Penn State Behrend Faculty Council

Tuesday, Jan. 31, 2017

4:30 p.m. in Reed 114

Attendance: Ralph Ford, Mary Kahl, Sharon Gallagher, Laurie Urraro, Jodie Styers, Joshua Shaw, Michael Rutter, Dawn Blasko, Matthew Swinarski, Vicki Kazmerski, Steve Strom, Rod Troester, Joseph Previte, Alicyn Rhoades, Eric Corty, Luciana Aronne, Kilic Kanat, Ken Miller, Joshua Pannaman, Rob Speel, Charlotte de Vries

1. Call to order by Chair
2. Approval of Minutes
3. Dec. 7, 2016
   1. Mike Rutter motions to approve the minutes. Luciana Aronne seconds the motion.
   2. The minutes are approved.
4. Reports of Officers and Standing Committees
5. Officers
6. Sharon Gallagher, Chair
   1. We are experiencing a new issue with LionPath. When a student places the class on his/her wait list, they are automatically enrolled into the class when a spot becomes available. There is no notification confirming this enrollment sent to the student. Some students are ending up enrolled in a class without realizing it. Also, there is a lag time with Canvas (approximately 24 hours) so even when a student is able to enroll in a class, they aren’t able to immediately access the course materials.
   2. Receiving positive feedback from faculty about drop/add period only being one week long.
   3. Receiving positive feedback from non-tenure track faculty about contracts being sent out in November/December.
   4. Receiving positive response about Chancellor Ford’s email outlining the updated BCF procedures regarding Fixed-Term Faculty.
      1. The Non-Tenure Track subcommittee did a lot of work on this.
   5. At the November Faculty Senate Meeting, there was a discussion about the role of SRTE’s from both the faculty and student perspective.
      1. Joshua Pannaman (student representative) invited the President of the Student Government Association (who also happens to be the Chair of Student Life) and a University Senator to participate in a forum to explore the topic.
      2. Forum at February 23rd at 12:30 p.m. to discuss how we can get these to work for both students and faculty.
      3. Sharon email the attachment in Appendix I to faculty in advance of the forum.
   6. Qi Dunsworth is holding a colloquium on Academic Integrity.
      1. This year’s featured speaker is Thomas J. Tobin
      2. The colloquium, Three Paths to Academic Integrity Across Campus, is schedule for May 10th, 2017.
      3. Faculty should email Qi with suggestions, ideas, or feedback.
   7. Soledad Traverso emailed a scholarship opportunity and is encouraging faculty to encourage advisees/students to apply.
      1. The American Association of University of Women is soliciting applicants for a scholarship that targets non-traditional, female students.
      2. Last year, there were almost no Behrend applicants compared to other local colleges.
      3. Eligible students can apply directly or faculty can forward the names and email addresses of eligible students directly to Soledad.
      4. Mary Kahl: That information was also sent to all of the School Directors and people who work in admissions. It’s $2000 for non-traditional female students.
7. Laurie Urraro, Vice Chair
   1. The Gender Conference is scheduled for April 13-15th, 2017.
      1. Laurie is coordinating and moderating a faculty panel on gender issues. The panel session will explore how the perceptions and realities of gender impact our student evaluations, interactions with students, and more. Participants will take anonymous and on-site questions. The panel is scheduled for Thursday, April 13th from 4-5:00 p.m.
      2. Laurie has one confirmed H & SS faculty member (female), and needs more representation, ideally from each of the four schools, and with Kelly Shrout and Qi Dunsworth. E-mails sent out. Some cannot make it due to teaching schedule; some have not replied as of yet. Anyone interested or names submitted to Laurie via email.
   2. Student groups want more interactions with faculty. Faculty aren’t aware of existing groups or their missions.
      1. In an effort to bridge the gap between student groups and faculty members, Laurie is cording “FAS Chat (Faculty and Student Chat)”. These events will be supported by Andy Herrera and his office.
      2. A monthly discussion with approximately two student groups. Groups will engage with faculty, explain the purpose of their groups and communicate what they want faculty to know about them.
      3. Being that February is Black History Month, the FAS Chat will feature ABC (Association of Black Collegians) and OAS (Organization of African and Caribbean Students). The FAS Chat will take place on Tuesday, February 22nd, 2017 at 5 p.m. with a room location TBA.
      4. Mary Kahl: Is there a way to get other student organizations to attend the event to foster respect between student groups?
      5. Laurie Urraro: This can be done through marketing. We can encourage student groups to reach out to one another as well.
8. Jodie Styers, Secretary
   1. No Updates.
9. Luciana Aronne, Past Chair
   1. Required Syllabus Statements: We’ve talked twice about having a copy of all of the policies in one place that can be easily updated and maintained. Faculty could access the policies and easily include them in their syllabii. How are we actually going to get this done?
      1. Sharon Gallagher: Doesn’t the math program have this?
      2. Mike Rutter: Yes. I put this together for math (included in minutes as Appendix II). It also includes the statement from Mary Kahl about notetaking. Faculty Affairs is talking about this issue. The current unknown is where to house it.
      3. Laurie Urraro: I get the sense that they are overwhelmed with Title IX at University Park. When she reaches out, there is a long time between communications.
      4. Luciana Aronne: It would be easier to have this in one place for everyone.
