

Professional Responsibilities and Concerns Committee
Report to the Faculty Senate on Student Ratings of Teaching

Zack Murrell (chair)
John Faine
James Flynn
Moosa Valinezhad
Don Nims

Below is a report on student ratings and comments of faculty teaching. We have provided a brief history of student ratings at WKU, a description of the present methodology used by the University, recommendations from the PRC Committee concerning needs for changes in the present policy, and a resolution to be presented to the Faculty Senate for their approval.

The Student Instructional Report was initiated in 1974 as a means of improving teaching, by giving faculty feedback on instruction from the students. This was initially implemented on the condition that it would not to be used in evaluation of faculty performance; however, by 1978 the administration began using the student ratings to evaluate faculty performance in the classroom. Over the next 20 years there were various changes in the questions used in the analysis and in the disposition of student comments that were used to evaluate faculty performance in the classroom.

In 1997 the Faculty Evaluation Advisory Committee suggested that teaching evaluations should be "multifaceted, flexible, and comprehensive." The Faculty Evaluation Advisory Committee stated that the "student ratings should not be made public." The Faculty Evaluation Advisory Committee also recommended the following changes in the method of student evaluation of teaching:

1. Changed "uncertain" to "neutral" as the mid-point in the questionnaire.
2. Selected 6 core questions to be included, and recommended that the compiled scores be made available to

- individual faculty member, Department Heads, Deans, the Vice President for Academic Affairs, and the President.
3. Recommended that transcripts of students' written comments be transmitted to the individual instructor, individual Head, and individual Dean.
 4. Allowed for additional questions chosen by the instructor, to be compiled and returned only to the instructor.
 5. Advocated appropriate training for faculty members, students, and administrators as an "important component of the general evaluation process."
 6. Recommended that the student ratings of teaching should be accompanied by self, peer, and administrative assessments.
 7. Recommended that peer review should be evaluated for potential use by individual units.

In 1997, on the basis of recommendations from the Faculty Evaluation Advisory Committee, the Implementation Committee made the following changes in the current method of student ratings (now called the Student Input to Teaching Evaluation or SITE):

1. Six core items will be used on the SITE.
2. "Uncertain" was changed to "neutral" as the mid-point.
3. Departments and faculty may elect to add other items.
4. Department Heads and individual faculty members will receive summary results of core items and transcribed student comments.
5. Deans, Vice-President for Academic Affairs, and the President may request appraisal materials from the department heads.
6. Individual faculty will not be notified of request for appraisal materials, but will have access to records describing such a request.

It should be noted that both the Faculty Evaluation Committee and the Implementation Committee stressed the need to interpret these data appropriately, and the SITE report dedicated several pages to this end.

The guidelines published by the Implementation Committee (Guidelines for using Student Input to Teaching Evaluation [SITE]) are the basic methods presently used by the University. Department Heads across campus generally allow for the inclusion of other materials in the assessment, at the request of the individual faculty member. Other methods of evaluation, such as peer review, teaching portfolios, or self-review, are currently utilized in some departments; however, there is no uniform policy other than that described in the Guidelines to SITE.

Recommendations

The Committee recognizes the reliability and validity of the core items of the SITE questionnaire as an effective assessment of teaching, and we support the use of this method of evaluating of teaching. We recommend that the core items be made available to the individual faculty member, individual department head, Dean, Provost, and President as part of the established review process of annual review, promotion review, and tenure review. In addition, the Committee was in complete agreement with the SITE Committee's suggestion that the student ratings should be recognized as only one piece of information to be used to evaluate teaching effectiveness. The Committee believes that, in practice, the student ratings carry considerable weight in the evaluation of faculty teaching, and we strongly recommend that all departments utilize additional methods of evaluating teaching at the University.

The Committee was very concerned about the use of anonymous student comments in the teaching evaluation process. There was concern that the comments were not representative of student learning, that they could be subject to misuse and misinterpretation by administrators, and that they were generally a poor method of evaluating teaching effectiveness. In spite of this appraisal of student comments, the Committee recognizes that there may be cases where the comments can provide insight into problems in the classroom, as well as potential cases where they can be a meaningful source of information for faculty improvement of classroom

teaching. Based upon the tension inherent in these positive and negative aspects of student comments, along with serious concerns about who has access to the comments, the Committee agreed that the current policy concerning the disposition of student comments should be changed.

The Committee recommends that the transcribed comments should be made available to individual faculty members and the individual's Department Head for the annual review. Furthermore, we recommend that the comments should be made available to the individual's Dean, the Provost, and the President only at the request of the individual faculty member or under extraordinary circumstances, in which case the individual faculty member must be notified in writing of that action. The Committee believes that this recommendation would serve three purposes: provide the individual faculty and individual department head with information that could be useful in improving teaching; protect the faculty from frivolous investigations and unnecessary and destructive abuse; and provide the administration with an effective, yet fair, means of evaluating problems in the classroom.

Based upon these recommendations, the PRC Committee presents the following resolution for approval by the Faculty Senate.

Resolution

The Faculty Senate recognizes the reliability and validity of the core items of the SITE questionnaire as an effective assessment of teaching, and we support the use of this method of evaluation of teaching. We recommend that the core items be made available to the individual faculty members, the individual's Department Head and Dean, and the Provost and President as part of the established review process of annual review, promotion review, and tenure review.

In addition to the SITE core, the Faculty Senate strongly recommends that all departments utilize additional methods of evaluating teaching at the University.

The Faculty Senate recommends that the transcribed student comments be made available to the individual faculty members and the individual's

Department Head for the annual review. Furthermore, we recommend that the transcribed student comments be made available to the individual's Dean, the Provost, and the President only at the request of the individual faculty member or under extraordinary circumstances, in which case the individual faculty member must be notified in writing of that action.