Annual Report
of The Effective Teaching Committee
to the Faculty Senate
of George Mason University
April 2018

Charge of the Committee

The Effective Teaching Committee is charged with developing and helping implement procedures that encourage and reward effective teaching, enabling faculty to improve their teaching effectiveness independent of any evaluation procedures, and implementing procedures for evaluation of effective teaching.

The Committee is charged with recommending policy to the Faculty Senate and monitoring the use of such policy for the evaluation of teachers and courses, including the following:

A. Review, improve, and provide guidance to Institutional Research and Reporting on the course evaluation form and related procedures at least once every three years;

B. Review existing policies relating to the faculty evaluation process, identify alternatives to these policies and recommend changes to the Faculty Senate;

C. Work closely with the Center for Teaching Excellence to support the use of formative and self-assessment techniques and materials for promoting faculty professional growth and teaching effectiveness, including strategies for robust student feedback.

Background

During AY 2017-18, the Committee consisted of four members during Fall 2017 and added a fifth member in Spring 2018. We continued our focus on improving the Course Evaluation Form, since this form has not undergone any kind of significant revision for over a decade. This Committee aims to recommend ways to revise the form to make it research-based, more useful to faculty for making improvements in teaching, and more fair when used
for faculty evaluation. We also propose to validate the items on the form for the dual purposes for which it is currently used – faculty evaluation and improvement of teaching.

We have followed a rigorous development process, including (1) identifying elements of effective teaching; (2) revising course items; (3) obtaining feedback on the items from both faculty and students; (4) pilot testing the items; (5) drafting policies for using Course Evaluation form data for faculty evaluation.

We chose to undertake this process for two main reasons: (1) to ensure that the inferences made about teaching and the subsequent decisions based on those inferences are valid and can be supported by an instrument that adheres to measurement development principles, and (2) to protect all parties involved in a high-stakes evaluation process. We have developed new items based on a review of the literature on the uses of university student evaluations of teaching (SETs) for faculty evaluation, with specific goals of increasing the validity and reliability of results. We also obtained faculty and student input on what they consider to be indicators of effective teaching.

In an effort to establish the construct validity of categories and items on the form, we reviewed a variety of sources on teaching effectiveness and identified eighteen potential categories that we ultimately collapsed into six for ease of response on a survey. Some of the categories were overlapping, and that became evident in survey results and on feedback from faculty. We identified categories of effective teaching by reviewing the criteria for teaching excellence set by the Center for Teaching and Faculty Excellence, the Provost’s criteria for genuine excellence in teaching, and databases for course evaluation form categories and items used by other universities.

To accomplish our goals during AY 2017-18, we met at least twice a month for 90 minutes each time, calling additional meetings as needed. We conducted out-of-meeting focus groups with both faculty and students across the university. In addition, we engaged in meetings and presentations (outside our regular meeting schedule) with Program Chairs and the Provost, a Dean from the College of Education & Human Development, the Faculty Senate Chair, the Faculty Senate, representatives of the Stearns Center for Teaching & Learning, and with the Director of OIRE to inquire about the development process and make plans to pilot a new form in Spring 2018.

During Fall 2017, the Committee searched for and identified items for inclusion on a new form based on the six categories of effective teaching identified by stakeholders on
surveys conducted the previous year. We consulted with the Office of Digital Learning for input on items specific to using technology and to online courses.

In Spring 2018, to determine the clarity and relevance of new items being proposed for the Course Evaluation Form, we met with a number of faculty and student focus groups and conducted an online survey with Program Chairs. Participants in each focus group were asked to identify items that were unclear or unnecessary to determining teaching effectiveness. Based on feedback from these focus groups, we made further revisions to our proposed items. We met with the following focus groups: (1) graduate students in a face-to-face class in the College of Education & Human Development; (2) undergraduate students in a face-to-face Spanish class; (3) graduate students in an online Spanish course; (4) undergraduate students in an engineering class; (5) the Student Senate; and (6) faculty from one teacher preparation program in the Graduate School of Education. We also conducted an online survey asking for feedback on the proposed items from 168 Program Chairs.

We met with Program Chairs to put out a call for faculty volunteers of online courses only (specification set by OIRE) to pilot the new items in April/May 2018. We received replies from 22 instructors across 13 schools and programs, some teaching multiple sections of an online course.

We also met with Senior Associate Dean M. Ford of the College of Education & Human Development, at his request, to consider a new course evaluation form being tested by faculty in that college. The form was short, in order to reduce the time needed to complete it (with the intent of increasing online response rates), and included some of the areas already being addressed in our new form. With Dean Ford’s agreement, we borrowed an open-added item to add to our form. However, based on our review, we decided not to pilot test the CEHD form due to its lack of a research base around the construct of effective teaching, which formed the foundation for the items developed by this Committee. In addition, the form did not reflect personnel evaluation principles and lacked input from stakeholders across the university, other key aspects of our development process. Finally, with the form being presented to us in Jan. 2018, and plans for pilot testing our form already well underway, the timing was yet another element that did not work in favor of piloting an additional form. We asked Dean Ford to consider nominating a member of his task force or another CEHD faculty member to join this Committee. We also invited him to nominate faculty to participate in piloting our new Course Evaluation Form, but he declined.
After approval by the Faculty Senate on March 7 for pilot testing new items for the Course Evaluation Form, we met with Drs. T.K. Raghuraman & A. Detlev of the Office of Institutional Research & Effectiveness (OIRE) to discuss specifics of administration and to request assistance with analysis of the results, including response rates. Dr. Raghuraman indicated that although they could pilot the form with face-to-face courses in Fall 2018, due to limited availability of paper forms, specifically a lack of resources for formatting a new form, students would be asked to complete the new form online. This being the case, we could do another pilot in Fall 2018 with online courses and compare results to Spring 2018. We would plan on piloting the paper forms in Spring 2019, if OIRE has the resources by then.

Recommendations

The Committee recommends:

1. Moving forward with piloting the revised Course Evaluation Form with online courses in May 2018 (approved by Faculty Senate in March 2018) and face-to-face courses in December 2018 with the intent to establish validity and reliability of the form.

2. Based on results of the pilot testing, revising items again in order to make final recommendations for validated items on a new form.

3. Drafting new faculty evaluation policies for using the Course Evaluation Form as one of multiple measures for making high-stakes decisions about course instructors.

Members of the Effective Teaching Committee, 2017 - 18

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