   2. The ad for Senior Associate Academic Dean for Research and Outreach (currently Bob Light’s position) is posted on the jobs site.
      1. When the ad for the Senior Associate Dean of Academic Affairs was posted, it specifically listed “full professor” as a criterion for application.
      2. The ad for the Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Studies says “Credentials appropriate for a tenured appointment at the rank of professor, preferably in a field of study offered at Penn State Behrend is desired”
      3. Ralph Ford: We can easily update the ad to include “full professor”.
10. Blair Tuttle, Parliamentarian
    1. Not present, No report
11. Committees
12. Aaron Mauro, Chair of Academic Computing
    1. Not present, no report
13. Terry Blakney, Chair of Athletics
    1. Not present, sent electronic updates
    2. The proposal to allow graduate student athletes with remaining eligibility to participate in college athletics was voted down.
    3. Wrestling and women’s bowling are slated to start at Behrend this fall (2017).
    4. This was the water polo team’s first year in the Mountain Pacific conference and they would like to continue in the conference as it provides great opportunities.
14. Matthew Swinarski, Chair of Curricular Affairs
    1. The committee is continuing to review proposals and work on their charges.
15. Michael Rutter, Chair of Faculty Affairs
    1. First meeting scheduled for Friday, February 3rd
    2. The common syllabus policies (what to include and where to house this) is on agenda
    3. The committee is also looking at workload for tenure-track faculty.
16. Alicyn Rhoades, Chair of Research
    1. First meeting scheduled for Friday, February 3rd.
    2. The committee is still brainstorming a faculty survey to explore how faculty are feeling about their ability to do research on campus (time perspective, resource perspective, etc.).
    3. All committee members had input, but they’ll compare it to what’s out there and what already exists at University Park.
    4. The goal is to have the survey developed and out by spring break.
17. Joshua Shaw, Chair of Scholarship & Awards
    1. The committee met at end of fall semester
    2. During the second week of semester, the announcements for college wide awards went out and a follow up reminder was sent last week. The number of nominations was down because the announcement went out earlier this year. As a result, the committee decided to extend the deadline one more week, now making nominations due by Friday, February 3rd.
    3. The committee will review the nominations and determine who to interview and then meet after spring break.
18. Charlotte de Vries, Chair of Student Life
    1. The committee met January 30th to review their charges.
    2. They have determined that charge 3 (Continue to operationalize and monitor change of location and student retention by developing and implementing a system to monitor ongoing progress with respect to retention for different groups (ex., local versus international) of students) cannot happen this year.
    3. Last year, the committee used a survey that was helpful but they cannot implement the survey this year due to the change to LionPath.
    4. They talked a lot about the second charge (Work with the Office of Student Affairs to establish and maintain a culture on campus that welcomes and supports international students to enhance their success at Behrend.)
       1. What should we be telling international students in regard to new executive order? Students did not get the direct email from President Barron the way faculty did. Can we send something directly from Behrend that we’re supportive and encourage students to use the International Student Office as a resource? Students are scared about having to choose between visiting family and being able to return to school.
       2. Sharon Gallagher: Erie held a march in support of immigrants and refugees on Sunday that many students and faculty attended.
       3. Laurie Urraro: This issue also came up at MCC last night. Jay Breneman wants to hold a public rally on President’s Day at East High School. He is looking for refugee students to speak about their experiences. He wants a half hour of 2 minute speaking engagements from students.
       4. Ken Miller: We do have 2 students from Iran and one from Syria. Both Iranian students have UAE and British dual passports. These students are scared to leave for spring break.
       5. Rod Troester: So your office is on top of that then?
       6. Ralph Ford: This afternoon he received an email from the Vice President of Programs at University Park with FAQ’s and contact points. This could be shared.
       7. Mary Kahl: She asked communications and marketing to prepare numbers. How many students could be effected and how? She also talked to School Directors to identify which faculty members might be effected and how. If you have a student who is in question, they shouldn’t even travel to Canada for spring break.
       8. Luciana: Is Penn State a sanctuary campus?
       9. Mary Kahl: Erie is.
       10. Luciana Aronne: Right but what about the university?
       11. Ralph Ford: University Park is not. President Barron has spoken on that. There is no definition of what it means to be a sanctuary campus so we are not officially designated as one.
       12. Sharon Gallagher: Have you heard anything from students Joshua?
       13. Josh Pannaman: No.
       14. Charlotte de Vries: An email sent to students would definitely help.
    5. The committee is also starting to assess student needs and which spaces we can add. Trying to get report done by the end of the year.
19. Joseph Previte, Chair of Undergraduate Studies
    1. Solicitations Teaching and Advising Awards were sent via email. The deadline is early March.
    2. The committee is working with the Faculty Affairs committee on the issue of make up exam policies.
