

***The Scholastic Policies Committee****: shall be concerned with all policies of an academic nature which pertain to students. Such policies include recruitment; admissions; transfer credit; class standing requirements; academic honors policies; graduation requirements; class attendance regulations; student counseling and placement; and other related policies.*

SCHOLASTIC POLICIES

CHAIR: Peter Laurence

**SCHOLASTIC POLICIES COMMITTEE REPORT**

**Agenda Item: 201901 Student Evaluations of Teaching**

**GENERAL BACKGROUND:**

Clemson’s “Course Evaluation” system (see <https://www.clemson.edu/institutional-effectiveness/oir/resources/student_assessment.html>) has been running for some 17 years. Clemson was an earlier adopter; few schools had online systems when ours was created. The downside of this early (now old), inhouse platform is that it is out of date relative to research regarding feedback from students about their learning and classroom experiences. It is also not easy to change due to the antiquated programming platform. Perhaps consequently, the questions have apparently not been changed since it was launched. For these reasons, the university is ready to adopt a new platform, perhaps a system provided by Watermark ([www.watermarkinsights.com](http://www.watermarkinsights.com)), the vendor providing the new FAS/eTPR replacement.

This is therefore an opportune time to review new survey platform options, including Watermark’s, and update the student survey questions based on research and scholarship related to student experience surveys, current best practices, and policies related to the use of surveys.

**RELEVANT FACULTY MANUAL BACKGROUND:**

The Faculty Manual explicitly indicates the following with regard to student evaluations of teaching (SET), with emphasis added:

**¶** Chapter V.E.2.e (Annual Performance Evaluation and Salary Determination Procedures/ Procedures for Annual Performance Evaluation), p. 55:

“**Student evaluations of teaching** must be incorporated into the evaluation of teaching faculty, as indicated in APPENDIX C BEST PRACTICES FOR A PERFORMANCE REVIEW FOR FACULTY.” See Chapter V.E.2.e (Annual Performance Evaluation and Salary Determination Procedures/ Procedures for Annual Performance Evaluation), p. 55.

**¶** Chapter VI.F.2.k.iii (Professional Practices/ Teaching Practices/ Policies/ Evidence of Student Learning in Evaluation of Faculty Teaching is an important process requiring a multi-faceted approach), pp. 75–76:

1. Research supports the use of multiple sources of evidence in evaluation, and effective evaluations should include at least three of the following [see FM for list of alternative teaching evaluation methods]…
2. The University provides a **standard form** that meets the minimum requirements of current research-based practices for student rating of course experiences.
3. This form must be approved by the Scholastic Policies Committee of the Faculty Senate.
4. Individual departments and faculty may develop questions supplemental to the University’s minimum standard questions or employ comprehensive supplemental questions, but the standard questions are required.
5. **Student Evaluations**
6. Student rating of course experiences is mandatory for all instructors and all sections of all classes at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.
7. Before the last two weeks of the semester, the instructor must activate the online evaluation and then inform the students that the evaluation should be completed by the end of the semester.
8. The instructor will announce to the students that the completed evaluations cannot be reviewed until course grades have been submitted.
9. If instructors use class time for the online evaluation, then they must leave the room during the evaluation.
10. Summary of statistical ratings from student ratings of course experiences (except instructor-developed questions) will become part of the personnel review data for annual review, reappointment, tenure and promotion, and for Post-Tenure Review consideration.
11. Statistical rating summaries will be available to department chairs through the data warehouse.
12. Comments are the property of faculty.
    1. The University will retain (at least for six years) copies of summaries of all statistical ratings and student comments to verify that the evaluations have been carried out and provide an archive for individual faculty who may need them in the future.”

**¶** Appendix C Best Practices for a Performance Review for Faculty, p. 171:

8. The performance review system should include written performance evaluation data from four sources:

a. Annually, instruction and **course evaluation forms** completed anonymously by students through standardized process and submitted for each course (not section) taught.

**¶** Appendix D Best Practices for Post-Tenure Review (see also p. 62):

7. “The post-tenure review must include evaluations from peers external to the department and/or institution as appropriate to the role and function of each faculty member (usually to evaluate the quality of research), as well as internal peer evaluations, **student evaluations**, and administrative evaluations.”

**DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS: FACULTY MANUAL ISSUES:**

The Faculty Manual indicates that the use of “student evaluations of teaching,” “course evaluation forms,” and/or “student evaluations” is required for the annual performance evaluations and post-tenure review. In general, the use of “course evaluation forms” is ostensibly derived from the state Commission on Higher Education (CHE) via Appendix C, although Appendix C uses the word ‘should’ and not ‘must.’ Appendix D, from CHE policies, indicates that PTR must include student evaluations.

The Manual indicates on page 75 that the evaluation form will meet minimum requirements of “current research-based practices for student rating of course experiences.” Insofar as this is not the case and because the evaluation system has not been updated with regard to current research, the evaluation system is not in compliance with the Faculty Manual.

The Manual indicates that course evaluations must be approved by the Scholastic Policies Committee. The committee agrees that the current set of survey questions is out of date and that suspect questions—Q10 in particular—should be removed as soon as possible.

