

Contextual Information: myUVM Portal Integrated Course Evaluation Platform

This is to offer some additional background and materials for the FSEC to consider prior to the discussion item at our September 11th meeting. To be clear, it is NOT planned to ask the Faculty Senate to take action on any resolution at the Full Senate Meeting on September 18th. Rather, it is planned to present this notion to solicit feedback from the senate at large before action on a resolution is considered later this academic year. This approach is intended to serve as a 'public hearing' of sorts with ample time for any concerns to be raised before any formal vote is considered.

Below is some additional background on this topic and attached are supporting materials.

This notion of a myUVM portal integrated course evaluation platform has received multiple formal (and unanimous) motions of support for further exploration by the Faculty Senate Student Affairs Committee (see [November 19 2015 Minutes](#) and attached SP16 SAC Resolution Approved Unanimously on 4/14/16), the Faculty Senate Educational Research and Technology Committee (see [November 11 2015 minutes](#) and [December 9 2015 Minutes](#)) and by the Grossman School of Business Faculty (October 2015 Faculty Meeting). The Student Government Association has also formally endorsed this motion (twice).

An early version of this notion received some formal objections from the United Academics Executive Council. The notion was reframed to address their concerns (specifically ensuring that each department would choose their own questions and maintain full control over the responses while also not being 'required' to use this platform for course evaluations).

This proposal attempts to disentangle the issues around Course Evaluations by separating them into two categories. The proposal is focused on developing an sophisticated, integrated course evaluation platform improving how Course Evaluations are conducted at UVM for departments that choose to use it – it does not address any policies on how course evaluations are used and does not mandate UVM departments use this platform. The decisions over how UVM course evaluations rest entirely with each department and this proposal re-enforces that standing university practice.

*Category 1. Issues with how course evaluations **are used**.*

1. **Access.** Who gets to see the responses? Departmental Faculty Peers? All UVM Faculty? Senior Leadership? Students? The public at large? Just the instructor of the course?
2. **Purpose.** Are course evaluation responses to be used for Reappointment Promotion and Tenure? Are they to inform students of the course 'character'?

- during class selection? Are they for curriculum alignment and sequencing?
Are they for formative improvement in our pedagogy?
3. **Bias.** What bias are captured in the response set? Gender bias? Influence (surveyed the day a final exam is changed to become a 'Take Home')? Weather outside on the day the evaluation is conducted?
 4. **Questions.** Who decides what questions to ask? Departments? Instructors of record? Deans? Students? Faculty Standards committees? All of the above with different blocks from different groups for different purposes?

*Category 2. Issues with the way course evaluations **are conducted.***

1. **When.** On the last day of class? During the last two weeks of the semester? During the last 4 weeks of the semester? During finals week? Continually throughout the semester?
2. **Format.** Paper or online?
3. **Required or Optional.** Completion/participation rate requirements? Opt in or opt out?
4. **Quality Assurance.** How access to the survey (paper or online) is ensured to ONLY be completed by valid respondents (students who took the course and not random posters like what RateMyProfessors permits)?
5. **Anonymity Maintained Dimensional Depth of Responses.** Do responses capture demographic data including academic year (first year, sophomore, junior...), general performance in class (>than B- vs. C+ or lower), gender of respondent, in major or out of major (BSAD vs. Non-BSAD major in a BSAD class)...
6. **Scale.** 1 to 5, 1 to 7, 1 to 9 or 1 to 10? Is 1 high and 7 low? Is 5 high and 1 low?

The notion being proposed is designed **ONLY to address the 2nd Category of issues** – how we **conduct** course evaluations. The questions regarding how we **use** course evaluations is a broader discussion that raises many valid concerns by UVM faculty and is not addressed with this notion of a myUVM integrated course evaluation platform. Those decisions are explicitly left for each department to continue to manage/decide.

There are many benefits to this proposal to improve how course evaluations are conducted at UVM.

- **Timing.** This would permit course evaluations to be consistently conducted at the end of the term (starting the first day of finals week) while ensuring the student completes the questionnaire *before* their final grade in the course is viewable.
- **Participation.** This would improve online evaluation completion rates as the questions would be presented in a trusted platform (myUVM portal).
- **Efficiency.** Paper based evaluations use a lot of resources that could otherwise be focused on richer value adding activities to the University.
- **Data Quality.** A sophisticated integrated platform would ensure security standards, anonymity and qualified respondents (students who took the

course and only one response per student) are ensured.

- **Data Richness.** Integration with the myUVM portal would allow for multi-dimensional data capture (while maintaining anonymity) to better understand how our courses are received by the subpopulations within our student body.

In the spring of 2012 in close collaboration with the SGA, the Faculty Senate passed a resolution in support of online evaluations (FS2012-174). In the fall of 2014, the SGA passed a follow up resolution on this topic calling for a 'revitalization and standardization of academic course evaluations' (SGA SR No. 4 – 11/18/2014). Then again in May of 2016 the SGA passed a resolution explicitly endorsing this notion. These resolutions are included in the attached PDF>

Lastly, it is of value to offer that the exploration of a rich, myUVM integrated optional course evaluation platform would directly fit with our stated UVM mission goal of:

“Instilling an institutional commitment to efficiency and effectiveness that optimizes the use of facilities, technology, assets, and shared services” -

<http://www.uvm.edu/president/?Page=mission.html>

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