Rutgers University Senate Instruction, Curricula and Advising Committee

Charge A-1708 - **Proposal to Improve Evaluation of Teaching at Rutgers**: Review the proposal to improve the evaluation of teaching received from Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs Barbara Lee, and make appropriate recommendations as input to the Senate's Faculty and Personnel Affairs Committee. Respond to Senate Executive Committee by October 24, 2017.

Summary

The Task Force report currently under review, *A Proposal to Improve the Evaluation of Teaching at Rutgers University* (Task Force Report) <http://senate.rutgers.edu/TeachingEvaluationTaskForceDraftProposalBLeeSeptember2017.pdf> makes recommendations on teaching evaluations and how those evaluations should be reflected in the promotion and tenure process.

The Instruction, Curricula and Advising Committee (ICA) wholeheartedly concurs with the Task Force in that "the current methods for evaluating teaching, for many schools and departments, rely too heavily on the Student Instructional Ratings Survey (SIRS) to the exclusion of peer evaluation of course materials, classroom observation, or other methods of assessing teaching."

While we are in full agreement on the core Task Force recommendations, we do have issues with some details of the process, and with what amounts to the elimination of the SIRS despite its use and usefulness outside of the promotion/tenure process.

1. We feel that there are a variety of issues involved in mandating that every course taught by non-tenured faculty—including NTT, PTL, and TAs—be evaluated every semester.

2. While some departments have been doing peer review and in-class observations for many years, for most departments this will be a whole new process. Departments need to establish specific criteria—the observers need to know what they are evaluating and what they need to look for. It is likely that many departments are going to need assistance from outside the department in establishing criteria and training the peer reviewers.

3. The Task Force report recommends that every instructor, including NTTs, PTLs, and TAs, create a teaching portfolio. There does not appear to be a common understanding of just what would be included in a teaching portfolio. In order to assure some level of consistency, we recommend that CTAAR, or some other appropriate group, develop a basic template for such a portfolio. This could then be modified based on disciplinary/departmental differences. There are also issues with requiring PTLs to create portfolios.

4. ICA fully concurs that the Standard Instructional Ratings Survey (SIRS) questions need to be revised. However it does not agree that the basic SIRS should be reduced to two questions, and does not believe that the two questions recommended by the report (Q1: Did the instructor contribute to your learning? Yes No/Q2: Did the course content contribute to your learning? Yes No") are appropriate.

5. As recommended in the Task Force report, deans and departments will be responsible for developing the formative assessment questions for their units. However, there is nothing in the report that suggests departments would be compelled—or even encouraged—to add their own questions to the survey. We would therefore recommend that rather than just two "standard" questions, a meaningful core of four or five questions be developed as the basic SIRS. Student input should be included as part of the development process. This would allow instructors and departments who wish to do so to add questions to the core without making the survey overly burdensome or too long for students to complete. And in cases where there are no added questions, there would still be data that could be useful to students and departments.

6. The Task Force report makes recommendations for both summative and formative assessments, and clearly states that "The results of formative assessments may not be used in the reappointment/promotion/tenure process without the faculty member's consent." However it also states that "Departments and deans may add questions to the SIRS and use them as part of their formative assessment process if they like," and that "Information solicited from questions added to SIRS by schools, departments, or instructors will also be included" [in Form 1-a as part of the promotion/tenure process.] Clearly, where those additional questions were meant to be formative in nature, they cannot be included in the 1-a except at the faculty member's request.

7. The Task Force report does not address how SIRS is administered. We would like to reiterate strongly our recommendation from the 2017 ICA report:

> To increase completion rates and make the results more meaningful, schools and units should have instructors give students time in class to complete the online surveys on their own mobile devices.

8. Despite the issues with the SIRS identified in the Task Force report, and in the many previous reports from the Senate and elsewhere, SIRS results are heavily used by students, with over 416,000 page views in 2015. We need to have a SIRS—preferable a revised one with more useful questions—available to students.

