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UNIVERSITY SENATE

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August 20, 2018

Christopher Walsh
Chair, University Senate
2118 Plant Sciences Building
University of Maryland
College Park, MD 20742

Dear Senate Chair Walsh,

I am writing on behalf of the Academic Procedures & Standards (APAS) Committee in regards to its pending charge on "Student Course Evaluation Improvement Project" (Senate Document #16-17-24). The APAS Committee was charged by the Senate Executive Committee (SEC) with review of this item at its meeting on January 30, 2017 and was given a deadline of December 15, 2017. The SEC granted an extension on its charge until May 1, 2018. I am writing to respectfully request an additional extension for the committee's review of this charge.

The APAS Committee has been working diligently to consider the charge since February, 2017, but this charge has proved to be complex, as the subject matter requires a deeper understanding of the research literature and theoretical constructs in a field that is currently evolving. It also requires consultation and collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders on campus, as student evaluations impact faculty, students, and administrators, and play a role in processes related to personnel decisions, programmatic review, teaching awards, and course selection.

In spring 2017, a subcommittee with members from the APAS Committee and members from the Course Eval Advisory Committee (which includes members from each College who advise IRPA on the development of the system and its uses on campus) was formed to consider the charge in-depth and make recommendations to the APAS Committee. The subcommittee has been meeting regularly since summer 2017, and has reviewed and discussed scholarly research on course evaluations; considered the appropriate purposes for course evaluations as indicated in scholarly research; discussed how to ensure that administrative personnel needs are being met while addressing student desires for transparency; learned about new efforts to measure course and teaching effectiveness through discussions with the Associate Provost for Faculty Affairs and representatives of the Teaching and Learning Transformation Center (TLTC); and reviewed research conducted by the Office of Institutional Research, Planning, and Assessment (IRPA) on UMD's course evaluation system. The subcommittee has gathered initial feedback from stakeholders on their needs related to course evaluations through discussions with the Undergraduate Academic Programs (UGAP) Committee, the Council of Associate Deans for Faculty Affairs (CADFA), the Senate Student Affairs Committee, and a focus group of student Senators and committee members.

The subcommittee has been working this summer to develop draft recommendations for consideration by the APAS Committee in fall 2018. The APAS Committee will need time to

solicit feedback on the subcommittee's draft recommendations from key stakeholders, and will need to refine the recommendations based on the feedback it receives. It will then make a final report to the SEC on its recommendations.

Because of the complex nature of the charge and the necessity of ensuring stakeholder feedback in the process of developing recommendations, we respectfully request an extension until March 30, 2019. We hope to complete our work prior to that point, and will submit our recommendations as soon as possible. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Thomas D. Cohen
Chair, University Senate Academic Procedures & Standards (APAS) Committee

Enclosure(s): Charge from the SEC, dated February 3, 2017.

TDC/seh

Date:	February 3, 2017
To:	Philip Evers Chair, Academic Procedures & Standards
From:	Jordan A. Goodman Chair, University Senate
Subject:	Student Course Evaluation Improvement Project
Senate Document #:	16-17-24
Deadline:	December 15, 2017

The Senate Executive Committee (SEC) requests that the Academic Procedures & Standards Committee review the attached proposal that requests a review of the University's student course evaluation system and assess whether changes are needed.

Specifically, we ask that you:

1. Review the report and recommendations of the Task Force on Course Evaluations and Teaching (Senate Doc. No. 02-03-39)

2. Review the Re-evaluation of the Student Teacher Evaluations at UMD (Senate Doc. No. 10-11-06)

3. Review evidence-based best practices regarding student course evaluation systems and procedures at peer institutions and other Big 10 institutions.

4. Consider current scholarship related to course assessment.

5. Consult with various campus stakeholders (e.g., faculty, students, advisors, departmental and college leadership) to better understand their perspectives on current needs, frustrations, and points of satisfaction with the current evaluation process.

6. Consult with a representative from the Teaching and Learning Transformation Center.

7. Consult with a representative of the Office of Institutional Research, Planning, and Assessment (IRPA).

8. Consult with the University's Office of General Counsel on any proposed changes.

9. If appropriate, recommend whether the existing evaluation system including questions and processes related student evaluations should be revised and submit recommended revisions for Senate consideration.

10. If appropriate, recommend an evaluation strategy that utilizes incremental and comparative studies of any necessary changes to the student evaluation system in order to facilitate broad implementation.

We ask that you submit your report and recommendations to the Senate Office no later than December 15, 2017. If you have any questions or need assistance, please contact Reka Montfort in the Senate Office at 301-405-5804 or reka@umd.edu.