Lastly, the Manual indicates that methods of evaluating teaching other than student surveys “should” be used. This “should” should be changed to “must”— to indicate that at least one other method of evaluating teaching must be used.

**DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS: CURRENT RESEARCH:**

In Fall 2017, members of the Clemson TIGERS ADVANCE research team (<https://www.clemson.edu/provost/tigers-advance/>) studied the literature on SETs and bias. The group noted multiple research findings of bias in SETs in English-language publications, as well as changes to SETs at other institutions based on these findings. The group recommended the removal of summative questions from Clemson’s SET and that those reviewing SETs follow commonplace best practices for survey data (i.e., consider trends, use multiple data sets/assessment tools, be aware of bias, etc.). In January 2019, leaders of the ADVANCE grant project recommended to the Scholastic Policies Committee the removal of Question 10 and broader measures to address bias and reliability in the use of SETs. See the attached for their longer report and sources reviewed and cited.

Empirical and anecdotal findings also show course surveys as a mirror of bias against certain faculty. For example, it is commonplace for Clemson faculty who are women to receive comments about their appearance, and implicit or explicit remarks about their sex appeal, on student evaluation forms. This occurs occasionally with men, but far less frequently. As such, women are statistically far more likely to be “evaluated” with reference to appearance than male faculty, and unequally, because of gender stereotypes and cultural biases, in terms of presentation styles, personality, perceptions of status, and competence. Although there may not be enough faculty of color or other demographic minorities at Clemson to make up a large sample, anecdotal evidence indicates that minority faculty are also subject to bias, which should not be a surprise, and that they too are subject to bias in summative questions, like our Question 10.

Stereotypes and biases are concentrated in comprehensive, summative questions, such as “Overall, the instructor is an effective teacher” (Question 10 in Clemson’s evaluation form). This is problematic because faculty are compared with one another as if there was no bias and such comparisons were pure and objective.

The problem of summative questions is further compounded when administrators or TPR peers evaluating faculty gravitate toward the convenience of using a single numeric metric, such as Question 10, to assess or compare faculty. There are anecdotal reports of faculty receiving evaluations that reference only Question 10 as an assessment of their teaching.

Apart from researchers, even companies that make evaluation products for higher education are aware of this topic. See “Best Practice Series- Gender Bias in Course Evaluation” from platform vendor IOTA 360: <http://pages.iotasolutions.com/download-best-practice-gender-bias>.

**CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:**

**1. While it is impossible to eliminate biases in SETs that exist in the minds of students, current research-based best practices indicate that summative questions that may concentrate bias must be removed. Therefore, Course Eval Question 10 must be removed as soon as possible. This is the focus of the resolution currently being drafted.**

**2. Those evaluating faculty with the use of surveys must be educated about potential bias and about other best practices in the use of such data, including multiple assessment methods; consistent use of evaluation methods; measuring trends over time; etc. This point is also made in the current resolution draft.**

**3. As already indicated in the Faculty Manual, SETs should only be one way of assessing faculty teaching. Multiple methods should yield better assessment of all instructors, and teaching assessment should obviously be done by peers as well as by students. Therefore, the committee recommends changing the Manual’s statement that multiple methods for assessing teaching should be used to one that reflects that at least one or two other assessment methods must be used besides SETs.**

**4. The Faculty Manual could be updated to use the same terminology to refer to student evaluations of teaching surveys/forms/questionnaires.**

**5. The committee plans to begin a complete review of SET survey questions in the spring semester with the goal of having a new draft question set by the end of the semester. To this end, the following is recommended:**

**a. Creating a sub-committee or ad hoc senate or university committee with local experts on teaching assessment.**

**b. Studying up-to-date surveys, such as University of Southern California’s, and scanning higher education press for other news about model SETs.**

**c. Hosting a symposium in late March, with local and extramural experts, open to faculty and students.**

**d. Considering a format where there are fewer questions; fewer quantitative questions; and fewer standard/university-wide questions and more discipline-specific questions.**

**6. Review and test new survey platforms such as Watermark’s (**[**https://www.watermarkinsights.com/our-approach/course-evaluation-institutional-surveys/**](https://www.watermarkinsights.com/our-approach/course-evaluation-institutional-surveys/)**).**

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| Member | College | Present |
| Peter Laurence | AAH, senator, chair |  |
| Bruce Gao | ECAS, senator |  |
| Sharon Holder | BSHS, senator |  |
| Jennifer Holland | BSHS, delegate |  |
| Puskar Khanal | CAFLS, senator |  |
| Eric Lapin | AAH, delegate |  |
| Linda Li-Bleuel | AAH, senator |  |
| Jiro Nagatomi | ECAS, senator |  |
| Christopher Norfolk | ECAS, delegate |  |
| Amy Pope | Science, delegate |  |
| Charles Weiss | Business, senator |  |
| David Fleming | Ex-officio, interim dean, Graduate School |  |
| John Griffin | Ex-officio, dean, Undergraduate Studies |  |
| Taimi Olsen | Ex-officio, OTEI director |  |
| Debra Sparacino | Ex-officio, Registrar |  |
| Bridget Trogden | Ex-officio, assoc. dean, Undergraduate Studies |  |