

**INSTRUCTIONAL FACULTY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
WORKING GROUP**

WORKING GROUP MEMBERS:

Melissa W. Aleman - Communication Studies
Marcus Davis - Interim AUH, Mathematics and Statistics
Gilpatrick Hornsby - Interim Executive Director, CFI
Jennifer Kester, Assistant Director, HR, HR, Training & Performance
Calvin Henry Lawrence - Alumnus
Meshayla Lumpkin - Graduate Student, CSPA
Steven Whitmeyer - Interim Associate Dean, College of Science & Math

Working Group Champion: Melissa Alemán Email: alemanmc@jmu.edu

Recommendation Title: Bias in Student Evaluation of Teaching

Problem Statement/Issue

Educational scholarship overwhelmingly demonstrates evidence that student evaluations of teaching (SETs) contribute to systemic racial and gender inequity in instructional evaluation practices. There are four central problems with the practices of SETs. First, SET instruments fail to measure or correlate with student learning and teaching effectiveness (see Boring et al., 2016.; Kornell, 2020). Indeed, SET show Second, there are wide ranging biases in SETs, including but not limited to BIPOC faculty receiving less positive evaluations than White faculty (Bavishi, Madera, & Hebl 2010; Hefferman, 2021) and women rating lower than men even when controlling for performance of same behaviors (Hefferman, 2021, Boring, Ottoboni, & Stark 2016). Third, SETs harm marginalized faculty and women, including BIPOC and queer faculty, as they face a rise in abusive comments (Tucker, 2014) that create stress and anxiety (Hefferman, 2021). Finally, SETs serve to reproduce power relations and the status quo, ultimately validating White male privilege (see Rodriquez et al., 2020). Indeed, Boring, Ottoboni, & Stark (2016) argue that because there are so many factors that impact SETs, it is impossible to control for bias.

Recommendation, Rationale and Success Measures continue on following pages.

**WORKING GROUP
LEADERSHIP**



David Owusu-Ansah,
Leadership Council



Cynthia Bauerle, WG CC



Cara Meixner, WG CC

Recommendation:

Eliminate the use of student evaluations of teaching (SETs) for (a) summative evaluations and (b) promotion and tenure-related purposes. Reform the processes associated with the evaluation of teaching. *Ensure support and resources are provided at all levels to foster and sustain change.*

This recommendation supports the ongoing work of four entities: the Academic Policies Sub-Committee of the Faculty Senate, Center for Faculty Innovation (CFI), Academic Effectiveness and Evaluation under Associate Vice-Provost John Burgess, and an *ad hoc* group of academic unit heads (AUHs) and PAC chairs who coalesced in fall 2020 to address well-documented racial and gender biases in the evaluation of faculty teaching. Specifically, this recommendation elevates the evaluation reform to the level of the Provost, Deans, and AUHs to develop methodologies, resources, and infrastructure to support long-term change within academic units.

1. Recommend the following be amended to the JMU Faculty Handbook regarding the role of SETs in performance evaluations:
Student evaluations may not be utilized or required as part of a teaching portfolio... Any such policy shall apply equally. . . Furthermore, student evaluation scores may not be used to evaluate teaching performance in annual reviews and tenure and promotion cases.
2. Recommend a culture shift in how student feedback is collected and utilized to cultivate a collaborative relationship between instructional faculty and students, rather than a customer service framework. Collecting feedback from students in the middle of the semester enables students to be active agents in shaping their ongoing learning experiences and humanizes the relationship between students and faculty, rather than the current frame that treats the course and the faculty as “deliverables” and “products” to be evaluated.
 - a. *Reframe* the activity of collecting information from students as “student feedback” and “course development.”
 - b. *Eliminate the quantitative items* on feedback mechanisms, identifying a standardized set of open-ended questions designed to give students the opportunity to provide instructors with substantive feedback on how they are experiencing aspects of the course – materials, assignments, and organization; classroom culture and inclusivity; and their own contributions to the learning environment.
 - c. *Provide resources to students* at the end of the feedback module to put students in contact with key offices/persons for student support on campus, particularly if they were triggered by reflecting on the class.
 - d. Identify a way to *incentivize student participation* in mid-semester feedback, ensuring that the feedback process meets universal design criteria and thus the needs of all students.
 - e. *Utilize the existing online system* to collect student feedback at mid-semester.
 - f. *Pilot a process* with volunteer departments to shape the common process, revise as necessary, and identify practices that promote a meaningful collaborative experience for faculty and students.
3. Provide training and development to AUH’s and faculty mentors to support faculty in reviewing mid-semester student feedback in a manner that is mindful of the biases that students bring. Only instructional faculty will have access to the mid-semester feedback from students. This enables the faculty to choose those whom they trust to provide guidance on incorporating feedback into the ongoing class. Instructional faculty may opt-in to sharing this feedback with AUH’s and mentors for support.

