UNIVERSITY COUNCIL
TEACHING LEARNING AND ACADEMIC RESOURCES COMMITTEE
NOTICE OF MOTION

PRESENTED BY: Vince Bruni-Bossio, Chair, Teaching, Learning and Academic Resources Committee of Council
Patti McDougall, Vice Provost Teaching, Learning and Student Experience

DATE OF MEETING: November 21, 2019

SUBJECT: Student Learning Experience Feedback Policy

NOTICE OF MOTION: It is recommended:

That Council approve the Student Learning Experience Feedback Policy

CONTEXT:
For six years the Teaching, Learning and Academic Resources Committee (TLARC) of Council has been advancing work related to teaching quality and its enhancement. Work on a policy related to student evaluations began in 2013 but was paused in 2015 in order to engage a working group of faculty, students, and staff to undertake a principles-based process to select a new instrument and system for collection of feedback on student learning experiences. After approval of the Student Learning Experience Questionnaire (SLEQ) in 2018, TLARC returned to development of a policy to frame the purpose, principles, and responsibilities related to the generation and use of student feedback as well as the procedures that would be used to guide administration of the SLEQ.

PURPOSE:
The Student Learning Experience Feedback policy document is intentionally high level, broad and applicable institution wide, regardless of the instrument being used. It is presented for approval by University Council. The procedures document is intended to guide implementation of our centrally supported student feedback instrument, the SLEQ and is presented for information and to provide additional context to the policy document.

This work has been advanced by a working group of TLARC with membership from across the institution. Working group members have included Alison Muri, Jim Greer, Jay Wilson, Trish Dowling, Marcel D'Eon, Aaron Pheonix, Chelsea Willness,
Marie Battiste, Sean Maw, as well as a number of USSU and GSA representatives, the Vice Provost Teaching, Learning and Student Experience and the Director, Teaching and Learning Enhancement.

CONSULTATION:

Throughout the development of the policy document, consultations have been undertaken. The list of those consulted includes:

- Joint Committee for the Management of the Agreement (JCMA)
- Associate Deans Academic
- Department Heads and/or Undergraduate Chairs and/or Chairs of Curriculum Committees currently using SLEQ
- Departmental Administrators currently using SLEQ
- Policy Oversight Committee
- USSU and GSA executives

SUMMARY:
These documents are important in providing clarity regarding the purpose, principles, responsibilities and procedures related to the generation and use of student feedback.

ATTACHMENT:

1. Student Learning Experience Feedback Policy
2. Student Learning Experience Feedback Procedures (for information)
Policy on Student Learning Experience Feedback within Courses

Responsibility: University Council
Authorization: University Council
Approval Date: xxxx

Purpose

The University of Saskatchewan is committed to excellence in teaching, academic programming and students’ learning experiences. The university is committed to gathering feedback on a regular basis from students on their learning experience for the purpose of the enhancement of teaching and learning. The purpose of gathering student feedback is both formative (i.e., for the educator’s personal use to improve teaching practice and students’ learning) and summative (i.e., available as one component contributing to assessment of teaching quality through collegial and administrative processes). In addition, there is value in using aggregate information (aggregated across educators or across courses) for planning and programming purposes. Student feedback is thus one part of an overall teaching quality framework that also includes regular peer review, self-assessment, collegial processes and other forms of assessment as appropriate to inform ongoing quality enhancement. The information received from students is thus beneficial for educators, administrators and the institution, and enables students to engage in a meaningful reflection on their experiences. This policy document on course-related student learning experience feedback flows out of and acknowledges educator and university community commitments made in the University of Saskatchewan Learning Charter.

