

Faculty Evaluations Committee Report and Recommendations to the Faculty Senate Executive Committee

2009 – 2010 Activities

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2009 - 2010

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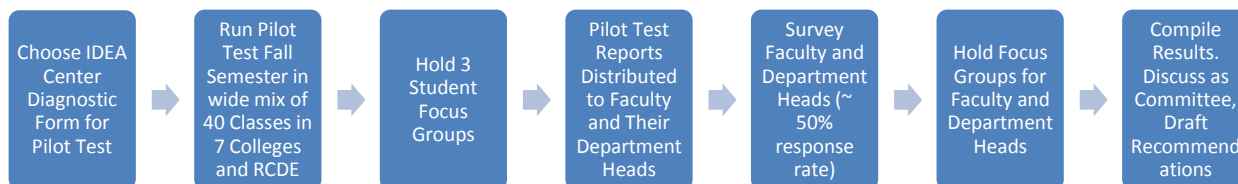
Faculty Evaluation Committee (FEC) Tasks: (1) assess methods for evaluating faculty performance; (2) recommend improvements in methods of evaluation; (3) recommend methods of faculty development; and (4) decide university awards for Professor and Advisor of the Year.

Overview of Report: This report opens with an overview of the Faculty Evaluation Committee's work in the 2009 – 2010 academic year followed by a set of recommendations regarding a new ratings of instruction instrument. The report concludes with a brief rationale for each of the Committee's recommendations and a cost analysis of implementation.

Overview of Committee's Work:

Note: This report focuses only on an assessment of and recommendations for the system of student ratings of faculty instruction. A report of the Committee's 2008 – 2009 work that was presented to the Faculty Senate Executive Committee and Faculty Senate in October, 2009 is available on the Faculty Evaluations Committee website (<http://www.usu.edu/fsenate/Committees/FEC/>). This document provides the history leading to the current report.

Workflow



Motivation

ASUSU student groups have asked for a new instrument for student ratings of instructions. Their concerns have been that the current instrument does not provide useful feedback to faculty and does not improve their instruction. In spring 2007, the Faculty Senate rejected a proposed new ratings form designed by the FEC asked the FEC to consult with a professional evaluator and investigate the use of a commercial form. In fall 2009, a petition was signed by 43 department heads asking for a new ratings instrument that was valid, focused on learning outcomes, and allowed comparisons with national norms.

Choosing a Ratings Instrument to Pilot Test

At the beginning the 2009 – 2010 academic year, the Faculty Evaluations Committee decided to pilot test the IDEA Center’s Diagnostic Form of Student Ratings of Instruction. Various options were reviewed, and the IDEA Center instrument was selected based on the committee’s evaluation of currently available commercial forms that have been tested for reliability and validity. It is important to note that in the context of ratings instruments, the terms reliability and validity have precise and restricted meanings. Reliability is the ability to accurately and consistently measure a characteristic. Validity is the effectiveness of the instrument in representing the attribute the user is interested in. FEC analysis of the existing USU instrument showed that it reliably measures one major factor (see the 2008 – 2009 FEC report available on the FEC website). However, the current USU ratings form has never been tested for validity.

The Diagnostic Form of Student Ratings of Instruction is one of two forms offered by the IDEA Center. This form is suitable for administrative evaluation of instruction and for formative assessment of teaching by instructors. The IDEA Center also offers a Short Form that is designed primarily for evaluative purposes. Although this form was not in the pilot study, it plays an important part in the FEC recommendations presented later in this report. Both the Diagnostic and Short Forms have been refined through more than 30 years of use and are in use at more than 400 institutions of higher education. A sample of the Diagnostic and Short Forms and the reports generated from their analysis are provided within the “Supporting Documents 2009 – 2010” file found on the FEC website. This bookmark-separated PDF file also contains many other documents relevant to this report.