Full Report

In April 2017, the Rutgers University Senate approved the report and recommendations of the Instruction, Curricula, and Advising Committee on Charge S-1510: *Student Teaching Evaluations, and Best Practices in Evaluation of Teaching 2015* (ICA 2017 Report) <http://senate.rutgers.edu/ICAConS1510StudentTeachingEvaluationsApril2017.pdf>. This was the latest of a number of reports that have come out of the Senate relating to the Student Instructional Rating Surveys (SIRS), their use in personnel evaluations, and how best to evaluate teaching.[1] The ICA charge[2] for this report focused on the SIRS, but recommendations [Attached

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[1] The most recent being *Online Teaching Evaluations and Best Practices in Evaluation of Teaching Performance* (March 2012) http://senate.rutgers.edu/ICAConS1104OnlineTeachingEvaluationsAsAdoptedMarch2012.pdf and *Online Teaching Evaluation* (March 2012) http://senate.rutgers.edu/FPACResponseToICACReportOnS1104BestPracticesInTeachingEvaluationMarch2012.pdf

her as Appendix A]--based on ICA discussions and input from the Senate Faculty and Personnel Affairs Committee—also dealt with the use of the SIRS in the evaluation of teaching and the promotion/tenure process.

The Task Force report currently under review, *A Proposal to Improve the Evaluation of Teaching at Rutgers University* (Task Force Report) <http://senate.rutgers.edu/TeachingEvaluationTaskForceDraftProposalBLeeSeptember2017.pdf> makes recommendations on teaching evaluations and how those evaluations should be reflected in the promotion and tenure process. While it makes a number of recommendations relating to the SIRS, those recommendations are largely linked to its use in the promotion and tenure process and not to its current primary use as a resource for students as they make course selection decisions and as a resource for instructors and departments for course assessment and improvement.

ICA wholeheartedly concurs with the Task Force in that "the current methods for evaluating teaching, for many schools and departments, rely too heavily on the Student Instructional Ratings Survey (SIRS) to the exclusion of peer evaluation of course materials, classroom observation, or other methods of assessing teaching.[3]" This is fully in line with Recommendation #9 of the ICA 2017 report:

> Peer review—in the form most appropriate to specific schools or departments—should be the primary tool used for evaluation of teaching for the promotion and tenure process and for renewals of all tenure-track, non-tenure track, contingent, and part-time lecturer faculty; teaching evaluations should be coupled with professional development.

While we are in full agreement on the core Task Force recommendations, we do have issues with some details of the process, and with what amounts to the elimination of the SIRS despite its use and usefulness outside of the promotion/tenure process.

Evaluation Process Recommended by the Task Force: Some Issues/Questions

Who Gets Assessed and When

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[2] Revisit the March 2012 Instruction, Curricula and Advising Committee report on Charge S-1104, on *Online Teaching Evaluations, and Best Practices in Evaluation of Teaching*. Consider questions such as: Have there been changes in the completion rates and use of the Student Instructional Rating Surveys (SIRS)? How can we make students more aware that the results of the SIRS are available to them? Are the questions on the SIRS still valid, or do they need to be modified in light of changes in educational technologies? To what extent should the SIRS results be used in the evaluation of teaching and the promotion/tenure process? Are other Big-10 schools using such surveys, and to what purpose? Solicit input on personnel ramifications from the Senate's Faculty and Personnel Affairs Committee.

[3] *A Proposal to Improve the Evaluation of Teaching at Rutgers University* (2017), pp. 2-3.

"Every course taught by nontenured faculty, including teaching assistants and part-time lecturers, will be evaluated every semester. Departments will propose an evaluation timetable for tenured faculty, which must be approved by the Dean and Chancellor." [p.4]

This statement seems to imply that unless there is going to be a personnel action, teaching evaluation doesn't really matter. We don't believe that's an appropriate message.

However, we also feel that there are a variety of issues involved in mandating that every course taught by non-tenured. faculty—including NTT, PTL, and TAs—be evaluated every semester.

The current AAUP/AFT contract[4] includes language relating to the evaluation of Non-Tenure Track (NTT) faculty and requires that the criteria for evaluation be delineated by the appropriate unit. How the proposed course evaluation process would be folded into the contractual process is something that needs to be addressed. Since departments with NTTs have had to develop evaluation criteria for those faculty fairly recently, some already have substantive processes in place. See, for example, the Rutgers Newark Biological Sciences Departments Appointment and Promotion Criteria (attached as Appendix B.)

