

Report of the FSU Teaching Evaluation Committee

10 April 2018

Members for 2017–2018, as posted at

<http://facsenate.fsu.edu/standing-faculty-senate-committees/teaching-evaluation-committee>

Jon Ahlquist, Arts and Sciences (chair)

Christine Andrews-Larsen, Education

Lynne Hinnant, Communication and Information

Elizabeth Jakubowski, Education

Tom Keller, Arts and Sciences

Joe Kraus, Music

Rhea Lathan, Arts and Sciences

Ashok Srinivasan, Arts and Sciences (Left FSU at the end of Fall 2017)

Candace Ward, Arts and Sciences

Ex Officio members for 2017–2018:

Janet Kistner, Vice President for Faculty Development and Advancement

Robby Fuselier, Coordinator of Instructional Development

Mike Straszewski, Coordinator of Assessment Services

Committee comments summarized by Jon Ahlquist (chair) and reviewed by the committee.

We met by creating a list of discussion questions online at Canvas under Org: Teaching Evaluation Committee. Committee members then responded by typing comments, so we have a written record of all comments.

The first discussion topic was the only topic we were assigned to consider. Jon Ahlquist (chair) added discussion topics 2–5. Lynne Hinnant added topic 6.

Discussion Topic 1: Should course evaluations be “online only” or “online or on paper at the discretion of the instructor”?

Committee consensus favored “online only” for several reasons:

- 1) It does not use class time and reaches everyone in the class, avoiding the possibility of someone being sick on the day chosen for a course evaluation on paper.
- 2) Writing course evaluation comments on paper in small classes can be intimidating, because the instructor may identify the student's handwriting, which could have repercussions in a later course. Comments typed online are more anonymous. Michael Straszewski,

Evaluation/Scanning Supervisor, who is on our committee, said that FSU could probably lower the minimum number of students in an evaluated course to three from the current value of five/ten for graduate/undergraduate courses if online evaluations were used because there is no handwriting to identify.

3) Mike Straszewski, Evaluation/Scanning Supervisor, said that scanning the paper evaluation forms requires extra personnel because the paper forms reach the scanning center at the busiest time of the semester, coming at the same time as end-of-term unit exams and comprehensive final exams. An online-only teacher evaluation would be easier to administer.

4) Response rates at FSU for Fall 2017 were comparable for online (64%) versus paper (66%).

Committee members did express concerns about “online only” evaluations, though. Joe Kraus (Music) experienced a roughly 30% online response rate, possibly because of the large number of performances that music students must attend or participate in at the end of the semester. Christine Andrews-Larson (Education) mentioned one solution to the online response rate. San Diego State University blocks access to a course’s semester grade until a student completes the course’s online evaluation.

Another disadvantage of online evaluations is that students are not evaluating the course at the same time, hence at different stages of the course.

Discussion Topic 2: Should teaching evaluation forms include an option to nominate an instructor for a teaching award?

Only three committee members commented on this topic, but all responded in favor of the suggestion. Because this would likely increase the number of teaching nominations, it should require a certain fraction of the class to trigger an official teaching award nomination.

Discussion Topic 3: Should we revise any of the questions on the teaching evaluation?

No one suggested any modification of the current evaluation questions.

Discussion Topic 4: Can we identify instructors who have made a difference one or more semesters after a course is over?

Only three committee members commented on this topic, but all three thought this would be a good idea. Thomas Keller (Arts and Sciences) noted that the senior exit survey is the natural place to collect this information.

Discussion Topic 5: Should instructors have an informal mid-term evaluation?

As chair, I added this topic because no university would dream of waiting until after a course is over before giving students an evaluation of their performance, but we give no feedback to instructors until the semester is over, and it is too late to amend or improve a course. Christine Andrews-Larsen (Education) wrote: I always do a mid-semester evaluation with three questions (and I think both I and my students find it helpful):

1. What is one thing about the course you would keep the same?
2. What is one thing about the course the instructor could change to better support your learning?
3. What is one thing YOU could change to improve your learning in the course?

The two people who commented on this thought it was a good idea that could be implemented either online or through a quick in-class survey.

Discussion Topic 6: Required evaluations for online courses

Two committee members, Lynne Hinnant (Communication and Information) and Robby Fuselier (Coordinator of Instructional Development) attended a Distance Learning Committee (DLC) meeting. There, the issue came up that currently instructors teaching online courses can opt out of student teaching evaluations. Specifically, the course evaluation policy (https://distance.fsu.edu/docs/admin_docs/CourseEvaluationPolicy.pdf) says: [Begin quote]

1. All courses must be evaluated, with the following exceptions.
 - a. Course type: Dissertation, thesis, internship, individual instruction, independent study, or practicum.
 - b. Term: Summer
 - c. Course format: Distance learning, online, hybrid, or field work.
 - d. Enrollment: Fewer than 10 for undergraduate courses and less than 5 for graduate courses; course evaluations may not be ordered for sections with enrollment fewer than 5 unless sections are combined for evaluation to result in a total enrollment of 5 or greater.
 - e. Teaching Load: Less than 25% for courses taught by multiple instructors.

[End quote]

Lynne Hinnant (Communication and Information) wrote: “The DLC has asked us to look at this, in part, in response to concerns Liz Jakubowski has raised concerning what constitutes appropriate student contact hours in online courses (which the DLC is currently addressing).” Only Joe Kraus (Music) commented on this, and he agreed. As chair, I personally would re-examine ALL the exceptions. For example, why should summer courses (subpoint b) be automatically exempt? Why should ANY of the courses in subpoint c be automatically exempt?