Features of the IDEA Instrument and Report

Many features distinguish the Diagnostic Form and Report from the system now in use at USU. Unlike the current USU form, faculty are required to decide upon learning objectives for each course as a part of the evaluation preparatory work. Selection of three to five objectives is recommended, with faculty rating these as essential or important. Student responses are analyzed in reference to these learning objectives and a score of Progress on Relevant Objectives is tabulated and used in the overall rating of instruction. Ratings are reported as both raw and adjusted scores. Adjustments are made on the basis of factors known to influence student ratings that are outside the control of the instructor. Factors include class size, level (e.g., lower-level undergraduate, upper-level undergraduate, graduate), student motivation, and whether the course is required or an elective. The report includes a detailed analysis of progress on each course

objective selected by the instructor, a description of the course (amount of reading, amount of work, difficulty, etc.) as perceived by students, and includes suggestions on ways to improve teaching. Recommendations for improved teaching are based on the match between the chosen course objectives and student perceptions of how well these objectives were accomplished. IDEA's paper-and-pencil Diagnostic Form contains one open-ended question, titled "Comments." This is unlike the current USU instrument, which has two directed requests for open-ended student responses: "What aspects of the teaching or content of this course do you feel were especially good?" and "What changes could be made to improve the teaching or the content of this course?"

Two rating items (Excellent Teacher and Excellent Course) are similar to the Overall Quality Of Course and Instructor's Effectiveness items on the existing USU form.

The scores on the Diagnostic Form that would likely be the focus of faculty and administrators are in the categories of Progress on Relevant Objectives, Excellent Teacher, Excellent Course, an average of the Teacher and Course Excellence scores, and finally, a Summary Evaluation Score that is the average of Progress On Relevant Objectives and the Excellent Course/Excellent Teacher average. Examining the sample report on the FEC website is helpful in understanding these scores.

Finally, the IDEA Center provides a Group Summary report that compares the choice of learning objectives and ratings scores of an academic unit (e.g., a USU English or Biology Department) with the USU averages and averages of all institutions in the IDEA data base. A sample group summary report and the USU group summary report from the pilot test are included in the materials on the FEC website. The IDEA Center will also begin offering a feature that would allow comparisons of USU ratings with a group of six to eight institutions selected by USU as peer institutions. If USU were to adopt an IDEA Center ratings instrument, this feature would not become available for two to three years until baseline data for USU were established.

The Pilot Test

The Diagnostic form was pilot tested in 40 USU classes in fall 2009. The FEC sampled classes offered by all USU colleges and Regional Campus and Distance Education. These classes covered the spectrum of courses offered at USU and are listed in the "Pilot Study Courses" portion of the FEC activities document provided on the FEC website. Only tenured faculty with approval of their department head were invited to participate in the pilot test. Faculty were asked to administer the Diagnostic Form as they would the current USU instrument.

In addition to faculty and administrator participation, students were invited to focus groups to discuss their reactions to the Diagnostic Form. Three student focus groups were held.

The results of the pilot (in the form of the Diagnostic Form reports) were sent early in spring semester to participating faculty and their department heads followed by an online survey. The raw survey results and summary reports are available on the FEC website. After completion of the survey, participants were invited to participate in focus group discussions, one for faculty and one for department heads. A synopsis of focus group discussions is provided on the FEC website.

Roughly half of faculty and department heads who participated in the pilot test completed the online survey. Ten faculty, six department heads, and roughly 20 students participated in focus groups. Some of the most significant findings from those surveys and focus groups are provided below:

Faculty

Important findings from the online survey of faculty participants (n=17) include:

