To:	UALR Faculty Senate
From:	Faculty Professional Development Committee
	(Andrew Amstutz, Sarah Clements, Amar Kanekar, Louise Lowe, Heba Sadaka,
	Leslie Smith, Christopher Trudeau, Scott Woolbright, Heidi Skurat Harris--chair)
Date:	April 30, 2021
RE:	Report on State of Student Course Evaluation Processes at UALR

This report of the Faculty Professional Development Committee of the Faculty Senate compiles survey data from department/unit chairs, heads, and/or directors regarding student course evaluation survey practices as of April 2021.

Existing UALR Student Evaluation Policy (403.18)

The current UALR Student Evaluations of Faculty Policy (403.18) is as follows:

> "At the end of each semester, departments provide each faculty with evaluations to distribute to the students. The evaluations are tabulated, and results are provided to the faculty member as a means of evaluating his or her teaching. Department chairs use these results in yearly evaluations of faculty.

> "The Student Honor Council administers students' evaluations of their instructors at the Law School. The results of these evaluations are not disclosed to the faculty until all final grades have been turned in to the Office of Student Records. A statistical summary of the student evaluations and copies of all written comments relating to each course are then supplied to the instructor of that course."

Committee Charge

On February 24, 2021, Faculty Senate President Amanda Nolen tasked the Faculty Professional Development Committee to conduct research that further clarifies how departments and units at UALR administer and use student evaluations of faculty/courses. Our charge was to study:

1. How course evaluations are administered (including who is responsible for administering them and where procedures are described).
2. What percentage of students typically respond to course evaluations and how student evaluation data is distributed to faculty.
3. How student course evaluation data is used at the unit level (i.e., course sequencing, curriculum review, accreditation reports, etc.) beyond faculty annual review reports and reassignment, promotion, and tenure files.
4. What (if any) common items/item types are used in evaluations.
5. How satisfied programs are with their course evaluation process.

Survey Methodology

The Qualtrics survey instrument "UALR Student Evaluation Procedure Survey 2021" was distributed via listserv to thirty-nine (39) department chairs, directors, or unit heads for academic departments (see Appendix A for the survey instrument). The survey was open from March 15, 2021 through April 10, 2021. Twenty-five individuals responded to the UALR Student Evaluation Procedure Survey (64% completion rate). Thirteen of the 25 respondents (52%) administer their own student course evaluation surveys. Ten of the respondents indicated that the UALR Scholarly Technology and Resource Office (STaR) administers their evaluation surveys (31%), and two responses indicated that individuals other than the respondent were responsible for administering the survey.

The following report answers the committee charges using data given by the 13 respondents whose departments or units administer their own course evaluation surveys.[1]

1. How are course evaluations administered, who is responsible for administering them, and where is this process codified?

Evaluation Instrument Creation
Student course evaluations were created by faculty (n=9, 69%), unknown entities (n=3, 23%), and STaR (1, 8%). Only 1 program indicated that the instrument was tested for validity and reliability (6 replied that it was not tested and 6 were unsure whether it had been tested). Ten respondents (77%) stated that department faculty voted to approve the evaluation instrument prior to distribution.

Process Descriptions/Dissemination
A majority of departments or units (n=9, 69%) indicated that course evaluations are a part of their governance document, and 4 (31%) indicated that they are not a part of departmental governance documents.

Departments whose student course evaluation process weren't defined in their governance documents indicated that their procedures for describing the evaluation process the process were
- distributed via email to faculty
- posted in Blackboard
- included in lesson plans and training materials, or
- listed in a college faculty manual.

Face-to-face Evaluation Survey Distribution
Nine departments/units rely on STaR to administer surveys via Blackboard (70%).[2] Six (6) departments use some combination of the department chair/unit head, instructor of

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[1] The additional 12 respondents exited the survey once they indicated that they were not responsible for survey administration (see "Survey Limitations" for more information about the data).

[2] These nine departments who utilize STaR for distributing surveys are in addition to the 10 departments that indicated that STaR is responsible for their course evaluations, meaning that of the 25 survey respondents, 19 have STaR distribute and collect their course evaluation surveys.

record, graduate/research assistant, and department staff member (24%). Two responded "other" with the explanation that either a student in the class distributes the evaluations or that they do not distribute any evaluations face-to-face.

