The Implementation of the SmartEvals System of Rating Teaching Effectiveness

Academic Affairs Committee Report
Report

EVALUATION OF THE SMARTEVALS SYSTEM OF RATING TEACHING EFFECTIVENESS
FROM FALL 2014 - SPRING 2014 IMPLEMENTATION

Academic Affairs Committee (AAC)

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April 23, 2014
**Charge from Academic Senate**: Work with Dr. J. Fernando Naveda and the Office of Academic Affairs to review the implementation of the SmartEvals system for student rating of teaching effectiveness. Report to senate at the end of the year on the implementation and address any potential areas of particular concern moving forward.

### 1. DATA COLLECTION

Three different samples were used to collect data regarding the implementation of SmartEvals; Associate Deans (College Liaisons for the SmartEvals system), Student Ratings of Teaching Effectiveness (SRATE) Office members and representatives from Student Government. These groups were chosen to provide the subcommittee with a general idea of how the system has been perceived during the past academic year.

#### 1.1. Associate Deans

Academic Affair Committee members spoke with Associate Deans at the Associate Deans Cabinet meeting. Attendees included: Chris Licata (Senior Associate Provost), Karel Shapiro (Assistant to the Senior Associate Provost), Ann Howard (COLA), Heidi Miller (CHST), Linda Tolan (CAST), Kathryn Schmitz (NTID), Laura Tubbs (COS), Robin Cass (CIAS), John Tu (COB), Michael Yacci (GCCIS), Babak Elahi (COLA), Marianne Gustafson (NTID), David Hostetter (ITS). Attendees answered a series of questions regarding the implementation (pre-launch, during, and post) of SmartEvals.

#### 1.2. Student ratings of teaching effectiveness committee members

Academic Affairs Committee members spoke with Fernando Naveda and Joe Loffredo. The SRATE committee was given a chance to respond to some of the concerns brought up by the associate deans as well as relay their own thoughts on how the implementation of SmartEvals went from their perspectives.

#### 1.3. Student Government

Academic Affairs Committee members spoke with representatives from colleges in attendance at their April 18th meeting. Students were asked to comment on what they thought went well with their use of the system and what they might improve.

Findings from these meetings have been separate into three sections: **pre-launch**, the time period prior to students having access to the surveys; **during**, the time period in which students were filling out surveys; and **post**, the time after surveys had closed and faculty as well as administrators were able to access reports.

### 2. PRE-LAUNCH

#### 2.1. Associate Deans

##### 2.1.1. Review

Associate deans reported liking the fact that they could more easily identify and remove courses where it was not appropriate to evaluate students (i.e. portfolio courses or Co-
ops). Good experiences were had by most (if not all) as far as the pre-launch communication and the ease of which they, chairs and faculty could use the system.

2.1.2. Suggestions
Associate deans reported satisfaction in keeping the surveys short to keep student attention and the high response rates achieved. They suggest keeping the addition of questions by colleges, departments and faculty limited\(^1\) but also reminding faculty that they could ask additional questions (SRATE did send numerous emails regarding the this factor including links to training videos).

Appreciation for the number of trainings offered (40+ training sessions were offered throughout the first semester). There was some discussion regarding the timing of various trainings (i.e. to add questions or read reports), however the SRATE committee reports extremely poor attendance at the onsite training and will therefore rely on the numerous videos offered through the SmartEvals website and www.rit.edu/smarbevals.\(^2\)

2.2. SRATE Office

2.2.1. Review
SRATE reported excellent communication with SmartEvals during the set up and learning of the SmartEvals system. RIT-ITS and Joe Loffredo did a great job at getting things prepared and set up on RIT’s end.

SmartEvals representatives came to campus for the numerous training sessions and worked with SRATE to help customize to RIT’s needs.

Process was more time-consuming than SRATE committee thought as RIT is unique and had requests different from other customers. However, the committee is very pleased with how everything worked out.

2.2.2. Suggestions
Ensure that communications being sent from SRATE to deans and chairs are being forwarded to faculty.

SRATE Office was happy (and did successfully) to work with faculty, chairs and deans to address questions and concerns prior to implementation. Sometimes requests would come in with very short notice, these requests were not always able to be met by the

\(^1\) Some colleges reported adding questions that were course versus instructor-related. The subcommittee would like to caution against the practice or remind departments to not use course specific questions when it comes time to review faculty for merit, promotion or tenure.

\(^2\) There are no training videos for chairs or deans as far as understanding the information/reports provided. SmartEvals prepared a document for this purpose that is accessible at www.rit.edu/smarbevals.
committee, however, requests given with sufficient time were almost always able to be successfully implemented.