While the above statement seems to unequivocally mandate that every course taught by non-tenured faculty will be evaluated every semester, this does not correspond to what is stated in Section IV. Teaching Evaluation Plans (p.7). Here it states that "Each plan should specify the frequency of evaluation for each category of faculty member…For example, PTLs might be observed each term, or annually."

Certainly, for departments with large numbers of PTLs (for example, English, Math, Language programs), having to visit every class every semester would be a daunting task. And a difficult one for small departments even if they only have a few PTLs. However, while there are indeed PTLs who have been reappointed year after year, in many cases a PTL may only teach during the Spring semester, or every other year, or every few years as needed. So while observing every PTL every term may not be viable, determining another kind of "regular" schedule for observing PTLs may not be possible.

Not all PTLs actually teach. For example, some PTLs may be assigned to labs, and may or may not interact with students. Where would they fit within this process?

We also wonder if there are FERPA issues relating to how, and by whom, courses being taught by TAs would be evaluated?

In-Class Observation

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[4] *Agreement Between Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey and Rutgers Council of AAUP Chapters, American Association of University Professors-American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO, September 1, 2014 – June 30, 2018.* <http://www.rutgersaaup.org/sites/default/files/images/2014-2018-FT-Faculty-TA-GA-Contract-10-6-15-FINAL.pdf>

> "Each department and program is expected to create a process of peer review, including a review of teaching materials, and an in-class observation by a peer." [p.5]

While some departments have been doing peer review and in-class observations for many years, for most departments this will be a whole new process. Departments need to establish specific criteria—the observers need to know what they are evaluating and what they need to look for. It is likely that many departments are going to need assistance from outside the department in establishing criteria and training the peer reviewers. Who will be providing this assistance?

Teaching Portfolios

> "Each instructor will make a teaching portfolio and in each teaching evaluation report to the Chancellor, departments and deans must explain how these will be used to evaluate teaching, updating as necessary." [p.5]

There does not appear to be a common understanding of just what would be included in a teaching portfolio. In order to assure some level of consistency, we recommend that CTAAR, or some other appropriate group, develop a basic template for such a portfolio. This could then be modified based on disciplinary/departmental differences.

PTLs are hired on a contingency basis, and are paid by the course. They are often compelled to simultaneously teach in multiple institutions. They often teach "preset" sections where the content is already laid out. While we acknowledge that in the long run developing a teaching portfolio would be beneficial to the individual PTL, it doesn't really seem fair to require someone hired to teach one course at Rutgers during a specific semester to have to submit a teaching portfolio. If nothing else, the basic template for a PTL portfolio should be different from "regular" portfolio template.

Innovative Teaching

> "Each department should have a method of reviewing innovative teaching tools and techniques." [p. 5]

We fail to see just how any department is going to determine a "method of reviewing" innovation in teaching tools and techniques. How innovative something is is fairly subjective and is likely to vary based on the observer's own teaching methods.

The Student Instructional Ratings Survey (SIRS)

For several decades, Rutgers students have been asked to complete the Student Instructional Ratings Survey (SIRS) for each of their courses at the end of every semester.

As the Task Force report, and every Senate report issued on this topic, has pointed out, use of the SIRS as a teaching evaluation is problematic and probably not appropriate. SIRS is meant to be a "University-wide survey of students for their comments about their experiences in the classroom.

The results are used by the individual instructors, departments, schools and the University for the assessment and improvement of teaching.[5] As we point out in the 2017 ICA report, there are issues relating to the current questions, student completion rates, student awareness of their access to the data, and even the name itself. However, as we also point out:

> Despite concerns about survey completion rates, the number of visits and returning visits to SIRS remained fairly constant between 2013 and 2015, while the number of page views has increased substantially with some 205872 views in 2013 and 416950 in 2015. These are impressive numbers, especially in light of the fact that many students seem unaware of their access to SIRS. [p.5]

SIRS Questions

The 2017 ICA report recognizes the need to revise the current SIRS questions. Recommendation 2 states:

> The standard questions should be reformulated to focus on course assessment and be appropriate for face-to-face, hybrid, and online courses.

