

Report of the Student Evaluation of Teaching Committee

Submitted to the Curriculum Council: 4/12/2010

Modified based upon recommendations of the Curriculum Council: 4/15/2010

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I. Introduction

In Fall 2009, the curriculum council of the Faculty Senate charged this committee with two tasks. The first task was to survey our peer institutions as to their student evaluation of teaching (SET) practices. The second was the creation of a standardized evaluation instrument that could be used across campus. The survey portion of our charge was completed in early Spring, 2010. The remainder of the Spring semester was spent discussing five major aspects of the creation of a SET instrument: the rationale for SET at SIUE, guidelines for content in a SET instrument, how a SET instrument should be administered, how data from a campus-wide SET instrument should be used, and how the instrument, once created, would be validated over time.

II. Recommendation

Given the issues involved in the creation and validation of such a document, it is the recommendation of this committee that this process would be best continued by an AQIP committee in Fall 2010. It would be chaired by a representative from the provost's office and staffed by representatives from all schools and colleges at SIUE (including the Library and ITS) as well as a representative from the student body. The charge of the committee would be as follows:

1. To create an SET instrument.
2. To create documents detailing the administration of the instrument, the acceptable uses of the data from the instrument, and a framework for continued review of the instrument.
3. To pilot the instrument in Fall 2010 using departments who voluntarily agree to participate.
4. To openly document the progress and goals of the committee on-line for all faculty to observe.

For all parts of the charge, the committee is expected to follow the recommendations for this process as described in the remainder of this document. The results of this process should then be shared with the Faculty Senate and the Curriculum Council in Spring 2011, upon which time a decision can be made as to the full scale implementation of a campus wide SET program. The rationale for the creation of this committee and our recommendations for its work follow.

III. Rationale

Proposing University-wide Student Evaluations of Teaching (SET)

Not surprisingly, there is an extensive body of research regarding the utility of student evaluation of teaching (See Resources & References). When SET instruments are designed in thoughtful ways, tested for reliability and validity, and considered as one source of evidence regarding teaching effectiveness, they can be used to facilitate instructors' efforts to improve the quality of their teaching and to promote student learning.

Student evaluations of teaching are one important source of information as faculty members seek to improve their teaching and encourage student learning. Accordingly, instructors may use SETs for formative assessment or diagnostic purposes (See Resources & References). Faculty members may use student evaluations of teaching to assess the extent to which they are reaching their personal goals for teaching in each class and over time.

SETs may also be used for summative assessment: administrators and promotion/tenure committees may use SET results as one measure of effective teaching. Faculty members can also use systematic reports of student evaluations of teaching as one way to document teaching effectiveness as part of the promotion and tenure process as well as for merit reviews.

Given these purposes, it is critical to have instruments that have been thoughtfully constructed, reviewed, and tested. SETs are, however, only one source of teaching effectiveness. They should be accompanied by additional measures of teaching effectiveness such as teaching portfolios, peer evaluations of teaching, informal feedback from students, etc. Because of their potential contribution to individual faculty member's professional development and potential importance to external constituencies, administrators, and potential peer reviewers, it is essential that the University consider the best ways to use SETs to support faculty development and encourage reflective assessment.

SETs at SIUE – Background and Current Situation

Currently, there are no university-wide mandates regarding the content of SETs or the form in which questions are asked. There are, however, university wide mandates concerning the administration of SETs and the use of the resulting data.

Because there is no mandate on form or content, the form and content of SETs is quite variable at SIUE. There can be wide variation within the Schools/Colleges, units or even departments. For example, within several departments, multiple instruments exist and there is no departmentally mandated set of questions. Faculty members maintain the autonomy to design a set of questions appropriate to their courses. In other departments, faculty members are required to use a uniform instrument but the form contains only qualitative questions. In contrast, some schools/colleges use a standardized form and process.

Rationale for Standard SET

1. Validated Student Evaluation of Teaching Form

The central concern with current student evaluation of teaching practices at SIUE is the potential lack of reliability and validity. Most forms, often developed at the department level, used to evaluate "teaching" have not been validated; that is, there has not been systematic attempts to determine whether they measure the intended concept—effective teaching. Validating a form is very time consuming and complex process that requires appropriate data, time, and professional expertise.

Should this be a concern? Yes. “Student rating forms that have not been constructed according to professional psychometric standards may be unreliable and thus able to be influenced by factors such as popularity, temperature in the classroom, instructor gender or anything else.

Unfortunately, many institutions use student rating forms that have not been constructed and validated using professional psychometric standards. Without rigorous reliability and validity data on such forms, it is impossible to tell for certain what influences the final student rating (Arreola, 2007).” Without such validation, instructors and administrators should use such information with considerable caution.

2. Addressing Faculty Concerns

Several faculty members across the various schools and colleges have confidentially contacted the Provost’s Office within the last three years with concerns about the way SETs are carried out within their department. Concerns have varied from “the SET questions change from semester to semester” which affect the faculty member’s ability to show trend lines in data for mid-tenure and tenure review, to “other colleagues get better evaluations because their questions are worded in a more positive manner”. Some faculty members are genuinely concerned about the disparate standards for effective teaching between individuals and/or departments. These concerns have even entered into faculty grievance complaints. Given the national prevalence of SETs as a measure of teaching effectiveness and their frequent use in tenure, promotion, and annual reviews, it behooves us to be sure that the faculty is provided with a fair and supportive process.

