

IFC Faculty Affairs Committee

[Copy of on-line document listed among the “Active Policies for IUPUI Faculty” on the IFC’s website]

RESOLUTION: FACULTY ACCESS TO STUDENT EVALUATIONS (Adopted 4/3/03)

<http://www.iupui.edu/~fcouncil/documents/studentevalaccess.htm>

Resolution: The IUPUI Faculty Council charges the Dean of Faculties to assure that existing policies on faculty access to student course evaluations are implemented according to common principles at the school and department level. The Faculty Council asks reaffirmation of the faculty’s right to access their student evaluations and statistical and other summaries of them by explicitly granting access in the Indiana University Academic Handbook to these documents, in addition to other documents named in the Handbook which the faculty may already access.

The right of access is already implicit. The Indiana University Academic Handbook, <<http://www.indiana.edu/~deanfac/acadhbkc/>> acknowledges the right of the faculty to access their personnel records, and implicitly, student evaluations. The “Policy Governing Access to and Maintenance of Academic Employee Records” (item I-B, p. 103) defines these records to include “...any items or collections of information on individual academic employees including transcripts of conversations, recorded and stored in any medium under personal name or by any equivalent identifying number or symbol.” “Access to Personnel File by the Academic Employee” (IV-B (3), p. 104) guarantees faculty members’ right to access their personnel file, except for letters or statements from students solicited by the University and written prior to November 1, 1983. Also, “Maintenance of Records of Academic Employees” (V-C, p. 105) clearly indicates that formal student evaluations are considered part of the faculty member’s personnel record and, hence, under the above-mentioned policies, accessible to him or her, “With the exception of formal student evaluations of teaching, anonymous communications shall not be included in any record, nor shall they be stored or maintained. Such anonymous communications shall not be considered or referred to in matters of promotion, tenure, reappointment, or salary determination.”

The use of student evaluations for faculty development. The principal use of student evaluations is for faculty development and faculty have a right to access all information that will help them evaluate their own teaching effectiveness and enhance their performance in order to meet the goals of the unit in which the faculty member is employed. This conclusion is consistent with AAUP policy (“Redbook” or AAUP Policy Documents & Reports, 1995, p. 136) that states, “The responsible evaluation of teaching does not serve advancement procedures alone. It should be wisely employed for the development of the teacher and the enhancement of instruction.” Faculty members’ self-assessment and their ability to learn from evaluations are hampered by inadequate access to information within or derived from them.

Correction of administrative errors. It has come to the attention of the FAC that, on occasion in recent semesters, faculty have been denied access to their student evaluations and have instead received only their supervisor’s opinion of the quality of their teaching drawn from the supervisor’s interpretation of the evaluations. The FAC believes that the faculty must be given the opportunity to correct erroneous conclusions drawn from statements that have been taken out of context and, in other rare cases, as a result of an administrator’s vindictiveness. According to the AAUP (1995, p. 134), “...unilateral judgments by department chairs and deans...” based on a paucity of data, are inadequate. All too often, chairs do not actually witness the teaching of their faculty, and conclusions drawn from anonymous opinions must be handled with sensitivity and caution. This protection is possible only if a faculty member can examine

original evaluations in order to verify the correctness of summaries of them as well as to verify the context in which comments are written, whatever the evaluation procedure employed in different units across campus.

Correction of conclusions drawn from student misconceptions. There must be a provision for faculty to examine student evaluations so they can distinguish complaints from students whose low expectations of their own responsibilities prompt them to conclude erroneously that the standards which an instructor establishes are unreasonably high, as opposed to complaints about assignments that are inappropriate considering the prerequisites and objectives of the course. It is imperative that faculty, not students, set the standards in a class. The integrity of every discipline depends upon the faculty determining those standards.

Furthermore, the return of student evaluations to faculty, whether the evaluations are administered at the end of a semester or midway through for some pedagogical purposes, as well as the return of statistical inferences generalized from them, can be delayed until after course grades have been assigned, eliminating the risk of retribution to students who write negative reviews of their instructor. In cases where there is continuity between the instructor and student beyond a single course, complete typed transcriptions of student comments, which eliminate any possibility of identification of the student by handwriting, can be given to the instructor. Evaluations that are multiple-choice, machine-graded forms pose no risk to the student in any case.

Conclusion. The IUPUI FAC acknowledges the extreme importance of this complex issue and notes that standardized principles protecting faculty members' access to their student evaluations are already implicit in the Indiana University Academic Handbook. Although we recognize the right, and the desirability, of each school or division to establish evaluation procedures that best meet its needs, it is vital that all faculty in all units across campus be explicitly guaranteed access to student evaluations as integral contents of their personnel records as stipulated in the Academic Handbook.

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ADOPTED W/AMENDMENTS BY FACULTY COUNCIL: 4/3/2003