

Student Affairs Committee (SAC) of the University of Vermont Faculty Senate

2015-2016 Annual Report

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The Student Affairs Committee (SAC) covered the following topics this year.

1. **Administrative F Policy Change.** Through thorough conversations on the topic of the grade letter 'F', the Registrar saw value in altering the current Administrative F policy imposed on students when faculty fail to meet the grade filing deadline. Per the Registrar beginning spring 2016, grades not filed before the Noon on Tuesday after Finals week deadline will be recorded as an 'M' (for 'missing') instead of an 'F'. This 'M' should spur the student to contact the faculty member about the grade and to politely prod the faculty member to submit a grade for the effort in the course that semester.
2. **Campus Wide Faculty Meeting.** Inspired by conversations in the Executive Committee of the Faculty Senate on the notion of the '21st Century College Student', the SAC explored the notion of starting a tradition at UVM with a 'big-tent' annual faculty meeting. In concert with the Faculty Senate, this notion is being explored by Associate Provost Vigoreaux to determine feasibility and planning next steps. For more information see Appendix A.
3. **myUVM Integrated Course Evaluation Platform.** The SAC has explored this topic in great depth and crafted a detailed resolution outlining parameters for a sophisticated, feature rich and myUVM integrated course evaluation platform. A resolution was passed unanimously on April 14th 2016 (see Appendix B) focusing on ways to better conduct UVM course evaluations (leaving alone the topic of how to 'use' course evaluations) – see Appendix C and D for additional details.
4. **Student Advising.** SAC conversations have involved the following topics:
 - a. *Student Peer Mentoring/Advising.* Healthy discussions guiding the direction of this initiative delineating responsibilities for these student leaders from the academic advising responsibilities of our Faculty.
 - b. *Academic Advising Award.* The SAC drafted and voted unanimously to create a campus wide advising award for UVM faculty.
 - c. *Advising Center.* The SAC continues to be apprised of progress related to and supports development of a centralized Advising Center.
5. **Academic Integrity Policy.** The SAC has formed a subcommittee to explore additional verbiage for our Academic Integrity policy that will give students fair recourse should they believe a UVM faculty member inappropriately adjudicated an academic integrity violation outside of this mandated due process.
6. **Books for Equality.** UVM students have sought support from our committee for a Faculty communication about textbook requisition practices that will benefit students economically. The committee has expressed support for this communication and directed the students to the Office of the Faculty Senate President.
7. **Academic Calendar.** The committee continued conversations from the previous year efforts on the important topic of the Academic Calendar in response to an SGA resolution outlining student concerns on the new configuration taking effect next year. The conversations were productive and guided the SGA to successfully lobby the Registrar for an optimally configured final exam matrix in the new calendar configuration that will offer students a reading day on the Wednesday of the 5 day exam week.

Appendix A: Annual Campus Wide UVM Faculty Meeting

Student Affairs Committee of the Faculty Senate

University of Vermont

Last Modified 3/10/16

Proposal: A Campus-Wide All-Faculty Meeting with Speakers on Subject Matters Relevant to University Educators of 21st Century Students.

Why: Our student body and our campus services change every year. The information technologies and support services available to all faculty change every year. For the same reason we provide a full day orientation to our newly hired faculty (to apprise UVM community members of services and processes in place to support their efforts), there is an identified interest to offer an annual campus wide faculty meeting.

When: The 2nd Monday of each October (designated our 'Fall Recess Day' in our academic calendar), a campus wide faculty meeting be held at an appropriate sized facility from 9 to noon followed immediately by an optional reception of appropriate lunch fare.

What: During this morning session, opening remarks would be made by campus leadership on relevant topics that academic year (changes to the calendar, priority initiatives, campus wide announcements...) followed by two or three speakers touching upon possible topics including:

1. **Teaching and the 21st Century Student.** What are their expectations and how does a University communicate and manage student expectations from the application to the day of graduation.
2. **Grades – what does a 'C' really mean?** What an A means today isn't what an A meant yesterday and won't mean the same tomorrow. What do grades really mean and what are common practices on grade distributions, grade composition, class participation considerations, proctored assessments weight vs. outside of class efforts, individual efforts vs. group collaboration assignments...
3. **Class Attendance.** If they vote with their feet, how do I get them to show up? What do effective attendance policies look like for various pedagogical approaches? Should attendance be taken? What are effective and easy to manage attendance tools available today for small and large enrollment classes?
4. **Technology on the Table.** When should screens be out and when should they be put away?
5. **Student Resilience and Faculty Expectations.** There is a tension between academic rigor, student retention and emotional fragility. How can faculty clearly communicate course expectations and student responsibilities? What supports are in place at UVM for faculty in this space?
6. **Student Issues.** Faculty have identified changes in the emotional, social and behavioral readiness of students. How can we tap into on-campus resources and beyond to better understand our students needs and methods to support them?

