



**AUGUSTA STATE
UNIVERSITY**

FACULTY POLICIES COMMITTEE

**TO: Bill Reese, Chair
Faculty Policies Committee**

FROM: FPC Subcommittee on Course Evaluation
Tom Crute
Cliff Gardiner, Chair
Pam Hayward
Nabil Ibrahim
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RE: End-of-Year Report

DATE: March 12, 2004

During the fall 2003 semester, the Faculty Policies Subcommittee on Course Evaluations was formed and asked to consider each of the following aspects of the course evaluation process used at the University:

1. possible revision of items in the University-wide course evaluation instrument adopted for use in the year 2000;
2. the appropriateness of statistical data provided to faculty and administrators in evaluation reports;
3. the feasibility of online administration of all course evaluations.

In addressing these issues, the committee met nine times, on the following dates, with occasional additional meetings of smaller groups:

October 23, 2003
November 7, 2003
November 21, 2003
January 30, 2004
February 6, 2004
February 13, 2004
February 20, 2004
February 27, 2004
March 11, 2004

Committee members worked exceptionally well together. Meetings frequently lasted two hours. Our sessions were marked by thoughtful exploration of issues, lively debate, creative problem-solving, and careful attention to detail. We considered ten drafts of the evaluation questionnaire and conducted five pilot tests with students before settling on the final document we present here. The statisticians among us

conducted analyses and prepared written explanations of concepts relevant to our decision-making process to help those of us with less understanding of statistical science. Along the way, we were indebted to Michelle Benedict, who shared with us documents and ideas that explored statistical questions. Her ideas informed several of our discussions and figured prominently in one of our recommendations.

Our revisions of the course evaluation survey instrument were guided by a number of concerns: applicability across a diverse set of disciplines, clarity and conciseness, elimination of ambiguity, improvement in document design, and usefulness for both formative and summative purposes. We were mindful of the impossibility of providing a perfect fit for the many diverse disciplines and courses taught on this campus; we hope that our successes outnumber our shortcomings.

The committee wishes to present the following recommendations:

1. **Evaluation Instrument.** We recommend that the attached revision of the university-wide course evaluation instrument be presented to the faculty for possible adoption and use beginning in the fall semester 2004. The instrument we present has three components:
 - A. Instructions to Be Read Aloud to Students
 - B. Course Evaluation (Sections I - IV, combined into one document) accompanied by Scantron form
 - C. Course Evaluation, Section V (Written Comments) to be distributed separately to students. To further differentiate this section of the evaluation, we recommend that it be reproduced on colored paper. This differentiation will facilitate the separation of documents when evaluations are collected from students.

2. **Statistics.** We recommend that next year's Faculty Policies Committee appoint a new committee to consider which statistical data should be provided to faculty and administrators in course evaluation reports. We further recommend that this committee include statisticians and non-statisticians, faculty and administrators, with broad representation across disciplines in the University.

Comments: The committee concluded that, given our time constraints, we were unable to reach a consensus as to which descriptive statistical data would be most appropriate to report. We agreed that no one measure of central tendency (e.g., mean, median, mode) is best for each and every situation. We also agreed that neither standard deviation nor interquartile range was by itself an adequate representation of variability (spread) of student responses.

Faced with the choice of reporting all of these measures or a select group of them, we were unable to reach a consensus.

Due to the unevenness of understanding of statistics among faculty and administrators, we felt that the former course of action might result in confusion and/or misinterpretation of results. Recognizing the danger of choosing some measures but not others, we decided that the most judicious course of action is to recommend that another committee be formed next year to consider the issue more thoroughly. In the meantime, we believe that the best course is to continue reporting the same statistical data currently reported, with

the exceptions listed in recommendation 3 (below).

3. **Course Evaluation Report. We recommend that the course evaluation report be modified beginning fall semester 2004 in the following ways:**

- A. inclusion of the frequency as well as the percentage of respondents choosing each response for each questionnaire item;
- B. elimination of the “omit #” column, which lacks significant usefulness and appears misleading; and
- C. elimination of the overall mean of student responses which is currently reported at the bottom of the report. This figure is at best meaningless, at worst dangerously misleading.
- D. inclusion of the median and the mode (as well as the arithmetic mean) as measures of central tendency for each item in the evaluation. This was appended to the recommendations by a 6-5 majority of the members of FPC on March 15, 2004.

4. **Training. We recommend that, in accordance with Statute 422.7 of the *Faculty Manual*, training be provided for faculty and administrators in interpreting quantitative evaluation data.**

Comments: To our knowledge, no systematic efforts have been made to provide such training since this statute was passed. We believe that a first step to ensuring that this much-needed training does occur is for the Faculty Policies Committee to address the question of which office is best equipped to coordinate such efforts.

In the course of our deliberations, we also concluded that training should not be limited to periodic instructional sessions. We recommend that “teaching” documents explaining appropriate interpretation of pertinent statistical measures be posted to the University website so as to be readily available to faculty and administrators at all times.

5. **Online evaluation. We recommend that next year’s Faculty Policies Committee revisit the request to consider the feasibility of online administration of course evaluations.**

Comments: Again, this committee did not feel that our time constraints allowed for an adequate analysis of all the issues involved in this request. In the discussions we did have, we agreed that online administration outside of class could save valuable class time and paper. However, we identified several concerns about online administration of course evaluations:

- a. questions about uniformity and ease of student access to computers
- b. questions about sampling problems, e.g.,
 - When students are allowed to evaluate the course outside of class, how many of them will participate?
 - Will students who regard the course positively be equally inclined to go online and participate as students who regard the course negatively? And what about students who are lukewarm?

– If a class has a defined period of access to online evaluation, will differences in the timing of individuals’ participation affect their feedback differentially?

c. concern for anonymity, authenticity, and individuality of respondents

6. **Frequency of Evaluation.** We recommend that Statute 422.1 of the *Faculty Manual* be modified to explain, unambiguously, the frequency of course evaluation across all academic units within the University.

Current wording: “All classes in the fall and spring semesters each year will be evaluated by students.”

Proposed wording: “Each year, every section of every course taught during fall and spring semesters will be evaluated by students.”

7. **Part-Time Faculty.** We recommend that the course evaluation policy for part-time faculty, as set forth in Appendix B (“Augusta State University Handbook for Part-Time Faculty”) of the *Faculty Manual*, be changed so as to be identical to the policy for full-time faculty.

Current wording: “Faculty Evaluations. Faculty evaluations by the students should be anticipated each year (fall semester for even-numbered years, spring semester for odd-numbered years). Evaluation instruments vary by department and/or school, so you should check with your department chair or dean to see how you will be evaluated.”

Proposed wording: “**Course Evaluations.** During fall and spring semesters, every section of each course you teach will be evaluated by students. Check with your department chair or dean to see how this evaluation will be handled.”

We look forward to meeting as a group with the Faculty Policies Committee on Monday, at which time we will be happy to answer any questions the Committee may have.