

REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE
ON FACULTY POLICY FOR STUDENT EVALUATION OF INSTRUCTION

On October 4, 1974, the Board of Regents approved a "University of Wisconsin System Policy on Student Evaluation of Instruction." This policy, contained in Appendix B here, asserts that "teaching ability should be one of the chief criteria considered in tenure decisions and in the retention, promotion, and compensation of faculty." Specifically, it calls for the use of student evaluation of teaching for "(a) improvement of instruction; (b) retention, promotion, and tenure decisions; and (c) merit salary increase deliberations." The Regents' policy deals with "formal student evaluation of instruction only" and does not limit in any way other methods of evaluating teaching performance. The Regents' statement seeks "to insure considered use of student evaluation for certain administrative purposes and to encourage its increased use for other purposes."

The Regents asked that by March 1, 1975, each institution report to Central Administration its policies then in effect concerning student evaluation of instruction together with evidence of their implementation. The Regents assumed that "the process of developing, testing, and phasing in an institutional policy and practice concerning student evaluation" would be completed not later than July 1, 1976.

Accordingly, on November 5, 1974, the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs addressed a memorandum to all UW-Madison deans, directors, and departmental chairmen indicating what was needed and what was being done in order to submit a report on implementation of the Regents' policy. As a part of this general effort on the Madison campus, the University Committee was asked to advise the Chancellor on "the need for revision of current practices and policies on student evaluation." The University Committee appointed an ad hoc committee to look into the matter and to report back. This committee, which met many times and devoted considerable effort to its assignment, consisted of John F. Thompson, Chairman, and the following nine members, including both faculty and students: William J. Berg, J. Ray Bowen, Sara Ann Head, Jane C. Hutchison, Thomas G. Kurtz, Mark N. Mueller, Michael B. Petrovich, Robert K. Prud'homme, and Patricia L. Wolleat. They submitted their report to the University Committee in April 1976. A summary of the Committee's recommendations appears in Appendix A.

In arriving at its recommendations, the Thompson Committee concluded the following:

- "1. The Madison Campus is in substantial compliance with Regent policy.
- "2. The design, implementation, and interpretation of results of student evaluation of teaching should be done at the departmental level.
- "3. Divisional Committees have the best perspective to judge whether departmental procedures meet the intent and spirit of Regent and Faculty policy.
- "4. Any meaningful assessment of the teaching of a faculty member must take into account not only student evaluation information, but also all other available information about classroom teaching, effectiveness in seminars and graduate student supervisions, efforts at innovation and other kinds of service to the department's teaching function such as advising.

(continued)

"5. Those interpreting and using student evaluation information should be aware that such evaluations, though necessary and useful, are far from perfect. Significant questions concerning the reliability and meaning of this type of information have been raised. . .

"6. If confidentiality of student evaluation is to be preserved, information must be used only for personnel purposes.

"7. Since a merit or a tenure decision may be subject to challenge, data that has been used in any significant way in arriving at a merit and tenure decision should be preserved an appropriate length of time in case of a challenge."

UW-Madison has already made student evaluation of instruction a regular procedure in retention, promotion, and tenure decisions for junior faculty; departmental recommendations to divisional executive committees must include results of student evaluations in every tenure case. Moreover, many instructors voluntarily solicit student evaluations in their courses for the purpose of improving their instruction. While formal student evaluations are less often used in deliberations over merit increases, a professor's qualities and service as a teacher are definitely taken into account in these decisions too. UW-Madison is, as the Thompson Committee concluded, already in "substantial compliance" with the Regents policy; and there are already established procedures and mechanisms through which UW-Madison can comply fully with this policy.

The University Committee generally agrees with the principles and objectives communicated in the UW System Policy on Student Evaluation of Instruction (Appendix B here). We specifically concur "that variety of practice, affirmed by the considered judgment of the faculties of the several institutions, constitutes the best basis for carrying out a Regent policy on student evaluation." We would similarly extend this salutary principle to provide for a variety of practice on the Madison Campus itself, recognizing the varied character of our several colleges, schools, and divisions, and respecting departmental autonomy. Pragmatic and creative development of a variety of ways of soliciting, recording, and evaluating student evaluations should be encouraged. Such flexibility will permit each department to suit its own circumstances, and can lead to constant improvement in implementation.

Departments, while using procedures and mechanisms best suited to their own needs and circumstances, should be given the opportunity to improve these procedures and mechanisms by comparing them with what other departments are doing, by receiving expert advice from specialists in student evaluation, and by receiving special funds for the implementation of improved methods. Since UW System policy requires student evaluation, the System should financially support the implementation of that policy.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE

1. Student evaluations of instruction shall continue to be considered in all tenure decisions; where not already being used, student evaluations shall also be considered in decisions involving faculty retention, promotion, and merit increases.
2. Each department or comparable unit shall devise means of soliciting and reporting student evaluations that meet the informational requirements of its divisional executive committee for tenure purposes, and of its dean for retention, promotion, and merit increases.

UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE:	Steven H. Chaffee (Chair)	Phillip Myers
	Marygold S. Melli	Michael Petrovich
	Gerald C. Mueller	Maurice B. Webb

APPENDIX A

Guidelines for Implementation

A. It is recommended that each department establish a committee or designate an existing committee on student evaluations. Such a committee should include (where applicable) at least one undergraduate, one graduate student, and one assistant professor. It would recommend to the department procedures for the evaluation of faculty teaching performance. (This is not to suggest that students be involved in the deliberative process of staff review.)

B. There should be a common core to evaluation procedures within a department when applied to courses having a similar format and requiring similar skills. However, opportunities should be available, regardless of the size of the common core used, for each faculty member to add questions related to the specific content or situation of his or her course.

C. The Regents' policy requires that "all faculty members being considered for merit salary increases shall be evaluated by their peers as to their instructional ability, using information from student evaluation of their instruction, as well as other information relevant to assessment, at least once every three years." Many departments will find it useful for each faculty member to be evaluated by students each year, and periodically evaluated in all courses that faculty member regularly teaches.

D. Course evaluation should be conducted near the end of the semester.

E. Anonymity of students providing information should be preserved so far as possible. In this regard, the faculty member should not collect data forms.

F. The departmental executive committee should be responsible for the interpretation of student evaluations. Interpretations should take account of significant variables that may influence the data such as the course level, size of class, student mix, or the newness of the professor to the course.

G. Each individual faculty member should have the right to review student evaluations and to know what interpretations have been made of them. The faculty member should have an opportunity to comment on these; if he makes a written response, it should be forwarded with the departmental recommendation.

H. All raw data, summaries, and interpretations are confidential unless the individual faculty member gives permission for public use of the information; such data should remain within the department except for information forwarded to the dean and divisional executive committee for personnel purposes. (According to legal counsel, records can remain confidential only if their use is for personnel purposes; once they are used for other reasons, they may become public records.)

I. All student evaluation information should be retained by the department until its likely usefulness has been exhausted. It is possible that an occasional decision for merit, tenure, retention, or promotion may be challenged on a number of grounds; the department may be called upon to produce the data supporting decisions made in the past. For assistant professors, a practical rule of thumb appears to be a minimum of one year after the tenure decision has been made. Retaining all other data for five years is probably sufficient.

J. Support services provided by the University should include coordination and funding of machine scoring where economical, provided data are gathered in a prescribed format. The Chancellor's office should also consider coordinating a central resource and information pool. Guidance, such as a handbook or the results of surveys of evaluation procedures, should be provided to departments.

APPENDIX B

On October 5, 1974, the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin adopted the following resolution:

That, upon recommendation of the President of the University of Wisconsin System, the document entitled "University of Wisconsin System Policy on Student Evaluation of Instruction," dated September 24, 1974, be approved.

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN SYSTEM POLICY
ON STUDENT EVALUATION OF INSTRUCTION
SEPTEMBER 24, 1974

Preamble:

The Regents, administrations, and faculties of the University of Wisconsin System have in common the purpose of providing the most effective instruction possible for all students. They also share the interest which students have in improvement of teaching quality, and assert that teaching ability should be one of the chief criteria considered in tenure decisions and in the retention, promotion, and compensation of faculty.

Student evaluation of teaching is an important source of information on classroom performance. For this reason, the Regents seek to establish University of Wisconsin System policy on the use of student evaluation of teaching for (a) improvement of instruction; (b) retention, promotion, and tenure decisions; and (c) merit salary increase deliberations. The statement herein is limited to formal student evaluation of instruction only and does not cover evaluation of non-instructional personnel or activities, or evaluation of instruction by faculty peers or administrators. As background for such a System policy, the Regents offer the following commentary:

General Observations

Student evaluation for such purposes as those stated above is now conducted in a variety of ways throughout the University System. The Regents recognize that the faculties of the several institutions have the primary responsibility for setting policy concerning the method or methods by which student evaluation of instruction may be undertaken. Currently in the System some campus have in operation a uniform institution-wide method of student evaluation, others permit departmental/divisional autonomy, and others use systems devised and/or administered by student groups. Institutional faculty governance bodies are encouraged to work toward an evaluation methodology, including delineation of faculty/student involvement in development of evaluation instrument(s) and procedures for its (their) use, particularly suited to the needs and nature of their institutions.

While research on the use of student evaluation has been extensive, no single instrument or methodology can be identified which is clearly more valid or useful than another. Emphasis may to good effect be placed on description of what happens in the classroom; research is still clearly needed to improve evaluation methodologies. Consequently, whatever practice is followed will need to be improved by an on-going process of testing and perfecting, and a wise understanding of the

strengths and limitations of the student evaluation methodology in use. The Regents accordingly believe that variety of practice, affirmed by the considered judgment of the faculties of the several institutions, constitutes the best basis for carrying out a Regent policy on student evaluation.

