UHD Faculty Senate Meeting
May 1, 2012
Minutes

Present: A. Allen (President), G. Preuss (President-Elect), J. Schmertz (Secretary), P. Lyons (Past President)

J. Ahmad, C. Bachman, R. Beebe, M. Benavides, C. Burnett, T. Chiaviello, G. Evans, S. Farris, J. Hackett, J. Harned, V. Hrynkiv, P. Kintzele, P. Li, C. Nguyen, W. Nowak, A. Pavelich, A. Sikka, K. Switzer, V. Tzouanas, W. Waller, I. Wang,

Absent: R. McMahon, S. Penkar, R. Scott, L. Spears, V. Zafiris

Allen introduced new members of Senate in attendance: Susan Henney (secretary) and Paul Mandell (A&H).

Farris made a motion that discussion of the core curriculum revision be tabled until May 8 and that Senate devote a special session to it. (The discussion of the faculty assembly had been placed last on agenda). Allen asked how many Senators would attend another meeting on May 8. It was determined there would be a quorum. Motion was seconded and passed 21-0 with 1 abstention.

Presentation on Course Evaluations (Bill Pallett from The IDEA Center—Individual Development and Educational Assessment)

Barbara Belbot, chair of Academic Policies Committee, introduced the guest speaker from IDEA. She provided background information: APC was charged to make recommendations on course evaluations. Rewriting the entire instrument was a big job, so the committee was not sure how to proceed. The committee noted that some companies work with universities to design and deliver course evaluation instruments. APC accordingly identified and spoke with 5 companies and looked at their websites. IDEA stood out from the crowd. Because IDEA is non-profit, APC had to ask for funding from Provost's office. Belbot thanked Senate for using its valuable time to listen.

Pallet noted that the website for IDEA is www.theideacenter.org.

IDEA has been a non-profit organization since 2001. IDEA focuses on student learning targeted toward an instructor's purpose, adjusted for factors extraneous to the teaching process such as student motivation. Statistics on IDEA's validity and reliability, as well as comparison data, are available on its website. Data on student responses is compared against the individual discipline, the database, and the institution. Departments can design and add extra questions to tailor the instrument.

Faculty fill out a Faculty information Form (FIF), on which they identify several key learning objectives from a pre-existing list. These key objectives vary by discipline, and are weighted double. IDEA's product is intended to achieve three purposes: measuring student learning, diagnosing areas for individual improvement, and program assessment/accreditation (group summary).

The short form does not include a diagnostic component. Universities choose to do a mix of short and long forms. The resulting reports include both raw and adjusted scores.

On using student evaluations from IDEA in the administrative process: IDEA recommends that universities consider weighing student evaluations at 30-50% in assessing teaching ratings for merit pay, tenure, etc. IDEA believes in the validity of its instrument, but emphasizes that faculty peers are often best equipped to judge teaching effectiveness, particularly on issues like knowledge of and currency within one's field. Big differences in evaluative judgment are too often based on minimal statistical differences. IDEA has a 5 point scale. More than this is beyond the scope of any instrument, so fine-grained distinctions and big decisions should not rest on any single instrument of measurement.

In IDEA, a course needs 6-8 classes that it can be compared against for the data to be valid. "Downward adjustments" are made by IDEA for classes with students who self-report as highly motivated, and upward adjustments are made for classes with students who indicate the opposite. Typically, upward adjustments need to be made for freshman/sophomore and Gen Ed courses.

On using IDEA for purposes of assessment: Tennessee Tech uses IDEA to assess its Gen Ed program and QEP for SACS. IDEA also aids other assessment goals, such as encouraging consistency of objectives on multi- section courses and ensuring that course sequences and prerequisites are designed in ways that build student achievement on learning objectives. Faculty sometimes explicitly incorporate their learning objectives into their course and tell students what these objectives are.

Additional resources provided by IDEA: IDEA collaborates with non-profit teaching improvement specialists POD (Professional and Organizational Development Network in Higher Education), who make recommendations for all 12 learning objectives and all 20 teaching methods. There are also larger "IDEA papers" on things like getting students to read more, how to write syllabi, and ways to improve critical thinking in students.