       1. They are compiling a document that contains current policies (Senate Policies 42 and 44) to establish what the current policies are and what should be taking place.
       2. The committee aims to generate a best practices document which includes perspectives of both students and faculty. The perspective of the students is being compiled by Undergraduate Studies and the perspective from faculty is being collected by Faculty Affairs.
          1. Mike Rutter: What is the form that we want this to be in? Should this information (best practices document) be distributed to directors? Or should be aim to make it a Behrend policy?
          2. Rob Speel: H&SS students were being asked to take make up exams in the hallway. H&SS is using a conference room far from offices. University Park has a common make up exam room with a proctor. We need something better than what we have now.
          3. Joe Previte: The committee is currently looking at the policies in place in each of the four schools.
          4. Mike Rutter: We need a designated space for make ups. From the students’ side, it needs to be free of distraction and from the faculty side, it needs to maintain academic integrity. But still, is it a policy? Is it best practices? What does the final product look like?
          5. Sharon Gallagher: I don’t remember the exact charge off top of head.
          6. Luciana Aronne: It would be good if it would ultimately become policy for the sake of consistency.
          7. Joe Previte: Should we bring a document for Faculty Council to review?
          8. Sharon Gallagher: We can do that here and then send it to Behrend Faculty Senate and put it to a vote.
          9. Matt Swinarski: Faculty Council can’t make policy.
          10. Luciana Aronne: Right, but if we pass it through everyone we can ask the administration to make it policy. This still doesn’t help with the issue of space.
          11. Joe Previte: Okay, we’ll head that direction.
          12. Luciana Aronne: The office of Disability Services is swamped.
          13. Mike Rutter: That’s a separate issue.
          14. Luciana Aronne: No, we’re out of space. What if we converted Erie Hall and make it one big testing center?
          15. Mike Rutter: I think mixing testing would be difficult.
          16. Rob Speel: Other universities are doing that.
          17. Luciana Aronne: Think about that too while you’re thinking about a testing center. We could all use it since Disability Services is bursting at the seams.
          18. Matt Swinarski: Maybe present pros and cons and we can decide
          19. Mike Rutter: We do need something short term and then we can look into the different models you’re suggesting.
       3. The committee is supposed to have a presentation on the new general education requirements. There is a subcommittee working on that.
20. Representatives
21. Renee Finnecy and Jennifer Mangus, Part-Time Faculty Representatives
    1. Not present, no report
22. Rod Troester,
23. Filling in for Sudarshan Nelatury ,University Faculty Senate Representative at Faculty Council and attended the last University Senate meeting on his behalf as well
24. The Senate Curriculum Committee is starting to approve general education classes. The committee is also starting to formalize the I courses. There are grants available locally through the university. There was another report on disciplinary communities. There is an effort to resurrect these for coordination of I courses and communication with University Park.
25. Everyone continues to beat up on LionPath
26. Attended a Forensic Session on the terminology for the new Fixed-term titles. That has been circulating. The committees are in place, they are working on titles, there is an implementations reports (how they’ll transition to new ranks), and he has met with the administration about this.
    1. Mike Rutter: Has the vote for the names taken place yet?
    2. Rod Troester: No.
    3. Sharon Gallagher: No. It’s March.
    4. Rod Troester: At our last meeting, it was a forensic session. No one likes titles and terminologies but no one has anything better.
    5. Mike Rutter: At the last meeting, we got the impression this was an all or nothing vote. Is that still true?
    6. Ralph Ford: That is what Kim Strauss was saying.
    7. Rod Troester: I hope that’s not the case. A lot of work has gone into this for a long period of time.
    8. Dawn Blasko: There is a group from a few colleges that are working on making amendments on the floor. I think officers have been working with them to see if they’ve come to common conclusions. The latest thing we’ve talked about was the amendment for the college of liberal arts. This distinguishes between those who hold the highest degree in the field versus those who do not. From the discussion, it seems that this would be decided by the academic unit (what the terminal degrees are).
    9. Rod Troester: I hope these pieces fit together and I hope by the fall we’re moving forward with this.
27. There were a number of informational reports. The link to the senate minutes is available and link to live site is also available.
28. There is a report on classroom climate and bias in the classroom. This may be useful for Laurie’s panel.
29. The University is trying to establish a new health care manager (not provider).
30. There as a report to tell University Park that they can’t tell campus location students to retake a course at University Park if they’ve already passed it a branch. This is current policy.
    1. Matt Swinarski: It is now official that they can’t do this?
    2. Rod Troester: This has always been the policy
    3. Dawn Blasko: But they’ve done it and they’ve gotten away with it.
    4. Rod Troester: There are credits that a program can require be taken as a resident in the program.
