Committee on Teaching Evaluations, a Sub-Committee of Curriculum and Instruction: Summary of Activities, 2002-2003
Prepared by the Committee
Submitted by Gayle H. Miller, Chair

Although the committee is aware that student evaluations can be used in varied ways and for various reasons, for the purposes of this report and the work of this committee, we focused on two particular purposes of student evaluation of teaching. Student evaluations are used both for making personnel decisions as well as for improving instruction. Our review of the research indicates that most campuses try and use variations of the same form for both purposes. Evaluation forms aimed at improving instruction usually have more questions than those instruments whose major purpose is informing personnel decisions. The research further indicates that student ratings, in general, tend to be statistically reliable and to provide important input into considering teaching effectiveness. However, without exception, the research emphasizes that only MULTIPLE SOURCES of data - no single source - provide sufficient information to make a valid judgment about overall teaching effectiveness. There are areas that students simply are unable to assess. Thus, the committee strongly recommends that departments, colleges, and the University consider several other aspects of teaching effectiveness before making any assessment of teaching, either formative or summative. The committee recommends that other sources of information for teaching evaluations be investigated for use at Western Carolina University to include teaching portfolios.

Membership: Gayle Miller (Chair, English), Glenna Batson (Physical Therapy), Ken Burbank (Engineering Tech), Dale Carpenter (Education and Allied Professions), Mae Claxton (English), James Deconinck (Marketing and Business Law), Harrison Kane (Psychology), George Mechling (Management and International Business), Nicholas Norgaard (Math and Computer Science), Will Peebles (Music), Charles Wallis (Math and Computer Science). Ex Officio - Alan Altany (Director, Coulter Faculty Center).

Meeting Time and Location: Third Tuesday of every month, Coulter 304, 4:00 P.M.

Charge: A March 4, 2001, memo from Gretchen Batille, Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs of the UNC system, to Dr. John Bardo, stated:

How is teaching effectiveness evaluated [at WCU]? Are there mandated teaching evaluations that are used in faculty reviews for both tenure-track and part-time faculty? If you have a standard teaching evaluation, would you send me a copy? This is an area I expect Betsy Brown will be considering as she evaluates various processes related to faculty development.

Dr. Scott Philyaw, Chair of the CIC, used these questions as his charge to this committee.

The committee responded to the charge in the following ways:
1.) Collecting teaching evaluations from each College in the University;
2.) Analyzing teaching evaluations from exemplary universities and colleges both in as well as outside the UNC system;
3.) Gathering data from acknowledged experts in the area of Teaching Evaluations;
4.) Attending a professional workshop on Evaluating and Improving Teaching;
5.) Preparing a summary of recommendations.

Recommendations

- The committee recommends that the Senate appoint a permanent committee or sub-committee to oversee the process of evaluating teaching as an important and ongoing aspect of academic life. But it must be noted that several members of the committee strongly suggested that, rather than forming yet another committee, the Senate Committee on Instruction and Curriculum assume responsibility for the teaching evaluation process. The committee recognizes that the Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence can be a valuable resource in the process of improving and evaluating teaching.
- The committee recommends that the Senate hold open forums next year to give the University community an opportunity to participate in the teaching evaluation process. Additionally the meetings during which next year's committee determines its recommendations for the specific university-wide questions (section 1 of the evaluation form) should be open to the university. Because these recommendations will affect all departments, all faculty should have an opportunity to hear the discussion and to provide input directly to the committee.
- The committee recommends that any instrument recommended for university-wide use be the product of university-wide input. Faculty should have multiple opportunities to suggest items or questions to be considered for use on a university-wide basis and should have multiple opportunities to review and comment on items and questions for use on a university-wide basis.
- The committee suggests that Dr. Peter Seldin, a nationally recognized authority on and expert in teaching evaluations, be invited to campus in the fall. Dr. Seldin should have the opportunity to meet with Deans, Department Heads, this committee, and the University community.

Recommendations for the Format of the Evaluation Form

The committee recommends that the evaluation instrument be divided into 3 sections:

1.) A section of questions related to the Seven Dimensions of Effective Teaching adopted by the Faculty Senate. This section of the evaluation would be common to all evaluation forms across campus;
2.) A second section of questions which each department would develop. In this section, the department would take into consideration the particular class being evaluated;
3.) A section for open-ended questions which each department would develop.

Note: The committee has many examples and models of questions used by other universities. Clemson University form is cited as an example of such a three-part form currently in use. A copy is included in the committee's folder of materials.

**Administering the Teaching Evaluation Forms**

- The committee recommends that the instrument be administered within two weeks before the end of the academic period;
- The committee recommends that someone other than the faculty member being evaluated administer the instrument;
- The committee recommends that students be given the instrument at the beginning of the class period and be allowed at least 20 minutes to complete the evaluation;
- The committee recommends that the instructor be given the opportunity to view evaluations only after grades have been turned in.

**Additional Recommendations**

The University-wide section should be short to minimize "evaluation fatigue" of the student (one authority suggests 12 questions are sufficient to cover areas that students are in a position to assess). The conciseness of this section is especially important for departments and faculty who value written student comments; a lengthy university-wide list of questions will discourage students from writing very much in the third section of the evaluation instrument.

Departments should have the flexibility to develop multiple evaluation forms to address different types of classes offered within the department (e.g., skill acquisition/performance classes vs. lecture classes vs. seminars, etc.). Next year's committee will need to be mindful of the different types of classes as they develop the university-wide questions to be used in the first section of the form.

**Concluding Comments**

Several members of the committee have reservations about the potential administrative use of the data gathered in the university-wide section of the evaluation instrument. The committee recommends continued discussion about the way this data will be used and limitations of its use.

Next year's committee should keep in mind that this year's committee brought up the topic of using Teaching Portfolios as an instrument of evaluation. A review of the research finds that Teaching Portfolios are the unanimous recommendation for evaluating teaching. Teaching Portfolios would eliminate the potential for relying too heavily on
any one instrument for evaluating teaching, especially on teaching evaluation forms. However, the committee feels that such a process will succeed only with University-wide commitment and support.

Submitted April 29, 2003
Gayle H. Miller, Chair, sub-committee, Curriculum and Instruction