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University of Northern Iowa Faculty Senate Meeting Minutes, February 4, 1980

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FACULTY MINUTES
February 4, 1980
1262

Topic:

Open Forum on Student Evaluation

Meeting called to order by Chairperson Judith Harrington at 3:10 p.m.

Members of the press present were, Roland Caldwell, Northern Iowan and Jeff Moravec, Cedar Falls Record.

Chair Harrington stated that the purpose of the meeting was to have an open forum on student evaluations. She explained that three members of the faculty would give brief presentations of a position on the question and then the floor would be open to general discussion.

E. Kalmar (English), President of United Faculty, was the first to speak. She stated that she would represent United Faculty's position by referring the faculty to Article Three, Section 2 in toto of the current contract.

The next to speak was M. Strathe (Education Psychology and Foundations). The following is the text of her presentation:

- I. Introduction: In order to examine the appropriateness/inappropriateness of the evaluation of teaching it is necessary to first understand several terms and assumptions which underlie entire process.
 - A. Definitions:
 1. Evaluation - the "making of judgements" regarding events, behaviors or results of behavior in light of predetermined and well-understood objectives.
 - a. "judgements" always reflect some degree
 - b. assumption exists that if the objectives are understood by all, and if the information used in making the judgement is as accurate as possible, the judgement will be based on a minimal amount of subjectivity.
 2. Measurement - the "quantification or quasi-quantification" of events, behavior, or results of behavior (sometime called assessment)
 3. Therefore, by using a measuring device (scale) for the evaluation of teaching by definition it would indicate "an attempt to quantify events, behavior, or results of behavior in order to make judgements about those events, behaviors, or results of behavior in light of predetermined and well understood objectives."
 - B. Assumptions underlying the Evaluation of Teaching and the Interpretation of those Results.
 1. Evaluation will and does occur - it's a question of how systematic is the process.

2. Evaluation is done under mutually agreeable conditions
 - a. awareness is given to differing expectations of individuals
 - b. respect is shown for all individuals involved
 - c. both parties are committed to the value of the process
3. Both parties understand and accept the objectives of the evaluation process

II. Objectives of Evaluation - variety of possibilities; any instrument designed to quantify something observable is based on the assumption that the sample of behaviors selected to be observed/evaluated are in fact reflective of the domain of behaviors which we attempt to make judgements about.

**Critical Question is one of validity - what is the instrument designed to measure? It should be designed to be consistent with the objectives for evaluation.

1. improvement of teaching: change performance of individual (may not need a scale, but rather open-ended)
 - individual growth
 - self-evaluation
2. rewarding superior performance (requires a scale which will differentiate)
3. modifying assignments: transfers, resignations, terminations, etc.
4. satisfying policy, or law
5. validation of the selection process (research approach-feedback mechanism)
6. protection of the organization and individuals - data to support decisions or policies against criticism.

** If agreement/common agreement does not exist on the purpose or the objectives of the valuation, obviously no agreement can occur as to validity of the instrument nor can agreement be reached as to the most appropriate use of the information quantified with the instrument.

**If parties agree to the purpose, then it is possible to agree on the instrument to be used in securing information for that purpose, and, in turn, it is reasonable to assume agreement might be common in interpreting the results.

III. Second Critical Characteristics of the Instrument Used in RELIABILITY - to the extent measurement is consistent from one time to another the instrument is said to be reliable.

**Reliability does not insure validity - an instrument may consistently measure but that measurement may not be in agreement with those pre-determined objectives.

--however, a valid instrument is reliable. If an instrument is in fact measuring what it is designed to measure, it usually will measure consistently.

IV. Decisions to be made regarding means of measurement (method of quantification)

- A. How will information be collected?
 1. observation
 2. questionnaire
- B. What will be measured
 1. processes of teaching: in classroom, other organization members, external groups
 2. products of teaching: achievement, attitudes/values, psycho-motor skills
 3. characteristics of teachers: interests, skills, aptitudes, social abilities, physical appearance

C. Who will measure?

1. self
2. peers
3. administrative personnel
4. instructional recipients (students)

D. When and where will measurement occur?

1. during an event (during the process)
2. following an event (end of the semester)
3. in/out of the classroom

E. What type of forms will be used?

1. summary report form (common)
2. individualized data collection form

V. Common Evaluative Criteria for Teachers

- A. Instructional Skill - knowledge in designing and conducting an instructional experience
- B. Classroom Management - skill in organizing the education setting
- C. Professional Preparation and Scholarship - evidence of theoretical background, knowledge in pedagogy and commitment to education; depth and breadth of knowledge
- D. Effort Toward Improvement When Needed - evidence of self-awareness
- E. Interest in Teaching - commitment of working with students

VI. Concluding: Is your evaluation system good? Is accomplishing your purposes?

- A. Is it improving the performance of individuals? Evidence _____
- B. Is it eliminating incompetence? Evidence _____
- C. Is it cost effective - worth the time invested? Evidence _____

The third speaker was P. Michaelides (Music). The following is the text of his presentation:

It is clear that, within our School of Music faculty ranks, opinions on student evaluation are quite evenly spread from one extreme position to another. Some are quietly resigned or indifferent to the inevitability of this manifestation of our society's spreading bureaucracy, while others hotly oppose and resent the intrusion into their private professional domain. Yet others, from time to time, volunteer constructive criticism and attempt to steer a judicious middle path.

