



MEMORANDUM

To: Academic Senate and Faculty Council Chairs

From: Elizabeth Graddy
Vice Provost for Academic and Faculty Affairs

Ginger Clark
Assistant Vice Provost for Academic and Faculty Affairs

Date: October 18, 2017

Subject: Revising the Student Course Evaluation at USC

Summary and Request for Feedback

Since 2013, three different faculty committees have agreed that USC's system of supporting, evaluating, and rewarding teaching requires a significant overhaul. The Committees were: 1) 2013 Academic Senate Task Force on Teaching Evaluations, 2) 2016 Provost's Task Force on Teaching Effectiveness, and 3) 2016-2017 Provost/Senate Committee on Teaching and Academic Programs. Each committee called for improved measures for assessing teaching quality and recommended that the same peer review standard that is used to evaluate scholarly work be used to evaluate teaching. Recommendations for changes were:

- Revision of student evaluations, including articulated constructs to be measured, revised items, and a more robust analysis
- Use of student evaluations to provide feedback about students' learning experiences and to give context, but not as a primary measure of teaching effectiveness during faculty review processes given their vulnerability to implicit bias and lack of validity as a teaching measure
- Implementation of a menu of valid teaching evaluation approaches, including peer review of classroom practices, syllabi, teaching portfolios, and teaching statements, as well as implementation of student learning outcome measures and long-term impact measures
- Implementation of transparent evaluation processes that include clear criteria and training

While many of these changes will be detailed in future memos, this memo outlines the rationale and process for implementing the first recommendation: *Revising the student course evaluation at USC*. We are **requesting feedback** from Faculty Councils during a *two-week window* on the pool of items to be considered for the revised measure. Five constructs will be measured, with three to five items per construct selected based on faculty feedback. Council members will have an opportunity via a Qualtrics enabled link to review each item in the context of the questionnaire constructs, and provide feedback on the item's content, clarity, and relevance in the comment boxes. A PDF file of the items accompanies this memo for your review prior to the October 18 Academic Senate meeting. Faculty input on the items is crucial to the Item Response Theory (Wilson, 2012) process being used to develop the measure. These items apply to the university-wide student evaluation form; however, schools will continue to have the option to include additional customized items on their forms. Senators will receive an email with the Qualtrics link at the close of the October 18th Senate meeting. Senators are asked to forward the email to their Council members with an urgent request for feedback to be completed by **November 1**.

Course Evaluation Change Rationale and Process

In response to recommendations made by three USC faculty committees, Vice Provost Elizabeth Graddy has initiated a revision of the USC student course evaluation questionnaire.

Faculty Recommendations (2013-2017)

Over the last four years, three faculty committees (2013 Academic Senate Task Force on Teaching Evaluations, 2016 Provost's Task Force on Teaching Effectiveness, and 2016-2017 Provost/Senate Committee on Teaching and Academic Programs) made recommendations for changing how teaching is supported, evaluated, and rewarded at USC. Below is a summary of the recommendations *specifically for student evaluations*.

The committees agreed that although more valid forms of evaluating teaching should be used, student course evaluations still provide valuable information about student experiences, and USC's questionnaire should be modified to better measure that experience in the following ways: The new questionnaire should articulate specific domains of students' learning experience, using multiple items with subscale scores. Items should evaluate course design elements as well as instructional practices. Customized open ended questions should be included, and rubrics should be used for reviewing qualitative comments. Items on student self-assessment of learning as well as variables such as grade, required/elective, small/medium/large enrollments, and graduate/undergraduate should be used to weigh and analyze the data. These variables should be described in a summary when evaluation results are examined to give context to the instructor's teaching environment. In addition, data such as course evaluation means, standard scores, and percent responding should be included. All of the data from the questionnaire should be utilized, not just one or two items, and cumulative data over a specified time frame should be used to identify patterns in student experiences. Response rates must increase to ensure validity of the measure, using required compliance for release of grades or orienting students to the importance of the evaluations and how they will be used as motivation for completion. In the overall process of evaluation of teaching, student evaluation scores could also be used as a flagging system that triggers subsequent in-depth examination of other valid measures of teaching—especially for faculty who receive very low or high scores. Once a new questionnaire is constructed, a systematic evaluation should be conducted, followed by regular evaluations, to ensure the questionnaire measures, and continues to measure, what it purports to.

