Campus-wide Trial of Smarter Services End of Term Course Evaluation SETE

This information is to provide more specific information about the SETE end-of-term student opinion surveys.

Overview: Much research has been conducted in the arena of student evaluation of courses at the university level. In general, research supports the notion that students can provide useful feedback on the classroom experience. No single instrument is perfect—or without controversy—for the purposes of gathering student feedback, which is required by ABOR. The proposal to institute Smarter Services on a one-year trial basis for 2013-14 recognizes the limits of any instrument and the importance of using multiple data sources for fair and thorough evaluation of teaching.

Questions and Answers:

Q: How did the suggestion to use SETE come about?
A: The proposal came from the Task Force on the Evaluation of Teaching, charged by Provost Grobsmith in 2011-12 to recommend enhancements to the evaluation of teaching at NAU.

Q: Who was on the task force?
A: The 11 members included representatives from each college; one graduate student; one undergraduate student; a member of the Academic Chairs Council, the Associate/Assistant Deans’ Roundtable, the Provost’s Academic Leadership Council, the Faculty Senate, and the Provost’s Office. Nine members hold faculty status; four hold only faculty status. The report was unanimously endorsed.

Q: What was the reason for recommending a single survey instrument?
A: The advantages of using a single, commercially available instrument were listed as follows: “comparability among units, uniformity in the administration of surveys, enhanced reliability of survey data, reduction of staffing demands within NAU, flexibility in the development of midterm survey items and integration with the Faculty Activity and Achievement Report (FAAR) system.” In addition, the student members emphasized the importance of a relatively short and focused evaluation at the end of the term.

Q: Did the task force recommend anything else regarding evaluations?
A: Yes. The student survey was embedded as one piece of a system of evaluations. The report called for multiple forms of evidence and provided a guiding framework (matrix) as a means of elaborating these forms of evidence.

Q: What happened with the report?
A: The report was presented to the Provost and to the Faculty Senate. Both received the report positively, but the Senate asked that the survey tool be piloted.
In addition, an email with the Task Force report on SETE was sent out to all faculty in the spring of 2012.

Q: Has the Faculty Senate been involved in discussion about the SETE?
A: Yes. The topic has come before the Senate on numerous occasions, including August, September and October of this year. The SETE was also presented to the ACC and PALC prior to and after the pilot.

Q: What was the initial pilot like?
A: All departments were invited to participate in the pilot. Two areas elected to participate in the fall of 2012; 4 participated in the spring of 2013.

Q: What did the initial pilot reveal?
A: There were numerous concerns about the administration of the instrument, most related to the lack of a centralized administration. No concerns were raised about the content or substance of the instrument.

Q: What were the main issues with administration?
A: Because we implemented the pilot on a localized level, we had a lot of variation in how the instrument was managed. Different questions were added; different timeframes were adopted. As a result, many of the potential benefits of such an instrument were lost (e.g., students did not receive a single, clear invitation to participate; they received multiple forms of evaluations).

Q: What happened after this?
A: The matter was brought to the Summer Faculty Senate, with a recommendation to engage in a full trial in 2013-14. The Summer Senate requested that the full Senate be informed. This occurred in the fall meeting of the Faculty Senate—one of approximately 5 times the issue appeared before the Senate. Information about the SETE was also presented to the ACC and PALC.

Q: Why do we conduct student opinion surveys?
A: Arizona Board or Regents requires a student opinion survey, policy 6-221B: General Policy. It is the policy of the Arizona Board of Regents that faculty shall be evaluated on their performance in accordance with the following guidelines:
1. Faculty shall have their performance, personal progress and future potential formally reviewed on a scheduled basis at least once every twelve months...
2) A systematic assessment of student opinion shall constitute one, but not the only, component of the evaluation.

Q: Isn’t Smarter Services a for-profit company?
A: Yes. Many of the services we use at NAU come from for-profits. Our intention over the long run is to free up a good deal of staff and faculty time, making this investment serve our goals.
Q: Does the tool assess my online course or hybrid course equally?
A: SETE has been tested in face-to-face, online, and hybrid environments with consistent results across each delivery format. After testing, Smarter Services found that the SETE questions assess each mode of delivery with the same results.

Q: What is next?
A: After the campus wide test is conducted for two semesters a review of the implementation will be conducted. Results will be used to determine if the SETE is an appropriate tool for evaluating courses at NAU.

Q: This evaluation form, compared to the evaluation forms currently in use, does not evaluate the course, but only evaluates the faculty. Is that a good practice and how will that impact program evaluation?
A: Currently, NAU has many evaluation forms and they are inconsistent across units. The Task Force report recommended the use of a more comprehensive mid-term evaluation to address program and specific course outcomes in addition to the end of term SETE. Smarter Surveys has the capability to support unit level mid-term evaluations. However, it is also important to remember the recommendation for other forms of evidence in evaluating a course.

Q: To what extent can the SETE be individualized in order to meet accreditation standards and/or program evaluation plans?
A: The Smarter Service can be individualized surveys to meet accreditation requirements. Units with specific requirements should contact Denise Helm to discuss the process for individualizing the end of term evaluation.

Q: The notion that it controls for bias in student responses assumes that data on faculty is collected. How is this data collected and weighted?
A: The faculty information is pulled from PeopleSoft and uploaded into the Smarter Services system. The details on how the data is weighted can be found in the SETE Documentation (UNT) long version at http://www.smartersurveys.com/sete/.

Q: Is it legal to share data on faculty with Smarter Services?
A: Appropriate data sharing is a concern for all of us at NAU therefore; we are being diligent in adhering to University rules about distributing of information. For this reason only data that has potential to bias the end of term course evaluation outcomes will be used in the analysis. Further, Smarter Services pledges to keep data transmitted to them secure and confidential. They will not share personal information with others.

Q: Can students print an email verification that states that they completed the course evaluation?
A: Yes. There are several options for students to print documentation of completed end of term course evaluations.

1. Student logs into Smarter Surveys via mobile device, laptop, or computer and
shows screen to faculty showing surveys completed.

2. Student receives bounce back/thank you email from our system upon completion of surveys in which the student can print and give to faculty OR forward email to faculty.

3. Student can take a screen shot of the screen showing surveys completed and send to faculty via email OR print.

Q: Doesn’t the SETE reduce teaching to a single number?
A: SETE does produce a scaled score of effectiveness; it also provides the raw data. End of term teaching evaluations are designed to measure teaching in a quantifiable terms. Again, the task force recommended multiple measures of teaching effectiveness to strengthen the overall evaluation process. Qualitative information on courses can be gathered through the unit level mid-semester evaluation.

Q: Does the SETE include student effort in the class?
A: The SETE does not measure student effort in a class. SETE does ask students to identify their anticipated grade.

Q: What open-ended questions are included with SETE?
A: None. However, NAU will add these open-ended question: a) Please provide any comments you wish to the instructor (e.g., what was particularly effective or what could use improvement) b) Please describe your own level of effort for this course.