University Council on Teaching

Meeting of Thursday, February 20, 2020

12:00-1:15, CTE Seminar Room

Agenda

Attendees: Jessica Black, Sylvia Sellers-García, Jackie Lerner, Danielle Taghian, Stacy Grooters, Emily Prud'hommeaux, Kathy Bailey

Agenda: bolded items discussed
1. **Course Evaluation Project – update on school visits and discussion of bias by Emily Prud'hommeaux, Assistant Professor, Department of Computer Science**
2. Student Well Being Project
3. Advising questions

The meeting began at noon, with Emily Prud'hommeaux presenting an analysis of gender bias in teaching. Her project evaluated gender differences in free text responses in teaching evaluations from the Rochester Institute of Technology, where she previously taught.

Dr. Prud'hommeaux noted that there was plentiful work on gender bias in numeric scores in teaching evaluations, but not a lot of work correlating these numbers with the text responses. The question she sought to address was whether numeric scores correlate with free text. In other words, do women and men get comparably favorable responses in free text, but then receive different numeric scores?

Dr. Prud'hommeaux presented on her findings from several experiments. In an experiment relying on teaching evals from an intro stat course, she and a graduate student trained an algorithm to rate satisfaction with a given instructor from an analysis of free text responses on their teaching evaluations[1]. Then, the investigators used the algorithm on a much larger dataset of 18,000 teaching evaluations from a variety of courses at RIT, finding that men and women had equally positive narrative evaluations. Unfortunately, they were unable to directly compare the numerical scores. They also used a mutual information technique to see word associations with gender. Perhaps unsurprisingly, they found that the students used more respectful titles for men, and that different adjectives were used for men and for women. Numerically, the male instructors outranked the women in overall ranking and adjectives such as "interesting," "brilliant" and "funny" were often used. Women outranked men in "students learning from attendance," "quality of assignments," "grading fairness," and "feedback," while adjectives such as "warm" were used.

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[1] Method: investigators rated student satisfaction on free text manually. The person doing the labelling did not know the gender of the instructor. Then, the algorithm was trained on the labelled responses.

One committee member asked if some numerical questions bring out gender bias more than others, which Dr. Prud'hommeaux confirmed. The free text responses also have a large gender bias, Dr. Prud'hommeaux noted. Another committee member asked about the gender of the student affecting bias in evaluations. Dr. Prud'hommeaux responded that men tend to give men higher ratings, while women are fair. Therefore, gender bias in student evaluations might be affected by gender balance of students in a class.

At Boston College, CSOM did a study of numerical gender bias on evaluations and found that on a five point scale, on average women were rated 0.1 lower than men. One committee member asked how Boston College's IRP could work on this. Dr. Prud'hommeaux suggested consulting a statistician. Another committee member noted that the conventional wisdom is that women work harder for the same ratings. Also, at small institutions like Boston College where the instructor does all the teaching, asking for separate ratings of the course and the instructor does not make much sense. One committee member mentioned a member of the faculty (Larry Ludlow) who would be well equipped to work on these issues at BC.

Moving on, the committee was informed that Jess Green and Peter Martin, members of the University Council on Learning Outcomes, met with Kathy Bailey and Billy Soo to discuss their project to incentivize faculty to do more creative assessment. A question was raised: does the UCT have any ideas about this?

Professor Bailey asked if the UCT should put aside or strongly encourage putting aside TAM and TAME grants for assessment projects.

One committee member asked: what do assessment projects look like? The response: the committee is still figuring that out. Committee members noted that assessment is always fuzzy: for instance, is it at a departmental or course level?

TAM and TAME grants seemed to some committee members like low hanging fruit, an easy start. Alternatively, the committee considered that TAM grants might now require an assessment component.

One committee member pointed out that in intro courses it is easy to assess learning but in elective courses it can be harder, and this is mostly true in STEM. The School of Social Work has a lot of experience with assessment, and does a lot of assessment work. One committee member suggested that BC faculty need outside training in assessment.

The UCLO wants faculty to be able to propose assessment projects to TAM and TAME grants. Should the committee write that they are encouraged? Committee members liked the language of "assessment projects are welcomed" to apply to TAM and TAME grants, rather than guarantee a certain number of grants for assessment projects.

One committee member noted that TAME grants cut out the summer. Applicants need to spend the money by May 15th, and they get the money in October, so there are no TAME summer projects. Committee members were in favor of shifting the TAME grants closer to TAM timing, with a small gap in order to stagger the work of reviewing applications.

Finally, Kathy Bailey gave an update on school visits to discuss course evaluations: she and Billy Soo have been to 5 of the 8 schools to speak about the proposed changes to course evaluation questions and associated suggestions, such as mid-semester evaluation IRP review of bias with data specific to BC. They also presented the idea of filling out course evaluations in class. The idea of in class evaluation got a lot of pushback, because professors would be tempted to be especially nice during the last class to get higher ratings, and because teaching time is especially valuable in the last class. While faculty are currently not forbidden to give evals in class, most faculty think it has to be done outside of class, some preferring that evaluations only be filled out after the class s over, or even after the final exam has been taken. One committee member suggested making in-class evaluations optional.

The committee returned to the topic of academic integrity violations: removing course evals from students who are 'found guilty' because they may be especially harsh against an instructor who reported the violation. However, students are often found guilty by Academic Integrity Boards only after a course ends and the evaluations have already been filled out. The university is exploring the option of removing evaluations completed by students who violate integrity standards after the review process has been completed and not before.

On the topic of faculty publishing syllabi on canvas, Kathy Bailey noted that instructors have to opt in on the Canvas site to make the syllabi public for students to review before registering for a course. Only 10% of faculty do this, most likely because they are unaware of how to make syllabi accessible, or because they don't use Canvas, or because they don't have traditional syllabi. One suggestion is to have department admins collect syllabi and post them to a site the university will set up. Some expressed concern that admins already have enough to do so this might not be effective.

Finally, the committee turned to the feedback from faculty on the proposed course evaluation questions. With respect to learning objectives, faculty worried that students will not remember what the learning objectives were. Some faculty were skeptical that there are clear definition of learning objectives or that this would be unclear to students, and preferred the language of the course being well organized to meet learning objectives