<center>MEMORANDUM</center>

To: All RIT faculty and staff
From: Dr. Chris Collison, Chair of RIT Academic Senate, and Dr. Jeremy Haefner,
             Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs
Subject: Formation and charge for a SRATE Evaluations Research Taskforce
Date: Fall 2017

Abstract

An SRATE Evaluations Research Taskforce (SERT) will be formed to investigate current practices in use of SRATE data. The committee will subsequently make recommendations for more effective use of SRATE as one of multiple tools for evaluating performance and aiding professional development for faculty.

The work of this committee is critical to ensure that i) merit-raises are distributed appropriately and that ii) faculty are promoted as a result of an accurate reflection of their summative performance.

A broad overview of the work of this committee charge is to:
- report on how SRATE Evaluations are used in annual faculty evaluations, and in the tenure and promotion process.
- report on the relative emphasis placed on SRATE evaluations compared to peer evaluations
- determine objective standards for acceptable performance that do not rely simply on being above or below the Institute average
- investigate appropriate statistical metrics for interpretation of SmartEvals results.

While new standards are being researched and implemented, SmartEvals data should continue to be used robustly for formative assessment but cautiously for summative assessment.

Overview and context:

In the spring term of 2013, the Academic Senate endorsed the implementation of a new student ratings of teaching effectiveness system. A commitment to the university was made at that time to research certain aspects of the use of the SmartEvals implementation after a period of three years. Therefore in 2016-17 the Academic Affairs Committee was charged as follows:

Re-evaluate operational recommendations 1 through 3 in the "Steps to Establishing an Effective System of Student Ratings" report from 2013, in light of the research data and information collected since the implementation of SmartEvals in 2013.

As part of this charge, Academic Senate suggested the following:

1. Monitor for drifts in average ratings attributable to implementation of the new system compared to previous systems.
2. Monitor return rates and association with strategies to improve return rates
3. Examine effects on ratings of variables associated with course, respondent, instructor, and survey characteristics.
4. Track attitudes, perceptions, and practices regarding the purposes, uses, and value of student input over time among students, faculty, and administrators.
   a. Track student opinion about the value of their input.
   b. Monitor faculty sentiment regarding benefit of student feedback.
   c. Monitor number of faculty supervisors who consult multiple types of evidence in evaluating teaching effectiveness.
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.
6. Apply research findings in formulating recommendations for system modification following a 3-year period of data gathering.

In addition, the Academic Senate endorsed the following four operational recommendations:

1. Use of the SmartEvals system to gather student ratings of teaching effectiveness in classroom settings across the university.
2. Use of the same set of established core items across the university that were used in the pilot ($\alpha = 0.93$ from pilot).
3. Provide the online results for individual instructor (except for instructor-added items) only to the instructor, instructor's immediate supervisor and dean, the provost, and tenure and promotion committees per college guidelines.
4. Re-evaluate recommendations 1-3 after three years of data collection with SmartEvals.

As charged, the Academic Affairs sub-committee (Joe Lanzafame and David Halbstein) attempted to acquire as much data as possible to answer these research questions and to help formulate new recommendations. They worked with the Provost's Office to collect these data.

The sub-committee uncovered issues associated with the way SmartEvals data was being reported. For example, one of the main issues relates to utilization of mean scores and whether reporting mean (average) values for Likert data is appropriate. A number of further questions were posed, necessary to complete the charge, that would require significant additional research and data analysis.

The sub-committee also determined that no quantified progress has been made in addressing faculty sentiment or faculty supervisor practices regarding use of SmartEvals data. The sub-committee was not able to undertake a study on the documented changes in instructional effectiveness based on student feedback. The sub-committee wrote in their final report that instructional effectiveness "should not, according to current RIT policy, be judged solely by student survey responses which makes the determination and evolution of effectiveness more challenging to ascertain".

After thorough review and discussion of the Academic Affairs Sub-committee's report to Academic Senate on March 11th 2017, the Academic Senate and the Provost's office committed to co-sponsor a SmartEvals research initiative and to develop the charge and associated timeline.

The Taskforce: The taskforce structure will have a full representation 'core' taskforce as well as a group of invited committee affiliates. The core group will have the main responsibility for the deliverables while the committee affiliates will serve as advisors. The members of the core Taskforce will be selected through usual college nomination and election procedures.
In addition, the Taskforce will include up to two at-large members from the Academic Affairs Committee of the Academic Senate, twoa delegates from the Provost's Office and the President of Student Government (or their delegate).

The Charge:

1. Briefly summarize the extent to which SRATE evaluations are currently used by administrators in instructional evaluation and compensation.
1.2. The Taskforce will investigate appropriate statistical metrics for interpretation of SmartEvals results.
2.3. The Taskforce will undergo thorough training on the SRATE system as an integral part of their charge, and make recommendations as to the requirement, depth and frequency of training for deans, department chairs, and faculty.
3.4. The Taskforce will determine objective standards for acceptable performance that do not rely simply on being above or below the Institute average.
4.5. The Taskforce will survey the faculty to gauge their attitude and responsiveness to SmartEvals along with their understanding of the meaning of the results.
5.6. Student Government will be involved in the formulation of new guidelines and will be asked to make recommendations to increase participation level.
6.7. Consideration will be given to mid-semester formative student evaluations. One major shortcoming of the current system is that any instructional issues that arise are not evaluated until after the semester has concluded. As a result, students will inevitably feel that the faculty are not responsive to their concerns because they do not observe any of the changes that their feedback helps to bring about.
7.8. The Taskforce will investigate a general system of instructional evaluation that does not rely solely on SmartEvals but that provides administrators with an efficient means of evaluating faculty performance and aiding faculty professional development. Recommendations on classroom evaluation by other faculty and the extent to which SRATE evaluations might be used are requested as part of this investigation.
9. The Taskforce will research and investigate the impact of unconscious bias on SmartEvals data and make recommendations based on their findings.
8.10. The Taskforce is asked to investigate correlations between teaching evaluation and final grade for the course, where data is available.

SERT is charged to deliver a report that will detail recommendations for a subsequent action plan, the implementation of which shall begin no later than 2019-2020. A list of specific recommendations together with proposed budgets and timelines for implementation will be

provided. Finally, SERT will recommend an 'enactment' committee to oversee the implementation of the action plan.

Target date: 31 December 2018.