

The University of Washington Faculty Council on Instructional Quality

The Faculty Council on Instructional Quality met Tuesday, March 5, 2002, at 12:30 p.m. in 36 Gerberding Hall. Chair Jan Carline presided.

PRESENT: *Professors* Carline, Kyes, McGovern, Simpson
 Ex officio Bridges, Conquest, Jacobson, McCracken
 Guests Diane Behler, James Jiambalvo - Arts and Sciences College Council

ABSENT: *Professors* Bierne, Coutu, Devasia, Hoffer, Mulligan, Reinhall, Wells
 Ex officio Evans, Lewis, Lowell, Pitre, Stromberg, Graff

Jan Carline called the meeting to order at 12:32 p.m.

Agenda

The agenda was approved.

Minutes

The minutes of the February meeting were approved.

Teaching Excellence Visibility

Wayne Jacobson said the Visibility subcommittee has some next steps scheduled, which they will pursue after Spring Break. They have done some promotion through CIDR's Website, including highlighting articles that appear in University Week and other UW publications.

Jacobson said CIDR plans to create a links page or index that will pull together online stories (University Week, etc.) about teaching excellence into one easily accessible resource. This page could be linked to the Teaching Page. He asked members to let him know about any such articles they see online.

Changes to Student Evaluation Information by OEA

Carline said that Nana Lowell, who could not attend this meeting, will report further on the impact of reporting student evaluations to just one decimal place instead of two. He and Lowell have talked to George Bridges and Vice Provost Debra Friedman - neither Friedman nor Bridges found any impediment to implementing the change.

OEA will explain this change on their Website, and will probably implement it in Spring Quarter.

Academic Challenge Discussion

George Bridges, Acting Dean of Arts and Sciences, updated the Council on what has transpired since the group met jointly with the Academic Standards Council to hear Regent William Gates' concerns about academic challenge at the University.

A group of faculty in the Teaching Academy has met to develop a set of principles and standards that would address the challenges Gates before the Councils and the Faculty Senate. That draft document, which was submitted to Brad Holt, Jan Sjøvik and Doug Wadden for review, sets forth some global principles of teaching that could be put into practice by departments and included in merit evaluations. These are very general ideas, which are intended to spark conversation with Councils and perhaps lead to Class C Legislation.

Carline remarked that the draft Bridges shared with him included very general principles of good teaching (e.g., provide a syllabus, assign readings appropriate to the content, etc.). Carline recommended that a statement be added to the draft that teaching methods or content focus at least in part on problem solving.

Bridges agreed, and said his next step will be to circulate the draft to Council members to see what they would like to do with it. This will be a topic of discussion at the next meeting.

Use of Student Evaluations of Teaching

Jim Jiambalvo

Jim Jiambalvo, Accounting Professor in the School of Business, was invited to visit the Council to provide information on the ways Student Evaluations are used in the merit process, and in the promotion and tenure process. To put the discussion into context, Carline said that the Faculty Senate Chair, Brad Holt, has received complaints about the use of student evaluations - the Council on Instructional Quality would like to know more about the ways student evaluations of faculty are used.

Jiambalvo provided a handout that described the evaluation process in the School of Business. For merit, faculty members are evaluated on teaching materials they submit. These can include syllabi, exams, student ratings, awards, lecture notes, letters from students, etc. - anything they think is germane to the evaluation process.

The materials are reviewed by senior faculty on a scale of 1-9; the materials are then forwarded to an advisory committee (in the School of Business, the advisory committee is made up of department chairs) who also rate the materials on a scale of 1-9.

The materials ratings are then weighted to obtain a merit score - the rating is multiplied by .4 for teaching, .4 for research, and .2 for service. These calculations result in a merit score (there is some slight variation in weighting depending upon the faculty member's rank).

"What drives the senior faculty's ratings, in most cases," said Jimabalvo, "are the student ratings." This is also true for Chairs, Jiambalvo added.

Exceptions to this can occur, Jiambalvo said. If a faculty member had received an award for teaching, they would typically get a higher rating. Conversely, if someone who had historically received high student ratings were to receive low ratings for one or two quarters, teaching material would be reviewed to determine whether the faculty member was experimenting with new methods, or whether something else unusual had happened. In these cases, the student ratings would probably be discounted somewhat.

In his 25 years of teaching, Jiambalvo has not seen widespread dissatisfaction with student ratings. If some faculty members are not satisfied, he said, "They don't have anything in mind that they think would be better." Jiambalvo added that he asked the Associate Dean for Faculty in the Business School about this issue and was told there were no complaints about the ratings in the past year.

