Governing Faculty Meeting Minutes

January 28, 2016

Happenings Room, 3pm-5pm

In attendance: M. Filter (NUR), M. McFarland (NUR), B. Kupferschmid (NUR), Christina Aplin-Kalisz (NUR), K. Shellenberg (MPA), F. Skarsten (Institutional Analysis), Deb White (OEL), K. Litwin (SOC/ANT/CRJ), S. Drummond-Lewis (SOC/ANT/CRJ), D. Getty (Institutional Analysis), H. Laube (SOC/ANT/CRJ), B. Veillet (PHL), E. Britt (ENG), M. Wolverton (LIB), E. Newberry (LIB), S. Lippert (CVA), K. Shilling (MTH), S. Roach (ENG), L. Smith (PT), B. Rodda (PT), S. Talley (PT), A. Goldberg (PT), B. Freiman (Theater and Dance), C. Larsen (PT), L. Knecht (NUR), M. Burzo (CSEP), C. Tiernan (PT), M. Huang (PT), J. Blackwood (PT), A. Dorfman (ED), D. Dyson (POL), B. Hollie (NUR), G. Hristova (MUS), J. Furman (ENG), M. Andrews (NUR), M. Keiser (NUR), S. Uludag (CSEP), M. Mani (CSEP), Z. Syed (CSEP), J. Song (CMB), Q. Mazumder (CSEP), F. Svoboda (ENG), J. Blumner (ENG), L. Alexander (MUS), B. Jones (NUR), V. Robinson (NUR), S. Rosaen (CVA), J. Schirmer (ENG), A. Lutzker (ECN), C. Douglas (ECN), S. Selig (PHHS), H. Wehbe-Alamah (NUR), N. Gaspar (OEL), A. Artis (PHL)

The meeting was called to order at 3:00pm

1. The minutes from the November 12, 2015 governing faculty meeting were approved.

2. S. Selig gave an overview of the agenda for the meeting. The agenda includes discussing the low response rate of the online course evaluations and options for remedying this, and the change in the charge of the Academic Assessment Committee to reflect the current practice of the university. Evaluations of administrators will be forthcoming in February as per the Faculty Code.

Nick Gaspar from the Office of Extended Learning (OEL) gave a presentation on the online course evaluations. The switch from the paper evaluations to the online system began in 2009 when Ann Arbor announced they were no longer support paper evaluations. The in-class response rates to the paper evaluation were between 60%-70%. Response rates to the online evaluations are in the 40%-50% range. A low point was the 39% response rate in Fall 2014. There was a 3 point increase in Fall 2015 response rate, perhaps in-part due to reminders posted on social media. Recent changes to the online course evaluations that might impact the response rate include a shortened evaluation window, separate evaluations for each instructor in multiple instructor courses, fewer reminders sent to students via email, and not identifying students who have completed an evaluation. Ann Arbor recommends telling students how much faculty value their evaluations, tracking response rates daily, adding a link to the evaluation in the course, including evaluation information in the syllabus, and increasing the evaluation window to help maximize the response rate.

S. Lippert asked whether the OEL website contained dates of the evaluation window for the upcoming semester. Nick replied that it does.
Purdue University researched why the response rates for their online course evaluations were low. The university found that students did not complete an evaluation because they receive too many evaluations, didn’t care about the class, and/or perceived that faculty don’t care about the evaluations. The majority of students said they would complete an evaluation if they received an incentive and/or it was made clear that the instructor cared about their opinions. Purdue University also found that campus-wide advertising, prize drawings, and reducing the survey length did not help the response rate. They found classes that offered incentives had an 85% response rate and a randomized evaluation order presented to students evened-out the response rate across classes. A randomized evaluation order has already been implemented at UM-Flint. UM-Flint sees a substantial drop-off in evaluation completion as the number of evaluations students have to fill-out increases, particularly after the sixth evaluation they receive in a semester.

Recommendations from OEL to increase the response rate include: faculty reconsidering the number of evaluations students are expected to complete, extending the evaluation window from 1 week to 2 weeks, and increasing the number of reminders emailed to students. Another possible recommendation is to allow small incentives for students completing the evaluations.

