

Course and Teaching Evaluation at Temple University: A White Paper with Recommendations

Faculty Senate Student Feedback Forms Committee

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Executive Summary

The Course and Teaching Evaluation Committee has previously considered, evaluated, recommended and implemented a number of changes to the old Course and Teacher Evaluation (CATE) system and forms consistent with the university's policy on course evaluation. (See

http://policies.temple.edu/getdoc.asp?policy_no=02.78.14 .)

- CATE's were renamed Student Feedback Forms (SFFs) to convey the committee's strong belief that student reports on teaching should be only one component of a comprehensive plan for assessing teaching, at the individual, departmental, and school or college level.
- The old, single CATE form was replaced by a revised set of four Student Feedback Forms (SFFs): one for single-instructor classes (S1); one for labs (L1); one for performance or studio courses (P1); and one for recitations (R1).
- SFF instructor reports replaced the percentile rankings of the CATE system with three broad levels: a U, M, L rating system, for upper, middle and lower.
- SFF instructor reports include mean scores but now reported only to one (1) decimal point.
- The six (6) open-ended or written-response CATE questions were condensed to three (3) on the SFF form.
- Following careful statistical analysis and review, some CATE questions in the quantitative sections were deleted from the SFF; others were reworded and re-ordered.

Following examination of a year-long pilot of administering online SFFs, the SFF Committee has continued its review of issues pertaining to teaching assessment using SFFs. The committee makes the following recommendations:

- 1. Based upon the results of the two semester pilot surveys and consideration of all the issues outlined above the SFF committee recommends that the university move to make the university Student Feedback Form system all-online by extending the e-SFF process to all instructors of all ranks effective for the Spring semester 2012. The committee recognizes that – at least in the short term - there will be very specific pedagogically driven exceptions to this e-SFF policy for courses that utilize multiple instructors during the course.**
- 2. The SFF committee recommends that students be given access to selected quantitative data for responses to four SFF evaluation items, using TUPortal or some other secure, intranet solution. Open-ended comments should not be included. During their first semester at Temple, students would be given access to these SFF data. For each subsequent semester students would have to “earn” continued access to SFF data by completing all of their own online SFF forms.**
- 3. The use of CATES/SFF was originally limited to classes of eight (8) or more students. The committee recommends that, with the move to online SFFs, SFFs be used for almost all classes regardless of enrollment. However, some practica, directed readings or research courses, dissertation prep., independent study and performance instruction courses, typically with one student registration, should be excluded. (Many of those courses can be identified by the specialized course numbers. Those courses would need to use some alternative type of assessment rather than SFFs.)**

The SFF committee further recommends a more holistic approach to evaluating teaching effectiveness at Temple, regardless of class size, and suggests that Temple establish strong processes, in each department, to ensure the quality and use of two key measures in addition to the SFF: standards-based peer review and instructor self-evaluation demonstrated in teaching portfolios.

- 4. The SFF Committee recommends that a common template be used for the presentation of SFF data in matters of merit, promotion and tenure or rehire.**

Background

Several of the university’s schools, colleges and departments have an extensive history of assessing teaching using their own survey designs. In the 1960s and into the 70s, students from various schools and colleges sponsored and published their own teaching assessments surveys. In 1972 the university introduced the Faculty and Course Evaluation (FACE), which was initially required and subsequently optional. This method of assessment lasted until, in AY 2000-01, a Task Force on Course and Teaching Evaluation was convened to study national models, to identify best practices and to develop recommendations on a new, common evaluation form. The task force completed its work in October 2001 and a pilot program was implemented.

Also in AY 2001-02, the Provost and the Faculty Senate formed a Course and Teaching Evaluation Oversight Committee (CATE-OC) to create the university-wide instrument—and the reports and logistical procedures going forward. The Committee had a three-year charge to review the progress and effectiveness of the program. From its earliest days, both the Task Force and the CATE-OC were careful to articulate the view that the student forms being developed should be but one of a number of assessments of teaching and student learning. Other methods might include peer visits, teaching portfolios, and specially-designed, discipline-specific assessment tools.

In fall 2002 the president required that all courses (professional, undergraduate and graduate) be evaluated using a standard form. Courses with fewer than eight students needed to be evaluated in an alternate method that preserved essential anonymity of the teaching evaluation. This decision led to the university's policy on course and teaching evaluation (http://policies.temple.edu/getdoc.asp?policy_no=02.78.14).

At the direction of the CATE Oversight Committee, a working group designed specifications for the AY 2002-03 CATE form and for reporting requirements and logistics. A Health Science group recommended the addition of a multi-instructor form, to accommodate the many courses taught at HSC (and elsewhere) that have more than one instructor. A vendor was hired to handle production of the single and multi-instructor forms, scoring, electronic storage, and generation of reports—and to adapt the common form for use in online course settings.

Since AY 2004-05 the CATE-OC's charge was renewed and the logistics of processing approximately 250,000 CATE forms per year and the task of generating reports were taken on by the university's Measurement and Research Center (MARC).

Student Feedback Forms (SFFs): Phase 1 Changes

In 2007 Provost Staino-Coico and Faculty Senate President Robert Aiken charged a joint faculty and staff committee on Course and Teaching Evaluation, chaired by the Senior Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies, to review the whole CATE process, including the forms, reports and the use of CATE data--and to continue work on improving the approaches to assessment of teaching at all levels.

The CATE-OC was reconvened and worked extensively during the 2007-08 academic year to revise the existing course and teaching evaluation forms (CATEs) and instructor reports. The committee reviewed evaluation data, considered a broad range of analyses and met with faculty in an open forum in spring 2008 to receive comments on the evaluation forms and processes. The Faculty Senate Steering Committee and the Educational Programs and Policies Committee (EPPC) of the faculty senate reviewed the committee's recommendations in the spring of 2009. As a result of this review process, the university introduced in the 2008-09 academic year a number of changes to the CATE-SFF program:

- The committee intentionally renamed the forms from Course and Teaching Evaluations (CATEs) to Student Feedback Forms (SFFs) to convey the committee's strong belief that student reports on teaching should be only one component of a comprehensive plan for assessing teaching, at the individual, departmental, and school or college level. Peer review and class visits, teaching portfolios, faculty statements about their pedagogical goals and techniques—and other

assessment approaches should be regularly used in the evaluation of teaching, along with the SFFs

- The old single CATE form was replaced by a revised set of four Student Feedback Forms (SFFs) - one for single-instructor classes (S1); one for labs (L1); one for performance or studio courses (P1); and one for recitations (R1).
- The SFF instructor reports replaced the percentile rankings of the CATE system with three broad levels: a U, M, L rating system, for upper, middle and lower. For each rated item, if more than 50% of respondents rate the instructor in the 'SA' [strongly agree] category, then the classification for that item is 'U'; if more than 20% of respondents rate the instructor in the 'D' or 'SD' [strongly disagree] category, then the classification for that item is 'L'. All other cases are classified as 'M'. In general this classification creates a university wide distribution where approximately 45% of faculty are rated 'U', 45% are rated 'M' and 10% are rated 'L'. In the new SFF instructor reports, the mean scores are retained, but they are now reported only to one (1) decimal point.
- The open-ended questions on the CATE form were condensed from six to three in order to encourage students to write fuller, more thoughtful responses. One of the questions invites students to respond to aspects of the course that "contributed most to your learning."
- Several closed ended questions were retained from CATE forms, so that some longitudinal perspective on teaching at Temple will be possible – e.g. "The instructor taught this course well" and "I learned a great deal in this course".
- Other closed ended CATE questions were deleted or reworded – e.g. the CATE question "The instructor consistently started and ended class on time" was replaced by SFF's "The instructor was conscientious in meeting class and office hour responsibilities."—or "in meeting rehearsal/studio and office hour responsibilities" in the Performance version (P1) of the SFF.
- The multi-instructor form was redesigned to allow a comment section both for the course and for each instructor – an improvement over the CATE format that allowed for only one response.

Instructor reports for the Student Feedback Forms (SFFs) from the AY 2008-09 semesters and summer sessions are available in electronic form via a secure site on the Temple Portal (TUportal). While 2008-09 was the first AY for the SFFs, e-copies of prior CATE instructor reports (dating back to fall 2005) are also all together on this site. The CATE-OC felt this to be a convenience to faculty who need handy copies of their SFFs/CATEs for merit, promotion or tenure reviews—or in the case of adjunct faculty, rehiring reviews. The SFF link on TUportal also provides answers to frequently asked questions, a short guide on interpreting SFF or CATE reports, and links to resources in the Teaching and Learning Center.

Student Feedback Forms (SFFs): Phase 2 Changes

The CATE-OC continued its work throughout AY 2009-10 developing recommendations for the provost on future developments for SFFs and on course and teaching evaluation more generally at Temple. The committee worked specifically to look at several key issues:

1. Recommendations for the use of online or paper administration of the SFF.
2. Recommended strategies and formats for distributing summary and other SFF results broadly to students, faculty and administrators.
3. Recommendations for alternate teaching assessments, especially for small classes ($n < 8$), and for assessments to supplement SFFs in matters of merit, promotion and tenure or rehire.
4. Development of a user-friendly template to organize the presentation of individual faculty data from SFFs for use in matters of merit, promotion and tenure or rehire.

1. The use of online or paper administration of the SFF

In late spring 2009, EPPC of the Faculty Senate requested that CATE-OC and the Undergraduate Studies Office work on a pilot project for increasing the scope of an online SFF. Initially, the Dean of the School of Communication and Theater volunteered her school for a pilot test of an online SFF system. Additional offers were made from several other schools.

