UAF Faculty Development, Assessment, and Improvement (FDAI) Committee

Year End Report 2012-2013

Committee members: Franz J Meyer (CNSM, Chair), Stephen Brown (CES Palmer), Izetta Chambers (SFOS MAP Bristol Bay), Cindy Fabbri (SoEd), David Fazzino (CLA), Andrea Ferrante (CNSM), Kelly Houlton (CRCD/Dev Ed), Trina Mamoon (CLA), Amy Vinlove (SoEd)

Ex officio members: Joy Morrison (Faculty Development Office), Mike Castellini (Dean, SFOS)

Committee affiliates: Eric Madsen (SoEd), Diane Erickson (CRDC)

1. Summary of the 2012-2013 period

During the academic year 2012-2013, UAF's FDAI committee was able to make a number of important contributions to key issues of faculty development, assessment, and improvement. As one of its major tasks, the committee conducted a large scale and very successful study of electronic course evaluation systems. This extensive study was carried out in close collaboration with Dr. Eric Madsen (SoEd), the Provost's office, and faculty senate leadership. Other highlights of the year included the support of the Faculty Development Office (OFD) in the development of innovative approaches to faculty development and in the inclusion of Postdoctoral scholars in faculty development and improvement activities.

Meetings of the FDAI committee were held monthly in 222 Bunnell. All meetings were well attended and all FDAI members contributed heavily to the rich range of discussions. All meetings were held with working quorums, indicating the activity of the committee during the period covered by this report. Our committee's recorder was Kelly Houlton (her third year as recorder), who has once again impressed the committee with her thorough and timely processing of the meeting minutes. During our first meeting in September 2012, Franz J Meyer was elected to serve as committee chair for this academic year. In November 2012 the FDAI had to bid farewell to long time committee member Diane Erickson, who left UAF for a position as Director of Academic Affairs and Assistant Campus Director at Mat-Su College. Details about the main activities of the FDAI committee during the 2012-2013 academic year are summarized in Section 2 of this report.

2. Highlights of 2012-2013 activities

a. Communications with the UAF Faculty Development Office

Joy Morrison of the Faculty Development Office (OFD) provided monthly updates on her work during the FDAI committee meetings. As during the previous years, Joy was very active throughout this academic period with supporting UAF faculty in many aspects of their work. Besides her usual activities of reaching out to established and new faculty, awarding travel awards, and inviting renowned speakers for guest presentations, she has engaged in the following activities:

- With this academic year, the OFD changed how it organizes its service to the University. Instead of providing centralized development offerings, Joy provided tailored faculty development presentations to individual colleges on a month by month basis. The presentation schedule was as follows:
    - September – School of Education
    - October – College of Natural Sciences and Mathematics
    - November – College of Engineering and Mines
    - February – School of Fisheries & Ocean Sciences
    - April – College of Liberal Arts

    The tailored offerings to the individual colleges in combination with an active involvement of the deans in the promotion of these offerings resulted in good attendance for most offerings. Joy will evaluate the success of this activity over the summer.
- In FDAI meetings it was noticed that postdocs were not included in most of the faculty development activities at UAF. This was mostly due to a lack of reporting of incoming and existing postdocs at various UAF units. Starting in September 2012, Joy invested a significant time and energy into collecting email addresses for postdocs and adjunct faculty in order to integrate them into her data base. Since then, Joy has integrated postdocs into her regular faculty development activities. In parallel, Mike Castellini engaged John Eichelberger, the new Dean of the Graduate School, into a discussion on postdocs at UAF.
- In the fall and winter of 2012, Joy organized a teaching group that met every Thursday from 3-4pm to develop their teaching skills. The meetings were guided by instructional videos followed by intense discussions on the topic.
- Inspired by an idea developed by Faye Gallant, OSP, Joy initiated a discussion with the FDAI on the possibility of a "research speed dating" session at UAF. The goal was to bring faculty member from all disciplines of UAF together and provide them with a brief idea of the breadth of research work that is being conducted across the state. It was hoped that such an effort would lead to improved networking across disciplines. While the format of such as session was discussed and developed over several months, this activity had to be postponed until fall semester due to scheduling conflicts and due to constructions in and around the intended meeting place.
- Joy was very active in bringing UAF faculty to national conferences on teaching and student advising. For instance, she organized a group of faculty members that were traveling to the Lilly West Conference on College & University Teaching. Together with a large group of UAF faculty members, she also attended the National Academic Advising Association's (NACADA) Region 8 Conference in Anchorage in April 2013.
- After consulting with the FDAI committee, Joy organized a discounted one-year subscription to the Magna Commons' archive of seminars and presentations. This archive hosts about 150 seminars that can now be accessed freely by faculty of UAF.

