

Memorandum

To: Academic Senate Executive Committee
CC: Membership, University Student Course Feedback Oversight Committee
From: Joanne Yaffe, Chairperson
Date: 3/12/2016
Re: Report of Activities and Request for Policy Changes

Report of Committee Activities

I was appointed as chair of the University Student Course Feedback Committee in late fall semester, 2014. At the time I was appointed, the committee, which was established and first populated for the 2011-2012 year, had not met since March 8, 2013. All regular committee members had been replaced, leaving only ex-officio members Ann Darling and Patrick Tripeny and Student Course Feedback Program Manager Adam Halstrom. It was difficult to assemble a committee and difficult to convene the committee. However, the committee met 3 times in spring semester 2015. In those 3 meetings, the committee grappled with trying to understand the mandate of the committee and current issues about the student course feedback instrument, and trying to set an agenda for our work. We were particularly confused about the mandate for the committee, how members were appointed and for how long.

The Committee met once during fall semester 2015 and has met twice this spring. The committee discussions have centered on trying to change the committee into a Standing Committee of the Academic Senate, to decide who should serve on the committee and for how long, and to better define the purpose of the committee. It has not been easy to assemble a quorum for the committee's work, but through the diligence of Adam Halstrom, we assembled the full committee to review final changes for the proposed policy changes which are attached to this cover memo. The proposed changes were unanimously approved by all members of the committee on March 9, 2016.

Proposed Policy Changes

The current committee structure and functions are defined in Policy 6-100: Instruction and Evaluation. Section III N. defines the committee membership as 6 faculty, 4 students, and 3 ex-officio permanent members with full voting rights, including the Associate Dean for General Education (or designee), one representative from the Center for Teaching & Learning Excellence, and the Student Course Feedback Program Manager. Faculty were to be appointed for 2-year terms and could not serve multiple consecutive terms. We are asking that this University committee be changed to a Standing Committee of the Academic Senate. Although the current committee faculty membership is appointed by the Senate's Personnel and Elections Committee and according to existing Policy the committee is required to report to the Senate, there seems to have been a less-than-desirable relationship with the Senate in the committee's five year existence. We believe that having this committee be reconstituted as a standing committee of the Senate will increase the Senate's attention to issues of student course feedback and its relationship to evaluation of curriculum and teaching proficiency.

Reconstituting it as a standing committee of the Senate entails having the committee's membership description be moved out of Policy 6-100 and into Policy 6-002, which governs membership of all of the Senate standing committees. Attached, please find our recommended specific revisions of both Policy 6-100 and Policy 6-002.

We request that four faculty be elected by the Senate (as with all Senate standing committees), rather than merely appointed by the Personnel and Elections Committee. We would like these elected faculty members to be broadly representative of the University, with at least one representative from Health Sciences, at least one representative from career-line (lecturer) faculty, at least one representative of tenure-line faculty, and one faculty member with experience as an academic administrator with responsibilities for reviews of faculty members. The reason for such specification is that the current student course feedback instrument is not being used uniformly across Health Sciences, and it is important for the committee to understand the issues so that the instrument might be adapted for their use. Further, data collected using this instrument and their interpretation are especially important to career-line (lecturer) faculty, representing one of very few measures of their effectiveness as teachers. Although University policies on faculty review standards call for peer-assessment of teaching in addition to the student course feedback instrument, our understanding is that the qualitative comments are sometimes misinterpreted and over-emphasized in the appraisal of teaching proficiency, and the committee believes that having a faculty member with experience as an academic administrator familiar with reviews of faculty members (e.g., for tenure-line faculty, the RPT and post-tenure appraisals) would be useful. The committee would also like elected faculty members to serve three-year terms as typical of most Senate committees (rather than the current two-year terms) and with the possibility of two consecutive terms because the work of the committee is very complex, and by the time committee members understand the tasks before them, they are currently required to step down. We have not specified a term for the Associate Dean for General Education because that person can appoint a designee faculty member in their stead. We recommend that the representatives of the Undergraduate and Graduate Councils be appointed annually—by the respective chairs of each Council, because they have limited terms on the Councils, and it is important that each be a sitting member of that Council during their service on the Committee—to provide ongoing communication between the Council and committee. . Finally, we would like one of the student SAC representatives to be a graduate student, as their concerns are often different from those of undergraduate students.

We are also seeking to change the description of the committee's work. Currently, Policy 6-100 defines the work of the committee as: "The Course Feedback Committee's primary function shall be to develop (and revise as necessary) a standardized "Student Course Feedback Instrument," and a standardized "Course Feedback Report." The Instrument and Report forms shall be designed to be suitable for use in all credit-bearing courses, of both undergraduate and graduate levels." The committee believes that development and revision of instruments should be the work of individuals well-trained in instrument development, survey methods, and program and personnel evaluation in higher education. It seems inappropriate to rely on faculty volunteers to do this sort of work as a committee assignment. However, providing input into evaluation and revision of the instrument does seem like an appropriate role for members of the committee. Further, the committee has questioned whether any one instrument can possibly be applicable to all credit-bearing courses at the graduate and undergraduate levels. The committee would like to explore the possibility of having different instruments, with some common elements, available for different types of courses and educational experiences, ranging from traditional undergraduate lecture/discussion courses, to various supervised internship experiences or independent research mentoring at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Finally, the committee proposes that evaluation be continuous, but that the process of formative and summative evaluation using both quantitative and qualitative methods and leading to implementation of instrument revisions will require a regular four-year cycle. While any interim changes to existing instruments or development of new instruments will need to be presented to the Academic Senate for its approval prior to implementation, regular reports of the full cycle of evaluation would be

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presented about once every four years. In any event, the committee should still be required to report on their activities annually. These changes in committee responsibilities are described in our attached recommended revisions of Policy 6-100 and 6-002.