

The University of Washington Faculty Council on Instructional Quality

The Faculty Council on Instructional Quality met Friday, October 18, at 10:30 a.m. in 36 Gerberding Hall. Chair Jan Carline presided.

PRESENT: *Professors* Carline, Coutu, Devasia, Greenwald, Kyes, McGovern, Nichter, Wenderoth
 Ex officio Bowen, Jacobson, Lewis, Lowell, Clark

ABSENT: *Professors* Copland, Hoffer, Mulligan, Reinhall
 Ex officio Bridges, Conquest, Pitre, Brooks

Carline called the meeting to order at 10:30 a.m.

Synopsis

1. Chair's Welcome/Introductions
2. Approve Agenda/Minutes
4. Recommendations for the Use of Student Evaluations of Teaching
5. Catalyst Portfolio Project - Guests Stygall/Lewis/Farrelly
6. Revision of Autumn Quarter Start Date
7. Proposed Revision of November Meeting Date
8. Voting rights for non-administrative ex-officio members.

Agenda

The agenda was approved.

Minutes

The minutes of the May meeting were approved.

Voting rights for non-administrative ex-officio members

It was moved, seconded, and unanimously passed to grant voting rights to J. Ray Bowen (Emeritus), Susan Clark (ALUW), and Karen Brooks (GPSS). Voting rights for the PSO and ASUW representatives can be revisited when the representatives are appointed.

Recommendations for the Use of Student Evaluations of Teaching

FCIQ spent time last academic year looking at the history and current uses of student evaluations of teaching, with a view to improving the overall evaluation process and correcting any inequities inherent in it.

Because faculty have complained about differences in merit based on very small differences in student ratings, council members invited Jim Jiambalvo, Accounting Professor in the School of Business, and Diane Behler of Arts and Sciences to provide information on the ways student evaluations are used in the merit process, and in the promotion and tenure process, in their respective schools. Both Jiambalvo and Behler agreed that very small differences in student ratings should not be taken into account and – in their schools – are not considered significant.

After investigating, last year's council concluded that there is no point in reporting student evaluations to the second decimal place – there is no difference in instructional quality between a rating of 3.43 and 3.44. In fact, said Nana Lowell, instructional quality should not be judged on less than a difference of .3 or .4.

After further discussion with George Bridges (Dean of Undergraduate Education) and Debra Friedman (Vice Provost), Lowell's office (Office of Educational Assessment) stopped reporting the second decimal place and notified the faculty that differences of as much as .40 are not significant in determining merit, promotion, or tenure.

On the basis of its investigations, the council also developed an 8-point document that outlined some guidelines for the evaluation of teaching. Carline said that the original intent was to include these guidelines in Class C legislation, but the legislation's timing was unfortunate. At the last Senate Executive Council meeting of last year, the SEC was dealing with issues of budget deficits and no pay increases – not a good time to introduce legislation on teaching evaluations.

SEC, said Carline, recommended that the guidelines be disseminated to chairs and deans as recommendations, through the Provost's Office. Vice provost Steven Olswang became very concerned about the cost of implementing the guidelines, and wanted the guidelines were shelved for the time being. In a conversation with Carline after the SEC meeting last year, Olswang said it would be too expensive to pay for as many evaluations as the guidelines specified – he said the University only pays for one evaluation per quarter for assistant professors and one per year for everyone else.

Lowell disagreed with Olswang's statement as related by Carline. She said that the University actually pays for one student evaluation per quarter for everyone, and two for assistant professors. In addition, OEA finds money for evaluations from several other sources and avoids charging the University if it can be avoided.

Carline asked council members what further action they would like to take on the issue of student evaluations. The consensus was that student evaluations should not be used alone, but always in conjunction with collegial (peer) evaluations. Council will continue to push for cultural change by keeping the issue in the forefront of awareness with chairs and deans, and by forwarding the evaluation guidelines to the Provost's Office for distribution to faculty members for their reference in case of need.