31. Mike Rutter: Where do we stand in the process of renewing general education courses?
32. Rod Troester: Every general education course will go back through the approval process to make sure everyone aligns with the new gen education requirements. My suggestion is that every program that teaches general education classes should be reaching out to the University Park to coordinate efforts so we don’t get to the point that University Park is telling us what to do.
    1. Mike Rutter: So is the onus on us to contact them?
    2. Rod Troesgter: It should be both ways
    3. Dawn Blasko: What the senate is trying to avoid is putting University Park in charge which means everyone needs to reach out.
33. Joshua Pannaman, Student/Senate Representatives
    1. No report
34. Dr. Ralph Ford, Chancellor
    1. Provost Jones he has a “semi-cute video” of him promoting the strategic planning sessions that he will be hosting. Provost Jones will present a session at Behrend in April. That one will be on Digital Innovation. There are 8 themes in the strategic plan being looked at by people across the University, hearing what the committees are coming up with, and providing feedback.
35. Dr. Mary Kahl, Senior Associate Dean for Academic Affairs
    1. AIM Mentor program: Fatima is hired. She is currently meeting with 16 AIM students this semester and meeting to sign contracts. This is staffed and up and running.
    2. The PASSS program-Behrend accepted the invitation from University Park to bring this program to campus. Several other campuses have the PASSS program as well. This will bring us further in alignment with the AIM Mentor program and what Faith Graham is doing. When students apply, they indicate whether they are a low income, ethnic minority, or first generation college student. The program takes place in the summer after a student’s high school graduation before their first semester of college. We can take up to 14 students. They’ll receive housing, meals, scholarships ($1,500 the first summer, then $3,000 the second summer), and peer mentors. We provide them with remedial math tutoring, remedial English help. We’ll be seeking additional summer courses for summer session II. We’ll be looking for math students to do this. Students are employed on campus as tutors.
       1. Ralph Ford: Early data does show improved retention (not fully vetted study).
       2. Mary Kahl: Taking courses in the summer should free up seats in classes in the fall
       3. Jodie Styers: Is it tutors or is faculty providing the math instruction?
       4. Mary Kahl: Students will receive specialized training in mathematics. This doesn’t mandate they take a specific course. We’ll have to provide math tutoring not in a formal class but we’ll need to hire someone (either students or faculty) to run the program. That is separate from seeking other students.
       5. Dawn Blasko: Will you be asking for other faculty to support these students from other departments?
       6. Mary Kahl: We’ve reached out to Ruth Pflueger about providing tutoring. Ken (Miller) and I have talked about doing social things as well. These students can’t just study.
    3. She has received inquiry on our status on assessment. She hasn’t pushed on this because we’re busy. She’ll be asking for status from directors across units.
36. New Business
37. 2017 Elections for Vice-Chair, Secretary, University Senators, and Part-Time Representative
    1. Elections closed on Friday. An email about who won will be forthcoming
    2. Elections opened on the January 20th. There were two glitches:
       1. Voters were initially unable to make 2 selections for University Senator. This issue was sent to Margie Sargent who consulted with Jessica Resig, Director of eLearning Initiatives, and fixed the problem. In the time it took to realize and resolve the problem, 15 people had already voted. Those people were contacted and asked to recast their votes.
       2. On Friday the 27th a faculty member emailed with a concern that he/she voted twice. In fixing the issue described above, it turns out that everyone could have cast a second ballot (not just the original 15 effected). Jessica reviewed the votes and determined that only 2 people voted twice. Fortunately, each individual cast the same ballot both times. One duplicate ballot was removed for each of the two individuals.
       3. This will be addressed in an email to all faculty. If people have questions, they should contact Sharon.
          1. Rob Speel: I assume this isn’t a secret ballot. Who was able to see how everyone voted?
          2. Sharon Gallagher: Jessica could identify voters in some way or she would have been unable to determine if there was double voting.
          3. Matt Swinarski: Votes are probably tracked by user ID
          4. Charlotte de Vries: Through Angel you can see who participated and how many times.
          5. Sharon Gallagher: There is also an anonymous function in Angel. However, the integrity of the vote was maintained. Jessica isn’t faculty and has no stake in the vote.
          6. Ralph Ford: Sharon came and asked me about it. There was the option to re-do the election but if someone didn’t get the same number of votes we could have contesting. The differential was large enough that it wouldn’t have caused a difference, at least that was my understanding.
          7. Sharon Gallagher: If there are people with questions, send them to me and I will discuss it with them.
          8. Matt Swinarski: The School of Business uses Google Forms since Angel is going away.
          9. Sharon Gallagher: With Angel leaving we’ll have to come up with something new. The final election results reflect everyone who cast a vote having it counted only once as checked by Jessica. The situation was discussed with the chair of the nomination committee.
38. Announcements
39. Faculty Council Meetings for Spring 2017:

* Tuesday, Feb. 28 at 9:00 a.m. in Reed 112
* Tuesday, Mar. 28 at 3:30 p.m. in Reed 112
* Monday, Apr. 17 at 4:30 p.m. in Reed 113

1. Faculty Senate Meetings for Spring 2017 – Faculty Committee Updates from Chairs Requested

* Tuesday, Feb. 21 at 4:30 p.m. in Burke 180
* Tuesday, Apr. 18 at 4:30 p.m. in Burke 180

1. University Senate Meetings – Spring 2017

* Tuesday, Mar. 14, 2017
* Tuesday, Apr. 25, 2017

1. Adjournment
   1. A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Mary Kahl and second by Joe Previte.

Appendix I:

How Do We Evaluate Teaching?

Findings from a survey of faculty members.

By Craig Vasey and Linda Carroll

American Association of University Professors. May-June 2016. https://www.aaup.org/article/how-do-we-evaluate-teaching#.WIX1OK2Qy1t. 23 Jan. 2017.

In fall 2014, the AAUP’s Committee on Teaching, Research, and Publication conducted a survey to gather information about how colleges and universities evaluate teaching and use the results. The committee hoped that this survey would help faculty members improve evaluation practices at their institutions and enable them to defend themselves and their colleagues more effectively against the misuse of student evaluations. A few respondents explicitly expressed the hope that the AAUP would provide a list of best practices or recommended guidelines.

The survey was sent by e-mail to approximately 140,000 faculty members, and 9,314 responses were received. Although these responses were informative and useful, the survey did have imperfections. While it was intended to reach all faculty members regardless of status, the response from non-tenure-track faculty members was lower than the committee had hoped: 75 percent of the respondents were tenured or tenure-track faculty members.

At the same time, the volume of the responses received—within about eight weeks, nine thousand responses had come in, including five thousand written comments—indicates that the evaluation of teaching is a matter of concern for many faculty members. The fact that the majority of the respondents were in relatively advantaged tenured and tenure-track positions and still felt their lives were being affected by evaluation practices likely means that the effects are even worse for those off the tenure track. It seems highly unlikely that the comparatively low response rate from their more vulnerable colleagues is an indication that the issue doesn’t matter to non-tenure-track faculty members. We need to find ways to hear more from this new majority.

Overview of Findings

The issues at stake in evaluation practices may seem insignificant, but they can affect our lives in big ways. Through the survey we sought to collect information about how student evaluations of teaching performance are handled and used in salary, promotion, and tenure decisions; how various institutions balance the responsibilities of research and teaching; and what kind of support for teaching is available at different institutions.

Of the responses received, 54 percent came from tenured professors, 18 percent from full-time non-tenure-track faculty members, 15 percent from tenure-track faculty members, 11 percent from parttime non-tenure-track faculty members, and just over 1 percent from teaching or research assistants. Two hundred respondents did not identify their appointment type. Almost half of the responses came from faculty members at four-year teaching-intensive institutions (48 percent), followed by four-year research-intensive institutions at 35 percent. The rest were divided almost equally between two-year colleges and professional schools, including colleges within larger institutions.

The survey began with questions about mechanisms for evaluation of teaching and whether those mechanisms were recommended, required, required frequently or occasionally, or not recommended or required at all. The percentage of faculty members reporting frequent required use of paper student evaluations and the percentage reporting frequent required use of online student evaluations were almost identical at 51 and 52 percent, respectively. Very few respondents said that the student evaluations were recommended but not required (4 percent for paper and 9 percent for online). The same was true for the occasional use of required student evaluations (5 percent for paper and 7 percent for online). The required use of quantitative evaluations beat out required qualitative evaluations, but not by much (55 to 44 percent).

By an overwhelming margin, the responses regarding the shift from paper evaluations done in class to online evaluations done outside the classroom told the same story: the return rate has dropped from 80 percent or higher on paper to 20 to 40 percent online. With such a rate of return, claims of “validity” are rendered dubious. Faculty members reported that comments from the students are on the extremes: those who are very happy with their experience or their grade, and those who are very unhappy.

Some faculty members expressed frustration at having little to no input in determining what the evaluations ask, pointing out that it is inappropriate to treat all teaching in every field or all students as if they were the same. A common instrument takes no account of the differences between a lecture-based class delivered to more than fifty students and a seminar of fifteen.

Numerous reports indicated that the abusive and bullying tone often seen in anonymous online comments is beginning to appear in student evaluations. Some women faculty members and faculty members of color report receiving negative comments on appearance and qualifications; it seems that anonymity may encourage such inappropriate and sometimes overtly discriminatory comments.

Most evaluations appear to be done in the last weeks of the semester; some schools allow them to be submitted even after students have received their grades. Commenters pointed out that factors such as stress and worry about grades increase for students toward the end of the semester, influencing their responses, and that allowing students to know their grades before evaluation occurs compromises the results by undermining objectivity.

About 25 percent of respondents said that their evaluations were frequently published—that is, made available to people other than the instructor and his or her department chair or dean. A majority (67 percent) said that their institutions did not require publication. About half said that, aside from student evaluations, they were evaluated frequently or occasionally by administrators, and about two-thirds said they were evaluated by peers.

Teaching portfolios, mentoring by faculty colleagues, or engagement with centers for teaching, while often recommended, were required only rarely. Although most respondents said that their institutions had centers for teaching (75 percent), few praised them for promoting better pedagogy. More often, faculty members associated them with efforts to promote technology or cater to students.

A small majority (55 percent) of respondents said that their institutions did not involve faculty members in decisions about the design of the evaluation instrument and its distribution. The gap grew when it came to the faculty’s input concerning the use of student evaluations in promotion and tenure decisions and decisions on merit salary increases, with 62 percent saying that decisions about the use of evaluations did not lie with the faculty. The gap became even wider (65 percent) with regard to having input in decisions about publishing student evaluations.

The majority of the respondents (69 percent) saw a need for student evaluations of some sort, but respondents were more evenly split when it came to weighing their effectiveness: 50 percent said that student evaluations are not an effective means of determining good teaching, whereas 47 percent said that they are. Numerous commenters claimed that faculty members are evaluated and recommended for contract renewal or promotion on the basis of the grades they assign and that administrators pressure faculty members to pass students who deserve to fail. A majority (72 percent) strongly or somewhat strongly agreed that confidentiality— that is, the anonymity of the students completing the evaluations and some restrictions on who sees the resulting comments—was essential to the legitimate pedagogical purposes of student evaluations.

Most respondents recommended mentoring programs for junior faculty (86 percent); even more said that institutions should evaluate teaching as seriously as research and scholarship (90 percent). The majority said they believed that scholarship and research on teaching should be recognized as equal to disciplinary scholarship (84 percent).

Responses to a question about the use of outcomes assessment to improve teaching were almost evenly split among those who agreed that it is effective, those who said it is not effective, and those who had no opinion about its effectiveness. While the majority of respondents somewhat or strongly agreed (in equal measures) that student evaluations create upward pressure on grades (67 percent), 77 percent were opposed to the imposition of grade distribution quotas by the administration.

The Contingent Faculty Perspective

Respondents cited significant differences between how administrators evaluate non-tenure-track faculty members and how they evaluate tenure-track and tenured faculty members. Most respondents also noted that the traditional means of providing oversight and support for teaching were limited to those on the tenure track. Non-tenure-track faculty members, including graduate students, receive significantly less support and often are excluded from participation in mentoring, teaching programs, instructional development, and peer evaluations. Given that non-tenure-track faculty members are responsible for teaching the majority of courses and that graduate students represent the next generation in higher education, this reported lack of mentoring and attention to quality seems surprising. It is challenging and disheartening to try to measure up to student and departmental expectations and to endure judgment of the quality of one’s teaching under such circumstances.

For those on the tenure track, student evaluations may be important in the promotion and tenure processes; however, once tenured, some faculty members seem to accord evaluations little value. In contrast, for non-tenure-track faculty members the emphasis is on student evaluations rather than on innovative teaching, instructional development, or formal recognition of excellence in the classroom. Many commented that evaluations are used solely in the context of renewal or nonrenewal of contract. Others said that even highly favorable student evaluations do not usually change the status of non-tenure-track faculty members.