Use of Student Evaluation for Improvement of Instruction

One of the widest uses of student evaluation is as a source of information for the improvement of instruction. The Regents recognize that a variety of instruments or methods of student evaluation may serve the purpose of improving instruction, yet at the same time have little value for purposes of comparative evaluation of teaching performance. For example, short questionnaires checking student reaction to particular teaching materials, units, forms of presentation, or exams; open-ended suggestions solicited from class members for course improvements; or class discussion as part of the on-going process of course planning and conduct may be useful for instructional improvement but not of value for peer group advice or administrative uses. Frequently, student evaluation for self-improvement is best used when the faculty member has freedom of choice as to instrument, methods, or frequency. In this context, information which a faculty member solicits from students may be of greatest value for teaching improvement when there is no requirement that it be submitted to support promotion, tenure, or merit increase decisions.

Use of Student Evaluations for Retention, Promotion, and Tenure Decisions

Peer group evaluation of a faculty member for retention, promotion, or tenure is necessarily based on multiple criteria which include effectiveness in teaching as well as high quality in scholarly activity and public service. Final consensus prior to a recommendation requires a judicious weighing of such criteria, both singly and in relation to one another, relative to the current mission and developmental needs of a department and institution. In assessing teaching effectiveness, the Regents believe that student evaluations are an important and useful source of evidence which should be explicitly considered in reaching judgments. The Regents assert, however, that student evaluation must not be a substitute for direct peer judgment of teaching effectiveness through a variety of means such as observation of teaching, assessment of syllabi, examinations, and other course materials, and evaluation of contributions to development and strengthening of departmental curriculum. Moreover, effective peer judgment of teaching effectiveness necessarily includes both examination of the faculty member's current level of performance, and also his or her potential for growth.

Use of Student Evaluations in Merit Salary Increase Decisions

With regard to merit salary increase, the Regents are aware that sharp differences of opinion exist within the System, and within higher education nationally, concerning the value of repeated and regular use of a single evaluative instrument as one of the bases for annual decisions. While some campuses regularly use student evaluations for the purpose of improving teaching, other campuses believe that requiring annual or semester use for all classes of all teachers (since all teachers might properly be considered for merit increases) may generate costs well beyond any benefits received. The system may be time consuming and costly to manage. It may generate a volume of data much of which is redundant in the sense that steady and repetitious use may not generate new information. Such concerns should be reflected in a policy statement on student evaluation.

Policy Statement

In light of these considerations and in an effort to insure considered use of student evaluation for certain administrative purposes and to encourage its increased use for other purposes, the Regents have prepared the following statement of System policy:

1. Student evaluation for the improvement of instruction.

Each institution of the System should develop policy supporting the widest possible use of student evaluation for the improvement of instruction, together with supporting services which will best encourage and assist faculty members to use student evaluation for this purpose.

2. Student evaluation of instruction as information used in actions on promotion, retention, or the awarding of tenure.

Each institution of the University System shall adopt such policies for instructional faculty as will insure (a) that student evaluation of the instruction of each faculty member being considered for promotion or tenure shall be undertaken; (b) that the faculty body which initiates recommendations for promotion or tenure shall consider, in addition to independent peer judgment of teaching effectiveness, student evaluation data, taking into account existing limitations in validity and reliability of the evaluation methodology employed; and (c) that the faculty body initiating the recommendation shall include both its explicit evaluation of the teaching effectiveness of the person for whom the recommendation is made, and shall include a summary of the information provided by student evaluation as part of the supporting evidence for its recommendation.

Each institution shall develop systematic and firm procedure(s) for the manner and form of presenting student evaluation material for administrative purposes. Faculty members being evaluated should be informed of and have the right to respond to any summaries of student evaluations to be submitted for administrative use.

3. Student evaluation of instruction as information used in actions on merit salary increase.

All faculty members being considered for merit salary increases shall be evaluated by their peers as to their instructional ability, using information from student evaluation of their instruction, as well as other information relevant to assessment, at least once every three years. The intent of this policy is to delegate to the institutions and their faculties decisions as to the minimal frequency with which full assessment of teaching performance should be undertaken and formal analysis of student evaluation data carried out. It does not, however, imply that more frequent student evaluation might not be wise or desirable in order to provide the most substantial basis for the formal assessment of teaching performance.

N.B.--The Policy Statement on Student Evaluation of Instruction shall be applied to all teaching faculty understanding that in UW-Extension major portions of faculty assignments may be to continuing education and public service. Accordingly, this institution should develop analogous procedures for gathering information on the response of client groups to the performance of such faculty.

Reporting:

The Regents ask that by March 1, 1975, each institution report to the Office of Academic Affairs its policies then in effect concerning student evaluation of instruction, together with copies of any instruments in widespread use by the faculty, and a description of any institutional services provided by the faculty member or department in carrying out evaluation procedures. It is assumed that the process of developing, testing, and phasing-in an institutional policy and practice concerning student evaluation will be completed not later than July 1, 1976. The Office of Academic Affairs shall summarize such information in a report to the Regents, and, as requested by the Council of Chancellors, shall assist in disseminating information on practices within the System to the several institutions.