Online Student Evaluation Survey Distribution
Six respondents (46%) indicated that they *did not* evaluate face-to-face and online students differently; seven respondents (54%) indicated that they *do have* separate procedures for evaluating the two modalities.

For online students course evaluations, 9 respondents (36%) rely entirely on STaR (through Blackboard) with one other using STaR to distribute some of their online evaluations. Other responses included the instructor or department staff member as the distributor of evaluations to online students. In addition, two responded "Other" with the department distributing the evaluations through a department email account or through a student.

2. What are student survey response rates, and how do departments distribute evaluation data to faculty?

Response Rates
Most respondents reported that average student course evaluation response rates were under 50% (see Table 1). Over half of the responses indicated response rates below 25%.

Response Rate	n=13	%
Over 50%	3	23%
25-50%	3	23%
Under 25%	7	54%

Table 1: Response rates for student course evaluations

Satisfaction with Response Rates
Understandably, departments with the lowest completion rates were dissatisfied with student course evaluation response rates while those with higher completion rates were satisfied. Eight of 13 (63%) reported they were not satisfied with the completion rate. Four out of 13 (41%) reported they were satisfied with the completion rate.[3] When asked if they believe that the COVID pandemic impacted their completion rates, 54% said "yes," 31% said "no," and 15% were not sure if COVID has had an impact on student evaluation completion rates.

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[3] One department chose "other" to report they are satisfied with face-to-face completion rate but not satisfied with the online evaluations process due to the lower completion rate.

Compiling and Preparing Student Evaluation Survey Data
Individuals responsible for compiling and preparing the completed student course evaluations for review/distribution are listed in Table 2.[4]

	N=13	%
Department Staff Member	5	20%
Chair/Director (sometimes with staff assistance)	5	20%
College Staff Member	2	8%
STaR	2	8%

Table 2: Person/unit responsible for collecting completed student course evaluations

How Faculty Receive Evaluations
Faculty receive their evaluations for their Digital Measures portfolios in various ways:
- summary reports
- directly from the chair/director
- via administrative assistant
- from STAR and IT services
- from STAR to the director to the faculty (one department mentioned they do not participate in the digital measures initiative).

When asked if this distribution process differed by faculty ranks and/or by adjunct status, 12 said "no" and 1 said "yes"[5]

3. How is student course evaluation data used at the department/unit level beyond faculty annual review reports and P&T files?

How student course evaluation data is used at the department/unit level beyond faculty evaluation is represented in Table 3.

	n=13	%
Curriculum review	5	38%
Improvement of future courses	4	31%
Accreditation purposes	3	23%
Scheduling and course sequencing	2	15%

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[4] Given that 9 of the 13 respondents who completed the entire survey indicated that STaR distributes their course evaluations, but only 2 departments said that STaR compiles and prepares data, we believe that there are some differences in how "compiles" and "prepares" are defined.

[5] Adjunct faculty in Nursing receive their evaluations based on their role descriptions in the AAS program. Adjunct faculty in the BSN program receive STAR evaluations.

Not used for any other purpose	2	15%
To give teaching awards	1	8%
Identify course bottlenecks	1	8%

Table 3: How Data is Used at the Department Level Beyond Faculty Evaluation

4. What common questions are used in student course evaluation surveys across units?

To answer this question, we asked participants to submit copies of their evaluation questions. Two departments did submit their evaluation processes (PEAW and Music). However, we did not receive enough responses to accurately identify any common questions across surveys.

STaR also provided a summary of their evaluation procedure and a copy of their standard student course evaluation questions, which can be found in Appendix B.

Recommendations regarding student course evaluation questions are further addressed in the "Conclusions" section of this report.

5. How satisfied are programs with their course evaluations?

Of the thirteen departments who administered their own student course evaluations, 6 (46%) were satisfied with the current course evaluation process and 7 (54%) were not satisfied.

An open-ended question asked for further clarification. Of the four open-ended responses, two focused on satisfaction/dissatisfaction with current evaluation instruments. One noted satisfaction with face-to-face methods but dissatisfaction with online tools. This dissatisfaction was reflected in the other response that called for a new "uniformly managed" process for online courses to replace current software used by STaR. Both of the latter responses noted the delay in obtaining results from current software. A final respondent noted that their department was small, relied heavily on adjunct faculty, and used departmental email to send evaluation links.

