

California

State

University,

Fresno

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**Personnel Committee**

**Academic Senate**

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**M E M O R A N D U M**

**MEMORANDUM**

DATE: April 29, 2022

TO: Ray Hall, Chair, Executive Committee, Academic Senate

FROM: David E. Low, Chair, University Personnel Committee

Kathleen D. Dyer, Chair, Student Ratings Subcommittee



RE:              APM 322 – Suggested Revisions

The Student Ratings Subcommittee has been charged with implementing the student ratings component of APM 322 (Policy on the Evaluation of Teaching Effectiveness). They have implemented the creation of a new instrument, the Fresno State Student Ratings of Instruction (FSSRI) questionnaire, and have transitioned the campus to a new platform for the online administration of those student ratings surveys. In so doing, they have become intimately familiar with the policy that shapes our work, and have identified some components of the policy that might be improved. They brought these suggestions to the University Personnel Committee, and the committees have worked in conjunction for over a year on addressing the policy. Collectively, the committees make the following recommendations regarding APM 322.

The primary issues are identified here, with a summary of our suggestions and/or our request for your consideration:

1. **Reorganization:** Purely as a matter of formatting, we suggest that the policy be reorganized to include one section of the policy about Student Ratings, and a separate section about Peer Evaluations. Right now, they are each addressed multiple times in different sections of the policy in a way that is confusing. We propose:
   1. Section I: Principles of Evaluation of Teaching
   2. Section II: Peer Evaluation (Instrument, Frequency, Procedures, Data Analysis & Use)
   3. Section III: Student Ratings (Instrument, Frequency, Procedures, Data Analysis & Use)
   4. Section IV: Overall Evaluation of Teaching

We have attached a file demonstrating how the existing policy might be reorganized for clarity without any changes to the content. In addition, we have attached a file with potential changes (described below) to the policy (not the format) using the reviewing feature in Word.

1. **Streamlining:** Some additional changes are not substantive, but they simply streamline the document. A few issues were addressed multiple times in the document, with something almost identical said more than once. We have combined these. For instance, sections I.A. and the original I.D. were almost identical. They have been combined into I.A. and the original I.D. was deleted. Similarly, a new I.B. was modified to describe the required department policy. Previously, all of the requirements listed there (I.B. a-c) were spread throughout the document (e.g., II.B.1., III.A.2., etc.).
2. **Eligible Courses:** This section (I.D.) was never necessary in the past because ratings were an opt-in system. But with the move to Explorance, we now use an opt-out system, so that every class in Peoplesoft is automatically included. This includes independent study classes and others that were simply never included before. It has created confusion about what is required to be rated. We propose stating explicitly that some “classes” as defined by Peoplesoft are not what this policy is designed to address.
3. **New Modality = New Class:** For both peer evaluations and student ratings, we propose that teaching a class online or hybrid after it has previously been taught only face-to-face, or vice-versa, should require that it be treated like a new class (II.B.1.A). Furthermore, we propose that new classes have to be peer evaluated (II.B.1.b.). A similar change is proposed for student ratings in section III.B.1.
4. **Department Chair authority:** We propose that department chairs be allowed to require an additional peer evaluation (I.B.2.). Right now, only personnel committees or deans can request additional peer evaluations. But chairs are the ones who identify potential problems, or make requests of part-time faculty, and now they are not authorized to ask for follow-up to verify that problems are resolved, because they cannot request additional peer evaluations. We have proposed the same thing for student ratings in section III.B.2.
5. **Peer Evaluation Deadline:** We propose adding a deadline for the submission of peer evaluations, and making explicit the right of faculty to submit a rebuttal, including a deadline for that as well (II.D.3.).
6. **Clarify Language re: SRI instrument:** Changes in this section (III.A. 1-5) simply describe the system as it currently functions. It does not propose any changes.
7. **Frequency of SRI:** The change proposed in Section II.B.1. is perhaps the most substantive change we are proposing. It is a response to our investigation of low response rates. We hope that reducing the frequency of required student ratings will increase student compliance. If they only have to complete a couple of ratings, they may be more likely to do so than if they have to complete five or six each semester. Plus, we hope to concentrate the feedback in the hands of faculty for whom the data are most useful. Specifically, student feedback is most impactful when a faculty member is developing a course. But if they teach it for many years, student ratings tend to remain totally stable from semester-to-semester, not providing any additional useful information. Therefore, we propose that faculty at all levels must obtain student ratings only for the first six times they teach a class. After that, they can do so if they choose.
8. **Procedures for SRI:** We propose some clarifications to the Procedures section (III.C.) because the procedures are different now that we use an online platform for administering ratings surveys. We suggest specifying the last day of finals as the deadline. In the past, the policy said “the end of the semester” but it is not clear exactly what day that is. We have removed the sentence about “nothing but a pencil and paper” because it does not apply. Please note that this sentence had been intended to mean “no incentives” should be handed out that day, no cookies or pizza. But we have decided to simply remove this sentence, which leaves open the possibility that faculty might use group incentives if they so choose. Anonymity remains intact, thereby assuring that students cannot be incentived to submit a positive rating. Finally, we have specified best practices separately for ratings administered on paper versus those administered online, as well as for synchronous versus asynchronous online classes.
9. **Data from SRI:** This section (III.D.1. a-f) is mostly cleaned up to more clearly describe what statistics must be included and to whom the written comments will be available. Please note that written comments should only be available to the instructor (for course improvement) and chairs (to check for violations of policy), but should not be submitted to Personnel Files because it is well-established that the written comments contain significant evidence of gender and race bias. The only substantive changes to this section include:
   1. The departmental standard must be a minimal threshold, not a departmental average (III.D.1.e.).
   2. Requirement to for Personnel Committees to consider standard deviations in addition to mean scores.
   3. Advice for how Personnel Committees might handle student ratings with response rates that are too low to be statistically reliable.
10. **Remove Summary**: A summary is unnecessary and redundant.

We know this is a lot. However, we believe that it is best to consider the entire policy holistically, to make sure it is coherent and consistently applied. Therefore, we have made a very careful analysis of multiple issues. Thank you for your consideration of these suggestions. We would be happy to provide further explanation on any point.

Respectfully submitted,

D. Low and K. Dyer

CC: Xuanning Fu, Interim Provost  
Jim Schmidtke, Interim Associate Vice President for Faculty Affairs