Introduction

Provost Huenneke convened this committee to evaluate the trial use of the Student Evaluation of Teaching Effectiveness (SETE) instrument and the SmarterSurvey systems being used as part of the evaluation of faculty teaching. This report addresses the 2013-14 trial and whether the instrument/delivery method met the criteria set forth by the Provost’s 2012 Task Force on Evaluation of Teaching.

Specifically, this committee was charged with the evaluation of

1. how the SETE **aligns with 2012 Task Force recommendations** and
2. the **process of the SETE implementation** during fall 2013 and spring 2014 semesters.

In addition, the committee decided that it would be prudent to provide a summary recommendation for or against continuing with the SETE instrument and a recommended plan for moving forward.

Committee Members

Karen Appleby, Senior Assistant to Provost, Office of the Provost
Charles Balch, Associate Clinical Professor, NAU-Yuma
Kathy Bohan, Associate Dean, College of Education
Brandon Cruickshank, Professor, Chemistry & Biochemistry
Cassandra Dakan, Lecturer, Honors Program
Chris Greenough (*no longer with NAU*)
Sibylle Gruber, Professor, English
Denise Helm, Provost’s Faculty Fellow, Office of the Provost.
Robert Horn, Chair, COE: Educational Psychology
Ellen Larson, Assistant Clinical Professor, Health Sciences
Angela Merlo, Assistant Professor, Physical Therapy & Athletic Training
John McClure, Associate Professor, COE: Educational Psychology
Susan Smiley, Senior Lecturer, NAU-Yuma
Rick Stamer, Associate Professor, School of Music
Sumner Sydeman, Professor, Psychological Sciences
John Tingerthal (Committee Chair), Associate Professor, Civil Engineering, Construction Management and Environmental Engineering
Maribeth Watwood, Chair, Biological Sciences
Heidi Wayment, Chair, Psychological Sciences
Eric Yordy, Assistant Professor, W.A. Franke College of Business
NAU Graduate Student Government represented by Jason Edward Kordosky

Background

The Provost’s Task Force on Evaluation of Teaching released a report dated April 24, 2012 urging more discussion on the evaluation of teaching. The 2012 Task Force specifically recommended the following practices in relation to student opinion surveys (questionnaires):

- Clarify the purpose of evaluations
- Administer strategic mid-term evaluations (as determined by units) that are more comprehensive, in conjunction with brief end-of-course questionnaires;
- Adopt a commercial (web-based) tool for student opinion surveys for the following reasons:
  - Enhanced reliability
  - Meaningful comparisons (within and beyond NAU)
  - Ease and uniformity of administration
  - Integration with the Faculty Activity and Achievement Reporting (FAAR) system

The task force recommended the use of the SETE instrument developed at the University of North Texas which is delivered through a web interface contracted through SmarterSurveys.

In fall of 2012 and spring of 2013, NAU completed a pilot project of using the SETE instrument. The SETE instrument was then deployed in a university-wide trial during fall of 2013 and spring of 2014.

General Comments

The SETE Evaluation Committee believes that the campus community should review the 2012 report and have further discussions on the remaining recommendations. In particular, the committee supports the 2012 Task Force recommendation that the student surveys should constitute only one of many data points and that the process for faculty evaluation should consist of other information as well.

The committee notes that any comparisons among faculty teaching different courses and different students is problematic. Because student evaluations are “student opinion surveys” and not measures of teaching effectiveness, the committee urges that, regardless of the instrument, the student surveys are properly labeled as opinion surveys and not measures of effectiveness.

This committee is concerned that any change in instruments (including the implementation of SETE/SmarterSurvey or a change from SETE/SmarterSurvey to another system) will make it difficult to track progress toward promotion, tenure and retention.

Our analysis of the SETE and SmarterSurveys pilot follows and includes specific recommendations R1 thru R13. It is the initial reaction of the committee that the evaluation of the SETE instrument itself is of paramount importance and that the choice of a delivery system is an administrative decision.
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Alignment with 2012 Task Force Recommendations

The following table lists the 2012 Task Force recommendations, corresponding committee comments and further recommendations to the Provost.

