

The UAF Faculty Senate passed the following at Meeting #173 on March 7, 2011:

MOTION:

The UAF Faculty Senate, upon the recommendation of the Faculty Development, Assessment and Improvement Committee, moves to approve the following actions:


- New electronic student evaluations will not be implemented without Faculty Senate approval.
- More research on this issue will be done at the administrative level in order to complement the FDAI committee's concerns and recommendations (attached).

Effective: Immediately

Rationale: During extensive discussions in the Faculty Development, Assessment and Improvement Committee, areas were identified that indicate that some aspects of online surveys of teaching are unreliable. Reasonable arguments can also be made in favor of electronic evaluations, for example, under the following circumstances:

- electronic evaluations may be the only practical choice in some distance delivery situations.
- security has been an issue at UAF with the paper-based IAS forms; however, switching to electronic evaluations will not necessarily prevent this from ever happening again.

This motion asks for more research on this complex issue that is so crucial to our professional lives as teachers. The motion also seeks to ensure that faculty concerns are addressed before a decision on the implementation of electronic student evaluations is made.



President, UAF Faculty Senate

7 March 2011

Date

APPROVAL: 

Chancellor's Office

DATE: 1 April 2011

DISAPPROVED: _____
Chancellor's Office

DATE: _____

Attachment to Motion submitted by the FDAI Committee:

To: Faculty Senate
From: Josef Glowa, FDAI

This is a summary of what has been discussed in our committee regarding the pros and cons of electronic student evaluations. Committee member Melanie Arthur deserves special credit for digging more deeply into this issue, and compiling and summarizing some crucial data (see below). Attached are the two articles that best illustrate the current unreliable state of online surveys of teaching.¹

-
- The first attached article compares modes of administration (paper vs online), finding a huge difference in response rates for in-class versus online evaluations (70% versus 29%, in the absence of special incentives for online evaluators). They included two additional groups of online evaluations, one in which the instructor provided an in-class demo of the online evaluation website and another in which a "modest" grade incentive was offered for completing the online evaluation. In the extra credit case, the response rates were comparable for paper and online evaluations. It should be noted, though, that no similar incentive was offered to the in-class students. Perhaps they could have gotten a response rate closer to 90% for the in-class evaluations if they had offered extra credit there? This was a single institution study of business classes and has not, to our knowledge, been replicated.
 - The second attached article is a lengthier review of practices, emphasizing the quality of ratings by different modes of administration, and emphasizing the importance of response rates. It reviews studies that have compared in-person and online and finds a difference in response rates ranging from 37 to <1% lower, with an average difference of 23% (notably in the 1% case the in-person evaluation only had a 33% response and included only distance ed courses). The author describes strategies that have been used to raise response rates, but notes in summary that these have typically NOT been used. In their absence, online surveys can be expected to fall well below the acceptable response rate. (Of course, this does not engage the question of students' ability to effectively evaluate their instructors, which is outside the scope of this discussion)
 - Acceptable response rates: Survey research methods texts (e.g. Babbie's Practice of Social Research) suggest that an absolute minimum response rate from which to draw valid conclusions is 50%, and 70% is desirable.
 - There is precedent (described in the second attached article) for using a combination of paper and online within a single institution. It is worth looking into more deeply if the administration appears completely inflexible in their desire to switch to online evaluation.
 - There is a lot more research out there on this topic, and both attached articles include lengthy bibliographies if one wishes to dig deeper. These two pieces appeared to be good representatives of the available literature.
 - Of note, UAA has not adopted an effective institution-wide strategy for improving response rates. Instead, they now write on their reports that the data cannot be considered valid for evaluative purposes in the case of low response rates.

¹ Curt J. Dommeyer*, Paul Baum, Robert W. Hanna & Kenneth S. Chapman, 2004. Gathering faculty teaching evaluations by in-class and online surveys: their effects on response rates and evaluations. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* Vol. 29, No. 5: 611-623.

Duncan D. Nulty, 2008. The adequacy of response rates to online and paper surveys: what can be done? *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* Vol. 33, No. 3: 301-314.