

Executive Summary Report of Faculty Senate Committee on Student Evaluation of Teaching
2-26-09

Committee Members (Serving during one or more semesters between Spring 2007 and Spring 2009): James Roe (Chair), Richard ‘Sonny’ Espinoza, Paul Humphreys, Linda Leon, Michael Miranda, Jennifer Pate, Kala Seal, with Jackie Dewar and Margaret Kasimatis serving as resource persons to the committee.

Context:

Two workshops, titled “How Can/Do We Evaluate Teaching at LMU,” were held in the Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) in Fall 2006 and an informal follow-up survey was conducted. Significant dissatisfaction was reported with the current Student Rating form. The director of CTE submitted a report of the workshops and survey findings to the Faculty Senate and the CAO recommending that a committee be appointed to review/revise the student rating form. This recommendation was reinforced in discussions at the 2007 Academic Leadership Workshop, in which participants expressed strong dissatisfaction with the current teaching evaluation instrument. A committee was convened in late Summer 2007 and began meeting every two weeks throughout the 2007-8 academic year and resumed meetings again this academic year.

Problems with the Current Form:

- Some of the rating items are not equally applicable to all types of pedagogies, and overall the form seems more appropriate for lecture-based courses and less appropriate, even problematic, for courses that employ group work, service learning, student presentations, laboratories, performance rehearsals, etc.
- The current form is seen as an impediment to experimentation with new pedagogies.
- The current form is seen as an impediment to increasing academic rigor.
- Several of the items on the current form also fail to pass one or more of the criteria for SRTs outlined in Berk (2006) such as “The statement should be a simple sentence” and “The statement should contain only one complete behavior, thought or concept.”
- The current form fails to address several important dimensions of teaching (Feldman, 2007).
- Data from the current form is often misinterpreted and conclusions are drawn about teaching effectiveness that the data does not support.

Goals: The Committee’s goals were to develop and pilot test a new SRT form that would

1. be pedagogically neutral, that is, it would not have items that were more appropriate for one type of pedagogy than another
2. have items that capture dimensions of effective teaching at LMU, which students are capable of assessing, and
3. follow recommendations for constructing such forms (Feldman, 2007; Berk, 2006).

In addition, the Committee recognized that it was equally important to

4. educate faculty and administrators about how to interpret the data obtained from any SRT, when valid conclusions could be extracted from the data and what valid conclusions could be drawn.

Results:

- The Committee has developed (through an iterative process involving three pilot tests) a form that is pedagogically neutral.
- The proposed form has items capturing important dimensions of effective teaching associated with student learning (and which students are capable of assessing).
- All items meet criteria for survey construction.
- The proposed form includes an item related to academic rigor.

- The proposed form includes a demographic item regarding the student's initial desire to take the course as one perspective for interpreting the data.
- The proposed form allows instructors or departments to add two items of their own choosing.
- The Committee developed and distributed guidelines for interpreting student rating data. (See <http://www.lmu.edu/Page35750.aspx>).
- On February 26, 2009 the Faculty Senate endorsed the revised SRT form on the Committee's recommendation that it be implemented in Fall 2009. A faculty vote will be taken.

Process: The volume of literature dealing with research on student ratings is immense. In 1988 Cashin noted that over 1300 books and articles existed on the topic. No doubt the number today is more than double that figure. Informed by IDEA Papers #21 & 22 (Cashin, 1989, 1990) and Chickering and Gamson's Seven Principles (1987), the committee first attempted to identify measurable characteristics of effective teaching and then formulated corresponding items for an SRT form that was piloted during the 2007-8 academic year.

Both the standard and the 'pilot' SRT forms were administered to 1060 students in 63 classes (Fall 2007: 275 students in 14 classes; Spring 2008: 479 students in 22 classes; Fall 2008: 306 students in 27 classes). A total of 37 faculty from all six schools and colleges were involved in the pilots, and both graduate and undergraduate courses were involved.

Student perceptions of the new form were gathered in two ways: (1) Two student focus groups (one with 8 grad students; one with 8 undergrad students) were held in early Spring 2008 to review and comment on the two forms (NOTE: these students did not actually use the forms); (2) An open-ended question on the 'pilot' SRT form asked students the following: "In the space below please COMMENT on this evaluation form as compared to the standard LMU course evaluation form, if you are able to make a comparison." The results were: 665 students (out of 1060) expressed opinions that could be coded as to preference. Of those 60 % indicated a preference for the pilot form, 14 % for the standard form and 26 % expressed indifference or equal satisfaction with the two forms.

The 516 responses from the first two pilots were also coded for reasons given in support of a preference. Far and away, the most common reason given (45%) was "better content." In addition, 14% cited "ease of understanding" and 12% said the pilot form "allows for my personal view to be expressed." The focus groups provided mixed results with the majority of the graduate students preferring the new form but the undergraduates being very divided.

Faculty perceptions of the new form were gathered by an on-line survey of piloters, excluding any piloters on the Committee. Sixteen of 30 responded. When asked if they had a preference for one of the forms 62.5% said they preferred the pilot form, while only 6.25% said they preferred the existing form. The remaining 31.25% indicated no preference for either form.

Statistical analysis comparing responses to particular pairs of questions on the two forms (standard and pilot) and a study of internal consistency were performed and the results were encouraging: (1) Initial statistical analysis shows that certain questions on the pilot form revised to be pedagogy-neutral still capture key instructional dimensions that were on the old form (such as organization and clarity); (2) other tests confirmed the pilot form has a high degree of internal consistency.

Guidelines for interpreting SRT data based on Pallet (2006) and Theall and Franklin (1991) were developed by the Center for Teaching Excellence and disseminated by the Committee to all faculty (August 2008), and chairs, deans, and members of the Committee on Rank and Tenure (Academic year 2007-8). These guidelines are posted at <http://www.lmu.edu/Page35750.aspx>