Anthony Greenwald commented that the idea that anyone below the ratings median is not a good teacher is false – the quality of teaching at the University is so good that a rating can be in the 20th percentile and still be good teaching. He would like to see this assertion included in a recommendation. Carline asked Greenwald to draft such a recommendation and email it to the Council.

Carline added that the second issue in student evaluations is their being made available on the Web. Many excellent faculty have strenuously objected to this as an invasion of privacy, but the Attorney General has said that it's OK to have this information available to anyone. Lowell advised that the Public Information laws require her office to give course rating information to anyone who asks and who is willing to pay the one-dollar copying cost. Handing this to people in person, however, is not as accessible as having it on the Web. Lowell's office now downloads the ratings data to Computing and Communications, who post it on the Web. Only the first four items on the evaluation are posted, and only the four most recent quarters' ratings are archived on the Web.

Making the information available is a legal requirement, but how the information is made available is a policy decision, said Carline. It might be possible to restrict access to those who have a UWNETID. Tom Lewis suggested that it might be possible to normalize how students look at ratings by putting the ratings on a channel on My UW. Mark Farrelly agreed that this would provide students with "one-stop shopping" for everything they need. Mary Pat Wenderoth agreed, but also wanted to make sure that using My UW or the NETID would solve as many identified problems as possible.

Carline summarized that use of a My UW channel would solve the problem of the "unintentional finder," to which so many faculty members object. Featuring student course ratings on My UW would ensure that students have the access they need to course information and would protect faculty members who feel very exposed when their course ratings published to the world at large. Members of the general public who want the information could still request it from OEA in paper form.

Carline asked that Council members think about this and consider whether access to ratings should be by UWNETID only, by a My UW channel, or remain as they are. Lowell added that Council members may want to do a Google search from the UW homepage on the term "CEC", and see what they find in the way of ratings and faculty information.

Catalyst Portfolio Project

Carline introduced guests Gail Stygall (English) and Mark Farrelly (Educational Technology Development Group), to talk about the Catalyst Portfolio Project.

In the English department, portfolios are used to store expository writing over the life of a student's major. Students write and revise their work online in response to comments from peers and instructors. It's a sensible scheme to evaluate student work, Stygall said. There's time for students to reflect and evaluate, and to select what they consider to be the best of their work and present it as a package. They have to exercise critical faculties in selection and evaluation.

In the Medical School, Carline said, the portfolio can also include video and audio tapes as well as other documents. Students revise and submit work over the entire length of the time they are students. Catalyst is now developing an electronic version of the portfolio, said Carline.

Mark Farrelly described the Catalyst tool as a place to collect, reflect, and present student work. It's a good place to collect metadata – it provides an electronic "box" for everything, and a way for the box owner to say who gets to look at what's in the entire box, or in parts of it. The difference in the Catalyst "box" is the capability for students to reflect on their work and decide what they want to show to peers, advisers, prospective employers, etc.

Instructors can also build portfolio projects for students to do, including multiple drafts and allowing for comments back and forth. When the project is in final form, the student can easily publish it to the Web. It can also be "frozen" during grading periods. Because the pages are database-generated, they don't exist on a server – this avoids privacy problems and gives the student total control of who has access to their work. When the student leaves the UW, they can take the collection with them.

Farrelly said that Catalyst tested the portfolio with more than 3200 Freshman Interest Group members (FIGS), who used the portfolio at orientation to set up reflection pages. After being given a one-page instruction sheet, all 3200 students successfully created the pages with a group total of just eight email requests for help. This is 80% of the freshman class – in four years, virtually everyone on campus will know how to use this tool. The Catalyst tool includes secure offsite storage, and is an excellent way to collect, reflect upon, and presents a comprehensive portfolio of student work.

Carline asked if Council members like to foster or advocate the use of this Catalyst portfolio – in general discussion, Council members favored the idea.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:02. *Minutes by Linda Fullerton, Recorder.*