

Minutes of 28 September 2015 SACUA

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THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
Senate Advisory Committee on University Affairs (SACUA)
6048 Fleming Administration Building
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109-1340
Phone: (734) 764-0303

Present: Fagerlin, Lehman, Mondro, Schultz, Smith, Szymanski, Weineck (chair), Ziff, Potter

Absent: Wright

Guests: James Holloway, Vice Provost for Global and Engaged Education; Lisa Emery Associate Registrar for Faculty and Staff Services

3:15 Call to Order/Approval of Agenda and Minutes

3:20 Announcements

3:25 Status Reports:

Office for Institutional Equity (OIE)

Professional Standards for Faculty SPG

Total compensation propriety and transparency

Regents' Faculty Governance Update

There will be an update for the Regents next meeting in October 23.

3:30 Guest: James Holloway, Vice Provost for Global and Engaged Education

Vice Provost Holloway opened the discussion of the proposed publication of data from the Evaluation and Examination (E&E) Forms under the auspices of the central administration. Vice Provost Holloway said that, as the result of FOIA requests, the University has been releasing foiable data from the E&E forms for some time. They were released in 2011; 2013; 2014. In the past, students publications published select E+E data and offered advice on what courses might interest students, but were not able to maintain the relevant sites. Students now take recourse to sites such as "Rate My Professors." Central Student Government (CSG) and Rackham Student Government (RSG) passed resolutions asking the administration to publish data from the E&E forms in a consistent way.

Vice Provost Holloway introduced Lisa Emery who handles the evaluation system for the Registrar's office. He said that the administration's proposal was to present the numerical data for faculty members, but not for GSIs since GSIs are considered students, and FERPA regulations forbid releasing their data. No data will be released for faculty in their first seven

terms at Michigan. Faculty would be allowed to comment on the data, a suggestion from the Academic Affairs Advisory Committee (AAAC), so that, for instance, faculty could note that they had tried something new in a course, which might have affected the student response. He also said that there will be an “opt out” mechanism for faculty, but the data could still be FOIA’d. Vice Provost Holloway said that there was a prototype site and that the system could be rolled out this term, but that a faculty committee was being formed to study the evaluations.

Members of SACUA raised concerns about the release of these data, reflecting faculty opposition to the plan. One concern is the probability that the data was biased against faculty of color and female faculty, noting that the Vice Provost for Equity and Inclusion shared this concern. Others noted that the methodology in a committee report studying potential bias at UM was professionally inadequate; that very high grades strongly correlate with high scores and low grades with low scores; that low response rates skew the data; that there was no mechanism to prevent the release of data in cases where there was not a meaningful response rate; that the data mask the difference between poor teaching and demanding teaching; that faculty could be damaged by the release of negative evaluations; that individual faculty could not control the “opt out option;” that the AAAC request that the questions be changed had not in fact been acted upon; that the current system’s validity for assessing learning outcomes is questionable; that other CIC institutions do not release data in the form Michigan is proposing; that there was strong feeling among faculty that the questions are very poor; that the data was being released before the faculty committee that had been formed to study the evaluations could report; that a decision affecting all faculty must be made only after broad consultation; and that the release of the data this semester would change the rules mid-game.

Vice Provost Holloway agreed that there was a good deal of concern about the content of narrative comments on the forms. He said that work had been done this summer to encourage students to produce more useful written evaluations. Vice Provost Holloway also said that in studies of course evaluations showed limited bias towards high grades, and that it would be disingenuous to suggest that the data was not already being used, blunt though they were.

Chair Weineck said that in her 17 years at Michigan no one has stated that these often used data were accurate measures of teaching. She also observed that the purpose of data collection was not they to help students choose classes. She agreed that students should get more help in choosing classes, but this was not the way, and that, as a world class university Michigan should be able to devise an instrument to evaluate teaching based on wide spread consultation—experts in assessment and statistical analysis, members of faculty governance and of student governance should be brought together. She pointed out that putting out the data in its current form differed from earlier postings, as it would put the University imprimatur on bad data.

Chair Weineck said that there was little reason to believe that the current evaluation system offered valid assessments of student learning outcomes. Vice Provost Holloway said that he would not assert that course evaluations were assessments of student learning, they are a source of feedback that is in some way normalized across units. Vice Provost Holloway did not agree that these were bad data. Chair Weineck wanted to know what could be lost by trying to get things right. Lisa Emery said that data would be released from classes with fewer than 30 students.

