To: Bill Boggess, Faculty Senate President  
From: Lisa T. Sarasohn, Chair, Advancement of Teaching Committee  
RE: Survey of Satisfaction with the SET (Student Evaluation of Teaching Form)  
Date: June 13, 2006

Dear Bill,

Here is the data collected on instructor, student, and administrator responses to the SET form. The numbers of responses were relatively small, and perhaps represent a census rather than a survey of opinion. Nevertheless, there were some striking patterns. Both students and instructors have real doubts about the reliability of the form. The recommendations of the Committee, based on this information, follow the summation of the survey.

**Report on the Responses to the SET Survey**

This report will summarize the instructor, student, and administrator responses to the survey conducted by the Advancement of Teaching Committee about the SET survey.

**Instructor Response**

257 members of the faculty responded to the Survey. The response was overwhelmingly negative:

1. The SET form evaluates teaching performance effectively.
   - 153 disagree
   - 75 agree
   - 26 neither agree nor disagree

2. The SET form identifies teaching strengths and weaknesses effectively.
   - 162 disagree
   - 72 agree
   - 19 neither agree nor disagree

3. The SET form enables instructors to improve their teaching.
   - 135 disagree
   - 76 agree
   - 44 neither agree nor disagree

4. The SET form reveals whether student learning outcomes were accomplished.
   - 201 disagree
   - 35 agree
   - 18 neither agree nor disagree

Summary of most prevalent themes in the open-ended question.

Many instructors view the SET as a kind of popularity contest. They believe that students take revenge for bad grades in giving low student evaluation scores. They believe that the form only reflects the entertainment value of the class, rather than whether anyone learned anything.
Another repeated theme was dissatisfaction with the use of the “median” rather than a mean on the form. There were several comments on how useless this measure is. Many responses suggested returning to the old form, which was based on a mean.

There were problems with the types of questions asked. Many instructors felt that a quantitative measure of teaching effectiveness would be more helpful in improving teaching. Some suggested that open-ended questions immediately follow each of the quantitative questions. Some suggested that the questions were too general and did not reflect the many differences in the kinds of classes that are offered. Some suggest that we develop more course-specific questions. One comment suggested that the same course be evaluated over time, rather than compared with others in the academic unit.

Several people pointed out that question number 7 on the form (Instructor's use of different learning techniques to accommodate different learning styles in teaching) resulted in classes being dumbed down. The form simply measures student comfort levels. In a similar vein, some people objected to the idea that students should evaluate teaching – they do not have the ability to do so.

Some instructors want the diversity question addressed more specifically on the form.

**Student Response**

The response to the SET by students was more mixed. 172 students responded. The majority of students thought the SET gives good feedback on course quality and instructor performance, but they overwhelmingly disagree that the SET leads to improvement of teaching.

1. The SET form is an effective tool for students to provide feedback on instructor performance.
   - 53 disagree
   - 97 agree
   - 19 neither agree nor disagree
2. The SET form is an effective tool to provide feedback on instructor performance.
   - 49 disagree
   - 103 agree
   - 13 neither agree nor disagree
3. The SET form leads to improvement of teaching
   - 103 disagree
   - 65 agree
4. Rating the different aspects of the course. (This grid was very difficult to read.) I believe the qualities were ranked in the following order:
   1. Learning centered
   2. Organization
   3. Enthusiasm
   4. Disclosure
   5. Responsiveness
   6. Clarity
   7. Use of Technology
The other factors were ranked below and were negligible.

Comments from students:
The overwhelming student response is no one – instructors, administers, and even other students - takes the SET form seriously. As a result, there are no changes in teaching and the whole effort is a waste of time. They would like more specific, qualitative and open-ended questions. They would very much like the results to be public. They favor taking the form online and earlier in the quarter, so that their comments would have some effect (instructors also agree with this).

Administrator Response

Administrators seem to rank the SET form more highly, although the written comments were largely negative. 53 administrators responded.

1. The SET form provides valuable information for P & T decisions.
   - 18 disagree
   - 19 agree
   - 8 neither agree nor disagree
   - 8 N/A
2. The SET aids in identifying strengths and weaknesses in teaching.
   - 16 disagree
   - 20 agree
   - 9 neither agree nor disagree
   - 7 N/A
3. The SET provides aid in assessing whether learning outcomes were accomplished.
   - 16 disagree
   - 5 agree
   - 11 neither agree nor disagree
   - 7 N/A

Comments from administrators:
Several comments suggested that the tool does not measure whether learning outcomes were accomplished and suggest that this lack should be addressed if the form is redone. Some people wonder whether the form addresses style rather than the success or failure of the course. One person suggests going back to the old form. Another suggests that we just keep it.

Committee Recommendations

We felt that there were two real problems with the current SET process of evaluating teaching: 1. there is quite a lot of misinformation about the reliability of the form; and 2. the results of the process are unknown. Both instructors and students fail to take it seriously. Instructors think the form simply reflects the grade a student is receiving in the class. Students believe that there is no accountability for poor teaching. Instructors are not aware that current studies of the reliability of student evaluation forms find there
is no correlation between poor grades and a negative rating of professors. Instructors are not aware that the form is taken seriously by administrators.

We suggest that a way to address this problem is to inform both students and instructors of the importance of the form. Part of the answer would be a fuller explanation of the role the SET plays in evaluating teachers when the form is given out in class. We suggest that the form be given at the beginning of class rather than at the end, thus giving the students more time to fill out the form in a serious way. The instructor should emphasize the importance of a thoughtful response that will be taken seriously in an effort to improve teaching.

It is the feeling of the Committee that part of the problem with the form is that it is summative rather than formative. We suggest that the form should be only one part of a broader Teaching Portfolio. Professors should be encouraged to develop their own questions to add to the back of the form to elicit information about whether the learning outcomes for the course have been successfully completed.

Another suggestion is that assessments of teaching take place mid course. Such a review would be formative rather than summative, and should remain confidential and not be included in the instructor’s file. An outside facilitator would review the class with the students, and that information could be used by the instructor to address problems. While this information would be confidential, the process itself would reinforce the perception that teaching is important, and that student input is vital.

Both instructors and students need to feel confidence in the evaluating process. Currently not all instructors leave the room or commission a student to turn in the forms. It must be emphasized that the results of the SET itself are confidential and that instructors do not see the results before the end of term. We considered whether the results of the SET should be published after the term is over, so students have this information when registering for classes. It was the consensus of the Committee that this information not be public. We do think it would facilitate the process if the SET was given online, although there would have to be some form of incentive (win an IPOD) for students to take the time to do this.

In short, the Committee does not necessarily believe that there is anything wrong with the form itself; we do not know if another committee could produce yet another form which would result in greater satisfaction. However, there does seem to be significant problems with the process of evaluating itself. The culture of the University needs to change, so that all members of the community will feel that teaching is important and is taken seriously.