

## **Student Evaluation of Faculty Teaching at UNC Charlotte**

### Background

Student course evaluations at UNC Charlotte serve as a primary tool for formal summative evaluations of faculty teaching. Resulting survey data is used by department chairs and deans to determine faculty salary, promotion and tenure decisions. The existing decentralized student evaluation system currently in use at UNC Charlotte, is paper-based and includes both required and optional survey items adapted from Purdue University's "cafeteria model."

*The student course evaluation system comes under the purview of faculty governance and any changes to the system must be approved by members of the University's Faculty Council.*

### Description of Current Course Evaluation Process

Formal course evaluations are conducted via paper surveys completed during class time. Open ended comments are included as appropriate or desired. The standardized paper forms are then hand delivered to the OpScan Center where the forms are manually scanned for data input, analysis and printing. Results are available via email and hard copy, with hand written, open ended comments manually entered into the final report. Student evaluations of online courses are typically conducted online via a web based enterprise system, known as Student Voices. Evaluation results of faculty teaching are typically not shared with students.

The current paper-based course evaluation process has served the needs of the University well until rapid growth during the last 5 years precipitated concerns over escalating costs and inefficiencies related to economies of scale.

### Problems with Paper-based Course Evaluations

- Escalating institutional costs for paper, printing, distribution, collection, and storage.
- Transcribing hand written comments allows for subjective interpretation of data and additional resources of staff time.
- Administering evaluations in the classroom setting limits the amount of time students are able to dedicate to the evaluations.
- Administering evaluation in class requires devoting a portion of class time to completing the evaluations.
- Classroom setting poses limitations on the effectiveness of the evaluations; students complain of being unable to contribute thoughtful comments in a short timeframe.

Additionally, the existing UNC Charlotte decentralized student evaluation system lacks uniform administrative support which makes University wide data comparisons of faculty teaching difficult and unwieldy. Provisions for administrative oversight, support, and coordination have not been considered.

#### Benefits of Online Course Evaluations

- Substantial savings to the institution for materials and staff time. *(Conservative estimates indicate that 80 hours of departmental staff time is required to complete paper-based course evaluations with an annual cost of \$215K for personnel, \$100K for paper, printing and equipment maintenance for a total of \$315/year.)*
- Lower turnaround time to deliver results to faculty, department chairs, and deans.
- Increased ability to perform statistical analyses with course evaluation data.
- More substantive feedback from students.
- Increased efficiency, less manual manipulation required by administrative staff.

According to *Online Student Course Evaluations: Strategies for Increasing Student Participation Rates (2009)*, a custom research brief prepared by the Education Advisory Board, the greatest challenge in converting to an online course evaluation system is the decline in student response rates that institutions often experience during the first year of transition. With a centrally supported, controlled environment in which to administer course evaluations, student response rates generally return in year two to the pre online rates. Key to a comparable student response rate is a concerted effort to demonstrate that course evaluations are important to both the institution as a whole, and to the individual faculty member.

#### FITSAC Recommendation

1. Faculty Council should support further investigation of online student course evaluations by appointing a University wide committee with faculty representation from each College, Office of Institutional Research, Student Government, FITSAC, and Center for Teaching and Learning. The committee would examine a systems approach for administering course evaluations.
2. Faculty Council should support a pilot study to examine user perceptions of an online student evaluation system. FITSAC recommends voluntary participation in a pilot study of top rated systems including Student Voices, an enterprise system currently used on Campus to conduct University wide student evaluations.