M. Burzo asked about the faculty reminder rate. Faculty get an email in advance of the evaluations opening, as well as an email on the date the evaluations open.

S. Lippert stated that a potential problem is that there aren’t enough laptop carts for faculty to use for evaluations. Faculty bringing the laptop cart to the classroom for the students to fill out the evaluation in-class has been an effective way to increase the response rate. An extended evaluation window would increase laptop availability for faculty.

S. Rosaen said that a work-around for the laptop carts is for students cab use their smart phones to complete the evaluation in-class as the evaluations are mobile friendly.

A. Artis stated that it is well known that evaluations are biased against women. There might be a similar problem with incentives biasing evaluation data.

D. Dyson stated instructors are incentivized to teach since they are paid even though they love their job. She stated that the pay incentive doesn’t negatively impact her job performance, so why should incentives bias student evaluations? She didn’t notice a difference in her numbers when she gave incentives versus when she didn’t and her response rate was as high as 95% with incentives.

Q. Mazumder said it is problem that some faculty currently give incentives while some don’t, so we need a policy to dictate this. We need to discuss what incentives are allowed.

S. Rosaen said she has tested various incentives over the years and has found that the size of the incentive doesn’t really matter. Any incentive increases the response rate by about the same amount, so incentives can be used without compromising student grades.
H. Laube asked about comments versus numbers when students complete the evaluations using their phones. Does completing the evaluation on a mobile device reduce student comments? S. Rosaen stated that she got a lot of comments when she had students use their phones. H. Laube said that biased results on evaluations for women and minorities is a problem. Also, why not have the evaluations earlier in the semester before students are fatigued at the end of the semester?

C. Aplin-Kalisz asked how incentives were possible if evaluations were anonymous. Nick stated that incentives are often offered based on the total response rate for the class. She stated anonymity might not be possible in lowly enrolled courses in terms of course evaluation completion.

M. Mali said that if incentives included gift certificates and/or money a potential problem is that students who were not attending the class would fill out the survey in order to collect the incentive. This would bias the results. A. Artis disputed this, saying that incentives inflate the numerical results reported on the evaluation, as incentives “prime” students to be more favorable on evaluations than the otherwise would be.

K. Shellenberg said that this inflation is less of a problem than the results from small sample sizes, as these results are not representative of the entire class.

M. Burzo said that his experience was that the numerical results were the same in the online and paper evaluations.

S. Lippert that a problem is that Blackboard doesn’t accurately reflect the students enrolled in the class at evaluation time due to students dropping the class. Nick stated that enrollments are rerun two weeks before the evaluations open to students to address this problem, though it does miss students who petitioned to drop late.

S. Rosaen agreed with K. Shellenberg, especially since evaluations are used for promotion and tenure. A possible solution to the potential bias in evaluations to take peer teaching evaluations more seriously.

G. Hristova asked about giving students early access to grades if they filled out an evaluation. Nick stated that this might be possible, though it would require collaboration with ITS.

M. McFarland stated that an Ann Arbor consultant expressed concern with the evaluation metrics currently used, especially with regards to the Likert scale. Deb White from OEL stated that they would invite a committee review the scale and the questions asked, as students have complained that some questions are repetitive and might not apply to online classes.

Z. Syed said that incentives inflating the numerical scores might actually be moving the reported scores towards the *true* score. A. Artis disputed this idea.

H. Wehbe-Alamah said that right now, students do have incentive to complete the evaluation, either they hate you or love you. If we provide a different incentive, it might induce the students
in the middle, who aren’t currently filling out an evaluation, to fill out an evaluation. This would present a more balanced picture of the instructor’s teaching effectiveness.

K. Shellenberg said that the bias is reduced by increasing the response rate. We need to think about the incentives currently used to increase the response rate. A potential problem is that faculty currently give students A’s in order to favorably increase the response rate.

B. Jones said minority versus non-minority is a problem, which is noticeable when you see two different people teaching the same class. This is troublesome since evaluations are used to make decisions impacting people’s careers.