Rather than strengthen the quality of teaching, student evaluations and their use by institutions exacerbate the problems of a two-tier system, compromising the quality of education. Knowing that administrators rely on student evaluations in making renewal decisions, non-tenure-track faculty members face the challenge of balancing rigorous and interesting courses with the reality that many students prefer to maximize their grade point averages. Hastily completed evaluations, critical or complimentary, are soon forgotten by the students, who reduce to a few data points the months that faculty members have put into planning and teaching each course. All faculty members admit concerns about grade inflation and sustaining student interest, but the tenured faculty member’s job is not in danger when a new course offering fails to attract a sufficient number of students.

In addition to the pressure to inflate grades in order to secure teaching assignments, contingent faculty members face pressure to raise course and program completion rates, which are tied to already much-reduced state funding. In the future, faculty members with no employment security likely will be under increasing pressure from both administrators and the expanding cadres of student-services staff hired to monitor students’ progress.

Recommendations from Respondents

Among the many open-ended comments submitted by respondents were a number of suggestions and recommendations. Here we summarize those that came up frequently.

The Association’s Statement on Teaching Evaluation and the Observations on the Association’s Statement on Teaching Evaluation, both of which are included in the eleventh edition of AAUP Policy Documents and Reports, provide the policy context for the committee’s survey. The overwhelming majority of the recommendations that emerged from the responses comport with those made in the Statement on Teaching Evaluation, which calls for clear institutional policies, assessment by multiple parties, the use of instruments that are suited to the field of knowledge, and the use of evaluation for developmental purposes. AAUP policy documents also emphasize the primary role of the faculty in teaching evaluation and warn against the encroachment of “corporate forms of governance” and the growing reliance on numerically based evaluations.

Survey respondents echoed this emphasis on a strong role for the faculty, and particularly the faculty in the field, in determining the components and processes of teaching evaluation. Decisions made with little to no faculty involvement, such as the widespread move from paper to online forms, frequently have negative consequences such as those discussed above. Numerous commenters recommended that administrators give more weight to qualitative components (comments) rather than reducing evaluations to a number.

Respondents also recommended that the evaluation of teaching be a multifactored process that includes all instructors and involves colleagues with expertise both in the subject matter and in standards of content and achievement in the field. This was viewed as a potential means of reducing the invidious correlation between grades given in the course and the scores given to the instructor by students.

Many commenters had no clear recommendation as to whether students should fill out evaluations anonymously, but some suggested that anonymous responders be tracked to ensure that no one filled out an evaluation more than once. While some commenters expressed support for grade quotas as an antidote to grade inflation, the large majority opposed it; outcomes assessment and the publication of average grades given in courses (which could be used by students to choose instructors with higher averages) were similarly opposed. Commenters instead recommended various other measures as counterweights to student evaluations, noting that such counterweights are particularly important when evaluations are included in tenure and promotion decisions. Peer review, coupled with the collective establishment of course content and grading norms by the faculty of the department or field, could serve as one such measure. For professional schools, the correlation between board exams and course grades could be helpful. Ideally, these measures would be combined with periodic meetings of the instructors of multisection courses or related courses to discuss common issues and share solutions and approaches. Such meetings could also provide the opportunity for another recommended approach, mutual mentoring by faculty members. An additional frequent recommendation was the development by faculty members of a teaching portfolio with a range of materials showing the standards set.

Respondents recommended that the evaluation instrument be developed by the faculty and that the questions be appropriate to the field and the pedagogical methods used. The most frequent recommendation was that the questions be carefully worded to avoid biasing student responses and that they focus on student learning: for example, the question should not be, “Did the instructor return work in a timely manner?” but rather, “Did the instructor return work before the results were to be applied to a later assignment?” Numerous commenters recommended a reflective component. Others reported adding their own evaluation forms, sometimes at midterm and frequently oriented toward the effectiveness of the course in promoting student learning.

Commenters recommended that students who have dropped a course or been charged with academic misconduct be excluded from evaluating the instructor. Some noted that a virtue of paper evaluations is that they are more likely to include responses from students who regularly attend the class—and less likely to include uninformed evaluations from students who are frequently absent.

A frequent recommendation was that course evaluations be treated as “a faculty development project”—that is, as formative rather than summative. They should be interpreted in the context of the course, and interpretation should take into account research on student evaluations and potential biases. Evaluations should not be used to impose conformity. Evaluators can gain perspective on an individual course by reviewing multiple courses taught by the instructor over multiple semesters, by reviewing the performance of the students of that course in subsequent related courses, and by including the instructor’s former students among evaluators. Cross-evaluation of students by other faculty members can also be helpful.