Survey Limitations

While the response rate for the survey was sound (64% of those contacted completed the survey), the primary survey limitation was survey design. Respondents who indicated that they were not responsible for administering their department's/unit's student course evaluations were asked to identify who did administer the surveys, and then exited the survey. Of the 10 respondents who indicated that they were not responsible for administering course evaluations, 8 responded that STaR administered the surveys and two said the surveys were administered by an administrative assistant and faculty.

Allowing those who answered that they were NOT responsible for the student evaluation survey to answer the remainder of the questions might have revealed differences between those departments/units who administer their own surveys and those who administer surveys via STaR.

Also, language surrounding terms--especially the word "administer"--were interpreted differently by different respondents. The committee had intended that the person in charge for overseeing the process of student course evaluations would be the person taking the survey (i.e., the survey could be sent to the person responsible for survey oversight in case that person was not the department/unit chair). However, all 10 respondents who indicated that they weren't responsible for survey "administration" listed the individuals who distributed and collected the surveys as those "administering" the surveys. Definitions of the terms "administration," "distribution," and "collection" could have alleviated some of this confusion.

Conclusions

No two departments or units at UALR have exactly the same needs or processes in terms of faculty and course evaluation. However, 7 of the thirteen full survey respondents (over half) were dissatisfied with current student course evaluation survey procedures at the university.

The following are conclusions the committee draws from the data in this survey.

1. **UALR departments/units follow no standard course evaluation protocol in the design, testing, administration, and use of student course evaluations.**

    Departments identified a range of practices for student course evaluation design, implementation, and use. In fact, the language surrounding student course and/or faculty evaluation seemed to be interpreted in different ways across programs. The completion rates for evaluations (with over half of respondents reporting response rates lower than 25%) begs the question of whether the results of these surveys provide enough useful information to draw conclusions about faculty performance.

2. **Whether "courses" or "faculty" are being evaluated is unclear.**

    UALR Students Evaluations of Faculty Policy (403.18) does not identify differences between evaluating courses and evaluating faculty. The only mention of the word "course" occurs at the end of the document ("A statistical summary of the student evaluations and copies of all written comments relating to each **course** are then supplied to the instructor of that **course**.") [emphasis ours].

    Policy 403.18 involves student evaluation of *faculty* performance and these metrics are used for retention, tenure, and promotion purposes. However, it is unclear how students are being asked to evaluate faculty and whether or not those evaluations conflate course design with faculty performance. For example, faculty have various levels of control over the content of their courses. They might:

    - design their own courses,

- use course content designed by a textbook or publisher,
- use a standardized curriculum for a program,
- teach a course designed by a committee or other faculty,
- be evaluated for a course they took over but had no role in creating.

Thus, making clear distinctions between what elements of survey instruments evaluate the instructor and which evaluate the course would be helpful in understanding that faculty member's performance in the course.

3. **Lack of reliability and validity tests limit what should be done with student evaluation data, and low student response rates further complicate using survey data effectively.**

Only one respondent in the survey indicated that their student course evaluation had been tested for reliability and validity. Faculty could (and probably should) be uncomfortable with their retention, promotion, and tenure being linked to potentially unreliable survey data that does not include a representative sample of a course.

While student course evaluation data is used beyond the initial purpose of faculty evaluation, whether (and how) it should be used is unclear based on the limits we have noted above.

In short, evaluating faculty performance is complex and dependent on the type of course being evaluated (face-to-face, hybrid, online, studio, independent study/private lesson, etc.), whether the faculty member is responsible for course design and facilitation, the response rates of those evaluating the faculty member, and how the university (and departments within the university) identify the components of "effective" teaching.

A uniform or close to uniform course evaluation strategy needs to be adopted by the University across various colleges and departments that accounts for flexibility to meet the needs of specialized programs and/or courses, as well as the role of course evaluations for accreditation purposes in specific programs. The course evaluation instrument(s) need to be validated and reliable. We know that incentivizing student participation rates has already been addressed by STaR and others on campus, but we hope that pilot programs can be developed to test various possible methods of increasing student survey responses.

Appendix A: UALR Student Evaluation Process Survey, 2021

Introductory Questions

What is your department/unit name and your title?

[   ]

Are you the person in charge of administering the student course evaluation survey?

○ Yes

○ No

○ Unsure

If you are not the person who administers your department's/unit's student evaluation survey, who is that person?