3. Issues Identified through Accreditation

In the 2006 AQIP Quality Check-Up the Higher Learning Commission identified an opportunity for improvement in the area of assessment. The Commission recommended that SIUE take a more “scholarly approach” to assessment measures. Additionally, in the 2007 Retention, Graduation, and Student Success Report the AASCU team found that SIUE could improve decision-making by using validated measures to make “data-driven decisions”. As SIUE moves into the AQIP Strategy Forum in 2010, the development of a validated Student Evaluation of Teaching form used as one source of data for tenure and promotion decisions would show our continuous improvement efforts in this area. It would also show our commitment to the AQIP category of “valuing people” by responding to numerous faculty concerns related to the issue of student evaluation of teaching.

4. Peer Institutions

In Fall 2009, the SET committee conducted a brief survey with 15 peer institutions. Findings from this effort suggest that most peer institutions surveyed (N = 11, or 73.33%) have a university-wide quantitative SET instrument. Of the four without standardized forms, one reported that they currently have a task force exploring it while a second reported repeated but failed attempts at adoption. These results speak to the national trend in assessment towards standardized SETs for an entire university that can provide for greater reliability and validity than instruments designed department by department.

IV. Recommendations for the creation of an SET instrument

Given the wide variety of SET practices currently in use at SIUE, the committee decided that a standardized SET instrument would need to be composed of material that was relevant to all faculties and was short enough that it could be administered in addition to any instruments or procedures currently in use. Based upon this, the committee recommends that the Instrument:

- Be based primarily upon the SIUE ethics of instruction, with the addition of a small number of validated questions (see Feldman (1988, 1989, 2007) for examples) to assess core aspects of instruction not covered by the ethics of instruction.
- Be limited to 8 to 12 standard questions that would be administered to all programs.
- Responses to questions should be provided on a 5 point Likert Scale.
- Individual schools, departments, and instructors should be permitted to add additional questions to the instrument as they see fit.
- A bank of additional, validated questions should be created and made available for departments who wish to add to the instrument.
- Qualitative questions may be added by individual units
- Information about the student (i.e. expected grade, motivation for taking the course, self-reported attendance, self-reported study time outside of class) should be included in the standard form to aid instructors in the interpretation of results.
- Faculty feedback should be sought as to the content of the instrument prior to pilot testing.

V. Recommendations for the Administration of an SET instrument

The committee recommends that existing policy on administration of SET continue to be used with the following additions:

- The policy should be modified to allow for both online and written evaluations.
- No incentive or punishment for student participation should be permitted.

- SETs using paper should be administered during the 14th week of a 16 week semester.
- Online SETs should be made available to students from the 12th to the 14th week of a 16 week semester.
- For the summer semester, both paper and online forms should be made available during the week prior to finals.

VI. Recommendations for the Use of data from an SET instrument

The committee recommends that a statement on the intended use of SET data collected from a standardized instrument be created based on the following guidelines:

- Faculty will be given the results from the standardized SET instruments. An analysis of these results may be included in the candidate's supporting documentation for tenure and promotion (Part III.B.2). Any presentation in annual review materials or promotion/tenure dossiers should be done in accordance with university policy for use. The candidate should also consult college/school/unit and department policies that may be relevant to the presentation of materials and requirements regarding inclusion of SET results.
- SET data may be used by a review body composed of faculty with the intent of ensuring the validity and reliability of the instrument. In this case, identifying information must be removed from the data prior to analysis as much as possible.
- Faculty members should employ multiple methods to evaluate their teaching effectiveness in addition to SETs. Specifically, faculty members, reviewers, and administrators should not use any single indicator as the sole source of teaching effectiveness.
- In the case of SETs specifically, presenters and reviewers should not rely on data from a single question, nor should they rely solely upon a composite or overall score for each faculty member. Teaching effectiveness is multi-dimensional and should be measured accordingly.
- Quantitative results must be presented as either number or % of responses for each choice on each question. Additional representations may be used but may not be required. Evaluators are cautioned to consult experts in the field of statistics of discrete quantities before attempting other analyses and are further cautioned that misleading or out-right erroneous evaluations of this type of data are common.
- Evaluations of teaching are to be used to assess achievement of declared goals. They may not be used for comparisons.
- The Chair and/or other review committee should provide either written or verbal feedback about teaching evaluations.

- No disciplinary action or complaint against faculty beyond annual merit and P&T reviews may be based solely on anonymous evaluation methods.

VII. Recommendations for the continued review of the SET process

Continued review of any SET instrument is vital to ensuring its validity and reliability in a changing environment. It is therefore recommended that following adoption, the instrument be reviewed by a committee of faculty created by the curriculum council of the faculty senate every three years. The committee should include representation from each school, the library, and ITS. Effort should be made to ensure that faculty with relevant statistical and quantitative skills are included. The results of this review should be made public and shared with the faculty senate in aggregate form in order to safeguard the confidentiality of faculty as much as is possible.

Resources:

Carnegie Mellon, University Course Assessment

<http://www.cmu.edu/uca/index.html>

IDEA Paper: Student Ratings of Teaching/ The Research Revisited

http://www.theideacenter.org/sites/default/files/Idea_Paper_32.pdf

Iowa State University, Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching

<http://www.celt.iastate.edu/set/homepage.html>

University of Massachusetts, Office of Academic Planning and Assessment

<http://www.umass.edu/oapa/srti/>

University of Michigan, Office of Evaluations and Examinations

<http://www.umich.edu/%7Eeande/tq/index.htm>

North Carolina State University - Task Force: University-wide Evaluation of Instruction

http://www.ncsu.edu/provost/governance/task_forces/UEI/reports/uei_execsum.htm

University of Oregon – Academic Affairs

<http://academicaffairs.uoregon.edu/content/student-evaluation-teaching-learning-procedure>

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