A. Dorfman said that quantitative measuring, in general, influences what we are studying and how we do the measuring influences our results. This is why we have to use multiple measures to assess teaching effectiveness.

M. McFarland said that the “excellent course” and “excellent teacher” questions are the ones of the most interest, which can be concerning as it is only a partial picture of the evaluation results.

C. Larsen stated that these questions are requested by the Board of Regents and the provost. Another question that should be included to them is how eager students were to take the course. Peer reviews should be included, as well as faculty feedback on how they have responded to these peer reviews to paint a broader picture of teaching effectiveness for promotion and tenure.

M. McFarland said that a problem is how the questions are grouped when they run the statistics, which biases the results.

M. Burzo wondered why results aren’t released until two weeks after the final grades were due. Nick stated this was so that late grade submission isn’t influenced by evaluations.

C. Aplin-Kalisz said she has been doing anonymous midterm evaluations, which have provided useful information to her. She doesn’t like the evaluation question regarding whether or not the course required more effort than the students other courses.

S. Lippert said that other campuses have committees to reevaluate questions and they use student focus groups to see if students understand the questions. Students might not understand academic terminology such as “critical thinking.”

F. Svoboda (English) said that a 30% response rate for a survey is actually pretty good by survey standards. We also need to talk to decision makers about bias in the survey results so that they know that the bias exists so that decisions are made with this in mind.

H. Laube stressed that we need to seriously consider the bias in evaluations.

K. Shellenberg said that in some subjects, we can evaluate how well the instructor did based on how much the students know after they took the course.
K. Litwin talked about how students might be more receptive to information that “looks like them” than someone who doesn’t, which would bias evaluation results.

S. Rosaen said there was a study involving sequenced courses to ascertain whether or not bias exists in evaluations. These studies seem compelling.

S. Selig summarized the discussion by listing the issues brought up by faculty with regard to the course evaluation. Issues raised include bias, broadening the measures we use evaluate teaching, the possibility of using small incentives to increase the response rate, reducing the number of evaluations for courses with multiple evaluations, and increasing the reminders to students during the evaluation window.

V. Robison made a motion to increase the evaluation window to two weeks, seconded by A. Artis.

H. Wehbe-Alamah became the chair of the meeting. She introduced the members of Faculty Council to new faculty members.

H. Laube made a motion that the two week evaluation window include at least three days past the final days of classes, seconded by S. Roach. S. Lippert said that if the evaluation window goes past the final day of classes then this can negatively impact the response rate since faculty aren’t there to remind students to complete the evaluation. S. Roach stated she is in favor of the longer window past the last day of class because an earlier window means that some students complete the evaluation before they complete key portions of the class. S. Lippert stated that a problem is that some classes don’t have a final exam, so the last day of class is the last contact the faculty member has with the students. Deb White stated that 15,000 course enrollments are online, which need to be kept in mind when discussing these issues and motions. E. Newberry wondered if it is possible for a student to amend an evaluation after if it was completed. Nick said that this was not possible. S. Lippert wondered if the evaluation window could differ class-to-class. Nick said that the window has to be the same for the entire campus.

S. Talley said that she likes the two week evaluation window. Students have a lot to do at the end of the semester and a longer window might increase the response rate. Ann Arbor’s response rate seems to support this.

3. H. Wehbe-Alamah presented the change in charge for the Academic Assessment Committee and discussed the rationale for it. S. Rosaen seconded the motion.

4. H. Wehbe-Alamah announced that the administrator surveys will be released in February as per the Code. Administrators to be surveyed this year include the chancellor, vice chancellor for business and finance, and all deans and associate deans.

5. Matters arising: Fawn Skarsten requested that faculty encourage students to fill out the national survey for student engagement. M. McFarland said that it is possible to report the median scores on the course evaluation instead of the mean. The median score is less affected by outliers than the mean. Nick Gaspar can show faculty how to do this. A. Dorfman made an
announcement for an event at the Early Childhood Development Center involving children’s museum activities. H. Wehbe-Alamah requested tea in addition to coffee at the next governing faculty meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:30pm