Draft

Course Evaluation Revision Task Force Report

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Charge of the Task Force

This semester, the default delivery of the Student Course Evaluation (SCE) is online with the "opt out" option of using paper evaluations. This is a great opportunity to reassess and revise the Student Course Evaluation. The SCE Revision Task Force is charged with revising the SCE to be more useful to instructors in improving their courses and for reappointment, promotion, and tenure applications.

The minimum revision will be to streamline and rewrite the two qualitative questions at the end of the SCE survey (both of which essentially ask what is good or bad about the course, so simple responses like "the lectures" or "the readings" are completely ambiguous).

 The TF may consider factors that may encourage higher response rates, such as ease of use (e.g. fewer questions, etc.), but is not required to consider such factors of implementation.

As for scope, if the TF deems it necessary, they may completely rewrite the SCE and submit the proposal to FA.

Report Due: September 30, 2018

Activities of the Task Force

The Task Force met regularly to accomplish the following tasks:

- Articulated the uses of the Course and Instructor Evaluation Forms at Ramapo
- Reviewed current form, identifying areas that may require revision
- Examined course evaluation forms from other NJ Public Colleges
- Reviewed literature on best practices
- Reviewed literature on bias in evaluations of teaching
- Examined Standardized Measures designed for course and instructor evaluation
- Reviewed AAC&U's LEAP (Liberal Education and America's Promise) essential learning outcomes
- Developed draft of revised "Student Evaluation of Instructor and Course"

Background

The Student Evaluation of Instructor and Course has been in use for some time now at Ramapo. The primary concerns with this form at the present time are the double barreled qualitative questions at the end of the form and the potential for biases to influence student's ratings, a problem that is not unique to this form but inherent to the process of student ratings and other similar evaluations.

The potential for biases to influence ratings has been an ongoing concern at Ramapo. In an effort to address these issues, an Ad-Hoc Committee on Student Evaluations was formed in 2001 and presented their report to the Faculty Assembly in 2002. At that time, the Ad-Hoc committee argued that the "collection and analysis of

numeric student evaluation data, at the All-College level, produces invalid information and results in unfair evaluation of faculty. (Ultimately, this practice also negatively affects student instruction)." These concerns were consistent with those articulated in a March 9, 1983 "Report of an Ad-Hoc Committee Established by the School of Science," which cautioned: "Numerical ratings offer important advantages, . . . but we fear that numerical ratings can be abused by personnel committees and administrators. Danger arises if averages are calculated." These issues are analogous with those arising in the scientific literature, particularly when data from student evaluation forms are inappropriately used to inform tenure, promotion and other personnel decisions.

In 2002, the recommendations made by the Ad-Hoc Committee were to do away with the quantitative portion of the Evaluation Form and to use only two qualitative questions to gather information about students' experiences in their courses. These recommendations were not supported by the Faculty Assembly and the College continued the practice of using the existing Student Evaluation of Instructor and Course to gather data about students' course-related experiences.

An extensive body of scientific evidence indicates that the process of evaluation of instruction is highly susceptible to bias (see Reference Section for further reading on matters of bias). Therefore, data from student ratings of instruction need to be interpreted with much caution, taking into account multiple context factors, and never as a primary way to evaluate teaching effectiveness.

However, research also suggests that the information gathered from students is of significant value, and when interpreted carefully, can provide useful information for enhancing teaching and promoting course development. It is on this framework that the work of our Task Force is founded.

The 2018 Task Force acknowledges the value of student feedback when it is used to inform and enhance teaching effectiveness. The collection and use of student feedback is considered a foundational component of model teaching (Richmond et al., 2014). Furthermore, **when used as one of multiple and varied forms of evaluating faculty** in the context of tenure and promotion decisions, data from student ratings can be valuable. We assert that given the extensive biases that can influence student ratings of instructions, data collected in this manner should always be interpreted with caution and with regard to important dimensions that produce bias (the level of rigor of the course, whether the course is required, personal characteristics of the instructor such as gender, race, age, ability, etc..). Moreover, data gathered from Student Evaluations should certainly never be used as stand-alone measures of teaching effectiveness (Boysen, 2016). Rather, the assessment of teaching effectiveness should involve multiple and varied methods such as peer evaluation, self-assessment, and review of course design and course materials by appropriate peers. Moreover, when used appropriately for the purpose of enhancing and informing teaching, and not for the sole purpose of evaluating faculty, course evaluations are an important vehicle for students to share their impressions in a safe and comfortable manner and for faculty to gather feedback in an efficient and consistent way.