Chair Weineck pointed out that the lesson of the Administrative Services Transformation (AST) was that large-scale initiatives should not be promulgated without widespread

consultation. She pointed out that the written comments show that there are negative attitudes based on gender and race that influence the numerical results. Vice Provost Holloway said that he felt that the discussion with the AAAC was sufficient. Professor Smith asked how the effectiveness of teaching was evaluated? Vice Provost Holloway said there were lots of sources of information that contributed to the evaluation of instructor effectiveness.

Vice Provost Holloway thanked SACUA for its discussion.

4:30 University Senate/Senate Assembly Meeting Preparation

The next scheduled Senate Assembly meeting is scheduled on Fall Break, raising the issue of whether there was a sufficient number for a quorum (100 for the Senate, for the non-appearance of faculty for three meeting does not count against the quorum so the quorum changes from meeting to meeting). The Senate Assembly meeting will be shifted to October 26.

The motion to move the Senate Assembly and Senate Meeting to October 26 carried.

The wording of the proposal to encourage Friday teaching was discussed. The following wording was unanimously approved:

As the faculty of the University of Michigan is committed to providing the University's students with a world-class education, it recognizes the need to provide that education in a safe and healthy environment.

And

As the faculty of the University of Michigan recognizes that providing regular instruction for First and Second years students five days a week promotes a better and more secure learning environment, and it recognizes that Friday classes, especially Friday morning classes, reduce the incidence of alcohol abuse in university communities.

The University Faculty therefore strongly urges the Provost to promote and incentivize the regular teaching of large enrollment 100 and 200 level courses (defined as courses having ten or more sections) with a Friday meeting. It recommends that in cases where such classes have a lecture component, those classes will regularly have a lecture on Friday.

The following language was proposed for the motion on the release of teaching evaluations:

Whereas our current student evaluation of teaching (SET) instrument is not designed to assist students in choosing classes, and

Whereas there is no consensus on the general validity of student evaluations of teaching, and

Whereas some research suggests that an instructor's race, gender, ethnicity, national origin, or sexual orientation may negatively affect his or her SET ratings, and

Whereas publicity of prior course evaluations can affect student responses on current evaluations, undermining the independence of response that is key to having a valid survey, and



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Whereas prior evaluations do not reliably correspond to later iterations of a course, and

Whereas a policy that affects faculty across the University should be endorsed only after broad consultation with the faculty,

Therefore the University Senate at UM resolves to request that

- a. the SET instrument be redesigned in accordance with the best available research;
- b. that a policy for publicly releasing data obtained by this instrument be formulated in consultation with student government representatives, faculty government representatives, and UM experts in teaching and learning assessment and in statistical analysis;
- c. that the data obtained with the current instrument not be released under the University's imprimatur.

The proposed language was unanimously approved

4:55 Executive Session
Discussion of the evaluation issue

5:00 Adjournment

Next SACUA meeting is October 5
Next Senate Assembly meeting is October 26

Respectfully submitted,

David S. Potter
Interim Senate Secretary

University of Michigan Bylaws of the Board of Regents, Sec. 5.02:
Governing Bodies in Schools and Colleges
Sec. 4.01 The University Senate

"...[t]he Senate is authorized to consider any subject pertaining to the interests of the university, and to make recommendations to the Board of Regents in regard thereto. Decisions of the University Senate with respect to matters within its jurisdiction shall constitute the binding action of the university faculties. Jurisdiction over academic polices shall reside in the faculties of the various schools and colleges, but insofar as actions by the several faculties affect university policy as a whole, or schools and colleges other than the one in which they originate, they shall be brought before the University Senate."

Rules of the University Senate, the Senate Assembly and the Senate Advisory Committee on University Affairs:

Senate: "In all cases not covered by rules adopted by the Senate, the procedure in Robert's Rules of Order shall be followed."

Assembly: "The Assembly may adopt rules for the transaction of its business. In appropriate cases not covered by rules of the Assembly, the rules of the University Senate shall apply."

SACUA: "The committee may adopt rules for the transaction of its business."