RESOLUTION TO REDESIGN STUDENT COURSE EXIT SURVEYS AND REINVENT THE EVALUATION OF AN INSTRUCTOR’S IMPACT ON ACADEMIC LEARNING AND ENGAGEMENT

On behalf of the Educational Policy Committee, Christine Julien (Committee Chair and Professor, Electrical and Computer Engineering) submitted the following resolution recommending the creation of a task force charged to design a new student course exit survey and another whose charge would be to develop a robust and comprehensive approach for the evaluation of individual instructors. The resolution will be presented to the Faculty Council for consideration at its meeting on December 10, 2018.

Alan W. Friedman, Secretary
General Faculty and Faculty Council
The University of Texas at Austin
Arthur J. Thaman and Wilhelmina Doré Thaman Professor of English and Comparative Literature

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As an R1, public flagship university, UT Austin could be a leader in the evaluation of the impact of teaching on student academic engagement and learning. The last time teaching evaluation was considered by the Faculty Council, however, was in 2013. In light of a changing landscape of research on effective evaluation of teaching, the Faculty Council charges the Educational Policy Committee to implement two task forces. The first will redesign course exit surveys and the second will reinvent the University’s instructor evaluation process.

UT Austin’s primary mechanism for feedback on courses and instructors is the Course Instructor Survey (CIS), administered at the end of every course. CIS results are used by many stakeholders for diverse purposes. However, many studies have demonstrated that student evaluations contain biases against certain populations of faculty. In addition, the University of Southern California has concluded that, although student feedback is “crucial,” it is not correlated with student learning and success. The feedback is a measure of a student’s experience in a course and is therefore valuable to faculty, but, collectively, student surveys alone “cannot be considered a valid measure of teaching effectiveness and student learning.”

Some institutions have entirely removed end-of-course surveys from promotion and tenure processes.

In light of this and other research, we recommend that the Faculty Council authorize the Educational Policy Committee to create a task force charged to design a new student course exit survey. Questions should focus on students’ academic engagement and learning, including the student perspective on course rigor. The task force should examine how the survey can be framed as a student success tool, connecting survey results to student learning outcomes, as well as instructor self-improvement.

We also recommend a second task force to develop a robust and comprehensive approach for the evaluation of individual instructors. We must evaluate instructors’ efforts, commitment, and achievements in promoting learning. These evaluations are essential to self-improvement, merit review, comprehensive periodic review, promotion and tenure, and teaching awards.

While the two charges are distinct, they are not disjoint, and the task forces are expected to collaborate with each other as well as other efforts on campus. The task forces will work closely with the Provost’s office, Faculty Innovation Center, Testing and Evaluation Services, Student Success Initiatives, and other appropriate entities. It is expected that the task forces will present a joint recommendation to the Faculty Council of (1) a redesigned course exit survey for students and (2) a reformed process for evaluating individual instructors.

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1 On December 10, 2018, the Faculty Council emended the resolution, which was then unanimously endorsed.