In addition to organized speakers on the possible topics above, Campus departments would be welcomed and encouraged to 'table' at the lunch offering UVM faculty an opportunity to ask questions about their offerings related to student success and faculty support.

Where: Being that we are a faculty of ~1,500, the likely location is the Patrick Gym with campus resources & faculty services fair tabling in the Tennis courts or the lobby.

Who: All UVM faculty, full time, part time, tenure track, non-tenure track, research or otherwise.

How: With the financial and administrative support of the provost's office.

Appendix B:



FACULTY SENATE

Student Affairs Committee

WHEREAS the University of Vermont Faculty Senate passed a Motion on Online Evaluations on April 9th 2012 (FS2012-174) supporting the creation of an online course evaluation platform for UVM courses;

WHEREAS the University of Vermont Student Government Association passed a resolution supporting the revitalization and standardization of Academic Course Evaluations on November 18th 2014 (SGA2014-04);

WHEREAS course evaluations at the University of Vermont are departmentally designed, managed, and controlled, while the myUVM student portal is a centrally managed information portal used to disseminate curriculum, grade and advising information;

WHEREAS course evaluations conducted at the culmination of a course enable students to best reflect on the entire course experience, after all coursework has been completed and all instructor feedback received;

WHEREAS online course evaluations experience reduced student participation rates because of technical or procedural obstacles, or because the collection platforms are unfamiliar to respondents;

WHEREAS a BANNER/myUVM integrated course evaluation platform would allow for the seamless capture of respondent characteristics that would provide greater insight into how students receive courses offered at the University of Vermont;

BE IT RESOLVED that the University of Vermont Faculty Senate supports the implementation of a BANNER/myUVM integrated departmentally controlled course evaluation platform;

BE IT ALSO RESOLVED that the anonymity of respondent submissions will be maintained in all presented results with specific attention to semantic security limiting multi-dimensional response parsing to only include sub-populations with a minimum number of five collected responses from that sub group;

BE IT ALSO RESOLVED that such a platform will make available the course questionnaire to students at the beginning of the final exam period for students to complete up until being able to view their final course grade, and that a prompt will ask students if they would like to opt out or in to completing the evaluation;

BE IT ALSO RESOLVED that if the student opts to complete the course evaluation, this will occur before the final grade is viewable ensuring that students must complete the course evaluation before their grade is viewable through the online portal during the two week period beginning the morning of the first scheduled final exam block;

BE IT ALSO RESOLVED that functional units or departments on campus are under no obligation to use this integrated platform for course evaluations, and that the determination to do so rests with the governance structures in place within each functional unit/department;

BE IT ALSO RESOLVED that this platform places full autonomy and control of the questions, responses and managed access to the responses solely with the functional units or departments on campus currently responsible for managing course evaluations;

BE IT ALSO RESOLVED that any implemented system would include data access and access attempt auditing to maintain verifiable integrity over the departmentally controlled responses to these course evaluations.

Appendix C: Departmentally Controlled Banner/myUVM Integrated Course Evaluation Platform Option

Educational Research & Technologies Committee and Student Affairs Committee of the Faculty Senate Joint Proposal
University of Vermont
Last Modified 2/29/2016

NOTE: This document is a revised notion incorporating feedback from many constituencies on campus regarding the departmentally controlled optional integration of course evaluations into the Banner/myUVM student portal.

Issue: At the University of Vermont, course evaluations are conducted during the semester before finals week with low participation rates (for units that conduct online course evaluations). Additionally, the data collected lacks depth in that it doesn't capture respondent demographics (class year, major, gender...) that could be used to better inform faculty on the student perspective in their courses.