Farris asked about the list of questions used to measure the learning objectives—she had concern about students' attention span and whether students will stick it out to the end of the survey to make written comments. Pallet responded that there is no indication that students fill out questions at the end of form less often than they do questions at the beginning of the form. "Survey fatigue" may be combated by mixing the plays: some campuses pick one class a semester or year for the full diagnostic survey, or rotate evaluations between diagnostic form and short form.

Evans asked about turnaround time. Pallet said it was 10 working days. Evans asked if other public universities use IDEA. Pallet said the organization's biggest clients were University of New Mexico, University of Alabama-Birmingham, University of Rhode Island , U of Alaska Anchorage. Evans asked what TX universities were using the IDEA product. Pallet said he would send a complete list later, but it included Angelo State, Sam Houston, and 5 TX community colleges, among them Delmar.

Sikka noted that she appreciated the idea of departmentally selected questions and learning objectives. She participated in a system like this 20 years ago. Would it be possible to phase an IDEA survey instrument in, to see what questions/items work best to aid program assessment? Pallet responded that campuses are encouraged to pilot IDEA before using it for any administrative purposes. Some campuses call their first year a "pilot year." IDEA does not include the first year of an institution's use of IDEA in its comparison databases.

Switzer asked how/if IDEA addressed multiple sections and a wide range of instructors including adjuncts. Pallet said departments can code in pre-selected objectives. Overall, campuses that use IDEA are moving toward uniformity in multi- section courses.

Harned asked about upfront initial costs or ongoing fees for continuation. Pallet said there was a sliding fee schedule listed on the website. His guess was that we would pay $4.50 per section and.15 per student. For a class size of 20, the cost would be $7.50 per class, including both delivery and report . There is no initial startup cost or contracts. Extra costs come with optional items, such as group or discipline summaries or a year's worth of aggregate data.

Discussion of Speaker's Presentation (Belbot)

Before discussing the policy, Belbot asked for input on the IDEA presentation by the guest speaker. She noted that APC and administration have made no decisions—the decision is up to faculty. There is no deadline for a decision, other than that Senate charged APC with examining the course evaluation instrument.

Evans said now that we have moved to online evals, it is a good time to make a change. She had seen Angelo State's use of IDEA and was impressed. She asked if administration had indicated it would fund the effort. Belbot said she had asked months ago, when she had asked for funds to bring Pallet in, and was told yes.

Waller said he was not sure if faculty were at the point where they could offer feedback, as this was the only company faculty had seen. Belbot responded that APC had selected IDEA because it looked interesting and was different from other companies that just administered questionnaires.

 Preuss suggested APC send online presentations and websites from other companies. He noted that he surveyed current Faculty Senate presidents, and all noted a decline in response rates after

moving to online evaluations. Lone Star did evaluations online and forced students to complete them in order to get their grades.

Sikka observed that our current student opinion survey is homegrown and has not been executed in the way it was originally intended (there were supposed to be optional items).

Sikka added that reps on the Academic Policy Committees should be going to their departments and colleges to seek input, rather than Senate being expected to give it without opportunity for consultation with faculty.

Sikka noted that it is essential that faculty get direct and timely announcements about the administration of the course opinion survey, so that they can encourage students to take it and get a good response rate. Faculty did not receive an announcement this semester, although they pushed to have this announcement made. Instead, the dates of the survey's availability were filtered down through deans and chairs.

Sikka reminded Senate that Texas Council of Faculty Senates (TCFS) had previously done a survey on online evaluations and had learned that concern about low student response rates was widespread among Faculty Senates in Texas. The survey showed that incentives and faculty encouragement, not withholding grades, was the best solution to raising these rates.

Evans suggested that APC provide a written description of the various companies/evaluation instruments they had examined. They could come up with a series of recommendations for the "handoff" to the next APC.

Hossein Shahroki noted that if the problem with the existing student opinion survey is the questions, that could be a simple IT fix. However, the IDEA company would be a change in systems, not questions, in part because of its incorporation of faculty input.

Waller said APC should consider how the data gets reported back to faculty, whatever system gets chosen. Evans concurred and said that that it is important that the instrument be responsive to what we are doing, what we are accountable for, and whether we get useful info. She applauded APC for identifying IDEA.

Harned said APC should include in its recommendations a list of options and companies, pros and cons, and cost figures.