However the Task Force report recommends [pp. 5-6] that SIRS "be revised to be comprised of at least two questions" and that "The two standard questions on the University-wide SIRS will be:

> Q1: Did the instructor contribute to your learning? Yes No
> Q2: Did the course content contribute to your learning? Yes No"

We found these to be singularly useless questions. It is hard to imagine a course—no matter how bad the course or the instructor—where you wouldn't learn *something*. And while how course content is organized and presented will certainly affect the extent to which the content is learned, the content itself is inherently neutral. The answer to these questions would not convey any useful information to students, or to the instructor, or to the department. And there certainly would be no incentive for students to go online to answer questions of this nature. Some alternative Yes/No questions might be:

- ✓ Is the instructor a good teacher? Please explain your answer in the comments section below.
- ✓ If you had the opportunity, would you take another course with this instructor?

Some felt that the summary questions 9 and 10 on the current SIRS could easily serve as the base questions on a new SIRS:

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[5] https://ctaar.rutgers.edu/sirs/

Question 9: I rate the teaching effectiveness of the instructor as: N/A Poor Excellent (on a 1 to 5 scale)
Question 10: I rate the overall quality of the course as: N/A Poor Excellent(on a 1 to 5 scale)

It is somewhat difficult to picture just what the "new" SIRS would look like, or who it would serve. Section F of III. Suggested Timeline for Implementation, recommends that the current SIRS remain in place through Fall 2018 and that "Departments and deans may add questions to the SIRS and use them as part of their formative assessment process if they like, or they can also use any other type of formative assessment anytime during the term, including surveys run through a course management system, an alternative survey system like Qualtrics, or departmental activities of review." Presumably these options will remain in place in Spring 2019 when "the new SIRS will be used university-wide."

For all intents and purposes then, and in light of nature of the two proposed "standard" questions, deans and departments will all be responsible for developing the formative assessment questions for their units. While an excellent idea in the abstract, the reality is that the development of meaningful questions is a labor-intensive process. Some departments will welcome the opportunity; others will be content with just using whatever "standard" questions are offered. There is nothing in the Task Force report that suggest departments would be compelled—or even encouraged—to add their own questions to the survey. Merely that "Departments and schools may choose additional questions" [p.5] and that "Departments and deans may add questions to the SIRS and use them as part of their formative assessment process if they like" [p.7].

We would therefore recommend that rather than just two "standard" questions, a meaningful core of four or five questions be developed as the basic SIRS. Student input should be included as part of the development process. This would allow instructors and departments who wish to do so to add questions to the core without making the survey overly burdensome or too long for students to complete. And in cases where there are no added questions, there would still be data that could be useful to students and departments.

Formative vs. Summative

The 10 questions currently used by the SIRS, include 8 formative (questions eliciting feedback that could help improve teaching and learning and/or the course environment), and 2 summative (overall assessment) questions. The results of current questions 9 and 10, the two summative questions, are the ones currently required to be transferred to form 1-a as part of the promotion/tenure process.

The Task Force report makes recommendations for both summative and formative assessments, and clearly states that "The results of formative assessments may not be used in the reappointment/promotion/tenure process without the faculty member's consent." [p.4]. However there seems to be inconsistency in their recommendations on where SIRS results fall.

Under "Surveys" [p.5], the Task Force reports recommends that "A summative survey (SIRS or some alteration of SIRS), will be made available through CTAAR or an equivalent office," and that "SIRS be revised to include two standard questions to be used University wide." The two recommended questions (discussed above), would indeed seem to be summative in nature. However, as referenced earlier, the report also states [p.7] that "Departments and deans may add questions to the SIRS and use them as part of their formative assessment process if they like…" So presumably the "new" SIRS would in many cases consist of both summative and formative questions.

This would seem be an issue in that "G" of Section III in the Task Force report [p.7] still lays out the process for SIRS data to be added to Form 1-a:

> Departments that have advised the Office of Academic Labor Relations that one or more tenure-track faculty will be evaluated for promotion will receive the SIRS results in a format suitable for inclusion on the Form 1-a. Information solicited from questions added to SIRS by schools, departments, or instructors will also be included.

