Steps to establishing an effective system of student ratings

Academic Affairs Committee Supplemental Report

STEPS TO ESTABLISHING AN EFFECTIVE SYSTEM OF STUDENT RATINGS

In order to maximize the potential that the SmartEval platform offers and help ensure that the student ratings process is adequately supported and effective for summative and formative analysis, further actions by the Provost are strongly recommended. The Academic Affairs Committee has organized these actions into what we hope will be helpful thematic groupings with suggested responsible parties and timelines.

1. PRE-LAUNCH COMMUNICATIONS TO THE COMMUNITY

Communication about the new student ratings system is essential to a smooth transition. The Provost has already communicated to faculty the need for a new system and the expectation that student ratings data are but <u>one</u> source of information used to assess teaching effectiveness.   In order to ensure that all stakeholders clearly understand the summative and formative purposes associated with this source of data collection, pre-launch communications are critical.

1.1. Educate campus community and international locations (faculty, students, administrators) regarding the formative and summative purposes of the new system

<u>Who</u>:   Provost's Office in cooperation with Student Ratings Campus Coordinator (SRCC)

<u>When</u>:   Fall, Spring and Summer terms: Weeks 1-2;

1.2. Educate campus community (faculty, students, administrators) regarding mechanics of new system, including such things as:
   a. How/when faculty request surveys
   b. How/when colleges, departments, and individuals add survey items
   c. How/when students receive notice to complete surveys

   <u>Who</u>:   Student Ratings Campus Coordinator and College Student Ratings Liaisons

   <u>When</u>: Fall Semester: Week 3 (task "b" recommended to be completed by week 7)

2. STRATEGIES TO ENCOURAGE SURVEY PARTICIPATION

Adequate response rates remain an issue of concern for every institution that uses online systems. While research suggests that this is readily manageable, potentially yielding return rates equivalent to or better than paper surveys (Wode & Keiser, 2011), institutions must be intentional about providing on-going support to encourage survey student participation by students.

2.1. Provide faculty help sessions, tip sheets, and electronic reminders on how to use personal communication, at the beginning of the semester and during the response period, to encourage participation

2.2. Notify faculty via automatic system monitoring about status of response rates (aggregate, not by student name) during the survey period

2.3. University campus student communications campaigns via posters, announcements, etc. including reminders that student input is confidential, valued and used for teaching improvement

2.4. Emphasize student responsibility to participate in the improvement of learning in freshman orientation and communications with student groups (fraternities, sororities, clubs, student leadership groups in each college)

2.5. Acknowledge or reward individuals or units with good response rates

Who: SRCC in collaboration with ILI and Division of Student Affairs

When: Continuously—to begin in Fall 2013

2.6. Enable easy access to computers during class time to complete the survey, if deemed appropriate

Who: Individual Faculty member

When: Each term

3. DATA ANALYSIS AND REPORTS

Providing guidance on how to interpret results and use data to guide teaching improvement and teaching effectiveness assessment is a responsibility that extends beyond the Student Ratings Campus Coordinator. It is recommended that the Provost consider utilizing the talents and expertise resident within the units of Institutional Research, Assessment and Teaching/Learning Services to coordinate these responsibilities.

3.1. Establish recommendations for summarizing student ratings
   3.1.1. Educate faculty and administrators regarding effect of small n
   3.1.2. Inform faculty and administrators about how and when to aggregate data over courses or terms
3.2. Educate faculty and administrators how to read and interpret ratings distribution, mean, SD, and confidence intervals
3.3. Maintain confidentiality of student ratings
   3.3.1. Release ratings summary from summative items to faculty member and supervisor
   3.3.2. Release ratings summary from formative items to faculty member only; to be shared at his/her discretion
3.4. Educate faculty and administrators how to download/extract report data

Who: Provost appointed team of research and assessment professionals in conjunction with SRCC

When: Establish by September 2013

4. ASSOCIATED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The formative information gleaned from student ratings should lead to teaching support and improvement. It is imperative that the university ensure that the appropriate body on campus, typically the Teaching and Learning Services, offer resources for faculty who are committed to improving their teaching based on the formative feedback. Best practice also suggests that every campus should make instructional consultants or master teachers, who are not in a supervisory line to faculty and have no input into performance appraisals, available to faculty. This combined with RIT's current emphasis on peer mentoring, can be a powerful tool that will allow faculty to use student ratings to improve their teaching throughout their career. RIT has traditionally emphasized quality teaching as its hallmark and provided resources to that end. Implementing the recommendations below will naturally fall to the Innovative Learning Institute.