At Ramapo, student ratings of instruction are not used as a sole method for evaluating faculty, and should never be used as a primary method given the potential problems that result from biases. Evaluation of teaching at Ramapo involves multiple, varied methods, which include self-evaluation, a review of course materials, peer evaluation of teaching, dean evaluation of teaching, and data from student ratings. This

process is consistent with best practices for the purpose of evaluating teaching effectiveness   (See Appendix A for more information about assessment of teaching effectiveness at Ramapo).

Student Ratings at other NJ Public Institutions

With the help of our AFT Union representatives, our Task Force examined the processes used by some of the other NJ Public Colleges for collecting student evaluation data. NJ Public Colleges rely on student surveys for collecting this information. Some use home grown forms such as our form, which afford flexibility and allow for questions that address specific teaching philosophies. A substantial number of NJ Public Institutions have adopted standardized forms for collecting student evaluation data. These forms have established validity and reliability and allow for more robust comparisons and data analyses.

Kean & Rowan: Student Instructional Report II

Stockton & New Jersey City University: Individual Development and Educational Assessment (IDEA)

Responding To Our Charge

In response to our charge, the committee developed a draft of a Revised Instructor and Course Evaluation for consideration by the FAEC and FA. The form aims to encompass quantitative items related to the students' perception of the following areas:

- quality of instruction
- student learning and progress in areas related to LEAP and overall
- student progress in areas related to the Ramapo pillars

In addition, the form includes 3 qualitative questions regarding the overall course experience of students. The development of this form was carried out after reviewing literature on best practices and considering forms presently in use at other institutions. The Task Force aimed to include items related to several dimensions: the quality of instruction, students' perceptions of progress on learning outcomes related to a liberal arts education, and students' perceptions of progress on learning outcomes related to the Ramapo Pillars. Additional questions were included to assess context variables, such as student interest, expected grade in the course, reason for taking the course, and time devoted to course work. The proposed form is available in Appendix B. Appendix C represents a comparison of the proposed form with the form presently in use at Ramapo.

Issues Related to Online Delivery

More institutions are utilizing online delivery for student evaluations of teaching (Boysen, 2016; Dommeyeret al., 2004; Goodman, Anson & Belcheir, 2015; Nulty, 2008; Stanny & Arruda, 2017). This change has aimed to reduce the time and resources needed for data collection and analysis when paper forms are used. In a review of the literature on SETs, Boysen (2016) asserts that "online evaluations can be just as useful as face-to-face evaluations" (p. 276). When SETs are delivered online, a standardized, multidimensional student evaluation measure with established validity is recommended (see more about this in the section that follows). Best practices require teachers "… (a) utilize reliable and valid student evaluation surveys, (b) obtain

an adequate sample of students, (c) analyze responses systematically to produce meaningful results, and (d) incorporate the results into professional development efforts known to improve teaching (p. 274).

Online methods for administering Student Evaluations of Teaching (SETs) are plagued by low response rates and related to lower ratings (Nowell, Gale & Handley, 2010). The difference in response rates across delivery methods renders invalid any comparisons of evaluations gathered online to those gathered in class. Moreover, low response rates increase measurement error, which can result in limitations to our ability to use the data.

However, online methods are not thought to inherently render the evaluations invalid. Instead, it is recommended that colleges use a single mode of delivery for all courses (Nowell, Gale and Handley, 2010).