See Rationale and Success Measures for Mentoring Champions on Page 3

Rationale:

The broader context for this recommendation is well articulated in the [Academic Affairs Anti-Racist and Anti-Discrimination Agenda](#): “A commitment to inclusive excellence is central to how the division functions, and this mindset will drive our strategies for the future. Beyond our division, JMU recognizes it cannot sustain what we think of as our excellence without authentically embracing inclusivity.” This recommendation, along with the steps and interventions described above, maps to the following of the Provost’s five goals, but most specifically goals 1 and 5:

1. Identify and correct practices, structures, and policies that contribute to oppression and that reflect structurally racist or discriminatory practices
5. Strategically allocate resources—money, space, and personnel—to dismantle racist and discriminatory practices and presumptions and build structural support for equitable and inclusive practices that sustain the diverse institutional culture we need.

The abundant scholarship on the structural inequities and biases of SET’s demands an *immediate* intervention to reduce both the harmful climate that they create for BIPOC, queer and women faculty and to stop their (mis)use in performance evaluations by AUPAC’s and AUH’s. Making AUH’s and AUPAC’s aware of the biases is not enough to correct discriminatory practices the biases embedded in SET’s and their harmful consequences on marginalized faculty.

To be sure, faculty may still find soliciting feedback from students to be formative in shaping their courses. Departments and colleges also benefit from understanding how students’ course experiences as they shape curricula in forward-thinking ways. This requires a culture shift in how JMU approaches student feedback on courses. *Shifting the frame* from end-of-the-semester evaluation drawn from a customer satisfaction business model to a mid-semester opportunity for feedback that centers a collaboration between students and faculty in shaping the learning community places the processes firmly where it belongs, as formative and developmental – not evaluative.

Success:

We recommend the appointment of an *ad hoc* working group (12 months) to create the pilot student feedback mechanism with one college during AY 2022-23 to solicit experiences and revise as necessary.

Specific benchmarks are suggested:

1. Provost directive to deans, AUH’s and AUPAC’s to eliminate the end-of-semester collection of student evaluations of teaching starting AY 2023-24.
2. Provost directive to deans, AUH’s and AUPAC’s to revise all annual evaluation and promotion and tenure related departmental and college documents removing criteria related to measures in student evaluations of teaching to be approved by Spring 2023.
3. Provost names working group chair/co-chairs: April 2022. We recommend Associate Vice Provost John Burgess as the co-champion and the working group chair given his work to date on this area of faculty development and evaluation.
4. Provost and working group chairs/co-chairs name additional members: April 2022
5. Summer data analysis of BLUE SET data (names of faculty eliminated) for summer data analysis designed to identify those areas of feedback most important to students of color (Office of Academic Effectiveness and Evaluation – Associate Vice Provost John Burgess). This project is important for ensuring that students of color have a mechanism for providing feedback to their faculty early in the semester. Identifying the kind of response sets that are most meaningful can guide the construction of the feedback form.
6. Working group identifies a college willing to pilot the new process during spring semester 2023 (Summer – Fall 2022)
7. Working group establishes standardized process for midsemester student feedback (Fall 2022)
8. Recommended change made to the Faculty Handbook Committee (Spring 2023)
9. Pilot process in designated college (Spring 2023)
10. Implement program based upon revisions to the pilot (Fall 2023)

Page 4 Instructional Faculty, Bias in Student Evaluations of Teaching

Resources for the Problem Statement shown on Page 1:

- American Sociological Association. (September 2019). Statement on Student Evaluations of Teaching.
- Anderson, K. J., & Smith, G. (2005). Students' preconceptions of professors: Benefits and barriers according to ethnicity and gender. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 27, 184-201. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739986304273707>
- Bavishi, A., Madera, J. M., & Hebl, M. R. (2010). The effect of professor ethnicity and gender on student evaluations: Judged before met. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 1(4), 245-256.
- Boring, A., Ottoboni, K., & Stark, P. B. (2016). Student evaluations of teaching (mostly) do not measure teaching effectiveness. ScienceOpen Research. DOI: 10.14293/S2199-1006.1.SOR-EDU.AETBZC.v1
- Flaherty, C. (February 27, 2020). Even 'valid' student evaluations are 'unfair.' Inside Higher Ed. Retrieved from <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/02/27/study-student-evaluations-teaching-are-deeply-flawed>
- Heffernan, T. (2021): Sexism, racism, prejudice, and bias: a literature review and synthesis of research surrounding student evaluations of courses and teaching. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 1-11. DOI: 10.1080/02602938.2021.1888075
- Lawrence, J. W. (May-June, 2018). Student evaluations of teaching are not valid. American Association of University Professors. Retrieved from <https://www.aaup.org/article/student-evaluations-teaching-are-not-valid#.YFztUhgI>
- Tucker, B. (2014). Student evaluation surveys: Anonymous comments that offend or are unprofessional. *Higher Education*, 68(3), 347-358. doi:10.1007/s10734-014-9716-2.
- Rivera, L. A., & Tilcsik, A. (2019). Scaling down inequality: Rating scales, gender bias, and the architecture of evaluation. *American Sociological Review* 84(2):248-274.
- Rodriguez, J., Rodriguez, N.G-L., & Freeman, K. (2020). Student evaluations of teaching: Phrenology in the 21st century? *Race, Ethnicity, and Education*, 23(4), 473-491.
- Stroebe, W. (2020) Student evaluations of Teaching Encourages Poor Teaching and Contributes to Grade Inflation: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 42(4), 276-294, DOI: 10.1080/01973533.2020.1756817