

UNDERGRADUATE COUNCIL MEETING
February 25, 2007
Rowe Conference Room, the Knight Library

Present:

Gavin Bruce, Herb Chereck, Dave Hubin, Elizabeth Jarvis, Andrew Leavitt, Ron Severson, Karen Sprague, Arkady Vaintrob, Kate Wagle, Alan Kimball, Paul Engelking, and Jim Imamura

Absent:

Andrew Bonamici, Hilary Gerdes, Anne Laskaya, Dean Livelybrooks, Alexandra Marcus, Steven Pologe, Karen McLaughlin, Malcolm Wilson, Bill Rossi, and Elizabeth Reis

Announcements:

The Chair opened the meeting with a reminder to Council members to return their availability information for Spring term 2008 to Cathy Kraus so meeting logistics could be finalized. He also announced that Lisa Freinkel would be presenting the COLT proposal to the Council at the first meeting of the Spring 2008 term. Paul Engelking added that the new COLT courses in the proposal had been approved by the University Committee on Courses (UOCC) with a few recommendations for changes.

Minutes:

The Chair asked if there were any amendments to be made to the minutes of the February 11 meeting. When none were made, he called for a motion.

The motion was made to accept the minutes from the February 11, 2008 meeting.

Moved: Gavin Bruce

Seconded: Arkady Vaintrob

The motion to accept the minutes passed unanimously.

Agenda

Online Course Evaluations

(*See: [UGC Recommendations on Revised Questionnaire for Online Course Evaluations](#), [Response to UGC Recommendations on Revised Questionnaire for Online Course Evaluations](#), [Proposed Revised Questions for Online Course Evaluations](#))*

A proposal to revise the four University-mandated questions on the student course evaluation questionnaire was forwarded to the Undergraduate Council by Paul van Donkelaar, Chair of the Senate Academic Affairs Committee for Online Course Evaluation Implementation. The revised questions are to be presented to the Senate on March 12.

The current four questions are :

Q1 - In comparison with other UO courses of this level and size, how do you evaluate this course?

Q2 - In comparison with other UO courses of this level and size, how do you evaluate this instructor?

Q3 – In comparison with other UO courses of this size and level, do you believe that the class time was well organized and efficiently used throughout the course?

Q4 – In comparison with other UO courses of this size and level, how available was your instructor outside of class time?

- **Discussion**

Council members carefully reviewed the proposed revisions and discussed various questions:

- Will the revised survey be clearer to students?
- Can departments remove redundant questions from their internal evaluations?
- How is the survey to be used: to improve pedagogy? To get student reaction?

It was noted that questions 1 and 2 in Part I are very general assessments of overall instructor and course quality. In contrast, questions 3-7 in Part I appear to parse out specific elements that contribute to that quality.

The Chair summarized the Council's discussion in four recommendations:

- 1) Move question 1 to the end of Part 1 so that the "quality of the instructor's teaching" becomes the last item to be evaluated. Thus, question 2 becomes 1, question 3 becomes 2, etc. and the original question 1 becomes 7 at the end;
- 2) Remove the parenthetical at the end of question 3 so that it reads: "How well organized was this course?";
- 3) Reword question 5 to read: "How effective was the professor's policy for communicating outside of class?"
- 4) Reword question 6 to read: "How clear were the guidelines for evaluating student work?"

The Chair will e-mail these recommendations to Paul van Dankaleer and include an explanation of the Council's reasons for its suggestions.

Discussion of Multicultural Requirement recommendations was tabled until the next meeting. Herb Chereck said he would likely be presenting the revised Drop/Add Deadline proposal again at the next meeting, as well.

The meeting was adjourned.

APPENDED: Communication re. Online Survey Questions

On Mar 1, 2008, at 4:48 PM, Ron Severson wrote:

Dear Paul-

Thank you for soliciting the Undergraduate Council's views on the revised questions for course evaluations. This is exactly the kind of thing that the Council wishes to be involved in, and ideas for improving the substance of course evaluations have come up repeatedly during our recent reviews of courses that satisfy the General Education Group and Multicultural requirements.

The Council considered the proposed new questions during its February 25, 2008, meeting and agreed that these are a significant improvement over the existing ones. We like the move away from asking students to compare a specific course or instructor with others of the same level and size, and instead, asking them simply to record their impressions of the course and instructor in isolation. After an excellent discussion that included the 3 student Council members who were present, as well as the faculty members, the Council was unanimous in suggesting four revisions to the proposed changes. These do not change the questions substantively, but we think they clarify the intent of the questions. In arriving at these suggestions, the Council was particularly attentive to the perceptions of our student members, who were able to articulate how alternative wording is likely to be interpreted by students at large.

