

**The University of Washington
Faculty Council on Instructional Quality**

The Faculty Council on Instructional Quality met Wednesday, December 12, at 10:30 a.m. in 36 Gerberding Hall. Chair Jan Carline presided.

PRESENT: *Professors* Carline, Devasia, Kyes, McGovern, Simpson, Wells

Ex officio Bridges, McCracken (with vote), Wayne Jacobson

ABSENT: *Professors* Bierne, Coutu, Hoffer, Mulligan, Reinhall

Ex officio Chong, Evans, Lewis, Lowell, Pitre, Stromberg

Carline called the meeting to order at 10:35 a.m.

Agenda

The agenda was approved.

Minutes

The minutes of the November meeting were approved.

Faculty Evaluation Concerns (Brad Holt, Faculty Senate Chair)

UW faculty members are evaluated in several ways, including student evaluations. Students rate faculty in various categories; the resulting numeric rating is posted on the Web to aid students in making course selections. Because the numeric rating is easily available, it has become a factor in the faculty evaluation and merit process. Brad Holt said he hears more about this from faculty than he does about anything else.

The use of this student rating system in the faculty evaluation process raises issues - is this the way teaching, tenure, and promotion should be assessed? What are our goals for evaluations?

In a workshop in Fall, 2001, Holt said, administrators were told it was "an absolute mistake" to use the student evaluation numbers as an assessment because this discourages innovation and experimentation on the part of the faculty. What should be used, he said, is the faculty members' response to the ratings.

At present, student rating numbers become part of the Academic Profile and are used in the UW Accountability Plan to assess the teaching quality of the faculty. But is this appropriate? If merit increases depend on high student evaluations, Holt said, most people will do all they can to get high ratings. This can inhibit the usefulness of the ratings as a tool for rigorous feedback on courses and teaching. Should there be different systems for merit evaluation and for student evaluation? What is the best way to accomplish this? It would be possible under the present system, said Holt, to improve both your course and your teaching but receive lower student evaluations.

Holt suggested that FCIQ may want to think about these rating numbers and consider providing some guidelines for what they mean and how they should be used. Is there really any difference in the quality of teaching between a faculty member who is rated and 3.5 and one who is rated a 3.6? Might it not be better to use a "good/outstanding/poor" designation than a number? These ratings are a knotty problem for faculty, and a hot topic Holt would like to see addressed.

In general discussion, Maria Simpson pointed out that student ratings are also averaged and adjusted by several factors, then applied to entire departments. This works to the disadvantage of small departments. Randy Kyes was troubled by the evaluations being made public - the University is not allowed to publicly post student grades, so why is it OK to post evaluations of the faculty that are made part of personnel records? Aren't these evaluations essentially faculty grades? Carline cited a book entitled *Evaluating Faculty Work*, which made a clear distinction between the primary activity of teaching and the product of that activity (merit, evaluations, etc.). In this model, student evaluations are done, but they are a minor part of the whole process. He suggested that student evaluations might be expressed on a three-point scale; e.g., good, acceptable, and non-standard.

Bill McGovern said he'd like to see mid-term, in addition to end-of-course, evaluations. This would make it easier to respond with course improvements and would be a different kind of course evaluation. Holt commented that these would all be ways to help faculty become better teachers - but right now, the only thing that makes it into the Instructional Profile is the core course evaluation number. Is this the best way to evaluate faculty?

George Bridges said that the Office of Educational Assessment not only conducts these student evaluations for the UW, but uses the UW system to do evaluations for 30 other institutions. "By virtue of the fact that we place so much emphasis on student evaluations," Bridges said, "we ignore other areas of content." If the Council is going to focus on the evaluation of teaching, he thinks it should not revise the student evaluation but devise other evaluation methods. From his perspective, knowledge of how individual departments actually use the student evaluations would be very helpful.

Carline asked whether the Council wants to work on this issue; the consensus was yes. It was suggested that Nana Lowell would be able to provide information and data for study.

Academic Challenge Discussion

In a joint meeting November 30, 2001, FCIQ and the Faculty Council on Academic Standards heard Regent William Gates present his views on academic excellence at the University. Gates feels some courses are not challenging enough, and wants more emphasis on writing, speaking, and critical thinking.

In general discussion of the meeting, FCIQ members agreed with Gates on some issues, but some members felt the level of the discussion was too theoretical. What is the prescription for making the improvements Gates would like to see? Randy Kyes said perhaps there should be a writing requirement for all freshman students, but he is not sure this is feasible. Carline said he thinks Gates' concerns are relevant - every University knows some courses are not up to par, but where do you apply pressure to make changes? The Faculty Senate can pass legislation, but this may or may not be effective. And how do you measure performance?

Norma Wells agreed that intellectual challenge is important, because this is common to all fields and carries over into life after the University. Several members endorsed the "W" courses (writing links), in which students use the subject matter of one subject area as the basis for a linked writing course. Kyes felt that this was a valuable way of teaching writing that could be used in any field, and linked with any course.

Course reviews by department committees are important to academic excellence, and can be an important way to weed out unchallenging courses. With thousands of courses taught at the UW, however, finding the time and money to do rigorous course reviews can be difficult.

Bridges said he thought the exchange was good, particularly since the discussion involved a Dean (Robert Crutchfield) asking for help, and because faculty from many different disciplines participated. President McCormick is very engaged with this issue, and Bridges believes the faculty will respond seriously to Gates' concerns. He, Jan Carline, Brad Holt, and Doug Wadden will meet to discuss ways to tackle this issue.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:55. *Minutes by Linda Fullerton, Recorder.*