Clearly, where those additional questions were meant to be formative in nature, they cannot be included in the 1-a except at the faculty member's request.

Completing the SIRS

The Task Force report does not address how SIRS is administered. We would like to reiterate our recommendation from the 2017 ICA report:

> To increase completion rates and make the results more meaningful, schools and units should have instructors give students time in class to complete the online surveys on their own mobile devices.

If the results of this, or a similar survey, are to be taken seriously, it is critical that the majority of students in a course actually complete the survey. The School of Management and Labor Relations recently tried having students complete the online survey in class as a pilot and the response rate doubled.

Student Use of SIRS Data

Since the Task Force report focused on teaching evaluation, and since we are all in agreement that SIRS is not an appropriate assessment of teaching, the Task Force's recommendations concerning the SIRS are generally not surprising. The Task Force did try to address the use of the SIRS as a means of gathering information for instructors and departments for formative assessment of courses. They did not, however, address the most significant current use of SIRS—the use of SIRS results by students selecting courses in which to enroll.

Despite the issues with the SIRS identified in the Task Force report, and in the many previous reports from the Senate and elsewhere, SIRS results are heavily used by students, with over

416,000 page views in 2015. We need to have a SIRS—preferable a revised one with more useful questions—available to students. Otherwise they will be forced to turn to sites such as "Rate My Professors;[6]" sites where it is not possible to determine if the student rating the course was even enrolled in the course, where comments tend to focus on the difficulty or easiness of the course and the personality of the instructor, and where studies have shown that "that students are more likely to post ratings on the website to whine or complain about instructors.[7]"

Proposed Resolution:

Whereas, the Senate Instruction, Curricula and Advising Committee has reviewed the Proposal to Improve Evaluation of Teaching at Rutgers

And Whereas, ICA is in agreement with the core Task Force recommendations but finds some inconsistencies in their recommendations, and issues with some details of the process

Therefore, be it resolved that the Senate recommends that:

1. Departments establish specific criteria for peer in-class observation as well as training programs for peer reviewers.
2. CTAAR, or some other appropriate group, develop a basic template for teaching portfolios that could then be modified based on disciplinary/departmental differences.
3. If it is determined that PTLs must, as recommended in the Task Force report, also submit teaching portfolios, a separate basic template for PTLs be developed.
4. Rather than two "standard" questions, a meaningful core of four or five questions be developed as the basic Standard Instructional Rating Survey (SIRS). Student input should be included as part of the development process.
5. Instructors and departments should be regularly reminded that they have the option to add questions that might be particularly relevant for that course or that department to the survey.
6. When additional questions meant to be formative in nature are added to the basic SIRS, they cannot be included in Form 1-a as part of the promotion/tenure process except at the faculty member's request.
7. In order to allow for student input, departments should include relevant student comments from the SIRS, or other sources as appropriate, in the teaching section of Form 1-a and related forms.
8. To increase completion rates and make the results more meaningful, schools and units should have instructors give students time in class to complete the SIRS on their own mobile devices.

November 3, 2017

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[6] http://www.ratemyprofessors.com/

[7] Elizabeth Davison & Jammie Price (2009). "How Do We Rate? An Evaluation of Online Student Evaluations." *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 34:1, 51-65, p.56. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02602930801895695

Recommendations: Response to Charge S-1510 on Student Teaching Evaluations (April 2017)

Resolution

Whereas, the Senate Instruction, Curricula and Advising Committee has examined the Student Instructional Rating Survey (SIRS), its intent, composition and use

And Whereas, it is clear that the SIRS was never formulated or intended to be used as a teaching evaluation

And Whereas, the Committee has discussed and received input from the Senate Faculty Affairs and Personnel Committee regarding the use of the SIRS in personnel actions

Be it resolved that the Rutgers University Senate adopts the following:

1. To better reflect the intent of the survey, the Student Instructional Rating Survey (SIRS) should be renamed the Student Course Assessment (SCA).
2. The standard questions should be reformulated to focus on course assessment and be appropriate for face-to-face, hybrid, and online courses.
3. Instructors and departments should be regularly reminded that they have the option to add questions that might be particularly relevant for that course or that department to the survey.
4. To increase completion rates and make the results more meaningful, schools and units should have instructors give students time in class to complete the online surveys on their own mobile devices.
5. The survey reports that go to individual faculty and their department should include the results in the same graphical format that is available on the web site.
6. The listings in the Schedule of Classes should link out to the assessment survey.
7. CTAAR should email all faculty at mid-semester to remind them about the availability of the Midcourse Survey.
8. CTAAR should investigate the possibility of developing a program that could add common questions to multiple course sections globally.
9. Peer review—in the form most appropriate to specific schools or departments—should be the primary tool used for evaluation of teaching for the promotion and tenure process and for renewals of all tenure-track, non-tenure track, contingent, and part-time lecturer faculty; teaching evaluations should be coupled with professional development.
10. The requirement that the results of SIRS questions 9 and 10 be reported should be removed from form 1-a and related forms (1-b; NTT 1-a; NTT 1-b; NTT 1-c; RBHS Form 1).
11. In order to allow for student input, departments should include relevant student comments from the SIRS, or other sources as appropriate, in the teaching section of Form 1-a and related forms.

Rutgers University Newark Department of Biological Sciences
NTT Teaching – Appointment and Promotion Criteria

I. Criteria for Appointment
    a. Advanced degree (MS, Ph.D., or equivalent) in relevant field in biological sciences
    b. Demonstrated experience in required disciplines of biology as judged by research
    and/or teaching portfolio
    c. Effective communication and pedagogic knowledge as judged by teaching portfolio
    and/or faculty committee screening

II. Criteria for Reappointment – reappointment at any, and, all levels is fundamentally contingent upon teaching needs of the department and/or availability of funding for the position. In all cases of reappointment, the candidate must present evidence of scholarly excellence as a teacher and contributor to the service needs of the department as judged by, any or all of the following:

    a. Evaluation of effectiveness of teaching strategies, success at meeting course goals and objects, and success at achieving programmatic learning goals and objectives. Such material may include assessments of exams, copies of student work product (lab reports, posters, presentations, etc)
    b. Evaluation of submitted teaching portfolio that includes, but is not limited to, a personal statement, curriculum vitae, course syllabi, instructional materials, and other materials judged relevant by the candidate
    c. Review of teaching evaluations obtained through student survey and classroom instruction provided by the department Committee on Teaching Excellence
    d. Evaluation of service in accordance with mission of department, several examples include, student advising, participation outreach activities, and participation on department committees.

III. Criteria for Promotion to all Ranks – re-appointment with promotion at any, and, all levels is fundamentally contingent upon teaching needs of the department and/or availability of funding for the position. In all cases of reappointment with promotion, the candidate must present evidence of ongoing and continuous scholarly excellence as a teacher and contributor to the service needs of the department as judged by, any or all of the following:

    a. Evaluation of submitted teaching portfolio that includes, but is not limited to, a personal statement, curriculum vitae, course syllabi, instructional materials, and other materials judged relevant by the candidate
    b. Evaluation of submitted of outcomes materials establishing success at meeting course and departmental learning goals and objectives. Such material may include assessments of exams, copies of student work product (lab reports, posters, presentations, etc)
    c. Review of teaching evaluations obtained through student survey and classroom instruction provided by the department Committee on Teaching Excellence

d. Evaluation of service in accordance with mission of department, several examples include, student advising, participation outreach activities, and participation on department committees.

e. Evaluation of demonstrated leadership service in accordance with mission of department, including but not limited to, course development, supervision of students in independent study projects, participation in development and implementation of departmental academic and/or assessment initiatives, leadership in developing new academic/service initiatives

IV. Additional Criteria for Promoting to Teaching Professor/Distinguished Teaching Professor – in addition to attaining and maintaining significant contribution to the teaching mission of the Department, as outlined above, the candidate must have established true distinction by achieving one of more of the following significant milestones:

a. Establish a track record of publication resulting from student mentoring and/or research of relevance to the greater field of education

b. Receive professional recognition as evidenced by receipt of teaching awards from campus, university, and/or external associations

c. Evidence for ongoing success at obtaining external funding, preferably from national level funding agencies, targeting improvement and advancement of the teaching mission of the department.