[   ]

Survey Creation

Who created your student course evaluation survey?

[   ]

Was the instrument tested for validity and/or reliability?

○ Yes

○ No

○ Unsure

Did unit faculty vote to approve the evaluation instrument prior to distribution?

○ Yes

○ No

○ Unsure

Is your evaluation policy a part of your department/unit/college governance documents?

○ Yes

○ No

○ Unsure

If not, where is the student course evaluation procedure detailed (i.e. website, memo to faculty, email to faculty, etc.)?

[ ]

Survey Delivery

Who distributes the student course evaluation survey to face-to-face students? (Select all that apply.)

☐ The instructor of record

☐ A graduate or research assistant

☐ A department staff member

☐ STaR (through Blackboard)

☐ The department chair or head of the unit

☐ [ ] Other

Is your procedure for distributing student course evaluations different for online students?

○ Yes

○ No

○ Unsure

Who distributes the student evaluation survey to online students? (Select all that apply.)

☐ The instructor of record

☐ A graduate or research assistant

☐ A department staff member

☐ STaR (through Blackboard)

☐ The department chair or head of the unit

☐ [ ] Other

Once the evaluations are completed, who compiles them and prepares them for review and/or distribution to faculty? (Select all that apply.)

- ☐ A graduate or research assistant
- ☐ A department staff member
- ☐ A college staff member
- ☐ STaR
- ☐ Unsure
- ☐ [_____] Other

How long is the student course evaluation survey available and when? (Select all that apply.)

- ◯ One week
- ◯ Two weeks
- ◯ Three weeks or more
- ◯ Before and during finals
- ◯ During and after finals
- ◯ [_____] Other

What is your survey completion rate?

- ◯ 0-25%
- ◯ 26-50%
- ◯ 51-75%
- ◯ 76% or more

Are you satisfied with the return rate for student evaluations in your department?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ [_____] Other

Has COVID impacted your student evaluation return rate?

- ◯ Yes, it has gone up.

○ Yes, it has gone down.

○ No, it hasn't impacted the return rate.

○ Unsure

Survey Use Post-Distribution

How do faculty receive evaluations for their Digital Measures portfolio (e.g. via email, paper report, etc.)?

Does the procedure differ for tenured, tenure-track, non-tenure track, and adjunct faculty?

○ Yes

○ No

○ Unsure

How does the procedure differ for different types of faculty?

How is student course evaluation data used at the unit level (e.g., course sequencing, curriculum review, accreditation reports, etc.) beyond faculty annual reviews and tenure and promotion files?

Are you satisfied with your current course evaluation process?

○ Yes

○ No

○ Unsure

Open Ended Questions

What comments or information about your student course evaluation instrument or process was not addressed in any of the above questions?

If we can contact you with additional questions, please leave your email address below.

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Appendix B: STaR Student Course Evaluation Procedure and Survey Items

David Montigue met with the Executive Committee of the Faculty Senate after the January senate meeting to discuss what STaR was doing in regards to student course evaluation processes. Notes of that meeting were provided to the committee by Faculty Senate President Amanda Nolen.

The current process is that they will administer the survey in a subset of online courses automatically and in courses where they were specifically requested to do so by the unit head. They aggregate the reports and send those to the unit head for each course. The report has the course number, crn, section number, and faculty name. The cost for them (currently) is primarily time. The STaR staff dedicates a lot of time to do this on top of everything else and not efficiently because each course evals are manually processed. The response rates have been quite low, so one has to ask if it is a good rate of return.

Likert Scale
Strongly Agree | Agree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree

1. The instructor's instructions for how to participate in the course were clear and easy to understand.
2. The course was easy to navigate (in other words, I could find my way around the course easily).
3. The instructor provided a clear statement of course objectives and grading procedures.
4. The instructor was able to explain complex subject material.
5. The instructor created interest in the subject material.
6. The instructor was able to answer class questions effectively.
7. The instructor appeared knowledgeable and up-to-date in his/her field.
8. Exams and/or assignments were consistent with course objectives?
9. Returned graded work in a timely manner?
10. Was fair in assigning grades?
11. Was available for academic consultation?
12. Was assigned reading consistent with course objectives?
13. What did you like best about the course? (with a comment section)
14. What would you recommend changing about the course?
15. Additional Comments