2.3. Student Government

2.3.1. Review
Students found the reminders very helpful and appreciated the emails.

3. During (while students are rating)

3.1. Associate Deans

3.1.1. Review
Most reported no issues at this time. Things seemed to go smoothly.

The mobile opportunities allowed for faculty to designate class time to fill out evaluations. As one dean said the, “high participation rates may speak volumes” to the ease of completion.³

The associate deans reported surprise and pleasure at the response rates (66% across the university). They felt that the publicity, outreach and ease of use all contributed.

3.1.2. Suggestions
There was some confusion about end dates and how long the survey was open to students. This issue was resolved and will now be consistent every semester. Dates will be prominently displayed at www.rit.edu/smartevals.

3.2. SRATE Office

3.2.1. Review
Only had a few minor issues (i.e. students not wanting to get emails but not wanting to necessarily fill out their surveys) all were addressed as they came in to the committee.

Students received five emails during the process and faculty received four emails during the process. Naveda noted that response rates tended to have marked increases immediately after emails were sent to students. Response rates increased even more when faculty would email students. Starting this spring semester, the SRATE office will be sending .pdf’s to deans and associate deans to keep them abreast of response rates each Friday during the evaluation period.

3.2.2. Suggestions

³ In the same meeting, ITS reported no knowledge of calls from students or faculty that had any technical issues with the system.
Keeping up direct correspondence with faculty and students seemed to help increase response rates across campus. SRATE would encourage this process and open communication as much as possible.

3.3 Student Government

3.3.1. Review
Overall, students were very satisfied with the system and the process. Students reported liking the consistency of questions between classes.

Reported enjoying having all of their classes ratings surveys online.

3.3.2. Suggestions
While students enjoyed the consistency they would also not mind a few individualized/customized questions.

Students were also interested in being able to rate support programs or tutors in the future.

4. Post (ratings closed, reports generated)

4.1. Associate Deans

4.1.1. Review
Associate deans reported liking the comparisons for instructor, department, college and university. Reported satisfaction with response rates and overall usability of system and viewing of reports.

4.1.2. Suggestions
A suggestion was made about having a standardized report for faculty going up for promotion and tenure.

While the system does not currently allow for it, some deans requested being able to segment faculty into categories (i.e. tenure-track, adjunct, etc.) to make comparisons based on different factors.

Associate Deans do not currently have access to any of the report data. They felt strongly that they needed access in order to perform their duties as college liaisons (and associate deans) efficiently and that they are being asked to perform some of their duties “blind” making it more difficult for them to help faculty or students with the system. Both Academic Affairs and the Provost’s office support the procedural clarification of providing associate deans’ access.

4.2. SRATE Office
4.2.1. Review
The SRATE Office believes that part of the beauty of the system is that it allows for everyone to look at their information/reports however they would like but it is all the same information.

4.2.2. Suggestions
The SRATE Office also communicated with SmartEvals about a standardized report for promotion/tenure purposes. SmartEvals reported that if RIT could wait until September they would be able to explore this option at no cost. There is concern, however, in regards to finding a format that might be acceptable to all colleges.

The SRATE Office would like remind the campus that all communication regarding SmartEvals be sent to SRATE@rit.edu versus specific office personnel.

4.3. Student Government

4.3.1. Review
While they do not have access to reports students were glad to be a part of the conversation to offer their suggestions/requests.

4.3.2. Suggestions
While students understood they would not have access to faculty ratings they would like to have “something” after completion. Students suggested things from a simple email from faculty or the system that tells them that faculty viewed the ratings survey to an action plan regarding how departments/colleges are using the ratings.

5. Final Thoughts

Overall, this committee finds that the implementation of the SmartEvals system of rating teaching effectiveness was very successful. This success is in no small part due to the great work by the SRATE Office, particularly J. Fernando Naveda and Joe Loffredo and RIT’s ITS’s Data Management Services staff. To continue this success the Academic Affairs committee suggests the following:

- Maintain limits on the number of questions added to surveys.
- In September, explore options for the standardization of reports for promotion.
- Explore options on how to use the SmartEvals system to give students some feedback or “closure” after they have submitted their ratings. (This may include providing students an email alerting them that faculty have “checked” their reports or provide information regarding action plans faculty members may implement based on their ratings.)
- That the members of the SRATE Office, college liaisons, deans, and chairs keep up the great communication amongst themselves, faculty and students regarding the system
and that everyone utilizes the comprehensive information available at www.rit.edu/smarTEvals.