Senate Ad Hoc Committee on Evaluation and Assessment of Faculty Teaching
Resolution for Faculty Assembly

Background

Fundamentally, education of students is the mission that most transcends all of the various units and campuses of the University of Pittsburgh. While not mandated by the central administration, evaluating classes with student surveys, for example the Office of Measurement and Evaluation of Teaching (OMET) Student Opinion of Teaching Surveys, has been common practice amongst the various units. Additionally, for reporting purposes, the results of these surveys are often summarized by a single question polling students on the “overall teaching effectiveness” of the instructor. These summary numbers are widely used, often in absence of any other data, to evaluate teaching effectiveness of faculty for annual reviews, justification of raise decisions, and evaluation for promotion and tenure.

Student surveys, including OMET surveys, are essentially student satisfaction surveys. Student satisfaction is an important metric that should continue to be monitored. Moreover, there is a recent movement in OMET surveys to consider new questions, such as “advice for fellow students taking the class” to improve and reinforce the value of the feedback to multiple Pitt constituencies, and these are positive developments.

However, there is a growing body of educational assessment literature that highlights problems with using student surveys, regardless of construction and how they are administered, as assessment of teaching effectiveness and student learning. This literature highlights bias in these student teacher assessments due to non-instructional related factors such as gender, race, classroom location, and family name that impact student survey scores. Additionally, the literature also reports there is often a negative correlation between student surveys in prerequisite courses and academic performance in follow-on courses. The Committee on Evaluation and Assessment of Faculty Teaching also felt that students are typically not qualified to comprehensively assess teaching effectiveness. This makes the results of a single polling question on “overall teaching effectiveness” problematic for true evaluation and assessment of teaching effectiveness and student learning.

Resolution

Whereas, either by policy or general practice of the unit, student surveys, including those administered by OMET, serve as the primary or only source of evaluation or assessment of teaching for faculty for the purposes of annual review, salary, and/or promotion and tenure.

Resolved, the Faculty Assembly recommends that the Provost develop a policy to move away from using student surveys (including OMET surveys) as a method for evaluating teaching effectiveness and student learning for the purposes of annual review, raises, promotion, and tenure. Under the advisement of existing or newly formed groups with expertise in education assessment such as the University Center for Teaching and Learning (UCTL), Learning Research & Development Center (LRDC) and Engineering Education Research Center (EERC), campus presidents, deans, and directors of centers are encouraged to seek alternative methods for better assessment and evaluation of faculty teaching for purposes of annual
review, promotion and tenure. Moreover, while student satisfaction of teaching is a reasonable and important criterion to measure through student surveys, should these surveys continue to be used as a part of faculty evaluation processes, such processes should explicitly include recognition of inherent biases that often deflect scores of these surveys including, but not limited to, race, gender, course level (e.g., freshman to senior, graduate, etc.), and intended audience (service course, required major core course, optional elective course). Reasonable and transparent benchmarking of student survey scores at the unit level that considers these biases should also be a priority. Additionally, a unit should not mandate use of OMET surveys if the faculty member chooses to employ defensibly appropriate (e.g., for which peer reviewed literature supports the validity and/or in consultation with the UCTL) alternative quantitative method(s) for assessment of teaching effectiveness.

Further Reading