In a study conducted by Dommeyeret al. (2004) taking no action to encourage completion of online evaluations led to a response rate of 29%, demonstration of the Website in class led to a rate of 53%, and a small grade incentive of one quarter of 1% of the total course grade led to a response rate of 87% (Boysen, p.278). More research on incentives has followed and a summary of recommendations for improving response rates are included below

Improving Online SET Response Rates (Suggestions are integrated from: Boysen, 2016; Dommeyeret al., 2004; Goodman, Anson & Belcheir, 2015; Nulty, 2008; Stanny & Arruda, 2017)

- The greater the number of measures taken to boost online response rates, the higher those response rates
- *Administer student evaluations during class time, preferably on a day when attendance is sure to be near 100%. Electronic forms may be completed using personal electronic devices or a computer station in the classroom.*
- Faculty members should emphasize the importance of the survey in class, explaining how they use the data to inform their teaching. It helps if students are assured that the feedback will be taken seriously
- Involve students in the choice of optional, course-specific questions
- Faculty members may demonstrate how to complete the electronic survey
- The College may provide repeated reminders
- Faculty members may provide reminders in a variety of ways (verbally in class, via email, by posting a reminder on the course page)
- Apply Incentives. Examples of incentives vary and include:
  - early access to end of term grades
  - lotteries for prizes to students who complete the forms
  - donation incentive—either from the community or a university alumnus—contributes one dollar to a local or national charity for every student course evaluation submitted…
  - General Prizes: food coupons, university bookstore coupons
- *Assure students of anonymity*
- *Use attractive formatting that is easy to navigate*
- *Keep surveys brief (easy to complete)*
- *Make surveys mandatory*

Home Grown versus Standardized Student Evaluations of Teaching

Several NJ Public institutions rely on standardized SETs. While making recommendations about standardized forms is outside the scope of our Tasks Force's charge, we agreed it was important to share what we learned about these methods.

Three well-researched, multidimensional measures were examined by our Task Force: the Instructional Development and Effectiveness Assessment (IDEA; Cashin & Downey,1992), the Student Course Experience Questionnaire (SCEQ; Ginns, Prosser, & Barrie, 2007), and the Students' Evaluation of Educational Quality (SEEQ; Marsh, 1983).

SECQ: The Student Course Experience Questionnaire The SCEQ is a scale for measuring the quality of students' experience. The instrument consists of 29 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (from strongly disagree to strongly agree). The SCEQ measures six dimensions of students' perception of their learning environment: good teaching (six items), clear goals and standards (four items), appropriate workload (four items), appropriate assessment (three items), key skills (six items), learning community (six items).

SEEQ: The SEEQ consists of 35 items nine factors: (a) learning/value, (b) enthusiasm, (c) organization, (d) group interaction, (e) individual rapport, (f) breadth of coverage, (g) examinations/grading, (h) assignments, and (i) workload/difficulty

IDEA: Individual Development and Educational Assessment (IDEA) administered by an independent non-profit organization. This form allows for an instructor to first conduct a self-assessment of the course, identifying from a predetermined list particular objectives (e.g., knowledge base, critical thinking skills, working with a group). These objectives are then included as measurements in the SET to determine the degree to which students' perceptions about their progress on those goals. The SET also includes students' ratings of the methods used to reach those objectives. The IDEA statistically controls for a number of extraneous variables, including class size, student motivation, discipline-related difficulty, and student effort.

Of the three standard scales examined, our Task Force found the Individual Development and Educational Assessment (IDEA) tool to be most flexible as well as consistent with our aims and values. Moreover, feedback from NJ Public Institutions using this method was overwhelmingly positive. Should the College decide to implement a standardized tool for collecting SET data, our Task Force would recommend consideration of this method in particular.

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Appendix A

Assessment of Teaching Excellence
From the Faculty Handbook

To achieve both completeness and objectivity in reviewing effective teaching, the criterion of effective teaching shall be assessed in a variety of ways, and in particular **five (5) separate perspectives** shall be sought, viz, student, colleague, dean, self, and historic record, as discussed in greater length in #7 below:

a. An instrument(s) suitable for registering student response shall be used, particularly at the end of a course but not excluding such activity during a course if it seems suitable and desirable.

b. A suitable instrument for registering "colleague" response shall also be used. For our purposes, we define "colleague" in several different, though occasionally overlapping, categories, i.e.

-- colleagues in the particular unit of the College,

-- colleagues in the same professional field, e.g., convening group or program

-- colleagues from the institution across unit or professional lines, i.e., this may take the form of a "representative committee or team" for evaluation purposes (e.g., All-College Promotions Committee, etc.).

c. The Dean of the unit or designee,

d. Self evaluation

e. A file shall be used which offers a documentary record of teaching activities, including, but not limited to course syllabi, papers, or project assignments, 5 quizzes, and examinations used, etc.