Benavides noted that selecting a company was only one major decision; selecting questions would be a larger issue.

Lyons agreed that committee should write up a summary report and then Senate should renew its charge for next year's APC. APC should do some sort of follow-up with Senate early next semester.

Waller asked what the response rate to last semester's online surveys was. Shahroki said he thought it had gone down from 50% to 30%.

Schmertz moved that APC write up a summary report, that Senate renew its charges to APC, and that APC do a follow-up with Senate in the Fall. Preuss asked if this was an amendment to the original charge. Schmertz said the charge could be amended in the renewal if needed.

Chiaviello suggested adding to the motion that the process be completed at this time next year. Schmertz accepted this as a friendly amendment to her original motion. Waller asked if the original charge seemed vague; Belbot and Allen said they thought it was. Pavelich and Evans agreed an end date would be a good idea.

Chiaviello requested the motion spell out a specific set of steps APC should follow in meeting the deadline. Schmertz declined to further amend her motion, saying she felt APC should decide its own process.

Sikka called the question. Senate passed the motion unanimously, with abstentions.

Policies from Academic Policies Committee (APC)

The Grading Policy is ready to be voted on in Academic Affairs Council.

Belbot pointed out an executive summary that had been distributed. The version of the policy initially presented to Senate needed to incorporate graduate programs. The revised policy was sent out to DT_All Users. Graduate and undergraduate programs are now separated in policy. The process for incompletes was detailed, and a distinction made between GPA at graduation and GPA following graduation.

Nowak asked about advising. Section 2.4.4 of the policy implies that a student cannot do partial withdrawal. Assistant Dean Mosier asked for this to be revised, and for the phrase "appropriate dean" to be defined as the dean where a student's major was housed. Belbot said practices for withdrawal are not consistent across the university. Her college does not allow partial withdrawals.

On a phrase that stated that students seeking retroactive withdrawal must "appeal" within one calendar year—shouldn't the policy replace "appeal" with "request"? Belbot agreed that this was what was meant.

Evans moved that Senate leadership support the policy, as presented, when it is considered by the Academic Affairs Council. Schmertz seconded. There were 21 in favor and 5 abstentions.

Recognition of Retiring Faculty Member Larry Spears

Evans introduced a resolution of thanks to retiring faculty member Larry Spears for his "service, insight, vision, and dogged determination." The resolution was widely seconded. Spears received a standing ovation.

Report from Faculty Handbook Task Force (Kirk Hagen)

Anjoo Sikka, Michelle Moosally, Nell Sullivan and Kirk Hagen are working on a faculty handbook, per Senate's charge. Hagen encouraged faculty to take the survey monkey sent by Moosally. The task force has a table of contents and will work on the handbook over the summer. They hope to have something in place by fall. A handbook is a "living document " and therefore subject to revision.

Allen said "keep up with good work."

Teaching Excellence Task Force Final Report (Van Horn, chair)

Van Horn submitted the report on the Task Force's work to Senate President Austin Allen. The report is attached to these minutes.

 The Task Force completed all Senate charged it to do. The Task Force interviewed colleges most like ours and found out about their programs, and it created a list of grant workshops and symposia.

The final report contains two pages of recommendations. The task force recommends that the proposed teaching excellence program be university-funded, and housed within Senate and answerable to it.

Focus groups were established and conducted for all departments. The response was "overwhelming." The Task Force used everything they learned from faculty to shape their recommendations. All members of the Task Force participated.

Van Horn thanked Preuss for sharing the HIPS data and Lea Campbell for recording the focus groups and the process of the committees' deliberations. This work can help ground assessments of future efforts.

The Task Force is eager to come to the first Senate meeting of the fall to "iron out some details." There is broad-based institutional support for this endeavor, and interest in developing a journal. Additional recommendations include collaboration with library and TTLC.

Senate accepted the Task Force report. Evans made a motion of thanks to committee for the quality of their work and the enthusiasm it has generated.

Preuss said the effort needs to be sustainable and institutionally supported. Van Horn said that the endeavor should not be dependent on grants and soft-funding; this was one of their recommendations. Grants would only be used to support workshops and speakers.

Sikka announced a workshop on differentiated instruction taking place Friday, May 4.

Respectfully submitted,
Johanna Schmertz, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of English
Faculty Senate Secretary