- 77% of faculty survey participants (n=13) said that compared to USU's existing evaluation report, the IDEA class diagnostic report was "valuable or quite valuable," with 18% saying "somewhat valuable" and 6% saying "not valuable." More respondents said that the IDEA report was "quite valuable" when comparing it to USU's current report than when rating it in isolation.
- 77% of faculty participants (n=13) said that overall the IDEA class diagnostic report was "valuable or quite valuable," with 18% saying "somewhat valuable" and 6% "not valuable."
- 71% of faculty participants (n=12) said the evaluation of faculty-declared relevant course objectives was "valuable or quite valuable" and 29% said it was "somewhat valuable."
- 82% of survey faculty participants (n=14) said the relevant course objective choices on the IDEA form "highly or moderately matched" their course objectives and 18% said they "slightly matched."
- 65% of faculty participants (n=11) said the adjusted ratings scores, a feature that adjusts raw ratings according to factors that influence student ratings of instruction, were "valuable or quite valuable," with 29% saying "somewhat valuable" and 6% "not valuable."

Open-ended responses (n= 11) on the online survey indicated:

Positive aspects (n= 4)

- The IDEA instrument includes a focus on key course objectives
- The IDEA instrument can be administered online
- The IDEA form has the ability to add customized questions

Negative aspects (n=7)

- The Diagnostic Form is too long
- The Diagnostic Form and report is too complex/complicated
- The paper-and-pencil Diagnostic Form discourages/lacks the feedback provided through directed student comments

The following trends emerged from the faculty focus group:

Positive aspects

- Averages and adjusts scores
- Researched and validated
- Makes you select relevant objectives
- Results "make you think about teaching"
- Can be administered on line

Negative aspects

- Too long
- Too complex/complicated
- Not all questions asked are relevant
- Lacks opportunity for good comments
- Steep initial learning curve

Department Heads

Some significant findings from the online survey of department heads (n=11) were:

- 82% (n=9) said that compared to USU's existing report, the IDEA reports are: "valuable or quite valuable" and 18% said "somewhat valuable."
- 91% (n=10) said that overall, the IDEA class diagnostic reports are "valuable or quite valuable" and 9% said "somewhat valuable."
- 91% (n=10) said that the evaluation of relevant objectives selected by instructors is "quite valuable or valuable" and 9% said "somewhat valuable."
- 91% (n=10) said relevant objectives "highly matched or moderately matched" their department's learning objectives and 9% said they "slightly matched."
- 82% (n=9) said that as a resource for guidance on teaching improvement, the IDEA reports are "quite valuable or valuable," and 18% said "somewhat valuable."
- 91% (n=10) said that as a resource for departmental discussion and decision making, the IDEA reports are "quite valuable or valuable," and 9% said "somewhat valuable."
- 90% (n=9) said that the information provided by the IDEA report on teaching methods and styles is "valuable or quite valuable," 10% said "somewhat valuable" and 9% had no response.

Open-ended responses (n=7) on the survey indicated:

Positive aspects (n=4)

- The IDEA instrument is normed and allows for real comparisons
- The IDEA instrument can be administered online
- The IDEA instrument includes useful results and tools

Negative aspects (n=4)

- The form is too long/the length of time required for student completion is too long
- The IDEA instrument (form/report) is too complex/complicated
- Not sure IDEA instrument adds much value to USU's current process

The following trends emerged from the faculty focus group:

Positive aspects

- Better psychometric properties
- Valuable to have national norms
- Instructor's ability to select important teaching objectives
- It has better potential because it will give new faculty more data
- Gives more detail about what is actually being done in the class

Negative aspects

- Too long
- Report too complicated and there are too many variables
- Want IDEA to use more defined CIP codes to identify courses
- No question to focus the students written comments

Students

Student data comes from three focus groups, two with ASUSU leadership groups and one from an undergraduate class (Biol 3060).

The trends were:

Positive aspects

- Questions appeared better crafted and more specifically directed at important features of instruction
- Options of questions added by instructor or department is a plus
- Scale (occasionally, almost never, etc.) of Diagnostic Form is better

Negative aspects

- Too long.
- Limited space for open-ended questions in pencil-and-paper form is a drawback

Summary

Faculty, department heads, and students saw advantages of the Diagnostic Form, both when viewed independently and in comparison with the current USU instrument. Many expressed an interest in switching from pencil-and-paper instruments completed in class to online forms administered outside of class. There was some concern about online delivery of course ratings forms leading to a reduction in student response rates. In terms of the IDEA instrument itself, the primary negatives expressed by students, faculty, and department heads were the length of the form completed by students, the complexity of the report delivered to faculty and administrators, and the limited space and lack of direction for open-ended questions.

