CofC Faculty Educational Technology Committee
Meeting minutes
Oct 20, 2009

<u>Committee members present</u>: Bing Pan, Georgia Schlau, Henry Xie, Dongmei Cao, Bob Podolsky, Bradley Woods
<u>Committee members absent</u>: Amy Faenger, Tim Scheett
<u>Also present</u>: Deanna Caveny (Interim Associate Provost)

The committee discussed three issues at this meeting.

  I. <u>Online course evaluations</u>. The FETC has been handling this issue since 2005, and has previously listed costs and benefits of moving to an online system in FETC committee and Faculty Senate meeting minutes. The FETC has been the home committee for this issue since 2005, and has previously listed costs and benefits of moving to an online system in FETC committee and Faculty Senate meeting minutes. For this meeting we were asked by Interim Provost Bev Diamond for our perspective regarding whether to replace the paper system with a fully electronic system, as a hybrid system is no longer considered an option. Use of a newly adopted evaluation form awaits a decision about whether to use the paper or electronic format.

  The general consensus of our discussion was that online evaluations will be adopted sooner or later, given that apparent benefits outweigh costs and that such systems have been adopted successfully elsewhere. Because response rates at other institutions have been shown to rise following an initial drop at the start of the program, the college should focus most on ensuring that response rates are immediately maximized, in order not to disadvantage faculty who will rely for tenure and promotion on evaluation data collected soon after the switch. Hence, assuming that the online system will be adopted now or later, the relevant questions seem to be:

  (1) Do we currently have the information needed to maximize response rates?
  (2) Is the college prepared, based on that information, to maximize response rates?

  Regarding question 1, we feel that (a) faculty who took part in the pilot program should be consulted to find out what worked or did not work from their perspective, (b) faculty whose response rates were especially high should be consulted in more depth to find out how they achieved those rates, and (c) students, perhaps through SGA, should be heavily consulted to find out what would increase their participation. We do not know if these data are available, but they seem critical to implementing a permanent program.

  Regarding question 2, we feel that all means of increasing response rates should be under consideration, pending feedback from faculty, students, and evaluation of success at other institutions. For example:

  (1) Using positive or negative incentives. The student member of our committee cited having access to grades as an especially strong motivator and felt it should be considered. Such is the policy at other schools that show high response rates.
  (2) Allowing students as always to "opt out" of giving feedback on individual questions or on entire course evaluations, but only by visiting the evaluation.

(3) Making evaluations available at more convenient times. Giving evaluations during the last week of class seems necessary only with a paper system. Students might find it easier to participate once classes are finished, for example on a reading day. Students might even be given the option of completing an evaluation after the final exam, since the exam is part of their experience of the course. It does seem reasonable to require evaluations only during typical daytime class hours in order to avoid late night venting.

(4) Making it easier to navigate to evaluations and feedback. We discussed a general rule of web design that information should be placed no more than two clicks away, especially when asking the viewer to fulfill a task. Consider single-click reminder emails that go to password-protected pages where evaluations can be completed rather than the more cumbersome process of navigation through a sent of pages that requires a set of instructions. Students are more likely to complete an evaluation if they receive reminders when sitting at a computer, and faculty are likely to find the system less frustrating if the data are not buried in the Faculty Activity System.

II. <u>Committee representation on the panel to acquire a new learning management system (LMS).</u>
Tim Scheett from our committee has volunteered to serve. Deanna explained that he will be part of a larger group (ADITR, Academic Department IT Representatives) making initial recommendations, and will also be part of a smaller group of five on the procurement panel. The decision will be based in part input from users who will have a chance to try the four options under review.

Deanna Caveny left before the next discussion.

III. <u>Committee role in distance education</u>. The committee received a request from Joe Kelly, Speaker of the Faculty, to consider voting on, bringing to the faculty senate, and maintaining the guidelines for Distance Education (DE) on campus. A member of our committee, Henry Xie, serves on the DE committee but has not yet attended any meetings.

Our discussion supported the unanimous opinion that the FETC was not the proper home for administration of the DE guidelines. The presumption seems to be that a DE course is like a traditional course with technology added, but those with experience in DE indicated that such courses require extensive planning and alteration involving more pedagogical and curricular issues than technical issues. Teaching at a distance can substantially change how material is covered and the nature of interactions, learning exercises, and evaluations. Few of the guidelines seem to involve issues within the mandate of the FETC. An alternative suggestion was to have a separate DE branch or subcommittee within the curriculum committee, with the FETC serving in an advisory role on technological issues.

Some additional concern was expressed about moving ahead with DE (a) without sufficient resources in place, including technical support, given that resources for on-campus educational technology are viewed by many as inadequate, (b) without technological means in place for verifying that enrolled students are actually doing work or taking exams, and (c) without verifying that ISPs within the state of South Carolina are sufficient to meet the demands of online course activity. Before finalizing guidelines for course design the DE committee ought to develop a realistic blueprint for the resources needed to launch a successful program, which might be better gauged by consulting other successful programs.

Bob Podolsky, FETC Chair