b. Electronic Course Evaluation Study

In October 2012, the Faculty Development, Assessment, and Improvement (FDAI) committee together with Dr. Eric Madsen, School of Education, were entrusted by the UAF Faculty Senate to study the current state-of-the-art of electronic course evaluation technology and its applicability to UAF. Early in

the study it was recognized that course evaluation technology is an integral part of a university's overall evaluation process. Hence, it was concluded that in order to recommend appropriate course evaluation technology it is necessary to evaluate all other components of an established evaluation process, including (1) the purpose of course evaluation at UAF, (2) the indicators that we want to use to determine success, (3) and the benchmarks we want to use to evaluate performance.

As a consequence, an evaluation team around the FDAI committee spent about half a year to conduct an extensive analysis of course evaluation technology as part of UAF's overall evaluation process and provide guidelines for a step-by-step approach to optimizing UAF's course evaluation philosophy. The main findings of the committee's activities as well as its main recommendations are summarized in the following:

1. We recommend to formulate a clear understanding of the main purpose(s) of course evaluation at UAF before deciding upon changes in course evaluation technology (see Section 2).
2. If a change in the course evaluation procedure is planned, we recommend to not change technology and question sets at the same time, but instead follow a step-by-step approach.
3. Electronic course evaluation systems have a number of benefits and drawbacks relative to traditional paper-and-pencil technology that need to be carefully analyzed and compared before selecting the most appropriate evaluation technology for UAF (see Section 3.1).
4. While student response rates are an important factor in evaluating the success of a course evaluation system, it is only one of many performance parameters (see Section 3.2).
5. Electronic course evaluation can produce satisfactory student response rates if students are incentivized, if the course evaluation system is easy to use, if faculty and administration actively promote the importance of course evaluation, and if regular reminders of active or upcoming survey periods are provided to faculty and students (see Section 3.3).
6. Nowadays, a large number of highly capable electronic course evaluation systems are available whose capabilities are ever improving (Section 4.3).
7. From our system survey, we conclude that available technology varies widely in aspects including (1) hosted vs. host-yourself solutions, (2) online-only vs. hybrid (paper plus online), (3) University-focused vs. generic survey-focused, and (4) flexible question set vs. fixed survey format. Also the amount of applied data analysis varies widely (see Section 4.3).
8. Three systems were identified that are excellent in their flexibility and functionality and are also well matched with UAF's needs (Section 4.3).
9. We recommend starting a discussion on the development of a culture of course evaluation on campus to improve course evaluation quality independent of evaluation technology.

To further analyze the capabilities of a down-selected group of three electronic course evaluation systems, UAF, under the leadership of Eric Madsen and Franz J Meyer and with heavy FDAI involvement, will continue to examine their suitability in fall 2013. We will coordinate our activities with UAF faculty and administration. Details of the evaluation activities in the fall will be announced.

3. Outlook into academic year 2013-2014

The committee plans to continue work in all the areas above, supporting the design of a new approach to faculty development, and further exploring other relevant issues involving the development, assessment, and improvement of our UAF faculty. We are working on strengthening a culture of faculty development at UAF, and we thank the members of the FDAI Committee for their dynamic input.