Committee Recommendations¹

- Adopt the IDEA Center Short Form for Student Ratings of Faculty Instruction as the USU baseline for student ratings of instruction
- Encourage use of the Diagnostic Form for Student Ratings of Faculty Instruction for pre-tenure and pre-terminal rank term appointment faculty who are developing their teaching and encourage its use for all faculty who desire the richest source of information to improve their instruction. Since the Short and Diagnostic Forms provide the same information needed for administrative evaluation, the decision to use the Diagnostic Form should be left to individual faculty.
- Use the scores for Progress on Relevant Objectives, Excellent Teacher, Excellent Course, and Summary Evaluation common to the Short and Diagnostic Forms as the baseline for comparing student ratings of instruction between courses and instructors across USU
- Switch to an online, outside-of-class administration of the ratings forms, and use structural incentives (e.g., early release of grades for completion of the course rating form) to promote student participation and maintain high response rates
- Add USU's current open-ended questions (What aspects of teaching or content of this course do you feel were especially good? What changes could be made to improve the teaching or the content of this course?) to the IDEA instrument
- Encourage colleges, departments, and instructors to formulate and include additional open-ended questions that aid the assessment and improvement of teaching effectiveness
- Provide training in the administration and use of the new ratings instrument while continuing to emphasize that student ratings of instruction is only one component of assessing teaching excellence

Rationale for FEC Committee Recommendations

Short Form versus Diagnostic Form

An often expressed concern about the Diagnostic Form was its length. With 47 multiple choice questions, including many that are a fixed part of the form but not always relevant to the objectives chosen by an instructor, faculty expressed apprehension that students would become tired or frustrated when completing the Diagnostic Form for multiple courses, with negative impacts on the results. The IDEA Center offers a Short Form consisting of 18 questions, of which 17 are identical to those of the Diagnostic Form. The Diagnostic and Short Forms and Reports are available for comparison on the FEC website. The information provided by the instructor for the Short and Diagnostic Forms, including choosing course learning objectives, is identical. The Short Form Report provides all the information of the Diagnostic Report except for recommendations for improved teaching effectiveness. Given the general satisfaction

¹ The Committee met March 9, 2009 with 10 voting members and three visitors (advisors) attending. The vote was 9 to 1 in favor of these recommendations. Two of the non-voting advisors were in favor and one opposed.

with the IDEA report, particularly regarding information about Progress on Relevant Objectives, the committee recommends adopting the Short Form as the USU baseline ratings instrument.

The committee believes that the IDEA Diagnostic Form offers a greater level of specific feedback on instruction, and would be valuable for pre-tenure faculty, lecturers seeking advancement to the Principle Lecturer level, and any faculty seeking guidance on improving teaching effectiveness. If USU chose to allow use of the Short and Diagnostic forms, most students would complete the longer Diagnostic Form for only some of their classes. If educated on the purpose and value of the Diagnostic Form, and the ways it will improve instruction, students are more likely to take the time to complete it thoughtfully. This mixed use of forms at a single institution is not a new idea of the Committee; it is currently employed by other schools that use IDEA Center ratings instruments.

To maintain a uniform standard for evaluation and avoid creating a two-tiered system of administrative evaluation that could be viewed as punitive by faculty, the FEC recommends using only the information common to the Short and Diagnostic Forms for evaluative administrative decisions and having the Diagnostic Form used only at the request of faculty.