For purposes of merit, the Business School arrays the ratings and looks for natural breaks - final scores of 6, 6.1, 6.2, and 6.5, for example, might all get the same merit.

A separate committee looks at promotion and tenure. More materials are reviewed, including outside letters, paper, and research materials. In cases where research materials are borderline in either direction, high student ratings scores might put a candidate over the bar, and lower scores might keep them out.

Jiambalvo said it would be helpful to know how the medians for student ratings are calculated - most of his colleagues do not know. Some faculty members believe that a very rigorous course with a small number of students will produce low student ratings; Jiambalvo does not think this is the case. It would be good to clarify this.

Carline asked whether it would disturb the process in the School of Business if only one decimal place is reported on Student Ratings - Jiambalvo said it would be no problem whatsoever.

Carline thanked Jiambalvo for his presentation.

Diana Behler

Diana Behler of the College of Arts and Sciences was invited to visit the Council to provide information on the ways Student Evaluations are used in the merit process, and in the promotion and tenure process, in Arts and Sciences.

The Arts and Sciences process for merit is not as specific as the School of Business, said Behler. It varies from department to department, but student ratings are still brought into the discussion as one element among others. Research still counts more than other factors, but student ratings are taken very seriously, Behler added, with service less so. There is a great deal of flexibility and it varies among departments.

For promotion and tenure decisions, the College Council looks at student evaluations individually and accords them a significant weight, Behler said. Any case that reflects poor teaching will have an adverse effect, or will require that better ratings be obtained before tenure is granted.

Yearly peer evaluations are required for junior faculty; senior faculty must have a peer evaluation every three years. These are taken very seriously.

Randy Kyes asked whether the emphasis on student ratings in terms of merit and promotion is increasing - Behler said that over the last decade she believes the emphasis is increasing. In general, a faculty member who is a fabulous teacher but an inadequate researcher will not be promoted. But teaching scores can "tweak" a borderline case one way or the other. In her opinion, the ratings carry more weight than they did in the past.

Bridges asked whether information could be provided that would help faculty members better interpret the student data. Behler felt there was no problem interpreting what the scores mean, in part because there is a lot of data that has been collected over the years. Peer evaluations are more problematic, for a variety of reasons.

Behler commented that some faculty members feel student evaluations inhibit experimentation in teaching. If that were all that the College Council looked at, Behler said, she would agree. But since all facets of teaching work are reviewed (syllabi, course descriptions, etc.) in peer evaluations, she does not think this is a significant problem in her department. If larger departments do not look as closely at all materials, it may be a problem.

Carline thanked Behler for her presentation.

General discussion

In considering the information presented, Council members were puzzled to hear that faculty members in these two large colleges were not complaining about the use of student evaluations, while the Faculty Senate Chair hears more complaints about the ratings than about anything else. Bridges said that despite this apparent disconnect, the system can be made better. What changes does the Council want to make?

Bridges suggested that the evaluations could be a useful tool for assessing how comfortable minority students feel in the classroom, and wondered what climate issues might surface as a result of different evaluation questions or procedures.

Simpson raised the issue of interpretation of the numbers, especially in arts classes. Are the right questions being asked and, if not, how is this affecting the numbers?

Carline described a cafeteria-style questionnaire system in use at University of Kentucky. This system allows the instructor to select a wide variety of questions to custom-make an evaluation document. But it is important to make a distinction, he added, between student evaluations for merit and promotion and those used for diagnostic purposes.

Jacobson said that the present UW system doesn't ask about innovative practices, unless the faculty member adds his or her own questions to the back of the form.

Bridges commented that the Iowa model, which requires a basic set of questions asked of everyone but that includes a pool of items that are constantly changing, may be something to consider. There is no clear view of what the faculty want, he added - perhaps Nana Lowell could look at other models and make the changes that the Council thinks are right.

Carline agreed that the Council should think seriously about that process, but observed that another question is whether there should be legislation or some kind of directive about how student ratings are to be used. He thinks perhaps a Class C resolution may be in order, to regularize the way the ratings are used.

The flexibility of some of these systems can be very useful, said Carline, but the literature indicates that the generalized measures are more stable - the uniquely-focused items for a specific instance or course may not be stable enough to give a good picture of teaching effectiveness. Bridges commented that OEA does evaluation work for 30 other universities - it might be cumbersome to do too much tweaking of the system.

Carline recommended that the Council take up these matters in Spring Quarter to consider what changes may be reasonable, and whether Class C legislation on the use of ratings seems appropriate.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:40 p.m. *Minutes by Linda Fullerton, Recorder.*