New Student Course Evaluation Questionnaire

Many of the above recommendations about student evaluation data analysis and use will be addressed at a later date. This memo focuses only on revising the items used on the questionnaire. While the current questionnaire has a number of items specific to various teaching domains, they are not combined into identified subscales, and only items 11 (*Overall, how would you rate this instructor*) and 12 (*Overall, how would you rate this course*) are widely used in faculty review processes. These umbrella items do not provide specific information about students' experience with their faculty or courses. The new student evaluation questionnaire will include items that measure students' perceptions of: 1) Course design, 2) Instructional practices, 3) Inclusive design and practices (embedded in the other subscales to decrease response bias), 4) Assessment practices, and 5) Course impact. Open ended items will also be included, and schools will continue to have the option of adding customized items. To make analysis of student responses more robust, additional items on student investment in their own learning will be included, as this variable has a positive correlation with student ratings, and the items will encourage self-reflection on student accountability. The intent of this revised instrument is to provide better contextualized information about students' experience. The design process will use a validated approach to measurement design called Item Response Theory (Wilson, 2012; Fox, 2010).

Faculty and Staff Leading the Change

To begin the process of change, Professor Gale Sinatra from the Rossier School of Education was consulted about changing the USC course evaluation due to her experience in doing so at two other universities. She worked with a faculty committee in the Rossier School with Professors Harry O'Neil, Sandy Kaplan, Julie Slayton, Ken Yates, Kim Hirabayashi, Artineh Samkian, and Ruth Chung to identify items that could be useful in measuring the variables outlined above. From there, a new committee was formed to take those items and further develop and test them for the entire University using Item Response Theory approaches. Gisele Ragusa, Heather Rosoff, Robyn Goldberg, and Ginger Clark comprised that committee. Gigi Ragusa is a Professor of Engineering Education and an expert in Item Response Theory and measurement design. Heather Rosoff is the Director of Data Policy and Analysis in the Vice Provost's Office of Academic and Faculty Affairs. Robyn Goldberg is the Course Evaluation Administrator in the Office of Institutional Research. Ginger Clark is the Assistant Vice Provost for Academic and Faculty Affairs and the Director of the Center for Excellence in Teaching.

Process

Item Response Theory calls for *feedback from subject matter experts* (faculty) on the items being used to ensure they capture the type of behavior, experiences, and perceptions we want to assess. It requires *cognitive interviews from those being assessed* (students) to confirm that the items are being interpreted as asking what we intend them to ask. And it requires formative *pilot studies* to evaluate the items using confirmatory factor analysis to ensure the items cluster into the variables we hope to measure. *Adjustments and items substitutions* are then made until the measure assesses the desired variables.

This process will take approximately six months before full implementation, and one year until the new course evaluation instrument is finalized. The timeline will be as follows:

- 10/18: The Academic Senate will review the evaluation process and new pool of items with a request that Senators forward a Qualtrics link to their Faculty Councils as soon as possible for feedback on the items
- 10/18 through 11/1: Feedback will be collected from Faculty Councils
- 10/18 through 11/1: Cognitive interviews will take place with students evaluating the clarity of the items
- 11/1 through 11/12: Feedback from faculty and students will be used to modify and select items for the first pilot questionnaire
- 11/13-11/17: First small pilot study will be run on a cross-section of courses. Confirmatory factor analysis will be used to determine whether items are measuring the variables we want them to measure, and modifications will be made for the second pilot
- February 2018: Second larger pilot will be conducted followed by analysis and modifications
- April 2018: Full implementation of the new student evaluation will take place, replacing the old evaluation form. This is to ensure the course evaluations for the next merit cycle are consistent for the Spring and Fall for the 2018 faculty review process
- April 2018 & December 2018: Data will be examined from the Spring 2018 and Fall 2018 evaluations to make slight alterations to the measure
- April 2019: Final version of the measure will be implemented, with periodic analysis to ensure the measure continues to assess desired domains of student experience

References

Fox, J. P. (2010). *Bayesian Item Response Modeling: Theory and Applications*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Springer.

Wilson, M. (2012). *Constructing Measures: An Item Response Theory Approach*. New Jersey, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.