Appendix B
Student Response Survey (from criteria)

Your responses to these questions provide useful information to your instructor for the purpose of professional and course development. Please consider each question carefully and provide thoughtful responses.

	1 Rarely	2	3 Sometimes	4	5 Almost Always	N/A Not Applicable
1. Course materials (e.g., syllabus, assignment instructions) were clear	1 Rarely	2	3 Sometimes	4	5 Almost Always	N/A Not Applicable
2. The instructor organized the course well	1 Rarely	2	3 Sometimes	4	5 Almost Always	N/A Not Applicable
3. The instructor provided constructive feedback on students' course work	1 Rarely	2	3 Sometimes	4	5 Almost Always	N/A Not Applicable
4. The instructor explained course material effectively	1 Rarely	2	3 Sometimes	4	5 Almost Always	N/A Not Applicable
5. The instructor made effective use of examples to enhance student learning	1 Rarely	2	3 Sometimes	4	5 Almost Always	N/A Not Applicable
6. The instructor encouraged participation, discussion and/or questions during class	1 Rarely	2	3 Sometimes	4	5 Almost Always	N/A Not Applicable
7. The instructor was sensitive to the diversity of students in the class (i.e. in terms of gender, race, age, religion and special physical or academic needs)	1 Rarely	2	3 Sometimes	4	5 Almost Always	N/A Not Applicable
8. Overall, this instructor was excellent	1 Rarely	2	3 Sometimes	4	5 Almost Always	N/A Not Applicable

Indicate the degree of progress you have made as a result of this course in each of the following areas (please note that some of these aims may not be addressed in this course, in which case you can select "Not Applicable"):

	1 No Progress	2	3 Some Progress	4	5 Substantial Progress	N/A Not Applicable
9. Learning the subject	1 No Progress	2	3 Some Progress	4	5 Substantial Progress	N/A Not Applicable
10. The ability to apply knowledge effectively	1 No Progress	2	3 Some Progress	4	5 Substantial Progress	N/A Not Applicable
11.Learning to critically analyze material	1 No Progress	2	3 Some Progress	4	5 Substantial Progress	N/A Not Applicable
12.Improving writing skills	1 No Progress	2	3 Some Progress	4	5 Substantial Progress	N/A Not Applicable
13. Improving oral communication skills	1 No Progress	2	3 Some Progress	4	5 Substantial Progress	N/A Not Applicable
14. Learning to critically analyze numerical/quantitative information such as numerical data, graphs, statistics.	1 No Progress	2	3 Some Progress	4	5 Substantial Progress	N/A Not Applicable
15. Learning to find appropriate sources for research projects or assignments	1 No Progress	2	3 Some Progress	4	5 Substantial Progress	N/A Not Applicable
16. The ability to work in teams	1 No Progress	2	3 Some Progress	4	5 Substantial Progress	N/A Not Applicable
17. Developing ethical reasoning or action	1 No Progress	2	3 Some Progress	4	5 Substantial Progress	N/A Not Applicable
18. Provide an overall estimate of your learning in this course	1 No Progress	2	3 Some Progress	4	5 Substantial Progress	N/A Not Applicable

Indicate your degree of agreement with each of the following items:

	1 Strongly Disagree	2	3	4	5 Strongly Agree	N/A Not Applicable
19. This course challenged me intellectually	1 Strongly Disagree	2	3	4	5 Strongly Agree	N/A Not Applicable
20. Overall, this course was excellent	1 Strongly Disagree	2	3	4	5 Strongly Agree	N/A Not Applicable
21. Optional Question 1	1 Strongly Disagree	2	3	4	5 Strongly Agree	N/A Not Applicable
22. Optional Question 1	1 Strongly Disagree	2	3	4	5 Strongly Agree	N/A Not Applicable
23. Optional Question 1	1 Strongly Disagree	2	3	4	5 Strongly Agree	N/A Not Applicable
24. Optional Question 1	1 Strongly Disagree	2	3	4	5 Strongly Agree	N/A Not Applicable
25. Optional Question 1	1 Strongly Disagree	2	3	4	5 Strongly Agree	N/A Not Applicable