Principles

This document is predicated on the ideals that:

- Educators seek feedback in their teaching and can use this feedback to enhance teaching and learning practice.
- Students want to provide feedback on their learning experiences.
- Feedback is collected, in part, to improve program quality and the quality of student learning.
- The rights and dignity of both educators and students shall be protected in the process of gathering student learning experience feedback and the reporting of results.
- The instruments that gather student learning experience feedback must be valid and reliable and must be approved by the college faculty council or department where such authority has been appropriately delegated to a department.
- The processes of gathering student learning experience feedback shall be fair and transparent; the processes should be explicit and understood at the outset by educators and students.
- Student learning experience feedback may be used as one part of a portfolio of evidence of teaching quality; interpretation of numeric results and weight given to qualitative responses shall be fair and transparent.
- Feedback is most usable for an educator when it is provided in a timely manner; feedback provided to an educator mid-course can be used to improve the learning experience of the students providing it.
Policy Statement

1. Under typical circumstances, feedback will be gathered for each undergraduate and graduate course each time it is offered. Such feedback is not limited to formal student learning experience feedback.
2. Where classes are taught by multiple educators, feedback for each educator will be gathered.
3. Educators will have the ability to add personalized questions to mid- and end-of-course questionnaires with responses to these questions available only to the educator.
4. SLEQ feedback from end-of-course questionnaires are to be released:
   4.1 to educators after final grades are approved by academic administrators (department heads or deans in non-departmentalized colleges or their delegates). Feedback from mid-course questionnaires will be released to only the educator and as soon as possible after the questionnaire close date.
   4.2 to academic administrators according to the guidelines developed and approved by the department/college.
5. All student learning experience feedback shall be confidential. Results will be provided to educators and academic leaders and their delegates in a form that creates anonymity of the student providing feedback unless the student chooses otherwise.
6. It is recognized that student learning experience data will be used in multiple ways and presented in different forms to fulfill specific purposes. As such:
   6.1 End-of-course numerical and written feedback may be used by educators, department heads and/or deans or their delegates to inform conversations regarding ongoing enhancement of teaching practice.
   6.2 End-of-course numerical and written feedback may be used in personnel related decisions (e.g. renewal, tenure, promotion).
   6.3 Mid- and end-of-course numerical and written feedback may be used in aggregate, eliminating the potential for identification of any individual educator activities, to inform activities such as ongoing curriculum and teaching and learning enhancement endeavours.
   6.4 Mid- and end-of-course numerical and written feedback may be used in aggregate, eliminating the potential for identification of any individual educator activities, in ongoing student learning experience instrument development.
7. The Vice Provost Teaching, Learning and Student Experience will be the data trustee of all student learning experience data.
Responsibilities

Institution:

- Oversee the implementation and maintenance of this policy
- Manage and coordinate the administration of the on-line instrument and support a platform for the University Council approved instrument in line with Procedures for Student Learning Experience Feedback
- Provide support and education to university community members regarding the interpretation, use and value of student learning experience feedback
- Ensure processes and this policy comply with other pertinent university policies (e.g., Academic Courses Policy, Academic Conduct Guidelines)

Colleges and Departments:

- Develop student learning experience feedback guidelines that reflect this policy. These guidelines will include (but are not limited to) information about how student learning experience feedback is gathered (e.g., who is responsible for setting up the gathering of feedback for a course), how frequently feedback will be collected (e.g., will feedback be gathered on all courses in the college/department each term), how feedback is to be reviewed (e.g., is individual data to be reviewed regularly by a department head), and how feedback might be used by educators and academic leaders and their delegates (e.g., for program enhancement purposes)
- Undertake the development of college, department, and/or program specific items for the student learning experience questionnaire as it relates to program enhancement
- Manage the administration of student learning experience questionnaires within the college/department

Academic Leaders (school or department heads or deans in non-departmentalized colleges):

- Ensure administrative resources are available for administration of student learning experience questionnaires
- Use student learning experience feedback appropriately, recognizing its benefits and limitations
- Act as data stewards of quantitative and qualitative student feedback from end-of-course questionnaires
- When undertaken, oversee review of end-of-course student feedback as a component of the assessment of teaching quality
- Act within the spirit and intent of this policy and college guidelines for interpreting student feedback data

Educators:

- Act as data custodians of their own quantitative and qualitative student feedback, in particular mid-course questionnaires and educator developed questions, which are not shared with academic leaders
- Honor and maintain student anonymity in the collection and use of feedback
- Understand this policy and college guidelines and act within their spirit and intent
- Where possible, find ways to communicate to students the value of their feedback and the ways in which data are/have been used to enhance teaching and learning
- Review and utilize student feedback regularly to enhance teaching and learning
- Discuss results with colleagues as appropriate including, for example, department head or dean

Students:

- Commit to participate in the sharing of their experiences of teaching and learning
- Provide respectful, ethical, thoughtful and constructive feedback so as to fuel educator and institutional reflection and enable processes of continuous enhancement of teaching and learning
- Understand the benefits and limitations of student learning experience feedback including when feedback provided may be inappropriate (e.g., disrespectful and/or unethical) and therefore not used to inform enhancement processes

Related Documents

Data Governance Framework for the University of Saskatchewan
Student learning experience feedback is used in place of student evaluations of teaching. This is a deliberate shift away from positioning students as evaluators of teaching quality toward student feedback positioned as a vital component of a broad suite of evidence of teaching quality (including, for example, peer feedback and self-assessment). Additionally, the word evaluation often implies that the feedback collected will largely be used to determine if teaching quality is adequate (also called summative use) rather than for development or enhancement of teaching quality (called formative use).

Student learning experience feedback serves both formative and summative purposes at the University of Saskatchewan. When used formatively, educators look to this information to enhance their teaching practices, courses and programs. When used summatively, student feedback serves as one piece of information to support assessment of teaching quality through collegial and administrative processes.

1. Instrument question limit and order

The total length of the survey should be planned within each college/department such that it does not exceed 20-25 questions in normal circumstances. This may need to include considerations for courses with multiple educators if that is common within the college/department.

The order of questions is 6 core closed-ended questions, college/department questions (inclusive of custom questions, modular questions, course-type specific questions), educator-personalized questions, and then the 3 core open-ended questions.

2. Process for requesting a change to the core questions

University Council approved the delegation of decision-making regarding changes to the core question set to the Teaching, Learning and Academic Resources Committee (TLARC) of Council. The following process will be used for these requests:

a. Support in creation of a request will be available from the Teaching and Learning Enhancement Specialist.

b. Requests should take the form of a simple overview of:
   i. the request being made (e.g., what questions will be changed, in what way, and in what circumstance, if change is requested for a subset of courses)
   ii. the rationale for the change, with clear connections to the fit of the questions with the curriculum and/or local teaching practices
   iii. the process by which the revised questions will be validated (where needed)
c. Requests will be reviewed by the Director, Teaching and Learning Enhancement who will make a recommendation to TLARC with a rationale including the established parameters (see item e below).

d. TLARC will consider the recommendation and vote to accept or reject the request for change.

e. The request will be assessed against the following parameters:
   i. The rationale for the change is clear and aligned with the curriculum and/or teaching practices of the courses identified
   ii. Not changing the questions could cause confusion amongst students completing the instrument and/or could compromise the quality of student responses
   iii. Plans for validation of the adjusted question(s) have been made, where needed

3. Open and close dates for end of course feedback

Typical practice is to open surveys two weeks prior to the final teaching day and close it on the last teaching day. This practice is recommended for the following reasons:

- To get the highest number of questionnaire completions possible. Making the survey available while students are still taking classes provides educators the opportunity to remind students about providing feedback and, whenever possible, provide time in class to complete it on a phone, laptop or tablet.
- To achieve greater consistency regarding when in the course students provide feedback. Restricting access to only this time means that students completing the survey are doing so at the same point in the course.
- Research evidence indicates that results are not affected based on when the surveys are administered in a course (i.e., before, during or after the final exam period).1

As such,

   a. The system is programmed to determine the default open and close dates of the course feedback period:
      i. The system default open date is the date that falls two weeks prior to the final teaching day of the regular term;
      ii. The system default close date is the final teaching day of the regular term/instruction period.