The original procedure was to request individual faculty volunteers from the participating schools and colleges. However, discussions with Faculty Senate President Paul LaFollette and members of the Faculty Senate Steering Committee in fall 2010 raised concerns that an experimental pilot involving unknown consequences for student feedback was likely inappropriate for tenure track and non-tenure track faculty. Accordingly, a last minute change in protocol resulted in a call for volunteers to all tenured faculty, all graduate student, primary instructors and all adjuncts in those schools and colleges to participate in the pilot study. Online SFF's were already in use for instructors in all online courses.

During fall semester 2010 electronic SFF's were completed in 703 course sections (11%) out of a total of 6405 sections. The results of the pilot (Tables 1 and 2) were examined by Institutional Research and the results suggested two major findings:

1. Comparison of response rates for online and paper modes of administration showed that overall, the response rate by section of students completing SFF forms declined from around 79% for paper to 44% for online. The online response rate is comparable with that found at several other institutions (e.g. University of Maryland) that employ online administration for teaching assessment.
2. Using a matched sample comparison of paper versus online results (comparing online results for an instructor who volunteered to participate in the online assessment during fall 2010 with the results from paper administration for the same instructor teaching the same course either during the fall 2010 or the most recent prior semester) the results show that of the 45 paired comparisons, four (4) exhibit a statistically significant difference – with three of the four differences indicating a more positive result from the online mode.

Based on this review of data the committee recommended that the university continue with an expanded online pilot in spring 2011. In addition, because the results did not indicate any significant change in the type of student response from the online SFFs, the committee recommended that all faculty other than pre-tenure be provided the opportunity to volunteer to participate in an expanded spring 2011 semester pilot.

During spring 2011 semester electronic SFF's were completed in 765 course sections (16%) out of a total of 4810 sections. The results of the pilot (Tables 3 and 4) were again analyzed by Institutional Research, and the results confirmed the fall 2010 findings:

1. The overall response rate declined from around 77% for paper to 36% for online – a lower rate for online SFF's than was found during the fall pilot.
2. Using the same matched sample comparison of paper versus online results the results show that of the 45 paired comparisons, one (1) exhibited a statistically significant difference – a more positive result from the paper mode.

The results for the fall and spring pilots were reviewed by the committee and careful consideration given to several key issues in the paper versus online debate:

- i. Concern that average scores might decrease because all enrolled students will have an opportunity to submit SFFs, not just those in class on a select day. Underlying this concern is an assumption that students who do not regularly attend class are more likely to rate instructors or courses negatively. Accompanying the concern is an expectation that dissatisfied or disengaged students will not only be more likely to submit ratings online, but that those students will have more opportunities to evaluate the course and instructor than they do when the only opportunity to evaluate using paper SRTs depends on their presence in class. The results of the fall and spring pilot studies found no meaningful differences between the delivery mechanism and the students' ratings
- ii. Concern that response rates will decrease when SFF's are administered online – a result confirmed by the fall and spring pilots. Indeed, it was recognized that online responses during the pilot project might have been artificially high because the faculty participated voluntarily and might have created a high awareness among their students and thereby inflated the response rate. Possible factors in the lower online response rates would include:
 - a. Students do not want to make the effort to complete the SFF's on their own time outside of class. Without the peer pressure of other students completing the SFF's in class, it is easier for students to opt out of the SFF process.
 - b. Because of the split mode – paper versus online – it was not possible to provide multi-media communication to students to inform/remind them of the SFF online process.
 - c. At present there are no incentives available to students to complete online SFF's; moreover, students have no access to results of feedback on courses and teaching which they have generated.
 - d. For response rates of paper versus online open-ended questions no qualitative filters at all were applied to the count of paper responses. This means paper responses including lines, squiggles, smiley faces and other non-substantive forms of communication not possible online were counted as 'response'.
- iii. An online SFF process offers considerably more promise of flexibility and efficiency. Aside from the significant administrative and resource cost savings and environmental benefits associated with online SFF's the committee noted that the online format:

- a. Provides quicker feedback – online data will be available within a couple of weeks of the close of grading. This allows student feedback to be used for improvement before the next semester begins.
- b. In the long run, online SFFs will allow for the use of SFF protocols for courses that do not conform to regular semester start and end times.
- c. Removes the need for instructors to cede class time for administration of the SFF's.
- d. Allows a student a two week period to complete their feedback rather than a one-shot opportunity during class time. Reports from universities having completed the paper to online transition (e.g. Penn State University) indicate that written feedback obtained online is more thorough and meaningful than the handwritten responses obtained in class.
- e. Is more consistent with the online world in which students are active.

Recommendation 1.