Attachment

JAG/rm

University Senate

PROPOSAL FORM

Name:	Benjamin Bederson & Alice Donlan
Date:	January 19, 2017
Title of Proposal:	Student Course Evaluation Improvement Project
Phone Number:	301-405-3394
Email Address:	bederson@umd.edu; adonlan@umd.edu
Campus Address:	4120 McKeldin Library
Unit/Department/College:	Teaching and Learning Transformation Center (TLTC)
Constituency (faculty, staff, undergraduate, graduate):	Faculty, staff
Description of issue/concern/policy in question:	Over ten years ago, the University of Maryland instituted student course evaluations on campus based on work from the May 2004 report to the Senate from the Task Force on Course Evaluations and Teaching (Senate document #02-03-39) which preceded Senate bill 10-11-06. There were 4 primary purposes of these evaluations articulated in the 2005 Final Report:

  a. Formative evaluation: to provide diagnostic feedback to faculty for the improvement of teaching
  b. Summative evaluation: to provide one measure of teaching effectiveness for use in the APT and post tenure review processes and in annual productivity reviews
  c. Informative evaluation: to provide information to students for their use in the selection of courses and instructors
  d. Outcome evaluation: for the purposes of documenting student learning.

The Task Force outlined several recommendations to aid in the pursuit of these four purposes, including a recommendation that the University have a university-wide requirement for student evaluations in all undergraduate and graduate courses.

Then, in 2010, the SEC received a proposal requesting a review of the current processes for course evaluations and the APAS Committee was tasked with reviewing the course evaluation system and considering whether it was consistent with the intent of the earlier Senate actions. The resulting Senate bill #10-11-06 recommended a

	few changes to the course evaluations system, including continued oversight of the CourseEvalUM system by a shared governance body, the development of unit-specific questions, and renewed consideration of a few specific issues, including how to better meet student needs through the course evaluations, how to educate students on the importance of civility in responses, and what efforts need to be made to ensure that APT dossiers include diverse documentation of teaching effectiveness.
	While the first instantiation of course evaluations made considerable progress, future efforts can build off of these recommendations to incorporate them into practice. We believe more can be done to improve the content and process of course evaluations to make the process more useful to campus stakeholders.
	Three concerns make this proposal particularly timely. First, the current system asks a parallel set of questions for student viewing, and personnel decisions, doubling the length of the survey instead of using questions for multiple-purposes. Second, principal components analysis of current evaluation data has shown that the current questions measure one overarching factor of course satisfaction, as opposed to measuring multiple, theoretically-grounded education constructs as it was originally designed to do. Third, recent research has identified significant bias in most student course evaluations that disadvantage female, ethnic minority, and other groups of instructors.
Description of action/changes you would like to see implemented and why:	We propose a process to evaluate and revise the current questions and procedures for course evaluations. In particular, we recommend designing the course evaluation to measure four pillars of effective education that comes from the education scholarly literature: classroom climate, course content, teaching practices, and assessment. ● **Classroom Climate:** Is the classroom environment constructed by the instructor inclusive and supportive of learning? ● **Course Content:** Is the content up-to-date, appropriate for the level of the course, and relevant for learners? ● **Teaching Practices:** Does the instructor include evidence-based teaching practices, such as providing timely feedback, scaffolding new information on to prior knowledge, and incorporating active learning assignments? ● **Assessment:** Are the assessments of learning (e.g., tests, quizzes, graded assignments) valid metrics of learning outcomes?

| | Structuring the evaluation around these constructs will more effectively address the four stated purposes of course evaluations.

We also anticipate that asking students about concrete classroom activities and practices instead of ambiguous questions about course satisfaction will serve to reduce bias. |
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| **Suggestions for how your proposal could be put into practice:** | We recommend that the group tasked with addressing this issue perform several activities by first consulting with multiple campus stakeholders (e.g., faculty, departmental and college leadership, students, student leaders, etc.) to understand current needs, frustrations, and points of satisfaction with the current evaluation process. We recommend working closely with the Teaching and Learning Transformation Center (that has performed a preliminary review of other Big 10 school practices and scholarship) as well as IRPA to improve the process of course evaluation. They should also evaluate the best practices of other institutions and the current scholarship on course evaluations. The group should make recommendations to revise the evaluation questions and processes based on what it learns about campus needs and evidence-based best practices. We would suggest that the committee should develop its recommendation through incremental and comparative studies, so that any changes are well understood before being broadly implemented. The University could enact an experimental process that might include, for example, including new and old questions in the same class to compare them directly. |
| **Additional Information:** | |

Please send your completed form and any supporting documents to senate-admin@umd.edu
or University of Maryland Senate Office, 1100 Marie Mount Hall,
College Park, MD 20742-7541. Thank you!