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b. The open date is 'soft', that is:
   i. It can be changed by department administrators (with the approval of the department head) for individual courses or for the entire department;
   ii. It is not determined by university policy or practice;
   iii. Open dates can be set to any date between the day that the data has been imported and verified in the system and the day of the default close date. Note that there is often significant technical work required in order to have the system set up to open.

c. The close date is 'hard', that is:
   i. It defaults to the system final close date;
   ii. It cannot be extended by a department administrator past this date but can be set to an earlier date;
   iii. It has been determined by university practice;
   iv. It can be changed for individual departments by the System Administrator with the approval of the department head, dean, associate dean or designate (in the case of non-departmentalized colleges).

d. The system is also programmed to determine the default open and close dates of the midcourse feedback period. Mid-course feedback:
   i. is enabled by default in the system
   ii. is typically only done in courses running 6 weeks or longer
   iii. can be disabled for individual courses or all courses by the department administrator with the approval of the department head, dean, associate dean or designate
   iv. is purely formative with feedback going only to educators and not to department heads, deans, associate deans or designates.

Timing of open and close dates for ‘atypical’ courses will be determined on a case-by-case basis with the department head or dean, associate dean or designate.

Note: Due to the way the system is set up to send out notifications regarding course feedback it is advisable to ensure that open and close dates do not fall on weekends.

4. Reporting instrument feedback

Frequency distributions for closed-ended Likert-type (i.e., rating scale) questions will be shown first on reports. As average scores from closed-ended Likert questions require context for interpretation, average scores will be presented after the frequency distribution for each question.

Additionally, comparative distributions and/or averages will be shown for a minimum of five comparator courses from the college/department.

Theme clouds will be shown for comment blocks that have 50 or more comments.

For larger aggregate reports, further text analytics such as frequency distributions for themes and positive/negative comment analysis may be included.
5. Changes/corrections to numeric feedback

On occasion, departmental administrators make errors in setting up surveys. For example, two sets of feedback are created for the same educator within a single course. In these instances, it may be necessary to make changes/corrections to how the data are stored in order to fix the error. When such a change/correction is required, the educator or departmental administrator will inform the System Administrator who, in turn, will consult with the Vice Provost, Teaching, Learning and Student Experience. Any change/correction to numeric course feedback information must be authorized by the Vice Provost, Teaching, Learning and Student Experience. Changes/corrections to numeric data for individual educators will not be made without the knowledge of the educator.

6. Removal of student comments

Comments provided by students on the survey are treated as confidential information (e.g., students’ identities are traceable, but they are not disclosed). Comments will not be removed from course feedback unless they are deemed wholly inappropriate, such as comments that are hateful or discriminatory on the basis of attributes such as gender, sexual or gender identity, race, ethnicity, religion or disability.

a. If an educator believes that a comment is wholly inappropriate, the following steps must be followed:
   i. A request is made by the educator to his/her department head or associate dean specifying why the educator finds the comment to be wholly inappropriate; and
   ii. Both the educator’s department head and associate dean (or associate dean and dean in non-departmentalized colleges) agree with the request put forward by the educator; and
   iii. The Vice-Provost, Teaching, Learning and Student Experience is informed of the request by the associate dean (or dean) and agrees that the comment must be removed.
   iv. The Vice-Provost, Teaching, Learning and Student Experience has the final authority for the removal of a comment. No comment will be removed without the educator’s knowledge.

b. An educator can make a direct request to the Vice-Provost, Teaching, Learning and Student Experience for the removal of a comment if a comment violates the University of Saskatchewan’s policy, including but not limited to:
   i. Standard of Student Conduct in Non-Academic Matters;
   ii. Discrimination and Harassment Prevention

c. Under normal circumstances, students will not be permitted to request a change or modification to their questionnaire responses. Prior to submitting their responses, students will see the following: “By clicking SUBMIT, you verify that you have answered this survey to your satisfaction, for the correct instructor, and that you understand that these answers cannot be withdrawn.” There are occasions when a student provides feedback in error, prior to the feedback being released to the educator, and makes the request that the feedback be removed. If the Vice-Provost, Teaching, Learning and Student Experience views this to be a legitimate concern for the integrity of the feedback being provided, he/she can make the decision to remove it.
d. When a comment is removed from the system, the entirety of that student’s feedback will be removed. Parts of a comment (leaving the remainder) or a comment independent of the rest of that student’s feedback will not be removed and portions of a comment will not be altered.

e. Normally, students will be made aware of the removal of their comment only in the event that:
   i. The Vice-Provost, Teaching, Learning and Student Experience believes it is in the student’s best interest; and/or
   ii. The nature of the comment is such that disciplinary action may be considered.

