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M E M O R A N D U M

To: All RIT Faculty
From: Jeremy Haefner, Provost and Senior Vice President
Subject: Student survey for teaching evaluation
Date: November 2010
Cc: Academic Senate Executive Committee

As an institution, we place the highest priority on providing a quality education for our students. While this can be measured in a variety of ways, one of the most important dimensions is the quality of the teaching and learning process. Teaching has been the hallmark of RIT. This is affirmed in Policy E4, which states: "… that teaching is the foremost activity of the RIT faculty is deeply rooted in the traditions of the institution, and the primacy of teaching continues to be a hallmark of RIT". It is further affirmed through the specific expectations for Teaching effectiveness that are requisite for tenure, promotion and continued appointment. It follows then that the evaluation of teaching is critical to RIT – we must be able to measure teaching effectiveness if we are to claim that teaching is an RIT hallmark.

Instructional effectiveness is most accurately assessed when multiple sources of data and input are used   Typically these sources include peer review, teaching portfolios, department chair evaluation, student work and student course evaluations. The input of students, especially through a formal student survey, is but one component of the assessment of teaching effectiveness at RIT. Nonetheless, it is an important one.

Student input for teaching evaluation can serve a variety of needs. It can be used in formative evaluations that help the instructor directly improve his or her teaching. It can be used by administration as a summative evaluation tool that factors in the formal assessment of teaching effectiveness. Finally, it can be used by students to underscore the principle that their input is an important consideration for teaching effectiveness at RIT.

During the 2008-2009 academic year several concerns were brought to my attention with respect to the instruments and collection methodologies that are used currently to elicit student input on teaching. First, ITS voiced serious concerns about the 38-year-old optical scanning service associated with paper forms (i.e. SCANTRON) that we use. The paper format is built on outdated and non-supported technology. Second, as I reviewed documentation for tenure and promotion, I noted the lack of consistent metrics and data in

the student course evaluations across the colleges. Third, Student Government voiced concerns with me about how the results of student evaluations were being used to improve teaching and asked for more transparency in the process. They pointed out that in some cases there was inconsistent administration and, as a result, student felt the process lacked legitimacy.

In order to help us examine these concerns and recommend improvements, the chair of the Academic Senate and the Provost charged a committee in the fall of 2009 to study our current formal student survey mechanisms for teaching evaluation. The taskforce had representation from each of the colleges, ITS and Student Government.

The charge to the committee was to recommend:
1. A consistent university-wide process for student evaluation of teaching that would be used across the campus that was based on best practices;
2. A set of 5-7 core questions that adequately reflect the essentials of teaching excellence, that would reflect best practices in the field, and that would serve a summative purpose;
3. A bank of customizable questions that would serve a formative use and would reflect best practices in the field; and
4. An appropriate use of technology, including technology currently used at RIT.

The report from the committee reflects an 8-month thoughtful deliberation by the committee. It recommends (i) that the campus adopt a uniform and consistent process of soliciting student input on teaching effectiveness through an online course evaluation survey; (ii) a list of 7 core questions be used across the institution and the ability for instructors and colleges to supplement these core questions with additional custom questions; (iii) an online teaching evaluation survey product; and (iv) a summative and formative framework by which parts of the information is shared with administrators and students.

The report and recommendations are posted to the provost's website for your review.

After consultation with the Executive Committee of Academic Senate, we have determined that Academic Senate should oversee a very thorough vetting process in the colleges that will culminate in a discussion at Academic Senate. The Provost will have final approval of the process. It is imperative that this process, the discussion and the final decision occur before the end of this academic year so that new software can be purchased, installed, tested and readied for the fall quarter of 2011.

In closing I wish to thank the members of the task force and the chair, Dr. Lynn Wild, for providing us with thoughtful and forward thinking recommendations for us to consider.

Respectfully,

Jeremy Haefner
Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs