

Resolution on On-Line Course Evaluations

WHEREAS, The Academic Senate of Humboldt State University recognizes the importance of maintaining the integrity of data used in class development and improvement, in the Retention, Tenure and Promotion process, and temporary faculty reappointment, and

WHEREAS, The Academic Senate of Humboldt State University recognizes the importance of maintaining student evaluations in a secure environment, in which each student can submit one and only one anonymous course evaluation, and

WHEREAS, the September 2002 *ad hoc* committee recommended to the Joint Council in their report on the Future of Optical Scanning of Course Evaluations and Grade Reports that a) "a coercive approach to increasing student participation in the use of on-line instructor and course evaluations should not be used. (p.3)," and that "Tenured, full professors should be encouraged to use the on-line system. Because they are not in the midst of the RTP process, they can be used to build an experience base of what works and does not ... (p. 4)," and

WHEREAS, Professors Rice and van Duzer have performed a preliminary study involving the quality of the data provided on-line course evaluations, and

WHEREAS, This study indicated that student response rates in on-line evaluations were poor when the release of student's grades were not contingent upon completing an evaluation, and

WHEREAS, The results of student course evaluations are identified in Appendix J as a critical element of evidence of teaching effectiveness and thus play a central role in the Retention, Tenure and Promotion process, be it therefore

RESOLVED, That to ensure fairness, completeness and accuracy, The Academic Senate of Humboldt State University recommends that further study of methods of on-line student evaluations over a representative sample of University courses be completed before the results of such evaluations can be required for purposes of Retention, Tenure, Promotion or temporary faculty reappointment; and be it further

RESOLVED, That this study is also required before on-line evaluations can be made mandatory for the purposes of class development and improvement; and be it further

RESOLVED, That an *ad hoc* committee shall be appointed by the Chair of the Academic Senate and the Vice President of Academic Affairs to complete a study of on-line course evaluations by the end of fall semester 2004; and be it further

RESOLVED, That this study shall identify procedures which meet the following criteria:

- 1) Response rates shall be shown to not differ significantly from the response rates of written evaluations without making the reporting of grades contingent on the submission of evaluation
- 2) Students shall in no way be rewarded or punished for participation or non-participation in evaluations
- 3) The distribution of responses to quantitative evaluation items must be shown to not differ significantly from that of identical written items for the same class and instructor in a representative sample
- 4) Security measures must be shown to ensure that each student in the course can submit no more than one evaluation, and that students not enrolled in a course cannot submit evaluations, and that no student can submit an evaluation for another student
- 5) Anonymity of responses must be maintained when they are reported to department staff and faculty
- 6) Students must have sufficient time to complete their evaluations, but in no case shall a student be permitted to evaluate a course after the due date for grades
- 7) The use of instructional time by the evaluation process shall not on average exceed 30 minutes.

Merry Schellinger

From: Rollin Richmond [rollin@humboldt.edu]

Sent: Friday, April 16, 2004 8:19 AM

To: Sue MacConnie

Cc: Patty Lindley; Merry Schellinger; Mary Greta; Gretchen Kinney Newsom

Subject: Response to resolution 13-03-04

Sue: Please find attached my response to the Senate resolution referenced above. Rollin

Response to Senate Resolution #13-03/04-EP

I am pleased to see that the Senate has begun to address the chaotic state of course evaluations on our campus. I approve of the resolution but urge the Senate to move more quickly on a thorough review of the entire evaluation process on this campus. In particular, I am concerned with the following issues:

- The process and substance of course evaluations vary widely on campus in ways that are likely confusing to students who complete the evaluation instruments as well as faculty, staff and administrators who use this information to evaluate the quality of instruction. This is unfair to our students and our faculty who depend upon these data for just evaluations of the quality of instruction.
- The campus needs to adopt a uniform set of evaluation questions that are applicable to a significant majority of courses that can be augmented by additional questions that may be pertinent to particular disciplines. This evaluation instrument should be largely uniform across campus with the exception of the addition of discipline specific questions.
- The campus needs to adopt a method of recording, archiving and evaluating data from evaluations and developing numerical ratings that allow comparisons of courses and instructors at various academic levels and across disciplines. The results of these analyses should be made widely available to instructors and students.
- Humboldt State University appropriately values the quality of instruction, but this ethic is belied by the wide variations in the ways in which we treat course evaluations. Since the results of course evaluations are a very important tool in the continual effort to improve the quality of instruction, we must develop procedures and policies to ensure the highest quality for the evaluation process. Thus department chairs and departmental personnel committees need to meet at least annually with each faculty member to review information from evaluations and help design programs to improve instruction if needed. This can only be effective if we have campus-wide statistical data for comparison and make those data widely available.

I have consulted with our student leaders and find that they have the following concerns with course evaluations and propose the following:

- In reference to the task force proposed below, the Associated Students should appoint two students with preference given to one undergraduate and one graduate student (particularly those students who have demonstrated an in depth understanding of survey methods, such as psychology, sociology, or education students).

- An additional charge to the task force should include the evaluation of “user-friendly” aspects in relation to online course evaluations. A goal of the investigative committee should include streamlining the process for conducting these evaluations. This would encourage a greater likelihood that students would engage the online evaluations with more enthusiasm and thoughtful feedback. As an example of these difficulties, students now must log on to WebReg, scroll to the bottom of the page, click “Personal Information”, scroll to the bottom of that page, and click “Answer a Survey”. Upon completing a single online evaluation, the student is bounced back to the first webpage, which includes a link to “Personal Information”.

I propose that the Provost and the Senate establish a joint faculty, student and administrative task force to deal quickly and effectively with these issues and to establish the infrastructure needed to meet the requirements summarized above. This group should be asked to consult frequently with the appropriate Senate committees and to prepare a final resolution for action by the Senate no later than the end of the fall semester of 2004.

Rollin C. Richmond
President