7. Department administrator access when a dual role exists

There are some, although rare, occasions in which the department administrator will also be the educator for a course. In order to preserve the integrity of roles and avoid any conflict of interest, a department administrator who is also an educator will not be permitted to manage the feedback for his/her own class(es). As such,

a. Department administrators for the course feedback system who are also educators must have a second department administrator assigned to manage their course feedback.

b. If there is not already a second administrator in the department with access to the system and the capability of creating surveys, the department head must appoint someone and have the authorization form submitted to the System Administrator in reasonably good time.

c. If there is no one else in the department who can act as the second administrator, the department head must request that the System Administrator manage this educator's course feedback.

8. Release of results

To achieve confidentiality in student learning experience feedback and create anonymity in provision of results to educators, academic leaders and their delegates, unless the student chooses otherwise, the process for release of student learning experience feedback will adhere to the following:

a. No reports will be released where there are fewer than 5 responses to the questionnaire except where students have agreed to their feedback being shared (see next bullet).

b. To facilitate educator access to student feedback, students in courses with fewer than 10 student enrollments will be provided the option of having their qualitative/open-ended responses included in reports to educators should fewer than 5 responses be received. This choice will be available to students during questionnaire completion and it will be made clear to students that, in the case of fewer than 5 responses, there is greater potential that an educator could attribute feedback to them.

c. To avoid inappropriate interpretation of results, in courses with fewer than 5 responses, no closed-ended question results will be released.

d. To facilitate appropriate interpretation of results, in courses with fewer than 10 responses, a qualifier will be added to reports indicating that: “due to a low number of responses the quantitative/closed-ended question results presented are less stable and caution should be
used in the interpretation of the results, particularly in relation to aggregate and comparative statistics.”

All attempts will be made to release educator end-of-course reports within 2 - 3 business days after grades have been approved. This timeline may not be possible if the reports are custom to the college, school or department; are being constructed and produced for the first time; or require significant human processing.

9. Aggregate data usage by department, college, and/or the university

Beyond the use of student-based course feedback data by educators, there are times when departments, colleges and/or the university benefit from summary level information. This usage fits with the principle that student feedback is collected, in part, to improve program quality and the quality of student experience. For example, a college may use student feedback (aggregated across courses and/or educators) as one piece of information in program review or renewal or to determine the outcome of a program change. As a second example, the university may wish to cross-validate findings from other student surveys (e.g., NSSE) with student learning experience feedback.

In those instances where a department, college or other unit in the institution wishes to use aggregated anonymized student learning experience feedback, certain restrictions apply. Any summary data being used must involve a minimum of three class offerings and a minimum of three unique educators. To reach the minimum number for aggregation, it is possible to use multiple years of offerings. Although the use of five or more classes/educators would be closer to an ideal with regard to aggregating data, it may be difficult in some instances. Setting a minimum number of three courses or educators accomplishes the following:

a. Ensures that the confidentiality of scores for individual educators is protected.

b. Increases the likelihood that the stability of the scores is good (e.g., that summary scores are not overly biased by individual scores in the extreme).

c. Makes clear to programs, departments, and colleges that the purpose of using data in this way is about obtaining an aggregate of student experiences of teaching and learning within a course and is not about assessing an individual educator.

An administrative unit seeking access to aggregated student learning experience data must request approval from the Vice Provost Teaching, Learning and Student Experience. In certain instances, the approval from the Vice Provost Teaching, Learning and Student Experience may also require institutional research ethics approval.