FAQ’s Regarding Course Evaluations

FALL SEMESTER 2010

Note: The questions below pertain ONLY to the evaluations being conducted during the Fall Semester 2010. The Texas Legislature enacted HB 2504, which requires us to post the results of the evaluations on the web. The University of Texas System requires us to complete this process this semester. Thus, we have had to move quickly to implement our new process and evaluation methodology.

The following answers to frequently asked questions apply ONLY to fall 2010. Final guidelines and rules will be implemented to take effect during the spring 2011 semester; at that time we will provide more information to you.

DEVELOPMENT AND CREATION OF THE SURVEYS:

Who selected the evaluative statements in my department’s new survey?

Four required items must be included on all evaluation forms. Two of these items are course/instructor-related statements that require a response on a 5-point scale, with responses ranging from poor to excellent. The other two items ask for additional information about (1) whether the course was required, and (2) what grade was expected.

An additional set of statements that require responses on a 5-point scale (i.e., strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree) may be chosen by colleges and departments within each college. These statements are designed to gather information that is important to those units. College-level and department-level statements must be approved by the dean of each college.

Who actually creates the surveys for distribution to the students?

College delegates serve as liaisons among faculty, departments, the dean of the college, and staff in the Office of Institutional Research (OIR). They also enter items chosen by the colleges and/or departments into the survey software.

Doug Atkinson, Director of Reporting in the OIR, supervises survey administration and Lisa Johnston, Program Coordinator in the OIR, works directly with the college delegates and assists them in survey construction and deployment.

What parts of the evaluation results will be posted online?

The university is required to post only the two required course/instructor-related statements that are used for all university classes. All other course survey results are collected for the benefit of the instructor to aid in improving teaching effectiveness.
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SURVEYS:

How will the students be informed about the survey?

Students will receive notification of the availability of the surveys via e-mail to their preferred e-mail accounts. Links will be provided within the e-mails that will take them to the survey specific to each class. A separate e-mail will be sent for each class in which a student is registered. Reminder e-mails are sent once a week to students for any survey not yet completed until the end of the evaluation period.

When will the evaluations be administered, and how will that happen?

On November 18th, 2010, students will be sent an e-mail for each class in which they are enrolled informing them that the surveys are open. They will be able to evaluate each class at that time, and the “window” for completing evaluations will close on December 3rd.

What classes will be evaluated?

As has been the case in the past, all organized classes with five or more students will be evaluated. Organized classes are all classes that meet on specified days of the week, at assigned times and locations. These are lecture classes, laboratories, seminars, and group music classes with enrollments of five or greater.

If a class would normally be excluded from evaluation, can I/we/someone request that the class be evaluated?

Requests will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis; decisions will be made in consultation with your department chair and the dean of your college.

When will results of class evaluations be available to faculty members?

Faculty will be sent the results no less than five business days following the last day during which final grades are due, or the first full business day following that day if it falls on a holiday; for the fall semester 2010, that date is January 3, 2011.

What is being done, and what can be done, to increase response rates?

A detailed communication/marketing effort will be used, using a variety of media to inform students about the survey and encourage them to respond. Announcements will appear on flat screens around campus, in UTSA Today, and when students log into the UTSA network. There will be two half-page color advertisements in The Paisano student newspaper.

Two videos will be available on the classroom desktop computer for you to run to inform your students about the survey, explaining its confidentiality and importance, and announcing a lottery drawing for prizes once the surveys are complete. Please make sure that your course computer is on, that you have logged in, and then click on the icon for the video. The first video will be labeled “Eval Video 1” and the second (a reminder) will be labeled “Eval Video 2.” The prizes
for the lottery will be iPads; the number of iPads awarded as prizes will depend upon the overall university response rate. If less than 50%, 2 iPads will be awarded; if the response rate is from 50% to under 60% 3 iPads will be awarded; 4 iPads will be awarded if the response rate is 60% or higher.

Research indicates that you can have a significant effect on increasing response rates if you repeatedly communicate to students the importance of completing the surveys, explain how the results will be helpful to you in improving your courses and teaching, and the fact that the results will be provided to you, as they always have been, anonymously. This latter point – assurance of anonymity – is especially important to students. Two databases are maintained. One database contains the responses to the survey, but it does NOT include any individual student information (IDs). A separate database containing only information about student e-mail address and whether or not the survey is completed will be used for the lottery drawing, but no survey responses are contained in that database.

Another way that faculty can increase response rates is to make some time available during a class for students to complete their evaluations using their laptops or smart phones, or computers in university computer labs. If class time is provided, the instructor should not be present while students are completing the survey.

ANALYSIS AND USE OF SURVEY RESULTS:

Will the results be used as part of decisions regarding merit, tenure and promotion?

UTSA’s policy is to use the results of surveys as part of the information used for evaluation of teaching, in decisions regarding merit, tenure and promotion. However, surveys are not the sole means by which teaching effectiveness is measured. The 2010 fall semester is the first semester in which the University will administer online evaluations to all organized classes. While the results of the survey will provide faculty with important formative feedback from students, caution should be used to interpret the results for summative evaluation.

Can the results of the new online evaluation be compared to the old IDEA surveys?

The questions asked on the IDEA survey – including the “general” evaluative questions (i.e., overall course, overall instructor) are different than those asked on the new form. Thus, while some general comparisons could be done, these will have to be interpreted very cautiously. The OIR will be doing comparisons during early spring of 2011 and those results will be shared with the Provost and Faculty Senate. In addition, the OIR will look, over time, at the internal consistency/reliability of the ratings. Other studies, in collaboration with the Faculty Senate and the Provost, will be done as the process continues.