I have listed the Council's suggested revisions below, together with the rationale for each of them. We hope your committee will be receptive to these suggestions and I would be happy to discuss them further with you, if you wish.

1. Move question 1 to the end of Part 1. so that the "quality of the instructor's teaching" becomes the last item to be evaluated. Thus, question 2 becomes 1, question 3 becomes 2, etc. and the original question 1 becomes 7 at the end.

Rationale: We recognized that Q1 and 2 differ from the others in being very general assessments of the overall quality of the instructor and course, respectively, whereas the other questions in Part I parse out specific elements that contribute to quality. We thought it reasonable to begin with a question that asks for an overall impression of the course (Q2) because that is commonly the starting point for students' thinking about a course. We all agreed, however, that it made sense to ask students to think through the elements of teaching that are the foci of Q3-7 before asking for the synthesis requested by Q1.

2. Remove the parenthetical examples at the end of question 3 so that it reads: “How well organized was this course?”

Rationale: Both students and faculty thought that these examples did not clarify the question, and had the potential to confuse students. For instance, what do we want to know about the syllabus; what does “schedule” mean – course meeting time, pace of course, timing of assignments or exams? Since course organization could be good or poor on several levels, we thought it best to keep the question general.

3. Reword question 5 to read: “How effective was the professor’s policy for communicating outside of class?”

Rationale: We recognize the inherent difficulty of asking this question because we know that student expectations for faculty availability outside of class do not always coincide with faculty views on this matter. Moreover, electronic media have expanded the possible forums for communication outside of class. We think that the important thing is for faculty to let students know what forum(s) will be used for a particular class and to be available in that setting. Students should be asked how well that policy, whatever it was, worked.

3. Reword question 6 to read: “How clear were the guidelines for evaluating student work?”

Rationale: We broadened this question because we think that it’s getting at more than “How were grades assigned – that is, what % of course points corresponded to grades of A, B etc.”? Moreover, we feel strongly that the question should communicate the fact that it’s not the student as a person who is being graded, but rather, the student’s work.

RESPONSE TO UGC RECOMMENDATIONS ON REVISED QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ONLINE COURSE EVALUATIONS

From: Paul van Donkelaar [mailto:paulvd@uoregon.edu]

Sent: Wednesday, March 05, 2008 10:02 AM

To: Ron Severson

Subject: Re: proposed new course evaluation questions

Dear Ron:

Thank you very much for the excellent and thoughtful feedback from the Undergraduate Council regarding the new course evaluation questions. After considerable discussion within our committee we have made the following changes to the questions:

1. The order of questions 1 and 2 have been switched.
2. The statements in parentheses have been removed from questions 3 and 5.

3. In question 6, the term "graded" has been replaced by "evaluated"

As you can gather from this list, we followed some, but not all, of the UGC recommendations. Below, I outline some of our reasoning for why we took this course of action.

Recommendation #1: Placing Q1 ("What was the quality of the instructor's teaching?") last puts it after "How much did you learn in this course?" Research shows that when a general question follows a specific one, the answer to the specific one considerably influences the answer to the general one (in the opposite order, specific -> general, the questions are much less correlated). Though assessing the amount of learning is important, the committee doesn't feel it should directly influence the assessment of teaching quality. This same logic applies to the remaining more specific questions as well. Thus, we have decided to put the original Q1 in second place. This results in the "quality of this course" question coming first because it is the most general, followed by the "quality of the instructor's teaching," because it is the second most general question. Then come all the specific questions that can vary relatively independently from the answers to the general questions.

Recommendation #2: done

Recommendation #3: Rephrasing Q5 to read "How effective was the professor's policy for communicating outside of class?" may create more problems than it will solve. First, it has the potential to cause confusion for the students. In particular, it confounds communication among students with communication between student and instructor. Second, effective policy is not the same as availability. Q5 as it is currently worded is intended to measure the absolute amount of availability outside of class, irrespective of the instructor's preferences. We have an expectation of a certain number of student contact hours, and if instructors are not available for such contact hours outside of class, then that should be directly evaluated.

Recommendation #4: done

I hope this is informative. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions...

Yours,

Paul

The next UGC meeting is scheduled for Monday, March 10, 2008, 12:00pm at Rowe Conference Room, the Knight Library.