4.1. Make available to faculty professional expertise to translate student feedback into an action plan for professional development in combination with the action plan developed through the use of the SmartEvals system and with clear implications for instructional enhancements.

4.2. Allocate resources to implement an effective professional development program through which faculty can gain needed information and skills

Who: ILI, Teaching Learning Services, College focused professional development activities

When: Ongoing

5. RESEARCH PLAN

Numerous researchable questions arise with the institution of a new university system for student ratings, suggesting the need for resources to establish and carry out a research plan associated with this effort. For example, are there unexpected effects on student ratings of variables associated with course, student, faculty or survey characteristics? Does response rate remain adequate over time? Do faculty who chose individually to implement incentives for responding experience higher response rates than faculty who don't? Is there a drift in average ratings attributable to implementation of the new system compared to previous systems used in the various colleges? Do more students realize the value of their input and more faculty find that there is benefit in the feedback? Do more faculty supervisors consult multiple types of evidence in evaluating teaching effectiveness? A research plan that tracks attitudes, perceptions and practices will be necessary to document success in achieving intended goals and to guide course shifts in the future.

Findings from such a research plan may also lead to reexamination of the principles established by the Task Force and a collective decision to modify the guidelines delineated in the report. We recommend that the Provost determine how such a research plan might be implemented and assign resources accordingly. This research component should begin in the 2013-2014 academic year and incorporate the following:

Goal: Allocate resources to monitor, document, and report on the university-wide student ratings system over a period of at least 3 years

5.1. Monitor for drifts in average ratings attributable to implementation of the new system compared to previous systems
5.2. Monitor return rates and association with strategies to improve return rates
5.3. Examine effects on ratings of variables associated with course, respondent, instructor, and survey characteristics
5.4. Track attitudes, perceptions, and practices regarding the purposes, uses, and value of student input over time among students, faculty, and administrators

5.4.1. Track student opinion about the value of their input
5.4.2. Monitor faculty sentiment regarding benefit of student feedback
5.4.3. Monitor number of faculty supervisors who consult multiple types of evidence in evaluating teaching effectiveness
5.5. Observe documented changes in (and perceptions of) instructional effectiveness as associated with the availability and use of professional development and application of student feedback
5.6. Apply research findings in formulating recommendations for system modification following a 3-year period of data gathering

Who: Provost designee

When: Fall 2013

6. PROMISING PRACTICE WORTH EXPLORATION AND ADOPTION

Guidelines from the literature about improving teaching effectiveness indicate that end-of-term ratings are limited in their effect and fail to satisfy one's current students who are unable to benefit from future-term instructional enhancements. The practice of early term student feedback has been used to obtain just-in-time information about students' learning experiences, allowing changes to be implemented before it is too late to benefit the current term enrollment. Students who participate in early-term feedback not only appreciate the opportunity to affect their instruction but also perceive the instructor in a very positive light as one who is concerned about optimizing student learning. A model has been developed within RIT at NTID. In addition, the SmartEvals platform allows this type of feedback system. Initial results from the NTID pilot are very promising. It is recommended that the ILI expand the practice of early-term feedback in collaboration with

campus representatives who are experienced in this area. This may be accomplished by carrying out the following actions:

6.1 Further develop convenient survey mechanisms, sample survey items, and workshops in how to interpret and apply early term feedback

6.2 Provide incentives to faculty to effect changes concurrent with instructional delivery via early term feedback

6.3 Work with Provost and deans to provide encouragement, support and rewards for implementing early term feedback

6.4 Regularly orient faculty supervisors regarding the availability of early-term feedback resources and their potential for enhancing teaching effectiveness

<u>Who</u>: ILI and expert campus representatives

<u>When</u>: Fall 2013