



Robert L. Barchi, President

September 13, 2018

Ms. Mary Mickelsen  
University Senate  
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey  
Liberty Plaza, Suite 1200  
College Avenue Campus

Dear Ms. Mickelsen:

I am writing in response to the University Senate's December 2017 report and recommendations on Charge A-1709, Proposal to Improve Evaluation of Teaching at Rutgers. I thank the members of the Senate's Faculty and Personnel Affairs Committee for their work on this issue.

Because another Senate report is closely related to the report on Charge A-1709, I am also responding to the University Senate's April 2017 report and recommendations on Charge S-1510, Student Teaching Evaluations. I thank the members of the Senate's Instruction, Curricula and Advising Committee for their work on this related issue.

I am pleased that the administration and the Senate, as well as Faculty Councils at Rutgers–Newark, Rutgers–Camden, Rutgers–New Brunswick, and RBHS have addressed the process for evaluating teaching and the use of student feedback concerning their experiences in the classroom, laboratory, and wherever else their courses take them. I know that the Senate has been recommending improvements for several years, and I am very happy that these issues are high on the agendas of both the Senate and the University community.

The recommendations in both of the above-referenced reports overlap, so I will respond in more general terms rather than addressing each recommendation, many of which are quite specific. I endorse the recommendations of the Task Force on the Evaluation of Teaching, convened by Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs Barbara Lee in 2016-17. It is my understanding that the recommendations in this report are being implemented, with appropriate local modifications, on all of our Rutgers campuses. It is also my understanding that quite a few faculty from all of the chancellor units have volunteered to participate in online training offered by the Association of College and University Educators, and that many Rutgers–Newark faculty have already completed the training and are enthusiastic about its contribution to their teaching.

Because the Task Force's recommendations are in the process of implementation, many of the recommendations in the two Senate reports are currently under way. For example, departments are beginning to use peer observation to provide both formative and summative evaluation of teaching, and staff from the Center for Teaching Advancement and Assessment Research (CTAAR) are working with departments to provide training and protocols for classroom observation. In addition, CTAAR staff are helping departments on several campuses to train faculty on the preparation of teaching portfolios. And we are working to implement the Task Force's recommendation that multiple data sources should be used to evaluate teaching, including peer observation, student feedback, and the instructor's teaching philosophy and accomplishments as collected in a teaching portfolio.

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In addition to convening the Task Force on the Evaluation of Teaching, Senior Vice President Lee also created a committee to make recommendations concerning how best to elicit student feedback and whether or not such feedback should be used, as one of multiple data sources, in making reappointment, promotion, and tenure decisions. The Student Feedback Task Force was chaired by Professor Jenny Mandelbaum, and met throughout the 2017-18 academic year. That task force recommended the Student Instructional Rating Survey (SIRS) be revised and updated, and that pre-course and mid-course surveys be used to both assess student opinion and demonstrate to students that the University cares about their opinions, which should increase the response rate to the SIRS. The task force rejected the recommendations of the Senate committees and the Faculty Councils that student feedback not be used in making reappointment, promotion, and tenure decisions, recommending instead for it be *part of* a multi-source teaching evaluation process. I agree with that recommendation.

The Student Feedback Task Force recommended several changes to the SIRS and proposed that individuals with expertise in educational measurement be asked to provide advice on how the SIRS (or some other instrument to elicit student feedback) might be reconstituted. I am asking Senior Vice President Lee to initiate that process.

I understand that the Senate recommendation not to use student feedback for summative purposes was primarily based upon the low student response rates and dissatisfaction with the use of two standard questions on the forms that are submitted with promotion and tenure packets, and with promotion dossiers for non-tenure track faculty. Implementing the recommendations of the Task Force on the Evaluation of Teaching, the Student Feedback Task Force, and the committee that will be recommending revisions to the SIRS should make student feedback a more reliable source of information as part of a multi-source evaluation of teaching.

Regarding the Senate recommendations about the specific data on student feedback to be included on promotion and tenure forms, I believe we will need to wait for the recommendations of the aforementioned committee examining how to best structure a student feedback instrument. We should revisit this matter after receiving those recommendations and working with faculty governance groups and the faculty bargaining agents with respect to moving forward.

I thank the Faculty and Personnel Affairs Committee and the Instruction, Curricula and Advising Committee for their thoughtful recommendations, and look forward to more discussion about these important matters.

Sincerely,



Robert Barchi

c: Nancy Cantor, Chancellor, Rutgers University–Newark  
Phoebe Haddon, Chancellor, Rutgers University–Camden  
Christopher Molloy, Interim Chancellor, Rutgers University–New Brunswick  
Brian Strom, Chancellor, Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences  
Barbara Lee, Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs



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