will address changes to the graduate student Commencement, and other topics of ongoing work of the Committee.

Benefit Committee Report

N. Ghiaseddin, Benefits Committee Chair, announced that the University will contribute to retirement for summer research income (if tied to salary), beginning next year.

Appointment of representatives to additional Committees

- Traffic Appeals Committee – John Shafer, one remaining position available.
- Campus Life Committee – Jill Goodmilow, Kristin Lewis
- Student Senate - Tom Noble, one remaining position available
- Bookstore Advisory Committee – Susan Youens, Nasir Ghiaseddin.

Jessop adjourned the meeting.