Administrators should respect standards developed by the faculty and not exert pressure to obtain higher evaluation scores by lowering standards to please students, a problem frequently cited by commenters. Many commenters also observed that institutions can do much to protect educational standards by offering higher salaries and the protection of tenure.

Finally, respondents to the survey preferred that institutions support instructors’ participation in field-based pedagogical conferences and workshops, as well as research on methods, rather than fund generic teaching centers. They almost universally recommended pedagogical training in graduate programs.

Additional Recommendations

The portrait that emerges from the survey suggests a number of additional recommendations.

First, student evaluations should be completed in class. The move to online evaluations completed outside of class appears to compromise whatever reliability one could hope to claim for student evaluations.

Additionally, faculty members within departments and colleges—not administrators—should develop instruments and determine practices (peer review, classroom visits, teaching portfolios) that reflect the kinds of courses being taught, the levels of the students in the courses, and the styles of teaching being promoted. University-wide or college-wide evaluation forms that disregard this variety should be avoided; they generate meaningless numerical comparisons that invite misuse.

Anonymity in student comments is necessary but may work against the gathering of reliable information by allowing students to make unfounded claims. Perhaps completing evaluations in real time in the classroom, though still anonymously, would curb this trend.

Fairness demands that changes be made in how institutions support teaching. Graduate students and non-tenure-track faculty members should be given access to the same teaching development opportunities offered to tenure-track faculty members. Moreover, chairs, deans, provosts, and institutions as a whole should not allow numerical rankings from student evaluations to serve as the only or the primary indicator of teaching quality. Publishing the results of student evaluations, as is done at various commercial rating websites, is counterproductive. The purpose of evaluation should be to help faculty members improve as teachers and to provide quality control; it should not be to help students find easy classes and avoid challenging teachers.

Perhaps most important, every department chair, dean, and provost should familiarize himself or herself with the AAUP’s Statement on Teaching Evaluation. If that statement’s policy recommendations were implemented more widely, many of the problems uncovered in the survey likely would not exist.

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Appendix II

*Academic Integrity*

Academic integrity is a basic guiding principle for all academic activity at the University, and all members of the community are expected to adhere to this principle. Specifically, academic integrity is the pursuit of scholarly activity in an open, honest, and responsible manner. It includes a commitment not to engage in or tolerate acts of falsification, misrepresentation, or deception. Such acts violate the fundamental ethical principles of the University community and undermine the efforts of others.

Violations of academic integrity are not tolerated at Penn State Behrend. Violators will receive academic sanctions and may receive disciplinary sanctions, including the awarding of an XF grade. In cases such as these, an XF grade is recorded on the transcript and states that failure of the course was due to an act of academic dishonesty. All acts of academic dishonesty are recorded so those repeat offenders can be sanctioned accordingly.

For more information: https://psbehrend.psu.edu/intranet/faculty-resources/academic-integrity/academic-integrity

*Disabilities and Learning Differences*

Penn State is strongly committed to providing full access to its programs and services for all individuals. The University encourages academically qualified students with disabilities to take advantage of the educational programs and accommodations offered at Penn State Behrend.

For more information: https://psbehrend.psu.edu/student-life/educational-equity-and-diversity/student-resources/students-with-disabilities-and-learning-differences

*Counseling and Psychological Services*

Students with academic concerns related to this course should contact the instructor in person or via email. Students also may occasionally have personal issues that arise in the course of pursuing higher education that may interfere with their academic performance. If you find yourself facing problems affecting your coursework, you are encouraged to talk with an instructor and to seek confidential assistance at the Penn State Behrend Personal Counseling Services at (814) 898-6504.

For more information: http://psbehrend.psu.edu/student-life/student-services/personal-counseling

*Title IX*

Penn State is committed to fostering an environment free from sexual or gender-based harassment or misconduct. The Office of Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response ensures compliance with Title IX, a federal law that prohibits discrimination based on the sex or gender of employees and students. Behaviors including sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, dating violence, domestic violence, and stalking, as well as retaliation for reporting any of these acts violate Title IX and are not tolerated. The University is also committed to providing support to those who may have been impacted by incidents of sexual or gender-based harassment or misconduct and may provide various resources and support services to individuals who have experienced one of these incidents.

For more information: http://titleix.psu.edu/ or http://titleix.psu.edu/resources-penn-state-erie-the-behrend-college/

*Copyright of Class Materials*

You may not share any information from this course (including notes and assignments) with others who are not currently registered for the course, nor post such information electronically without the permission of the instructor--this includes online note-taking/note-sharing services (See Penn State Administrative Policy AD-40). Unless you have my permission, you risk disciplinary sanctions.

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