

**Report of the Faculty Standards Committee to the Senate Executive Committee
on Potential SET Revisions
October 2018**

In Spring 2017, the SEC charged the FSC with reviewing the existing Student Evaluations of Teaching (SETs) and potentially recommending changes to them. These deliberations took place during Fall 2017 and Spring 2018. The draft of this report was reviewed at the February and March 2018 FSC meetings and further revised in October 2018. If the SEC endorses the recommendations in this report, the full Senate could debate and vote on the changes.

Summary of Expert Consultations and FSC Discussions

In September 2017, Dr. Lloyd Blanchard (OIRE) provided the FSC with a variety of analyses of the SETs, including information regarding bias in such measures. In particular, Dr. Blanchard argued that the current UConn SET is no more or less biased than other instruments. He did state that research (and provided supporting research) has shown that many/most instruments contain some degree of bias against instructors of color. There is also some evidence in the literature that female instructors fare worse than their male counterparts. OIRE and CETL have investigated other measures used at peer institutions, and none appear to have any greater validity than the measure developed and used at UConn.

In November 2017, Dr. Peter Diplock (CETL) and AAUP representatives (Profs. Tom Bontly and Tom Peters) were invited to attend the FSC meeting. Dr. Diplock discussed the various forms of course evaluation that are available through CETL and beyond. AAUP representatives discussed issues related to the current contract and the UConn AAUP views on the current SET.

In December 2017, Dr. Betsy McCoach (EPSY) attended the FSC meeting and spoke about Likert scaling as it relates to the SET among other issues regarding the SETs. Discussions ensued on matters including: the 5-point scale as ordinal or quasi-interval; strengths and weaknesses of a 5-point (vs. 7-point) scale and optimizing variability; interpretations of mean, median, and mode. Concerns included: the use of a different scale for specific dimensions (items 1 through 13) vs. the “overall” rating (item 14); small differences in ratings, especially for APIRs or instructors who aren’t also judged on research; response rates for SETs and ways to manage/enhance rates; over-reliance on the SETs, rather than utilizing a complement of other means of evaluating teaching effectiveness (e.g., peer evaluations, portfolios, and tracking of student outcomes).

Based on all of the experts’ advice and the discussions of the committee, the FSC concluded that the existing SET measure (and its 5-point scale) should remain in place. However, the committee makes the following recommendations for revisions to the measure and its interpretation.

Recommendations of the FSC to the Senate

#1 - Amend ordering of the questions as reported to instructors to make summary and/or independent items stand out.

This recommendation is specifically in response to confusion in interpreting Item #14 on the SET ("What is your overall rating of the instructor's teaching?" with a 5-point scale from Poor to Excellent). Item #14 is widely interpreted (wrongly) as a composite indicator of Items #1-13 (which are on a different 5-point scale from Disagree strongly to Agree strongly).

Please note that OIRE has already reorganized some of the SET format. Questions 14 (overall instructor rating) and 22 (overall course rating) are set apart from the individual items, and the different scale is noted. OIRE also provides feedback to instructors (and their supervisors) that include all items, not just the summary items (14 and 22).

#2 – In Item #19, change “textbook” to “course materials.”

Many courses at the university do not use a textbook.

#3 – In collaboration with OIRE, revise some items for more appropriate use with on-line courses or encourage the use of supplemental assessments in online courses.

#4 – The University should investigate incentive systems for increasing the response rate for SETs.

Low response rates call into question the validity of scores. Incentives (such as the early release of student grades to those who have completed all class SETs) have been used effectively at other institutions. The University should continue to provide instructors with information about best practices for increasing response rate and encourage their use.

#5 – The FSC reaffirms its long-held stance that the SETs should not be the only method used to evaluate an instructor's teaching.