26. Please comment on what the instructor has done especially well:

27. Comment on what you believe were the best features of the course:

28. Identify specific ways the course could be improved:

29. Indicate the number of hours you spent on this course outside of class each week, on average:

0-1   2-3   4-5   6-7   8+

30. Indicate your expected grade in this course:

A+   A   A-   B+   B   B-   C+   C   C-   D+   D   F

31. Why did you take this course?

__This course is a requirement of the major or minor
__This course is a general education or school-specific requirement
__This course is an elective

	Current Student Evaluation	Similar Question(s) in Proposed Evaluation	Deletion Reasoning
1	The goals, requirements, and grading policy of the course were clear.	*Course materials (syllabus, assignment instructions, etc…) were clear.	
2	The material was presented in an organized manner.	*The course was well organized.	
3	The instructor was available for scheduled conferences.	*The instructor was adequately accessible to students during office hours.	
4	The class session, readings, and assignments generally corresponded to the course outline.	removed	Flexibility / adaptability of class sessions can lead to significant learning experiences.
5	The instructor was helpful when the students had difficulty with the coursework.	*The instructor provided meaningful feedback on students' academic work. *The instructor was adequately accessible to students during office hours.	
6	The instructor was sensitive to the diversity of students in the class (i.e. in terms of gender, race, age, and special physical or academic needs).	Retained as is	
7	Exams and assignments were graded and returned within a reasonable time period.	removed	Student assessment of what is reasonable may be unreliable.
8	Students had opportunities to ask questions or express ideas.	*The instructor encouraged participation, discussion and/or questions during class.	
9	The instructor was able to explain difficult concepts effectively.	*The instructor explained course material clearly and effectively.	
10	The instructor used enough examples or illustrations to clarify the material.	*The instructor made effective use of examples to enhance student learning.	
11	I received useful feedback on my work in this course.	*The instructor provided meaningful feedback on students' academic work.	
12	The instructor seemed to care about my learning.	*Overall, this instructor was excellent.	
13	The methods of evaluation (tests, papers, projects, etc.) provided an adequate opportunity to demonstrate my grasp of the subject matter and skills taught in the course.	removed	
14	I have learned a great deal in this course.	*Provide an overall estimate of your learning in the course.	

15	Optional Question	1-5 Optional Questions may be added and be course- or program – specific	
16	Optional Question		
17	**This course improved my (Fill in as many as apply)** Analytical Reasoning Critical Thinking Creative Productivity Communication Skills Computational Skills Writing	*Various within the section based on LEAP goals progress.	
18	**Why are you taking this course?** It meets requirements for my major or minor It meets requirements for my school's core It meets general education requirements It is an elective The time and day were convenient The course or instructor were recommended	*Why did you take this course? -It is a requirement of the major / minor -It is a general education or school-specific requirement -It is an elective	
19	A course information sheet (syllabus) was distributed at the start of the semester.	removed	Determined to be unnecessary question
20	Please indicate your expected grade in this course:	*Please indicate your expected grade in this course:	
21	Comment on what the instructor has done especially well. Comment on what areas you believe need improvement.	First part kept, second sentence dropped from evaluation. *Comment on what the instructor has done especially well.	
22	Comment on what you believe were the best features of this course. Identify specific ways the course could be improved.	Separated into 2 questions: *Comment on what you believe were the best features of this course. *Identify specific ways the course could be improved.	

New Questions not Mapped to Current Evaluation	Reasoning
This course challenged me intellectually (Likert scale 1 - 5)	Obtain student perception of course difficulty.
Overall, this course was excellent. (Likert Scale 1 - 5)	Obtain a quantitative overall assessment.
Rate your level of interest in the subject matter PRIOR to taking the course. (Likert scale 1 - 5)	Interest was thought to be an important context variable
Rate your level of interest in the subject matter AFTER taking the course. (Likert scale 1 - 5)	To gather information about change in interest resulting from the learning experience
In general, I tend to work harder than other students on my academic endeavors (Likert scale 1 - 5)	Student self assessment- context variable

Indicate the number of hours you spent on the course outside of class each week, on average: (0-3 4-7 8-11 12-15 16-19 20+)	Approximation of student effort in current course.