

Western Kentucky University
Academic Quality Committee Report to the SEC and Faculty Senate

February 18, 2016

The Academic Quality Committee (AQ) met on January 13 and February 11, 2016 to discuss a response to the following SEC motion:

Motion from the Senate Executive Committee requesting the Academic Quality Committee look at the following issues related to SITES: (1) the timing of the SITES; (2) a recommendation on how to use/interpret the SITES for promotion and tenure (in addition to making sure that the links work and compiling in one place); and (3) reviewing the formatting of the report (in changing from paper to online, the standard deviations are different (mean/median)).

1) Timing of SITE administrative window

AQ has reviewed correspondence from Dr. Tuesdi Helbig to Provost Lee and forwarded to the Faculty Senate regarding the timing of the SITE administrative window (**AQ Item a**). This document describes the criteria used by WKU Institutional Research (WKU IR) for determining the administration window, and several scenarios for adjusting this timing are also presented.

AQ concurs with Dr. Helbig's warning that shortening the duration of the SITE administration window could be detrimental to response rates. Furthermore, AQ concluded that moving the three-week window forward in time (i.e., one week later in the semester) would likely have no significant impact on the evaluations (response rates, quality of the responses, etc.). Therefore, the committee makes no recommendation on this issue.

2) Interpretation of SITE response data

AQ has reviewed the booklet entitled, *Guidelines for using the Student Input to Teaching Evaluation (SITE)*. This document—hereafter referred to as the SITE booklet (**AQ Item b**)—was originally prepared by the 1997 SITE Committee (**AQ Item c**), and has since been maintained by Dr. Sally Kuhlenschmidt until Fall 2012. The SITE booklet discusses how to interpret and compare student response data.

AQ further examined whether any WKU benchmark or other Kentucky public institutions have similar guidelines associated with their respective course evaluation instruments (**AQ Item d**). This study also examined how these institutions use student course evaluations to assess teaching performance (tenure and promotion, merit, etc).

Most of the institutions studied do not appear to have (or at least do not publish) explicit guidelines for interpreting student course evaluation data. University of Kentucky is one

exception and has guidelines posted on the UK IR website (**AQ Item e**). Most of the institutions studied do appear to have some type of published guidelines for tenure and promotion. Of course, these vary considerably from institution to institution and also among colleges and departments within a given institution. Such guidelines typically include a reference to student course evaluations as one of several components for the evaluation of teaching performance. WKU tenure and promotion guidelines are no different in this regard.

AQ members are concerned that (i) SITE data can be easily misinterpreted or even abused, and that (ii) academic units can place too much emphasis on SITE data in measuring teaching effectiveness. There is a rather large literature on the subject of student course evaluations. Two recent articles highlighting these issues are attached to this report (**AQ Item f and g**).

Recommendation

AQ recommends the SITE booklet be resurrected and regularly maintained within the Faculty Senate and in consultation with WKU Academic Affairs and WKU IR. This document should be used by faculty and administrators as a set of best practices guidelines for analyzing SITE response data.

3) Format of SITE reports

AQ discussed differences between the older paper-based and newer online SITE report forms. The paper-based report forms contained instructor, Department, College, and University response distributions as well as median, mean, and upper/lower reliability boundaries. The following statement was also included on the paper-based reports:

The reliability limits of the University-wide items are reflected by the boundaries surrounding the item means. When the ranges defined by the upper and lower bounds of any two means overlap, those two means are statistically equivalent. That is, if the ranges of two instructors overlap on a given item, then the actual means cannot reliably discriminate between them.

The online report forms contain response distributions for only the instructor and mean values and standard deviations for the instructor, Department, and College. There are no guidelines for interpretation included within the online report.

AQ believes that the value of the online report forms would be enhanced if a statement were included describing how to identify statistically equivalent (or distinct) SITE response values. The committee noted a caveat here—the boundaries reported in the paper-based forms are not equivalent to the standard deviations in the online forms. It will likely be necessary to evaluate how statistically meaningful comparisons can be made using the online SITE report data.

Recommendation

AQ recommends that online SITE report format be modified (or amended by an appropriate information resource) to include sufficient data and instructions so that statistically equivalent (or distinct) response values can be easily identified.