In the short time I have today I find it impossible to do justice, to put into proper, fair perspective, all the parts I have been collecting. I can only provide you with the following partial bill of particulars which I have compiled from both verbally transmitted and written comments by members of our School of Music faculty. And, after that, I would like to add something of my own. To begin, then, here are the points made by our music faculty:

FIRST POINT. There seems to be a pervasive doubt that most students here have the ability to make fair, objective judgments of faculty teaching effectiveness. Reasons given have been varied both in content and feeling intensity, but pretty much include the following:

1. Students don't appear to have enough maturity collectively especially as freshmen to warrant being given the responsibility of helping to determine the professional fate of a teacher. For example, it has often been noted that a popular, easy going, easy testing, joke-telling instructor whose teaching efficiency is very low, gets consistently higher evaluation marks than an instructor who knows his field, teaches it well, challenges, demands the best from his students, but who does not have an outgoing personality.

2. Student response varies with the student-teacher ratio. It was noted that instructors receive better ratings from their one-on-one studio students than from those in their small-sized classes. The lowest ratings seem to come consistently from students in large classes.

3. Some of our faculty question the right of students to judge the content and quality of the subject matter taught. After all, if they were capable of this kind of judgment, they would have to know the subject as well as the instructor, or perhaps even a bit better. Do we wish to admit to this possibility?

4. Occasionally, students are used by an instructor to turn against another instructor. While instances such as this are rare and difficult to document, they do occur, and certainly influence evaluation responses, and subsequently the fate of the victimized person.

SECOND POINT: Some instructors are intimidated by evaluations, with the result that they lower their academic standards in order to gain student approbation and a favorable evaluation.

THIRD POINT. The questions in the evaluation instruments are not always relevant to the type of course or the teaching methods used. Although this is a common complaint aired by many faculty here and elsewhere, the problem is more acute in our department, where there is a large diversity of course types and teaching methods. The questions in the present questionnaire seem to relate better to lecture courses in music history than, say classes in conducting and aural training. And, of course, how can one use that same instrument to judge an applied music instructor (that is, one who gives music lessons).

FOURTH POINT. Though some faculty agree that student evaluation is a good idea, they point out that the reputation of a good teacher is usually known by word of mouth, and often reaches even incoming freshmen. Such an instructor does not need this kind of mass evaluation. Neither does a very poor instructor --the word simply gets around, and quickly. The point is that no matter who you are and how you teach, rarely are you not known to your students and peers, and to those who must judge you. This leads to the FIFTH POINT, which is that some faculty feel that the entire judgmental process, of which student evaluation is but one part, is shamefully superficial and encourages any combination of flippant, capricious, socially motivated, revenge motivated, politically motivated responses. For these faculty, a ten minute evaluation cannot possibly do justice to the instructor.

There were other responses, but most related to some degree to what I have just listed for you. The only suggestions I received were from some who recommended that a new, more appropriate evaluation instrument be devised, and from a few others who would really rather have the whole business scrapped.

I wish now to add a personal statement which, although incorporating some aspects of points already mentioned, includes an experience I had, the pertinence of which to this subject might be of interest to you. I am one of those who has always held any kind of faculty evaluation in very dim light, my belief being rather hopelessly elitist, that is, that neither

faculty nor student evaluators can judge with sufficient fairness or effectiveness, without bias, in sufficient depth, etc., etc. to justify the process. Coupled with this was my belief that a teacher's reputation is quickly established, and an insightful administrator and/or tenure and promotion committee should be able to render a fair judgment of teaching effectiveness without all the hoopla of everyone getting into the act. I also believed then as now that the error factor is probably the same no matter what system of evaluation one uses. So why make it so complicated?

Last fall, I had occasion to visit at length with a nationally known pediatrician and his wife, also well established as a psychologist. Both are on the staff of the medical center at a major university. At one point during the evening the conversation touched on student evaluations. I promptly offered my rather uncompromising views, and promptly sliced off in the opposite direction. After an hour I was sitting dazed but impressed and enlightened. These people had just given me an entirely new perspective on the matter. Not only did they approve of student evaluation--they eagerly sought and competed with their peers for favorable results! A few days later I received from them a bundle of evaluation forms and something called "Comments on Using Student Ratings to Evaluate Faculty Instructional Effectiveness." Although the questions asked, on a 1 to 7 point rating scale (including a "not applicable" answer opportunity) were rather predictable (there were 15 in all), the most impressive part of the whole business is that evaluation instruments such as these are passed out for each lecture given. Furthermore, a student is assigned, in each lecture class, to take notes on the lecture given. These notes are then typed up and sent to the instructor to "see if I am getting the point across." Remember now, from what our guests said--all this is solidly backed by the majority of the medical unit faculty. For them, the results of these evaluations provide each with a welcomed critical mirror. Through this means, teaching flaws can be detected and quickly corrected. The competition for excellence is kept on a consistently high plane and accepted with great professional pride. Lastly, I was told that there are stringent requirements for continued employment, and for tenure and promotion, which are strictly observed by the department head and peer evaluation groups. What you should be most interested in, however is that each new faculty member, vulnerable without tenure, is placed under the wing of what they call a sponsor--a tenured faculty member who serves as his guide and protector-defender. Although this does not fit directly into the subject of student evaluation, I am sure that you can see the oblique but important relationship, that is, that through the support and guidance of this sponsor, a new faculty member might better understand, accept, and favorably respond to the various evaluation instruments he would be subjected to. In this case, it seems to me, the strong sense of professionalism and devotion to excellence provide for these people a ready willingness to accept any reasonable means which would assist them in maintaining and improving their skills.