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<tr>
<th>2012 Task Force Recommendation</th>
<th>Committee Comments</th>
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<td>Clarify the purpose and uses of course questionnaires for students</td>
<td>Committee agreed that purpose of the questionnaire has not been made clear to faculty and / or P&amp;T/Service committees. The committee agreed that the primary purpose is to meet ABOR and COFS requirements (emphasis added): ABOR 6-211 General Policy: “…faculty shall be evaluated on their performance in accordance with the following guidelines:… Elements of the summative evaluation shall include, but shall not be limited to… A systematic assessment of student opinion shall constitute one, but not the only, component of the evaluation” NAU COFS 1.4.5.2 Professional Review File shall include: “Results of formal student, peer, and administrator evaluations, including recommendations and/or decisions relating to the faculty member resulting from such evaluations;” 1.4.5.3a Annual Faculty Performance Report: “Every annual review will include course evaluations by students and every faculty member is expected to be evaluated on every course, every semester.” ABOR 6-201h1 Post Tenure: “Every annual review of teaching will contain and seriously consider student input including evaluation of faculty classroom performance in all classes”</td>
<td>(R1) Provide transparent explanation to the faculty of the purpose of opinion surveys and explicitly state how data will and will not be used. (R2) Provide explicit guidance to appropriate faculty committees (e.g. promotion and tenure committee) and administrators regarding how data is to be used. (R3) Develop guidelines for broader faculty evaluation which emphasize that student opinion surveys are just one piece of the data. Realign COFS documents to be consistent with these guidelines.</td>
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<td>Administer strategic mid-term evaluations (as determined by units) that are more comprehensive, in conjunction with brief end-of-course questionnaires;</td>
<td>SETE, as implemented, constitutes the end-of-course questionnaire. SETE is not appropriate for midterm feedback.</td>
<td>(R4) Do not use SETE for mid-term evaluations.</td>
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<td>Adopt a commercial (web-based) tool for the following reasons:</td>
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<td>1. Enhanced reliability</td>
<td>The original task force report suggested a commercial provider to administer opinion surveys. The SETE is a commercial product, but we cannot judge its validity or reliability due to a lack of information provided by the vendor.</td>
<td>(R5) If a commercial product is selected, the committee recommends that vendor provides updated psychometric information (i.e. data on reliability and validity).</td>
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<td>2. Meaningful comparisons (within and beyond NAU)</td>
<td>Committee is concerned that since SETE scores are quantifiable, they may be used by administration inappropriately Committee understands that SETE scores cannot be compared to other institutions.</td>
<td>(R6) Student opinion survey scores should not be compared across units or even courses within NAU due to varying contexts. (R7) Student opinion survey scores should continue to be available to individual faculty for personal use. (R8) Caution should be used when automatically reporting student opinion survey scores. Any report of student opinion survey scores should contain warnings regarding proper and improper use. (Option to eliminate reporting student opinion survey scores altogether).</td>
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<td>3. Ease and uniformity of administration</td>
<td>This criterion was met.</td>
<td>(R9) Integrate evaluations into Learning Management System (LMS, aka BbLearn).</td>
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<td>4. Integration with the Faculty Activity and Achievement Reporting (FAAR) system</td>
<td>This criterion was met</td>
<td>(R10) Raw data should continue to be uploaded to FAAR system automatically. (see also R8 – Caution when reporting scores)</td>
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Process of SETE implementation

This committee was charged with evaluating the 2013-14 campus-wide trial. We have provided comments and recommendations below regarding the process by which the trial was implemented.

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<td>Web interface apparently worked smoothly</td>
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<td>Student responses are not entirely anonymous, but we are comfortable with the confidentiality provided by the vendor.</td>
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<td>Unclear to some faculty how to assist students with accessing the system and unclear what notices the students are getting.</td>
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<td>There exists a perception among the faculty that they did not have input on the selection of instrument.</td>
<td>(R11) Every effort should be made to make the instrument selection process transparent.</td>
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<td>Serious concerns about low response rate.</td>
<td>(R12) Implement actions to improve student response rates, and provide university-level guidelines on incentives to students for completion.</td>
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<td>Disagreement about the timing of survey. Considerable opposition to keeping surveys open into finals week.</td>
<td>(R13) Continue closing surveys prior to first final exam for the term and be open a percentage of the term.</td>
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Recommendation regarding continued use of SETE instrument and score.

Based on our evaluation, the majority of the committee **recommends against the continuing use of the SETE instrument and score** for the following reasons:

1. There is a lack of evidence of validity and enhanced reliability of data and no ability to make meaningful comparisons within and beyond NAU.
2. The title “Student Evaluation of Teaching Effectiveness” is a misnomer. While the instrument provides a measure of student perception of an instructor’s practice, it does not (and cannot) measure other aspects of effectiveness, including learning outcomes and curriculum design.
3. Faculty are concerned about summative teaching evaluations being based solely on this one single score. Reporting of a single SETE score could lead to unfair comparisons among faculty due to the ease with which quantitative values can be ranked. There is general consensus within the committee that there are many factors that would preclude making meaningful score comparisons, including level of class, size of class, topic, and course difficulty.
4. There exists general skepticism of the SETE score because faculty do not understand how the algorithm works and do not feel that they had a voice in its selection.

**Recommended process for selecting alternative instrument**

The process recommended below differs from that which occurred with the current trial in that the recommended process provides a dramatically enhanced opportunity for faculty input and transparency. This process should begin as soon as possible.

1. Implement recommendations R1-R3 (explanation of purpose, use of data, and guidelines for broader faculty evaluation.)
2. Form a committee to research and suggest candidate instruments. Committee should include:
   - members with expertise in evaluation, teaching and psychometrics,
   - provision for stipend to committee members,
   - members who commit to be true representatives of their constituents,
   - representation from each college, the teaching academy, NAU Yuma and Extended Campuses.
3. Charge this committee to select candidate instruments:
   - research and select multiple instruments
   - establish pros and cons of each instrument
   - develop method for getting feedback from faculty
   - develop guidelines for assessing feedback
4. Gather feedback from faculty
5. Select one or two finalist instruments based on feedback and assessment guidelines
6. Recommend instrument(s) to the Provost and copy recommendation to faculty.