Proposal:

To address the issues above, the Educational Technology & Research Committee and the Student Affairs Committee proposes that the faculty senate pass a resolution supporting the implementation of an optional myUVM portal integrated course evaluation platform for UVM departments to consider using for their own purposes. The key features of this platform would be:

1. **Timing.** Students would be prompted to answer these departmentally designed questions BEFORE they see their final grade for the course. By integrating the course evaluation into the myUVM portal, it will have students offer feedback on the course at a time when they can reflect on the class in entirety (including end of semester help sessions, papers, or exams conducted during finals week) BUT still before they see the final grade in the class. Current campus evaluations are conducted during the week or two BEFORE final exams when students have NOT completed the course and are under a lot of pressure from their academic responsibilities. Integrating the evaluation into the myUVM portal will allow the evaluation to occur after the course is complete but still before they see their final recorded grade in the course.
2. **Opt-In.** Based on previous conversations on this topic, the integrated online course evaluation platform would ask the respondent (student) if they would like to complete a survey on their course. If they choose yes, they will be presented the departmentally selected questions. This Opt-In gateway will ensure only meaningful responses are harvested.
3. **Online.** There are some academic units at UVM using paper based surveys with scantrons and manual transcribing of open ended comments. This would be an optimized web-based course survey platform units could opt to consider migrating towards for operational efficiencies in collecting and aggregating the responses.
4. **Participation rate.** Academic units on campus using online course evaluations struggle with low participation rates (especially compared to paper based course evaluations). Presenting students with these Evaluations JUST before they are able to see their final grade will do two things:
 - a. Validate the authenticity of the survey for the potential respondent (while they are logged on to the trusted myUVM web portal).
 - b. Put the survey conveniently in front of them (circumventing issues with spam filters, authentication problems or browser problems).
5. **Richer Data.** Current course evaluations at UVM are not able to parse responses on important dimensions including Class Year, Ace score or Course Performance. Integrating a course survey mechanism into the myUVM/BANNER SIS portal will allow for seamless capture of respondent characteristics while still ensuring anonymity to the submitted response. This would allow for response parsing to identify differences in the student course experience among academic sub groups of our student population. Figure 1 is an example of how three questions could provide deeper perspective on the student experience among different student sub groups.

Figure 1

Course Survey Responses				
1: Strongly Disagree - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5: Strongly Agree		Q1	Q2	Q3
All Responses	Mean	3.89	3.86	3.77
	Std. Dev.	1.01	1.06	1.08
	Min / Max	2.0 / 5.0	1.0 / 5.0	1.0 / 5.0
Class (Mean Scores)	First Year	-	-	-
	Sophomore	3.25	3.21	3.06
	Junior	3.89	3.87	3.80
Performance (Mean Scores)	Senior	4.25	4.21	4.33
	High (A+, A, A-, B+, B or B-)	4.12	4.30	3.87
Major (Mean Scores)	Low (C+ or lower)	3.66	3.78	3.75
	In Major (BSAD)	4.44	4.62	4.51
Major (Mean Scores)	Out of Major (Non BSAD)	3.20	3.10	2.40

6. **Departmental Autonomy.** The University of Vermont culture values departmental control over course evaluation questions and data. For the platform to be supported by the Faculty Senate, the implementation of this solution would need to ensure that:
 - a. Departments would be under NO obligation to use this platform – it would merely be an option for them to consider using if they so choose.
 - b. Each department that wants to use this platform would choose their own questions (meaning there would be no common questions).
 - c. ONLY the department (or departmentally designated individuals) may access the collected responses.
 - d. Data access auditing would be required of any considered solution (showing regular, verifiable access of records or access attempts to validate the integrity over the security & policy controls restricting access to evaluation data).
7. **Question Rating Scale Directional Consistency.** Current course evaluations conducted at UVM have different directional scales on their ratings based questions (e.g 1 is Strongly Disagree on some evaluations and 1 is Strongly Agree on other course evaluations). A centrally implemented campus platform would create an opportunity to unify the scale direction of all departmentally designed course evaluation questions.

Appendix D: **Memo on the Notion of a myUVM Integrated Course Evaluation Platform at UVM**
Spring 2016

Creating a myUVM integrated course evaluation platform has received multiple formal (and unanimous) motions of support for further exploration from the Faculty Senate Student Affairs Committee (see [November 19 2015 Minutes](#) and 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).

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 notion attempts to disentangle the issues around Course Evaluations by separating them into two categories.

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 is captured in the response? 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 is 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 explored presently is designed 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 and is not addressed with this notion of a myUVM integrated course evaluation platform.

A myUVM portal integrated course evaluation platform would do four things to improve how we conduct course evaluations 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).
- **Participation.** This would improve online evaluation completion rates as the questions would be presented in a trusted platform (myUVM portal).
- **Data Richness.** The myUVM portal integration 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.
- **Qualified Respondents.** This would be a secure platform where only students who took the course would be permitted to complete the evaluation. This would ensure that random, unqualified or repeated responses are not permitted.

This is a conversation spanning multiple years with previous expressions of support arguing for a sophisticated online course evaluation solution to be implemented at the University of Vermont. 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).

Lastly, it is of value to offer that 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>