MEMORANDUM

TO: Deans and Department Chairs

FROM: Judith A. Ramaley

October 11, 1985

The evaluation of courses and instructors has been a matter of considerable policy attention on this campus since 1969. Numerous EPC and CPCA recommendations have been adopted by the Senate, and approved by the President, calling for the systematic collection of student opinions on a regular basis. In 1983, the Senate and the President approved a policy which provides additionally for the peer evaluation of teaching, outlines the major elements to be contained in such evaluations, and specifically requires the systematic collection of student opinion as a necessary but not sufficient component of the peer review of teaching effectiveness. Recently the CPCA went on record as refusing to act on personnel cases which do not contain peer reviews of teaching.

The purpose of this memo is to provide you with a copy of the peer review policy (which was approved as Senate Bill 8384-07) and my subsequent memorandum implementing the policy, and to offer suggestions on how to collect student opinion for subsequent use by faculty in the peer review process.

Attachment
GUIDELINES FOR COURSE AND INSTRUCTOR EVALUATIONS

Since 1969, instructor and course evaluations have received considerable policy attention by governance and administrative bodies. Both the Council on Educational Policy and the Council on Promotion and Continuing Appointment have adopted a number of recommendations and resolutions, subsequently approved by the President, calling for the systematic collection of student opinions about the quality of instruction.

The most recent of these statements was made in 1983 when the University Senate and the President approved a policy providing for the peer evaluation of teaching. The Senate bill outlines the major elements to be contained in such evaluations and specifically requires the systematic collection and inclusion of student opinions of an instructor's performance as a necessary, but not sufficient, component of the peer review of teaching.a

The content of instruments now used to assemble student opinions of teaching, however, vary considerably from department to department. There is also significant variation in the methods of collecting this information, the uses to which it is put, and the audience(s) for whom it is intended. The absence of any consistency in the form this evidence takes presents certain obvious problems for persons with responsibility for personnel recommendations or decisions. Moreover, although hundreds of evaluations are done each year, there are some significant omissions, and periodically questions arise concerning how the policy is to be implemented in unusual cases.

In an effort to increase the coherence and utility of the information forwarded in support of personnel recommendations, and to reduce the areas of confusion in obtaining course and instructor evaluations, the following procedural guidelines are issued:

1. Each department is free to use a questionnaire of its choosing. The only requirement is that it solicit basically the same information contained in the sample questionnaire that is attached. Additional questions may be asked or questions may be reworded. The only requirements are that the responses be anonymous and that the questionnaire reveal how well the faculty member provided instruction to the students. Different questionnaires may be used for lecture courses and small group/individual courses.

aThe instruments referred to are those used to inform personnel decisions and should not be confused with questionnaires sponsored by Student Association, those associated with the General Education Program or used by faculty members for the purpose of enhancing their classroom performance.
2. For part-time and untenured faculty members, all lecture and seminar courses should be evaluated each time they are given. Student opinions of tenured faculty members' instructional performance should be gathered at least every third year.

3. Evaluation of small group or individual instruction should be on an optional basis. If an instructor wishes the course/performance evaluated and the student(s) has (have) no reservations about loss of anonymity due to the small size of the enrollment, the evaluations may be used in personnel decisions.

4. Information gathered from fewer than ten students should be used with caution. Similarly, care must be exercised in evaluating rating results when less than half of the students enrolled in a course have responded.

5. Research indicates that student opinions of instruction stabilize after 6-7 weeks. Student ratings gathered at that time in a semester correlate on the order of .80 or .90 with ratings from the same students in the same course taken at the end of the semester. Thus, student ratings might be gathered anytime after, say, November 1 in a fall semester or April 1 in a spring semester. There is no need to defer data collection until the last week of classes. Indeed, students opinions should not be gathered either just before or just after a test or examination.

6. Questionnaires should be distributed and collected by someone other than the faculty member being evaluated. A teaching assistant, secretary, graduate student, or faculty colleague would be appropriate for this task.

7. Completed questionnaires should be summarized as soon as possible. The results should be made available to the faculty member, the Department Chair, and to others in accordance with department policy. The Department Chair should discuss the summary with the faculty member, including areas of weakness and strength, comparison with other faculty members or other times the course was taught, and patterns in ratings from semester to semester. It should be made clear that summaries of students opinions will be made available for use in future personnel actions, including promotion, continuing appointment, merit raises, excellence awards and distinguished faculty appointments.

8. Summaries of tabulated data and comments as well as the original questionnaires are to be retained under department control for seven years so that they will be available for use in personnel actions, including reviews for promotion or continuing appointment.
The attached "Student Instructional Rating Form" (SIRF) was developed on this campus and pilot tested in 18 departments, colleges and schools in 1981. Results of those tests indicate that the items perform comparably to those of commercially-available student rating forms. Departments may adopt this instrument, and take advantage of the scoring and reporting services that are part of the SIRF system, by contacting the Office of Institutional Research (442-5410).

The student evaluations of courses and faculty can be important in identifying strengths and weaknesses in our academic program. They will play an increasing role in all personnel decisions. We all have a responsibility to make the evaluation program work as effectively as possible.

Any questions or concerns should be addressed to Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs Harry L. Hamilton.

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