M E M O R A N D U M

To: Academic Senate

From: Miguel Chuaqui
        Chair, Student Course Feedback Oversight Committee

Subject: 2012-2013 Annual Report

Date: May 13, 2013

During the 2012-2013 academic year, the Student Course Feedback Oversight Committee initiated a review of the new Student Course Feedback online instrument and report, implemented in Spring 2012, in order to assess the extent to which it meets the needs of students, instructors and administrators, and to gather a set of best practices for its use. Upon request by the Academic Senate, the Committee also responded to recommendations for use of student feedback presented on March 4, 2013 to the Academic Senate in a report by the Committee's previous chair, Dr. James Anderson. The Committee had received the first draft of this report in April 2012, and its responses were presented to the Academic Senate at its April 1, 2013 meeting.

In its review of the Student Course Feedback instrument and report, the committee sought input from the department chairs of all course-offering units, as directed by University of Utah Regulations (6-100- Sec. III-N, 1.b.). Through a survey sent out through D-mail (the university mass mailing system) the committee received suggestions from chairs for ways of improving the instrument and report, as well as input regarding the use of student feedback to measure teaching effectiveness at the University of Utah (which is one of the main topics addressed in Dr. Anderson's report). The survey response rate was 16% (13 responses).

•Most respondents identified Student Feedback as one of several sources of information in RPT teaching evaluations. Other sources cited include peer reviews and exit interviews with students.

•Most respondents indicated that Student Feedback carries about a 50% weight in assessing teaching effectiveness, with a high of 90% and a low of 33%, in the survey.

•Most respondents indicated that Student Feedback has some influence on the selection of instructors for different courses, particularly in the case of adjunct instructors, and of instructors for lower division courses.

The responses to the survey also identified concerns and provided several useful recommendations for improving the Student Course Feedback instrument and report. These recommendations as well as the recommendations in Dr. Anderson's report were discussed in the committee, resulting in the following points of agreement that the committee will carry forward as it crafts recommendations for revisions to the Student Feedback instrument, report, and procedures:

•The student perspective is especially important in this Committee. The Committee is committed to finding ways to receive student input. In particular, an informal survey carried out this year by student committee member Brian Van Ausdal, asking for student input regarding questions useful to students, was a step in this direction and it should be part of future Committee discussion.

•The new instrument and report offers several analysis features of interest to students, faculty and administrators. CTLE/SCF should publicize these features as widely as possible to the University community.

•CTLE/SCF should continue to stress to departments that they have flexibility in how they set up their course feedback. For instance, departments can set up evaluations differently for lecture sections and lab sections led by graduate student instructors.

•Given the significant differences between courses of different sizes and levels, it would be useful for the Student Feedback report to show comparisons between courses of similar size and level in addition to comparisons to department or college averages.

•There is general agreement on the committee that early access to grades may lead to hasty consideration of the items on the online questionnaire. It recommends suspending this practice and is considering alternative ways of encouraging student responses.

•The committee is considering changing and/or reducing the number of items on the questionnaire. Some of the suggestions from chairs include creating specific questions that serve the needs of specific university communities, such as students, faculty, and administrators, and simplifying the questions to make the task of filling out the form less onerous. This, in turn, may attenuate the high interrelationships among responses to the current items (or, in some cases, "block rating").

•The committee is developing a set of best practices for the use of comments in instructor and course feedback.

•The committee agreed that student feedback should never be used alone in any type of instructor or course evaluation, and that other methods of evaluation, such as class observations by peer instructors, syllabi review, and assessments of student outcomes should also be used. However, specific recommendations for use of student feedback in RPT and merit reviews are beyond the purview of the Committee.

•The committee agreed that continued in-depth study of student feedback measures, carried out by a team of professionals that report to the committee, could be useful, but it should be carried out after any changes to the student feedback instrument and procedures that the committee is recommending are in place. We believe that such a study would be feasible only after 3 years, but within 5 years. We understand, however, that AVP Amy Wildermuth has begun the task of putting together resources and support for studying student feedback, including how it is used. According to AVP Wildermuth, she plans to work with the committee and CTLE so that the effort will proceed as quickly as is feasible. We are fully supportive of her efforts and look forward to working with her.