Based upon the results of the two semester pilot surveys and consideration of all the issues outlined above the committee recommends that the university move to make the university Student Feedback Form system all-online by extending the e-SFF process to all instructors of all ranks effective for the Spring semester 2012. The committee recognizes that – at least in the short term - there will be very specific pedagogically driven exceptions to this e-SFF policy for courses that utilize multiple different instructors during the course.

2. Recommended strategies and formats for distributing summary and other SFF results broadly to students, faculty and administrators.

Temple students are asked for their active, serious participation in the process of providing feedback on courses and teaching. They complete evaluations each semester for all their courses, but almost all (the Law School is the exception) never see the results.

In the absence of SFF data students will utilize other sources of information on courses and/or instructors.

Recommendation 2.

The SFF committee recommends that students be given access to selected quantitative data for responses to four SFF evaluation items, using TUPortal or some other secure, intranet solution. Open-ended comments should not be included. During their first semester at Temple, students would be given access to these SFF data. For each subsequent semester students would have to “earn” continued access to SFF data by completing all of their own online SFF forms.

Beyond the general recommendation the SFF Committee makes the following specific suggestions:

- i. Enhance instructions to faculty and students to stress the importance and potential impact of the ratings. Students should be reminded to participate in the SFF process in a thoughtful, serious manner.
 - ii. Include an “Interpretive Guide” with the ratings, to serve as a frame of reference and context for the information.
 - iii. Publish past ratings on the website, with an alphabetic list of instructors and summary data from each course/section.
 - iv. Provide summary data ratings for four (4) SFF items:
 - a. The instructor provide useful feedback about exams, projects and assignments
 - b. So far, the instructor has applied grading policies fairly
 - c. The instructor taught this course well
 - d. I learned a great deal in this course
3. Alternate teaching assessments, especially for small classes (n<8), and assessments to supplement SFFs in matters of merit, promotion and tenure or rehire.

Teaching effectiveness is best assessed by a triangulation of related measures:

- a. student evaluation
- b. peer evaluation
- c. instructor reflection and self-evaluations (e.g. teaching portfolios)

The SFF committee recognizes that in a small class with non-significant student evaluation statistics, peer review takes a more prominent place in the measures of teaching effectiveness. However, the committee affirms that peer review should have a prominent place, regardless of class size and recommends that peer reviewers evaluate course materials (syllabi, assignments, assignments with feedback) and classroom performance. The committee also recommends that each department establish a clear and consistent peer review protocol.

The SFF committee highly recommends the development and utilization of teaching portfolios created by the instructor to augment other measures of teaching.

Together, these measures provide a more complete picture of teaching effectiveness and information derived from each optimizes continued enhancement of teaching. Colleagues who evaluate teaching can make stronger formative and summative decisions (for tenure, promotion, contract renewal) with access to these multiple sources of information.

The use of CATE/SFF was originally limited to classes of eight (8) or more because there was concern about the confidentiality of student comments, which were handwritten in CATE and paper SFF forms. With the move to an all online system, confidentiality of student comments is better preserved because comments will be typewritten.

Recommendation 3.

The use of CATES/SFF was originally limited to classes of eight (8) or more students. The committee recommends that, with the move to online SFFs, SFFs be used for almost all classes regardless of enrollment. However, some practica, directed readings or research courses, dissertation prep., independent study and performance instruction courses, typically with one student registration, should be excluded. (Many of those courses can be identified by the specialized course numbers. Those courses would need to use some alternative type of assessment rather than SFFs.)

The SFF committee further recommends a more holistic approach to evaluating teaching effectiveness at Temple, regardless of class size and suggests that Temple establish strong processes, in each department, to ensure the quality and use of two key measures in addition to the SFF: standards-based peer review and instructor self-evaluation demonstrated in teaching portfolios.

4. Development of a user-friendly template to organize the presentation of individual faculty data from SFFs for use in matters of merit, promotion and tenure or rehire.

Recommendation 4.

The SFF Committee recommends that a common template be used for the presentation of SFF data in matters of merit, promotion and tenure or rehire.

The template should minimally include.

- a. Demographic information about the course
- b. A summary of scores for each item relating to the instructor
- c. The performance indicator for each score (U, M, L)
- d. Comments

The comment section would allow instructors to document their reflections relating to the course and to the student feed-back. They could identify plans to revise/develop their teaching methods and/or course content (if indicated). Instructors could identify innovative teaching/assessment techniques that were implemented, problems that occurred during the semester, class idiosyncrasies etc. that might have affected the scores.

A draft template for summarizing SFF data has been designed and approved by SFF Committee members. The form could be made available on-line. When developing the Promotion and Tenure portfolio, faculty could cut and past the data from each year and summarize the Student Feedback for each course taught longitudinally. Reviewers would be able to observe changes in scores for an individual course over time with a summary statement at the end of each course section documenting strategies used to improve learning and potential barriers that were encountered.