Paper-and-Pencil, In-Class Administration versus Online, Outside-of-Class Administration

Prior to the pilot test, the Committee discussed online, outside-of-class administration of the ratings forms instead of our current paper-and-pencil, in-class administration system. We decided to use in-class administration of the paper-and-pencil forms to avoid changing multiple variables during the pilot test. However, in discussions leading to the pilot test many FEC members expressed a preference for ultimate online administration of USU evaluations.

During the pilot test, we were asked by many students, faculty and department heads why online forms were not being used. The request for online forms was strong and unanimous from RCDE faculty who have students at many sites and currently use a mixture of online and paper-based evaluations.

Our recommendation is to implement the IDEA ratings system in an online, out-of-class environment. This system presents at least four advantages: a) students have unlimited time to complete the evaluation; b) online forms allow unlimited space for answering open-ended questions, and many faculty in the pilot test indicated that the response to these questions provides the most valuable information for improvement of teaching; c) online administration frees up valuable class time; and d) online administration removes the significant challenge of distributing, administering, and collecting pencil-and-paper forms from students spread across the State in courses offered by RCDE and reduces the potential for human error inherent in scanning, processing, and analyzing more than 100,000 paper forms annually.

A challenge of online forms is ensuring an acceptable response rate. We propose adapting a system in place at the University of Utah in which students who complete the ratings form have their grades released two to three weeks earlier than those who do not complete the form. Using this system, the University of Utah achieves an average response rate of 72%, very close to the 75% (fall 2008) average response rate achieved at USU using in-class administration of forms.

Open-Ended Questions

A consistent concern expressed about the pencil-and-paper Diagnostic Form was that it only had a small space for open-ended student comments and there was no guidance for the response. Many of the faculty participating in the pilot said that their primary focus on USU's current form are responses to the questions, What aspects of teaching or content of this course do you feel were especially good? and What changes could be made to improve the teaching or content of this course? Both the Short and Diagnostic Forms allow the incorporation of customized questions in both open-ended and multiple choice formats. Based on faculty input, we recommend that the two open-ended questions of the current USU form be added to the online IDEA Center ratings forms. We also encourage academic units and faculty to consider including their own questions tailored to their unique needs in the online forms.

Training

The Committee believes that the IDEA Center ratings instruments are powerful but complex. Some faculty and department heads stated that the learning curve seemed steep and that the Diagnostic Form Report was overly complex. Training is essential in selecting course objectives, understanding the way scores are analyzed and adjusted, and in how to interpret IDEA Center reports. Faculty should also be instructed on the differences between the Short and Diagnostic Forms so they can decide which is best for their needs. Equally important is education to shift some prevailing views of student ratings reports. In focus groups, the Committee found two disturbing trends. Students uniformly expressed the view that many faculty never read or responded to information in the current Teacher/Course Evaluation Report. It is important that faculty, and the university as a whole, communicate to students in words and actions that student ratings of instruction impact teaching improvement. It is also important for faculty and their supervisors to understand that student ratings of instruction are only one part of the evaluation of teaching effectiveness. Creation of reflective teaching portfolios and carefully structured peer observations of teaching are other, equally important components of teaching evaluation that should not be overlooked in a focus on easily compared summary scores.

Implementation Costs

The direct cost of the using the IDEA Center ratings instruments is estimated to ~ \$29,000/year for USU's current number of courses. The two other commercially available ratings instruments tested for reliability and validity have an estimated cost of \$100,000 and \$120,000 annually. According to USU Office of Analysis, Assessment and Accreditation (AAA) figures, the cost of implementing the IDEA Center ratings system represents approximately 0.0002% of the direct cost of instruction (which was more than \$130 million in FY2009). AAA estimates that their direct cost of administering the current ratings system is between \$8,000-\$10,000, and cautions that this calculation does not include any costs that are currently borne by individual departments, colleges or units. For example, it does not include RCDE's cost to ship evaluations to and from remote sites, or the costs of distribution, administration, and collection of forms at the departmental level, nor does it include data-entry or creating PDFs of individual forms at the departmental level.