My attitude has been altered by this encounter. I now have made room in my original position to include a qualification: Yes, perhaps there are conditions under which evaluations can have some meaning. I now believe that an evaluation instrument can be successful, but only when both student integrity and seriousness of purpose, and faculty integrity and seriousness of purpose are on a sufficiently high plane. Thank you.

Following the three presentations, Chairperson Harrington made the following statement as a prelude to general discussion:

Since I am aware that there has been some expression of concern regarding the right of the faculty as a whole to discuss this topic, I want you to know that I posed that same question to Peter Pashler, Director of the Iowa Public Employment Relations Board. He asserted that under the rights of Freedom of Speech, we may indeed discuss policies that are of interest to us, whether or not they are contained in the contract. However, we are cautioned that we are solely serving as RESOURCES, thus, we are not entitled to attempt to modify the contract by negotiations with our faculty colleagues who also serve as administrators, nor may we mandate modifications to the agent. We may make recommendations to express collective philosophies.

I ask that you appreciate the delicacy of this situation since to my knowledge- this is the first general meeting of the faculty called for discussion of a topic that is included in the contract since we entered into collective bargaining.

The Chair asked the panelists if they cared to comment on one another's statements.

Strathe responded to Michaelides by agreeing with his final statement, that the major criterion of an evaluation instrument should be that all involved agree to it.

C. Shields (English) asked if there is any way to know the history of the current instrument.

Kalmar responded that she was not sure, but asserted that there had been a meeting of the administration for the purpose of drawing it up, when collective bargaining first was established here. It is her understanding that the administration consulted with representatives of the student body and faculty. She went on to state that the fact there is an instrument is not open to debate.

Shields asked if the instrument could be negotiated.

Kalmar responded that the administration has the right to evaluate, therefore, it is not negotiable.

F. Conklin (Speech) disagreed, stating that it is not a "right" of administrators.

M. McGrew (Library Science) asked Strathe if she had analyzed the current instrument according to her stated criteria.

Strathe responded that she had seen the instrument, and can state that it measures something, but there is a question as to exactly what is being measured. She further stated that personally speaking, whatever the instrument is measuring, in her own experience, the instrument is consistent. However, she is not sure of its purpose.

S. Cawelti (English) informed the body that he had chaired a United Faculty committee on evaluation, and that it was the consensus of the committee that the current instrument was not measuring what it should and that a change of instrument was recommended.

He went on to state that the I.D.E.A. system was used on a voluntary basis in the College of Humanities and Fine Arts in Spring, 1979, and that reaction to it had been good.

Kalmar said that, according to the administration, changing over to a new instrument is a problem in that it could catch a probationary faculty member between two instruments.

G. Harrington (Psychology) provided a perspective of existing research in the area of student evaluations. One example he cited was a study that suggested one cannot use tests of student knowledge as a measure of teaching competency, since in a poorly instructed class, the student would have to do more independent learning; thus he would demonstrate greater understanding of the subject matter because of his own efforts.

J. Skaine (Speech) asked why the administration is still using the 1977 normative data and why the administrators were ducking this meeting.

J. Harrington asserted that, in fairness, not all had ducked it, (one dean being present). She then asked the body what, if any, direction it wished to take.

Shields countered with, "Where can we go?"

J. Harrington responded that we could discuss our views further, or terminate the topic.

E. Jamosky (Modern Languages) asked if a motion was in order?

J. Harrington responded that it was.

Jamosky moved (seconded) that another meeting of the faculty be devoted to this topic.

Skaine said that he felt the administration should be present and answer questions about their use of the instrument.

J. Harrington responded that Pashler had stated that nothing prevented administrators from attending such meetings. But, to Pashler, would be not prudent to express a view.

R. Chung (Geography) stated that he was acquainted with several studies on student evaluations and that what was most needed now was a presentation of the history of the current instrument.

A straw poll on the motion was taken, since lacking a quorum, a vote would be unofficial. The motion passed without dissent.

It was moved (seconded) that the meeting be adjourned. Passed.

Meeting adjourned at 4:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

N. D. Vernon, Secretary